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**PRAGYA, 22**

Seeing people younger than me out on the street with so much hope for a better system really inspired me. Political parties aren't inherently bad, but we must distinguish between people and party ideology. Blindly trusting leaders must change. As for the GenZ, rage alone isn't enough.

**SURESH, 22**

"This is the right time to change Nepal's political landscape. The old leaders have lost power but not their behaviour. Each vote is a statement against them. We need the most deserving technocrats who know what they are doing and are capable of leading. We should stand under a single banner to support our nation."




**PRABESH, 21**

Older generations voted for leaders who didn't develop Nepal, so we thought of migrating. So if my one vote can help get a good person to power, future generations might not think of leaving. But I see even older people in my neighbourhood who earlier used to believe in Deuba and Oli now say they will vote for newer faces.

**MIRAJ, 19**

We have to vote for credible leaders to prevent older discredited leaders from coming back. There are a lot of options, for me it is RSP. We need leaders who work on reducing the brain drain, prioritise inclusion and hear the voices of the unheard. Don't underestimate your power to bring change.




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## Which way GenZ voters?

**Suman Nepali**

With 49 days to go for polls, we asked eight of the 800,000 first time voters about their voting preferences. The GenZ movement has impacted on new and old political parties and their alliances. Some have pledged to represent youth aspirations, while older parties have mobilised younger members.

However, the UML, NC and NCP still do not practice internal democracy, and have not responded to the popular demand for change. An example of this was the split in the NC (page 4). The very fact that it has put up Gagan Thapa as prime ministerial candidate is a response to the RSP fielding the GenZ favourite Balen Shah. Even so, Kulman Ghising quitting the RSP has shown that the new parties are not really 'new'.

Not many GenZs are contesting in the elections barring the likes of Sudan Gurung. Some are trying to influence parties from behind the scenes. Geopolitical pressure seems to have forced the RSP to withdraw Tashi Lhazom from its PR list. Nevertheless, an election that looked near impossible is now on track. But what do the young new voters want, and will they make a difference? Watch an exclusive video on our YouTube channel.



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**SHRISTI, 20**

For the longest time it didn't matter who came to power in Nepal and the country ran as usual. But for the first time here is a hope for change. People who live outside Kathmandu, please travel to vote to at least honour those who shed their blood in the GenZ protests in September.

**PRABHU, 20**

My main concern is that people in Nepal should get well-paying jobs as per their skills so that they are not compelled to migrate. Older politicians promised us Switzerland, but that didn't happen. They didn't develop the country.




**ALEX, 20**

I'm not that excited to vote, there is still so much confusion. There are also unnecessary protests, we are like sheep following the biggest crowd. The old parties will still buy votes. And no, I don't have anyone in my mind that I would want to vote for.

**ANUSKA, 19**

I hope Balen Shah and Rabi Lamichhane can bring about real change in the country. I just hope they serve Nepal like it is a sort of social service, not make it a business and line their pockets like the older leaders did. Please vote for the right ones, each and every vote counts.




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# Shaken, but not stirred

This is not fear-mongering. It is a public service announcement to plan for the next big earthquake.

Sonia Awale

Only a handful of people who witnessed the 1934 megaquake as children are still alive. And the memories of 2015 are fading fast.

We were shaken, but have not stirred into action. We have not even started preparing to be prepared for the inevitable, for it is not a question of 'if' but 'when'.

Thursday 15 January was National Earthquake Safety Day commemorating the 1934 disaster that killed 10,000 people in Kathmandu Valley at a time when its population was barely 100,000.

Nepal is in an active seismic zone, and a really big one is overdue in the seismic gap in western Nepal where there has not been a megaquake for 500 years. The 7.8M quake in 2015 did not completely release the tectonic stress below Central Nepal.

An 8M+ earthquake epicentred in western Nepal will be even more violent than the 2015 one in Kathmandu and will be powerful enough to cause destruction across northern India as well.

We Nepalis are resilient, but we are also complacent and fatalistic. How else does one explain the unsafe and unplanned building construction in Kathmandu, Pokhara and other towns despite frequent reminders of what quakes can do?

Most designs are ad hoc and follow no engineering logic. Reinforced Cement Concrete (RCC) is now widespread across the country since such structures mostly withstood the 2015 event. But structural engineers say most



SUMAN NEPAL

concrete structures are substandard, and can be death traps. Also, the country lacks equipment and training for search and rescue in cement structures.

## FIRE HAZARD

If an earthquake struck Kathmandu on a windy winter evening, there is the added risk of fires from gas cylinders in collapsed buildings spreading across the densely packed city core. Fire trucks will not be able to reach those areas because the streets will be blocked.

Seismic risk is now amplified by climate breakdown. Nepal now needs to factor in the co-hazard of massive avalanches and Glacial

Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs) triggered by future earthquakes. There are 41 potentially dangerous glacial lakes in the region, and 27 of them are in Tibet feeding rivers that flow into Nepal. A megaquake there could cause multiple simultaneous GLOFs.

If the 2015 earthquake had not happened on a Saturday, tens of thousands of children could have been killed in the 7,000 schools that were flattened. More than 2,500 government buildings came down, and would have killed and trapped many if it had not been a weekend.

Schools and health facilities retrofitted before the disaster were unscathed, and served as shelters for survivors. Chhatrapati

Free Clinic (CFC) was reinforced three years before the earthquake for Rs5.2 million, and with support from National Society of Earthquake Technology (NSET), 800 community members were trained in search and rescue.

Bhuwaneswori Secondary School in Bhaktapur and Bal Bikas Secondary School in Kathmandu both survived 2015 because they had been retrofitted. Singha Darbar, the Supreme Court and the Department of Roads buildings were also made seismic resistant after 2015 quake, but the arson attacks on 9 September gutted them.

While many private residential homes built after 2015 continue to flout building codes, municipalities are now stricter. New schools and colleges, hospitals and high rises now have to meet stringent requirements for seismic resistance.

Nepal is a hotspot for many types of disasters — earthquakes, floods, droughts, glacial outbursts, wildfires. These are not 'natural' disasters, they are human induced. Earthquakes do not kill people, poorly-built buildings do. Climate breakdown is anthropogenic.

Waiting for a disaster to strike means we have waited too long. Search and rescue readiness are well and good, but much more important is preparedness — seismic resistance structures especially of public buildings, strict zoning to establish open spaces, pre-positioning supplies and simulated drills.

We do not know how much time we have before the next one. But it is not too late to start preparing. 🇳🇵

## Trending Online

### Nepal's airspace in WWII

by Bhaskar Koirala

The Rana rulers in Kathmandu were wary of planes overflying Nepal's airspace during World War II and were ready to fire at them regardless of whether they belonged to the Allies or the Japanese who were advancing westward from Burma. Visit nepalitimes.com for archival material from the time.

Most reached and shared on Facebook



### A compulsion, not a choice

by Shristi Karki

The Editorial reviews the Nepal Labour Migration Report 2024 which has a slightly outdated trend analysis of Nepalis going abroad for work. But the figures give an idea of the scale and spread of Nepal's overseas migrant workers. Read online.

Most popular on X



### Might might be right

by Sonia Awale

The American military action in Venezuela and the abduction of President Nicolás Maduro may redefine Nepal's geopolitics as it juggles between three world powers, India, China and the United States. Follow us online for the latest updates.

Most commented

### New 8,000ers

by Edward Morgan

The new six 8,000er peaks have not yet achieved universal acceptance, but it is possible that climbing an expanded list of 20 eight-thousanders could set off a new peak-bagging race. Visit our website for feedback from readers around the world.

Most visited online page

## Letters

### NEW 8,000ERS

If, indeed, a new mountaineering race begins, MoT, NMA and HRA better engage now in planning for improved en route services, stricter management of numbers, and oversight of material and detritus disposal ('New 8,000ers may restart peak-grabbing race', Edward Morgan, #1293).

Iván G. SOMLAI

### VENEZUELA

Nepal is safe, you do not have oil or gas or rare minerals, so you will never come up on Trump's radar ('Might might be right, after all', Sonia Awale, #1293). China is happy to have you as a buffer against India and vice versa. Smart Nepali politicians and business people can win for Nepal by playing the two countries against each

other. Anyway, Trump's USA is in terminal decline, the dollar is at its lowest since 1973 and capital is exiting the dollar at around \$1 trillion a month, the US economy is stagnating while its defence sector has just been hit by Canada going for the Gripen rather than the F35 and Europe, Canada, Australia, Japan and South Korea all signing up to the EU's SAFE protocol which focuses current and future defence spending within these countries to the exclusion of US defence companies. Trump is doing what he always has done, overvaluing assets, bringing a cash flow squeeze and then bankrupting his company, it is just the USA's turn next.

Peter Thomson

Nepal and Venezuela have very few similarities. The American and Nepali militaries also have a strong history of cooperation and

joint training. Furthermore, Nepal recently demonstrated that it can handle issues with internal corruption of its political system organically.

Michael Mastin

Nepal just has to look at countries like Switzerland and Luxembourg. When politicians lack basic morals, even gods can't help. Nepal only has advantages but all of them turn into disadvantages due to visionless politicians who don't have any plan. We can learn from our neighbour Bhutan.

Roshish Roshish

As an American, Nepal needs to take notice. These policies and actions are not 'American' policies and actions. They are Trump's. His approval rating is one of the lowest in American history. Let's call the actions what

they are - Trumpism. And in time he will be gone. Not soon enough.

Christophe Noel

The Chinese might be a bit more subtle but I quite felt their presence in Nepal last time I went in 2014. I hope the new government will fare better.

Etienne Loyon

### CHOLERA

Cholera is a forgotten history ('Life in a time of cholera', Ajaya Dixit, #1292). Seeing the title and the picture I thought it was an Indian Cholera outbreak of the time. But then remembered the story my dad told me about Kathmandu.

Harihar Joshi

### KUTUMBA

Kutumba has taken an awesome initiative with great outcomes ('Music to our ears', Sudiksha Tuladhar, #1293).

Albizia House

## Online Package



### FIRST TIME VOTERS

Nepali Times interviewed eight first-time voters about recent political developments, their preferred candidates and their hopes for the future. Story on page 1, also watch the video.



### EARTHQUAKES

15 January marks National Earthquake Safety Day. Nepali Times delves into why quakes are so devastating in Nepal and how retrofitting can reduce risk. See editorial, and video on YouTube.

## 1,000 Words



**OILYGARCHY:** US President Donald Trump met with energy tycoons to discuss investing in oil exploration in Venezuela on 9 January, a few days after his military extracted President Nicolás Maduro. Among those who attended the meeting at the White House were executives from ExxonMobil and Chevron.

Nepali Times

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# Grand split in Nepal's grand old party

But the Nepali Congress factions may still decide that breaking up is hard to do so close to polls

Shristi Karki

At the stroke of the midnight hour, it finally came to something everyone in Nepal's oldest and biggest party had been dreading — a split.

Not that this was anything new. The Nepali Congress (NC) had splintered twice before and the main protagonist both times was five-time prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba.

The showdown between the Gagan Thapa-Bishow Prakash Sharma camp and Deuba came to a head on Wednesday as the establishment leadership decided to suspend Thapa, Sharma, and Farmullah Mansoor for five years to punish them for daring to challenge the leadership and hold a special general convention.

Bhrikuti Mandap in the centre of Kathmandu is the venue for trade exhibitions, but this week it was where an exhibition of everything that is wrong with Nepali politics was on full display — lack of internal party democracy and an unaccountable gerontocracy clinging on to power.

Thapa and Sharma had gathered the support of 62% of the NC membership at their convention. Deuba's allies had refused to attend or endorse the special general convention, and were adamant about holding a general convention to choose a new party head after the election. Thapa, Sharma and their supporters argued that the party



GAGAN THAPA/X

would face ignominious defeat in the polls if Deuba insisted on being prime minister again.

Thapa and Sharma were NC general secretaries and held multiple rounds of discussions to convince Deuba to accept their eight-point demand that for the party's and the country's sake his time was up. Despite having already handed over the party leadership to Purna Bahadur Khadka in September, Deuba refused to step down.

'What demands has the Nepali Congress been unable to reconcile that it is headed for a split? There is no ideological dispute, just a proposal to make it easier to go

for the election,' noted journalist and author Narayan Wagle. 'If those who have been in politics for so many years cannot reach an agreement, what have they learned in life and what hope is there for the country?'

Gagan Thapa was elected unopposed as the new party president on Thursday midnight, with Sharma and Pushpa Bhusal appointed vice-presidents. Thapa has said backroom talks are still ongoing through mediators, but for all intents and purposes the split seems irreconcilable.

The million dollar question now is: who gets to be the real Nepali Congress? Who gets the NC's tree

election symbol at the polls?

Both the Thapa and Deuba factions have written to the Election Commission (EC) laying claim to the party and its symbol. Whatever the EC decides, with less than two months to go for the polls, the dispute over its legitimacy will almost certainly have to be decided in the courts.

## INTERNAL RESTRUCTURING

Deuba and his counterpart K P Oli in the UML have been unwilling or unable to fathom the level of outrage that young Nepalis feel about their parties. Second generation leaders within those parties who have grown old waiting for reform, seem to have better internalised the need for internal restructuring.

Oli has managed to hold on to power after displaying increasing authoritarianism within his UML, while Deuba has shown an unwillingness to bow out of leadership with grace. Both have squandered away their legacy.

For Gagan Thapa, the events of this week was a culmination of his long-standing claim for leadership change within the NC coupled with a compulsion to address the demands of the youth movement to maximise gains for his party this election. Thapa told Onlinekhabar on Wednesday: "Our belief was that we cannot go into elections under the present circumstances under [Deuba's] leadership and with him as the party's prime ministerial candidate. We would lose."

The special general convention

has taken further steps for reform, endorsing amendments to the party statute. If Thapa's leadership holds legitimacy, this new chapter for the NC might come as a welcome change to young Nepalis who have been calling for leadership overhaul and internal party reforms within the establishment parties. But it may also come at the cost of the NC's core base. It remains to be seen which side tips the scale at the polls.

The NC's infighting and institutional shake-up has also posed fresh concerns about how it will affect the election schedule just as it looked as though all the mainstream political parties were finally on board and preparing for the polls. With voting barely weeks away, Nepal's political parties are still too busy cleaning up their own house to give too much time to work on their platforms, agendas and serious campaigning.

Historically, political break-ups and make-ups in Nepal are not set in stone. Even the newest alliance between Rabi Lamichhane's RSP and Kulman Ghising's UNP did not last more than 12 days. Balen Shah is set to resign from his mayor position and has gotten into the thick of election preparation with the RSP. His next step will be to choose which constituency he is going to contest from.

Meanwhile, in the light of a new day, the two NC factions may still decide that breaking up is hard to do when they are so close to elections, and the political stakes are so high. 🇳🇵

## NMB BANK एनएमबि बैंक

### Turkish investment

Turkish Airlines has launched an investment initiative to strengthen Türkiye's aviation infrastructure and advance its competitive edge. Groundbreaking ceremonies were held for eight new facilities with a total investment value



exceeding TRY100 billion primarily at Istanbul Airport, homebase of the flag carrier. Said Turkish Airlines Chair Ahmet Bolat: "In line with our 2033 targets, we are developing not only our fleet but also the robust infrastructure that will allow us to fully utilise this fleet."

### Shah back at Nabil

Anil Keshari Shah has returned to Nabil as director after serving previously as the bank's CEO. Shah has served in Grindlay's Bank and Mega Bank before joining the RSP.

Nabil has also graduated participants of the fourth and fifth groups of its Nabil School of Social Entrepreneurship. The six-month program, held in collaboration with Tribhuvan University School of Management, trains budding entrepreneurs and connects them to funding and mentors.

### Ncell Yuwa Sim

Ncell's new Yuwa SIM, targeted at Gen Z, offers a Rs299, 28-day pack with unlimited Ncell-to-Ncell calls, discounts on all other calls, 5GB data, and free access to eSewa and Khalti. The pack also offers discounts on all calls. SIMs available at Ncell Centres with a government ID and a student ID.

### Dongfeng 100

Official Dongfeng distributor MAW Vriddhi held a celebration drive to mark putting 100 of its EVs on the roads of Chitwan. More than 80 Nammi Box and Vigo models drove through the district. A test drive and exchange camp for Dongfeng EVs are also planned.

### Oxfam forum

Oxfam in Asia held its Rivers, Rights, Resilience Forum 2026 in Colombo. The three-day meetup brought water experts, policymakers, civil society, researchers, and community leaders from across South Asia. Former water resources minister Dipak Gyawali addressed the group about public-private-civic partnerships for more inclusive and accountable water governance.

### Chhurpi exports

Chhurpi exports through the Mechi Customs Office in Kakarbhitta, Jhapa have increased 32% during the first five months of FY 2025/26. More than 275,246kg of hard yak cheese used in dog chews worth Rs485.2 million was exported. Nepal is working to ensure quality control on chhurpi, even as India and China compete with the Nepali product in pet stores in the West.



### NMB 30<sup>th</sup> AGM

NMB Bank conducted its 30<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting on 8 January chaired by Manoj Kumar Goyal. The AGM approved a proposal to distribute dividends of 10%, half cash half stock, on current paid-up capital to shareholders.



### Ather finance

E-scooter brand Ather's new financing program allows customers to buy an Ather scooter at Rs6,058 a month. Features include a touchscreen dashboard, fast charging, software updates, 160km range. Ather has a fast charging network with 27 points in key cities and highways.

### NRB issues bonds

NRB is selling one-year bonds to soak up extra cash sitting idle in banks. It has offered Rs155 billion in bonds since 29 December. Banks buy these bonds using spare money, which temporarily moves it to the central bank. This helps slow down inflation and pushes banks to lend more.

### Kid bonus in Syangja

Kaligandaki Rural Municipality in Syangja is offering Rs4,000 a month for two years to families with three or more children. The local government hopes the incentive will boost the region's declining population. Villages are emptying as people have fewer children or move out.

### NEA power cuts

NEA director Hitendra Shakya has instructed officials to solve frequent power failures in the evenings. Shakya carried out on-site inspections, and held discussions with grid officials. He stated that electric heaters increased electricity usage, causing localised outages.

### Hydro shares

Locals of Api Himal Rural Municipality are protesting against a 10MW project by Makarigad Hydropower, demanding 80% of shares. They want concrete walls on roads affected by the project, as well as replacement water mills, and material for the construction of schools and hospitals. There has been a surge in local demands from hydropower projects since the GenZ protests.

### Agro Expo

The Nepal AgriTech International Expo at the Chitwan Expo Center scheduled for 16-18 January, aims to modernise the agricultural sector and promote new technologies. Companies providing agricultural technology, dairy, tools, seeds, fertilisers, pesticides, food processing, agricultural machinery, animal health services, and financial solutions from Nepal, India, and China will have stalls. Entry is free.

### Launches Union-Pay

Nepal Investment Mega Bank launched Union-Pay Card, which will allow customers to transact conveniently within the country and abroad. It is accepted at most businesses and ATMs around the world. The bank is offering to waive the card fee for five years.



### NAIMA training

NAIMA will train 1,651 Kathmandu Traffic Police for the next five years on practical skills and new vehicle technology. The first phase of training begins 18 January and will include topics like modern traffic management, road safety, stress management, communication, conflict management, hand gesture skills.

# Proud to wear DOLPO

As domestic adventure tourism takes off, so does this Made in Nepal outdoor wear brand



## Vishad Raj Onta

The series Nepal Made profiles world-class Nepali products and the people behind them.

Deepak Acharya was born in a farming family in Kaski, and at age 14 came down to Pokhara to study. To pay for classes, he sold down jackets.

More than 20 years later, he is still selling jackets. Not international brands anymore, but products of his own outdoor outfitting company, DOLPO. And despite a double master's degree, he is still studying.

Acharya and his brother-in-law started making and selling jackets and gear for international companies out of Thamel. After losing his business partner in the 2015 earthquake, he was done selling imported items and launched his own line of outerwear named after Nepal's rugged and remote district known for its stunning landscape.

Something clicked, and DOLPO took off, replacing foreign brands with Nepal-made high quality outdoor gear at affordable prices.

"A lot of work went into choosing the name Dolpo," says Acharya, who considered what came into people's minds when they heard the name of a place



PHOTO COURTESY: DEEPAK ACHARYA



DOLPO

with double-O sound. "I wanted a brand that local customers would instantly relate to toughness and mountains."

The elegant logo reflects this as well, made up of two overlapping rounded triangles denoting mountains with a third peak in the middle. Underneath is 'DOLPO' in upper case sans serif.

**RIGHT DESIGN, RIGHT PRICE**  
"Our philosophy is to have the right design, at the right price," says co-founder Deepak Acharya, adding with a smile that his pricing strategy has made business easy: "The employees at North Face may sell North Face, but they wear Dolpo."

The rebranding was so successful that Acharya regrets not launching it sooner. The reason for the success is that the outdoor gear market in Nepal has taken off with more and more domestic tourists trekking in the high mountains to share their adventures on social media.

Nepalis seem to be consciously choosing sustainable, Nepal made products of international quality. Acharya says: "Of course, there will always be a demographic that only wears North Face, or Sonam. But we have the right design, right price philosophy."

DOLPO uses fabric and material mainly from Japan, and adheres to strict quality control. The reversible down jackets, windcheaters, shorts,

fleece-lined pants, trekking trousers, backpacks, and polo shirts can be bought through its website, or two exclusive flagship stores in Sorakhutte and Thamel Chok.

"After the rebrand, we slowly made a digital platform, marketed online, and worked with a delivery company to get items directly to buyers," says Acharya. "We have no brokers or middlemen to keep prices low for the consumer."

Besides selling directly, DOLPO is a family business with Acharya's mother, sister, and nephew all involved (pictured). The company proves there are business opportunities in Nepal to meet a growing demand for high quality products at affordable prices "The market is begging for an auto-correction," he says.

For Nepal's pessimistic youth who are fleeing the country, Acharya urges patience: "The younger generation wants shortcuts. The mindset is to set up a venture and in three years they will be set for life. But this is not how success works."

"Choose a field, put in ten years of effort, really learn about it, and then you will see the vast possibility present in Nepal," he continues.

Last month, the DOLPO logo was seen on the jerseys of the Biratnagar Kings in NPL 2. The company made hats, jackets, and jerseys for star-studded cricket players including Lokesh Bam, Sandeep Lamichhane, Faf Du Plessis, and Martin Gupthill. The Kings finished second in the group, and although Acharya is a football fan, he is happy to contribute to the rise of cricket in Nepal. 🇳🇵

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Sonaha communities here have deeply-rooted socio-cultural ties to the river. They have fished in it for generations, and fish is associated with births, deaths, and weddings. As their name suggests, the Sonaha have also traditionally panned for gold in the sand along the banks (pictured, far left).

But in recent decades, over-fishing, pollution and infrastructure have led to a decline in the Karnali's fish population.

Last week, near the Satti bridge connecting Sudurpaschim and Lumbini Provinces, the fog lifted to reveal the blue-green Karnali glimmering in the sun. Hundreds of people from Kailali's Tikapur and Bardia's Rajapur gathered for the inauguration of the Sakhi Fish Sanctuary — the first conservation effort of its kind in Nepal (main photo).

The sanctuary covers nearly 4 sq km of the Lower Karnali that falls within the two municipalities, and is ecologically significant since it serves as critical breeding, spawning, and nursery habitats for endangered fish, reptiles and mammals.

Here are found the rare Gangetic River Dolphin (*Platanista gangetica*), the Gharial (*Gavialis gangeticus*) fish-eating crocodile, and Smooth-coated Otter (*Lutrogale perspicillata*). In addition, there are 197 species of fish in the Karnali, of which 136 are found here in the Tarai section of the river.

The pebbled riverbed is a

# KARNALI AQUATIC RESERVE

Nepal's first fish sanctuary is an initiative of local governments and indigenous communities

Shristi Karki in Kailali

The wide Karnali River looks like the sea here in the Tarai, and thick fog makes it impossible to see the other shore. Farmers melt into the mist as they head off to their farms.

A weak sun filters through by mid-morning. Pigs nap in their pens, goats are dressed in cardigans fashioned out of jute sacks for warmth, hens peck listlessly at the mud. Ducks waddle across the country roads, and cars swerve to avoid them.

The indigenous Tharu and

## Indigenous people pay price

Local communities in Nepal suffer consequences of wildlife-related crimes, while traffickers go scot free

Sonia Awale

Illegal wildlife trade is the fourth most lucrative trafficking crime after drugs, humans, and weapons. Most wildlife ends up in China and Southeast Asia to be used mainly in traditional medicine or as bushmeat.

Nepal is both the source and transit for wildlife trafficking, and while the authorities have been successful in protecting flagship mammals like tigers, rhinos, and leopards, the country still serves as a major transit point for less popular wildlife.

Despite strict laws against wildlife crimes, members of indigenous communities are easily tempted by organised transboundary criminals. They are recruited to poach endangered animals and plants, and end up in



jail, while ring leaders are rarely caught.

Many are not hardened criminals, just regular folk like Bishnu Adhikari, 30, who served time in Kathmandu's Central Jail. He had gone with a friend to sell pangolin scales without knowing it was illegal and that the punishment was so harsh.

Bikash Chhetri, a Grade 11 student, was riding a motorcycle with college friends when they were intercepted by the Central Investigation Bureau (CIB). Chhetri says he had no idea his friend was carrying the contraband in his bag.

Both Adhikari and Chhetri served five years in jail. But most people from Nepal's indigenous

communities are often unaware of the protected status or importance of the wildlife they were recruited to smuggle, handle, or transport.

"Most indigenous people involved in wildlife trade in Nepal are not criminals, they are poor and live near protected areas, and are simply trying to support their families, and mostly



it is opportunistic killing," says wildlife researcher Kumar Paudel of Greenhood Nepal. "Often they are exploited by higher-ups in the ladder of organised crime."

Paudel filed a petition at the Supreme Court in 2018, and the court five years later ordered the government to implement the law in a full, fair, and consistent manner.

breeding ground for fish when the river is low, while the oxbow lakes are nursing grounds for fish. This is what makes this section of the Karnali ideal to be declared a sanctuary.

But what makes the conservation effort really unique is that it is an initiative of the two local municipalities, the local Tharu, Sonaha and other indigenous communities.

The sanctuary will support the river's aquatic biodiversity, and is supported by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the Dolphin Conservation Centre, Freed Kamaiya Women Development Forum, Small Mammals Conservation and Research Foundation, and the Sonaha Bikas Samaj.

### MEKONG LESSONS

The mayors of Tikapur and Rajapur visited fish conservation zones in Laos along the Mekong River to learn about their conservation practices.

"We have indiscriminately killed the fish in the Karnali during the breeding and nursing season," said Rajapur Mayor Dipesh Tharu at the inauguration. "We felt that if this continued there would be no fish left."

Tharu is aware that some locals are wary of conservation initiatives, fearing that it will ban fishing altogether. The sanctuary will allow sustainable fishing but ban the use of dynamite and poison to kill fish.

"The sanctuary will contribute to the conservation of not just fish species, but also the mammals and reptiles that live here," explained ichthyologist Suresh Wagle. "It will protect the spawning and nursing grounds, restore the natural habitat of fish and ensure their genetic continuation."

Tikapur's mayor Ram Lal Dangaura Tharu recalled his own childhood spent fishing in the Karnali: "Even two decades ago there used to be plenty of fish here, we used to bring baskets full of them home. Now, it is looking like there will be no fish left. This is why the sanctuary is important."

Local governments taking the lead in conservation allows them to have ownership, and help citizens understand the importance of protecting the riverine ecosystem better.

"The commitment of the local government towards resource conservation, management and sustainable development is what makes this sanctuary so unique," says Ghana Gurung of WWF Nepal. "In Nepal and across the world, we are seeing indigenous culture and traditions disappear with the biodiversity. This initiative will not just protect freshwater aquatic species but also the culture and heritage of indigenous groups linked to the river."

Komal Sonaha grew up fishing and panning for gold along the



suspicion among local communities, but now, there is a realisation that the sanctuary is the best thing that could have happened here," Sonaha added.

Sonaha and her family still pan for gold, but with the fish scarce, their primary means of livelihood has shifted to livestock like many other families in Tikapur and Rajapur, supported by national and local institutions.

Ashmita Tharu and Pratima Tharu also used to depend on fish, but now have shifted to vegetable farming in Rajapur. This time of year, there is spinach, cucumber, and cauliflower ready to be sold to nearby markets.

The women are now financially independent and actively contribute to their household expenses and their children's education. Said Pratima: "We used to fish in this river without thinking about the consequences. We had no idea how important conservation was."

Ashmita nods in agreement. "Now, we are self-employed and so busy with our vegetables that we do not even have time to fish anymore," she said.

With Tikapur and Rajapur municipalities leading the charge, conservationists hope that other local governments and communities along other rivers in Nepal will follow suit to preserve aquatic biodiversity.

"This initiative from the two municipalities is a milestone in conservation," said Bijay Shrestha of the Dolphin Conservation Centre. "This will serve as a model and can be replicated across the country to conserve our freshwater habitat and the people who rely on them."

Local officials also hope that the sanctuary will provide an opportunity to explore options like fishing tourism.

Said Tikapur Mayor Ram Lal Dangaura Tharu: "The Karnali, with its biodiversity, is a river of opportunity and possibility, we are determined to protect it, and make what this river has to offer known to Nepal and the world." 🇳🇵



SNEHA TAMRAKAR / WWF NEPAL

# e for poaching



PHOTOS: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

One of the indigenous communities is the semi-nomadic Chepang who have a long tradition of eating fruit bats. Dibesh Karmacharya of the Center of Molecular Dynamics Nepal in Kathmandu has been looking into new diseases for over a decade and a half, and this community in Makwanpur next to Chitwan

National Park was selected.

"Bats are known to carry viruses and bacteria, which are not harmful to them, but when humans get exposed the microbes can mutate and become pathogens with high transmissibility," explains Karmacharya, who found that many Chepang had been imprisoned for poaching.

"Indigenous communities are often disenfranchised and at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder, and need some kind of income," says Karmacharya. "They are hunter-gatherers and have knowledge of the land as well as wildlife, so they get recruited by wildlife traffickers, and often end up being the ones getting caught, instead of those who hire them."

### CLIMATE FACTOR

Global warming has meant that vectors that carry pathogens, as well as animals, are also moving to higher altitudes. As temperature rises, glaciers melt, and previously barren slopes have vegetation. Many mammals, such as common leopards, which are found in the foothills, are moving up the mountains to share the habitat of snow leopards. Tigers have also been known to move out of Tarai

national parks to seek cooler climates in the Mahabharata Range.

Besides the risk of being caught, indigenous communities also are exposed to disease when they handle wildlife and harvest organs. In the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic, there was speculation that the virus had jumped from pangolins to humans, which has since been disproven.

Even so, pangolins are the world's most trafficked mammal. The scales of the anteater are thought to have medical properties and are used in traditional Chinese medicine in China, as well as eaten as a delicacy in parts of Asia.

Tulshi Laxmi Suwal of the Small Mammals Conservation and Research Foundation (SMCRF), who did her PhD on pangolins from Taiwan, says there is a link between climate, increased human-wildlife contact, and emerging diseases.

"Climate change is directly affecting their food and habitat," explains Suwal. "Pangolins need a lot of water and if they don't get it, ectoparasites under their scales might be easily released to their surroundings. But water

is becoming scarcer with climate breakdown."

Researcher Kumar Paudel says law enforcement must be driven not so much by the total number of traffickers arrested, but by the goal of discouraging people from participating in the trade. This means fair and accountable implementation of the law so that indigenous people are not disproportionately impacted.

Some ring leaders involved in tiger and rhino poaching have been arrested, but a handful of them staged jailbreaks during the September GenZ protests and are again at large — raising the risk that poaching may increase.

"Investigation must move to the upper echelons of the trade," says Paudel. "And indigenous people need alternative livelihoods and education so they are not easily recruited to hunt down wildlife."

The solution may lie in small, local incentives that can help communities realise the importance of conservation while also empowering them, socially and economically. One such example is the Pangolin Trail in Bagh Bhairav Community Forest in Kirtipur near Kathmandu.

After their study found the community forest to be a habitat for pangolins and endangered bird species, SMCRF built a trekking trail which has since been handed over to the local community which can get income from visitor fees. The local government has expanded the trail, added an information center, and runs clean-up campaigns.

This gave the local Tamang community of 100 households a sense of ownership and agency. Local villagers have been trained to become citizen scientists, and help in recording pangolin behaviour. One of them is Sun Laxmi Pakhrin, who is not formally educated, but works in pangolin protection using GPS tracking systems and camera traps.

A community previously notorious for theft, drug trafficking and wildlife poaching is now reformed. Families are also involved in small businesses such as poultry.

Suwal says: "Women in indigenous communities are now in decision-making roles and the guardians of nature and wildlife." 🇳🇵

With contribution from Qian Sun, *Global Voices*.



## Events



### Metamorphosis

Explore a transformed world of creatures and insects crafted from everyday trash at Metamorphosis, a solo exhibition by Saurab Koirala.

15 January, 4pm onwards, Taragaon Next, Boudha

### Stand-up show

A stand-up comedy special by BT Kancha, known for his sharp and satirical takes on Nepali cinema and society.

17 January, Tickets: Rs600, Titos, Thamel

### Queer Film Festival

The second edition of Queer Film Festival Kathmandu features over 170 queer films from across the globe.

15-24 January, 11am onwards, Airavat Picture House, Thapathali

### Samrat Joshi exhibition

Siddhartha Art Gallery's upcoming solo exhibition of paintings by Samrat Joshi will explore the beauty and essence of the valley.

18 January-18 February, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited



### Eh Thibeu

A Nepali theatre production blending myth, culture, and human relationships, offering a unique stage experience that audiences will not want to miss.

Starts from 21 January (except Tuesdays), 5:15pm, Shilpi Theatre

### Gurkha Knife Making

If you are traveling to Nepal, experience the history and craftsmanship of the Gurkha knife through a hands-on blacksmithing workshop. Learn about the origins, cultural significance, and forge your own piece. Book through Trip Advisor.

Ongoing, \$66



### Overnight hiking

A two-day medium-level hiking adventure from Jorpati to Ama Yangri, with overnight stay at Basecamp. Explore Tarkeyghyang, reach Ama Yangri peak, and enjoy guided trekking with meals, tents, and basic support included.

23-24 January, Tickets: Rs5,500 per person, Jyatha, Thamel



## Music

### Live at XO

A live music night bringing high energy from Urgan Dong & Jambu Ling, who will perform hits like Tamang Dai.

19 January, 8pm onwards, Tickets: Rs800-Rs1,200, XO Club, Thamel

### KTA Haru x Phosphenes

Alternative rock by KTA Haru blends with indie sounds by Phosphene to create an evening of soulful music.

16 January, Tickets: Rs1,200, Eden Sanepa



### The Elements fundraiser

A live fundraising gig for Echoes of the Valley featuring The Elements, known for their powerful, emotive sound, with Hami Jotma opening the night.

16 January, Tickets: Rs1,000, Lord of the Drinks



### Cobweb

An exclusive show at which Cobweb will launch its Jay Nepal music video along with a live performance.

17 January, 5pm onwards, Tickets: Rs1,499, Moksh Bar

### Karaoke & Open mic

Ladies, get together with friends, get some drinks and sing your heart out at Karaoke & Open mic nights every Wednesday.

Wednesday, Beers N' Cheers, Jhamsikhel



## Getaway



### Newa Chén

This hotel is reminiscent of the Malla Dynasty. The open rooms and courtyards embody the palaces of the family that once ruled the city.

Kobahal, Lalitpur (01) 5533532

### Shangri-La Village Resort

Get away for a couple days this winter and head to the idyllic Shangri-La Village Resort. Meditate in the outdoor Yoga Pergola, indulge in a massage in Phewa Spa and soak up the sun in the Sanctuary Garden.

Gharipatan, Pokhara (61) 462222



### Maya Manor

This Rana palace turned boutique hotel offers a Victorian Gazebo, manicured gardens, highly-rated restaurants and an exclusive rooftop garden overlooking the city.

Darbar Marg (01) 4528028

### The Last Resort

Bungee jump, Tandem swing, or white water rafting--take an adventurous trip to Bhote Koshi River near the Tibetan border.

Bhotekoshi, Sindhupalchok, 9801258675

### Royal Singi Hotel

The distinctive and symbolic art elements of Tibetan culture, made by local artisans adds to the serenity and charm of the Potala suite at Royal Singi hotel.

Lal Durbar, Kamaladi (01) 4524191



## Dining

### Bayleaf

Drop by the garden restaurant for Burmese dishes such as Burmese Tofu Thoke, Khao Swe Thoke (Noodle Salad), Mohinga (fish noodle soup) and other signature pork dishes.

Tangal, 9823514053

### Gangnam Galbi Barbeque

Korean barbecue, grill and stick food, a.k.a. galbi, will tempt and tantalise taste buds as it cooks right in front of visitors.

Naxal (01) 4547137



### New Orleans

Offering a wide variety of western dishes that are scrumptious yet healthy. The rosemary chicken and hamburgers will make you come back for more.

Jhamel, 9813057100

### 8848 Mt. Bar

8848 offers a selection of world-class beverages at a reasonable price. Enjoy your favorite drinks inside the bar, patio or even in the resort's main courtyard.

Gokarna Forest Resort, Thali (01) 4451212



### Pawan Sweets

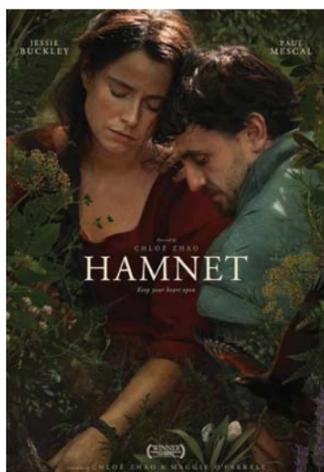
In the mood for Indian? Enjoy sweets, South Indian cuisines and other meals. The Pawan Special Dosa is a must-try.

Baneshwor (01) 5906437

## Weekend Weather



## Our Pick



Chloé Zhao's critically acclaimed 2025 historical drama Hamnet, adapted from the 2020 novel by Maggie O'Farrell, is a dramatisation of the life of William Shakespeare and his wife Anne Hathaway's grief and life in the wake of the death of their son, Hamnet. The film premiered at the 52<sup>nd</sup> Telluride Film Festival, and most recently won Best Motion Picture – Drama at the Golden Globes this week, with its star Jessie Buckley also winning Best Actress for her category. Also stars Paul Mescal, with Emily Watson and Joe Alwyn in supporting roles.

## 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

# The Man Who Shook Our Minds

New documentary on Ujwal Thapa is an essential viewing for those who care about Nepal's future, and want to make a difference

Sophia L Pandé

At Budhanilkantha School Ujwal Thapa was a few years my senior. He was quiet and kept to himself. I didn't know him very well despite being related to him.

What we did have in common, coming of age in the 1990s, is our generation, GenX, which became weary and inured to Nepal's famously unstable politics.

Counting the events of September, GenX has astonishingly lived through three people's movements, one armed conflict, a flawed but hard-won Constitution, and a major earthquake.

Despite his previous youthful reticence, GenXer Ujwal Thapa did not long remain a complaisant bystander against the backdrop of these upheavals.

By the mid 2000s he had become deeply political, but without the equivocation that so often accompanies politics. Thanks to his lived experience he came to believe that the youth of Nepal are the key to our future. He believed in discerning wisdom (bibeksheelta), innovation, and nurture. He inspired entire generations, young and old, including the GenZ, before his untimely death due to Covid in 2021 at age 44.

He had started a tech company, and employed and mentored scores of youth. Only after making a significant contribution to civil society did he turn towards politics, founding and then stepping back from the Bibeksheel Nepali party, which has after several complicated mergers and splits, been integrated into the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP).

When the Ujwal Thapa Foundation set out to make a documentary on his life three years ago, no one could have known that it would premiere at such a crucial point in Nepal's social and political history. Everything that Ujwal Thapa believed in still holds true. He would have been proud to see Nepal's GenZ stand up for themselves, peacefully. He would have been grieved at the state condoned bloodshed, and deeply shocked by the savage revolution that followed.

Most of all, I wonder how he would have reacted to the publishing of the blatantly elitist RSP proportional representation list, the party that many had pinned their hopes on. That party now seems like it may be a chip off the rotten old block, ruled by men endorsing rampant nepotism, and



Stills from the documentary Dimag Ghochné Manche.



outnumbered by people without scruples. Many of the names on the list and the rankings, in particular, disrespect the very spirit of a provision that was created for those competent individuals who would not otherwise be able to contest elections, due to lack of monetary and social capital, but whose marginalised voices are vital for inclusive policy making. There is still time for real inclusion, to embrace a more bibeksheel path, before the March elections.

#### CIVIC-MINDED CITIZEN

Ujwal Thapa's own firm ethical stance is clear in the *The Man Who Shook Our Minds*, translated loosely from the Nepali title (दिमाग घोच्ने मान्छे). At almost two hours, the film is filled with thought-provoking and sage counsel, and also offers very real insight into how Ujwal Thapa evolved into the icon he is today.

It isn't easy making a documentary after the passing of the primary subject. While there are many talking heads, the people featured, friends, family, fellow activists and senior politicians are all eloquent in their descriptions of Ujwal Thapa and his transformation from an engaged, civic-minded entrepreneur into a committed political leader. He believed in putting women first, and understood the crucial necessity for a welfare state that would serve its people. The main man is not deified, he is humanised.

The feature is punctuated and leavened, with moments of real humour as his infamous bluntness and occasional domestic haplessness are gently exposed. Another strength of the film is the profound love story between Ujwal Thapa and his brave, brilliant, incredibly resilient wife, Erica Adhikary, the heroine to a real life hero, and a major force behind the film.

Prime Minister Sushila Karki was present at the premiere of the film with members of her Cabinet. Candid and sincere in her opening

remarks, she said she had wanted to attend the moment she heard about the film. She had known Ujwal Thapa, and she had mourned his loss, praying for him during his illness. She wished that leaders like him were here today to show us the way forward in a time of need.

Ujwal Thapa was not perfect, but he was remarkable. He realised that being a civic-minded citizen just is not enough. To make a real difference, one also needs to be principled, insightful, entrepreneurial, creative, self-motivated, able to speak truth to power, incorruptible, practical,

well prepared, and, perhaps, most importantly, able to step back from holding power even after attaining it.

The saying by Plato 'He who does not desire power is fit to hold it' was surely meant for people like Ujwal Thapa. One can only hope that in the near future more people embodying this description will, however reluctantly, come forward to lead Nepal. Ujwal Thapa worked hard to enable this, they must be out there. 🇳🇵

*Sophia L Pandé is on the Ujwal Thapa Foundation Advisory Board, and is a writer, art-historian and filmmaker.*

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# Father's migration, son's



**DIASPORA  
DIARIES 78-79**

These are the 78<sup>th</sup> and 79<sup>th</sup> episodes of *Diaspora Diaries*, a Nepali Times series in collaboration with Migration Lab providing a platform to share experiences of living, working and studying abroad.

**Pawan Dev Majhi and  
Shiv Narayan Majhi**

**Pawan Dev Majhi  
(Son, Mahottari)**

Growing up, my grandfather and father inspired me to study well by offering incentives of Rs5-10 every Saturday. This worked well, even though I failed to earn a reward every week.

This was an especially big deal in my Musahar community where education is not a priority. First come basic necessities like food, roof and clothes. Only after this, can we think about education.

As my brother and I grew up, my father in 2009 decided to migrate overseas for work to support our family, and our educational expenses. I come from a community in which passing Grade 10 is a big deal.

During the Covid-19 lockdown I relied on YouTube videos on my uncle's phone to prepare for

my high school exams. My father was back from Qatar during the lockdown. After I passed Grade 8, my father had bought me a bicycle, but there was no reward for passing Grade 10. We were struggling to survive day-to-day.

My father and grandfather wanted me to be a doctor. For them, this meant completing the Health Assistant course. But to be a doctor, I learnt only in grade 10 that I had to do an MBBS. My teachers and friends encouraged me. But everything eventually comes down to money. I could not even go to Kathmandu for my further studies because of high expenses.

My school had added a +2 course so I was in the first cohort in the science faculty. After my Grade 12 exam, we could not afford coaching classes for medical school entrance exams that everyone else was taking. I thought I was capable of making it on my own.

My results were not good enough for a scholarship. Paying was never an option. I tried again, and appeared for five exams including MBBS, dentistry and public health. Again, I did not get the MBBS scholarship but passed four other exams with scholarships.

My family urged me to choose dentistry, and I boarded a bus to Kathmandu to enroll. During that journey, I changed my mind to take up entrance preparation for medical school despite the expenses.

My success with the other four exams without any guidance had also boosted my confidence. I thought guidance through coaching classes would help me secure a scholarship for my MBBS as well.

My parents supported the decision although they had



legitimate fears: I was wasting one more year and what if I did not even get the MBBS OR dentistry scholarship the following year?

I came to Kathmandu with Rs50,000 which lasted two months. I tried to find work. I was ready to do anything from dishwashing to tutoring, but failed. Guiltily, I asked my father for help again,

and he came through as always by borrowing money. Studying in a preparation institute helped a lot. There were many of us and we had to take mock exams every week. When I was studying alone, I used to be overconfident. Back home, there were many distractions, with farm work and household chores.

In Kathmandu, there was no



pressure of this sort. But the loans pushed me to make the most of my time there. I studied till 2AM. All this paid off, and I passed.

I did not tell everyone immediately because there was still uncertainty around whether I would get a scholarship. When my name came out on the scholarship list, I could not be happier.

## Our migrant sons

What elderly parents of Nepal's overseas workers say about the sacrifices their children have had to make



**Jitu Mahato**

I have three sons. My eldest worked in Saudi Arabia for ten years and then went to Dubai. My second son has lived in Dubai for four years. My youngest worked in Malaysia but came back after his company went bankrupt.

Here, we don't have much land so what they have earned has helped with the grandchildren's education and other household expenses. My sons feed me, buy my clothes and medication. I take loans from others when I need it for our work in the field and pay them off when they send me money.

My farm work is not affected without them here because they had no interest in खेती बारी anyway, even when they were here they did not want to step in the fields.

Many youth have migrated from our village. Some have gone to Malaysia, others to the Gulf.

Some have done well, others have not. Some buy land or pay off loans, others come back without saving much.

Children can go to school wearing better clothes because of the money migrants send home. There are both good and bad sides of foreign employment. The earnings help because without it we would die hungry. But there are no young men in the village, everyone is abroad.

We are old. We are not educated. Even small things like paperwork that requires someone who knows how to read and write become inconvenient without them around. During hardships, it becomes more difficult and whoever is left behind comes together to help each other in whatever way we can.

My son recently bought me a scooter, as I am getting older and it has become difficult to get around. It has made it convenient to visit my daughter's house and other places.



**Tukra Bahadur  
Ale Magar and  
Gangi Maya Ale**

**Gangi:** My son is in Malaysia. He sends us money and we spend on household expenses. I wish we could save money too but we have not been able to. It balances out. He could not get a job here, so he left. Parents do not want to send their children away, but what could we do?

We have to spend Rs3,000 just on medicine every month. I am always worried about my son, it's not the same as having him in front of me. When he falls sick, there is no one around and he does not even get to take time off without wage deduction. Those things

worry me, having him around was more assuring.

Before Malaysia, he worked in Dubai for six years and was back here for two years in between. He got married then and re-migrated as responsibilities increased. The earnings of Dubai is this house.

**Tukra:** We used to have a small mud house but my son said we should invest in a stronger house. I did not go abroad myself because it was not common in our village back then. But now it has become a trend and our son also left. I wish I had got to migrate as well. By not migrating, I think I did not get to see the world. How is the world? How is it to earn abroad? I have never been in a plane, I just have six goats and the farm. Everything is going alright.

# education

## Against all odds, a Nepali migrant provides education for his son to become a doctor



feel the need to repay everyone who contributed.

It helped that I enjoyed school. There was still a lot of work in the fields, but I managed to study for a few hours every day. Had my father not migrated, I would have dropped out at Grade 8, and there would be pressure on me to also migrate for work. We used to live in a mud house, now it is a sturdier building that is still under construction.

My father could not complete the house because his savings went towards my education. We will now complete the house. Our father has already done his share of work. He is now 55 and his health is not what it once was.

He went to Qatar again after we took out more loans for my studies. He will come home soon. I had dissuaded him from re-migrating last year, but he insisted saying everyone has to do their duty. Indeed, my duty is also to study.

### “I have done my duty”

**Shiv Narayan Majhi**  
(Father, Qatar)

Things are lighter for me after my son passed his MBBS entrance exam with scholarship. I was thrilled to get his call with this great news.

My friends here are also happy for me. I have told them I will buy them sweets once I get my salary this month. People like me who work hard overseas can understand the happiness I feel as a parent.

My son was always bright, and that gave me the determination to work harder. Even when he chose to wait another year for an MBBS



has achieved what even the richest people cannot get easily.

When I first came to Qatar 17 years ago, people did not migrate from my village. I had a relative overseas who connected me to a job in Qatar. As a labourer, I was determined to make sure my son had it better and education was the only way out.

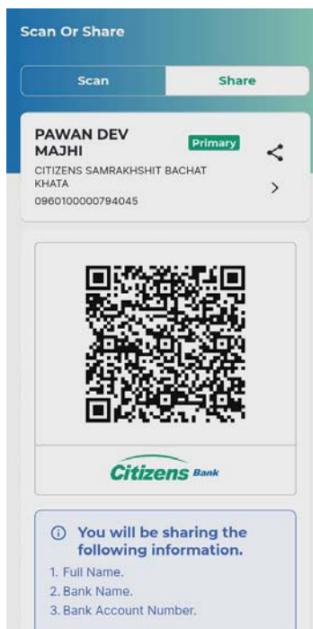
I never got a chance to study growing up, but I knew the value of school because some educated people from our village had got good jobs as accountants and teachers. Because I had no education, I had to work on other people's land and we got 3-4 kg of paddy for a whole day's work.

Even here in Qatar, it is physically demanding work in the heat. Those with education are supervisors, timekeepers and engineers who order us around.

The trust in my son's capabilities made me work hard and invest in his studies. And that is what I am doing even at age 55. I am still repaying his loans.

Now my son tells me to come back. I feel I have done my duty. 🇳🇵

*To support Pawan with his MBBS education, please contribute to Pawan Dev Majhi (Account No. 0960100000794045, Citizens Samrakshit Bachat Khata) or use the QR code.*



scholarship and let go of four scholarships, we supported him. My wife farms back home and I earn money overseas.

I have invested some of my earnings in land and a house, but mostly it has gone for the education of my children. The scholarship reflects our sweat and blood, and he

We had to deposit money for admission at BPKIHS in Dharan, and we did not have enough to pay that amount. Folks back in the village started a Rs100,000 donation campaign on social media. With that money, I enrolled at BPKIHS.

The scholarship only covers tuition costs, there are still living expenses. People have been

contributing whatever they can: some sent Rs40, others Rs30,000. I do not know who these people are since online banking does not disclose names of contributors.

I am extremely grateful for the support, and it has added a greater sense of responsibility. If we had to take loans, it would have been pressure to pay one person. Now I



### Mohan Bahadur Karki

All three of our sons are working in Malaysia. We had trouble feeding ourselves so they wanted to go and earn for the family. Having sons overseas has helped ensure we can survive, and have clothes to wear.

We used to live in a mud house in the past, which had to be repaired over and over again. Now we have a concrete house. All our children and grandchildren should have been living with us, but it feels empty sometimes with just the two of us. We have moved many times in our life. This is the ninth place we are living in. Now we won't move.

My son sent the design of the house from Malaysia. He sent a picture of a house he liked from there to the contractor here. It is an exact replica, and people even come here to make TikTok and music videos. Even in my dreams, I never thought I would one day live in a house like this. Our sons were smart, and managed it. People get surprised that I, a labourer who worked in others' fields, live in a house like this, but we still have outstanding loans for this house.

Many youth from our village have left. Some have lost their jobs and returned. Ours are thankfully okay so far, but one of our sons' companies has started laying off workers so he might be next on the list. Overtime hours have also been cut in Malaysia, they say. We will see.

We have faced too many difficulties during our lifetime. We don't know what is waiting for us next. All our lives, we have faced difficult periods uncertain about the next day, the next night. Life has been full of tests.

Farming is not reliable because the rains are erratic. Too much of it this year. It was okay for paddy, but not for tomatoes. As you get older, you cannot work as much. While you have your youth, you can earn. I never got to migrate overseas, I grew old just ploughing fields. I did not get an opportunity to study. I

don't even know how to write my name.

I worked as a labourer all my life to take care of the family because the land did not produce enough. Now I cannot work, even if I wanted to. I am not so strong anymore, and my mind is not as sharp. Thankfully my sons have taken over and they tell us not to work hard and to rest, they will take care of us.

They remind me not to carry heavy loads or push myself too hard in the fields. I have started getting sick more frequently. I spend quite a lot on medication. At some point, I had become near immobile for two months and could not even go to the bathroom. I had to come back from Kathmandu with medicine that cost Rs14,000.

If my sons had not gone overseas, we would be relying on our farming. Things would have been tougher. We don't know how long they will stay overseas. I heard there is a limit of ten years in Malaysia. Once they are back, maybe they will go back to the fields. What other option do they have? But we cannot always rely on overseas work either. What to do?

Life's challenges don't go away but you have to figure ways out to deal with them. As long as there is even one breath left, we must keep fighting.



### Nirmala Rana Magar

Two of my sons are abroad. One is in Kuwait, the other in Malaysia. The younger son migrated more recently and his earnings have mostly gone to pay off recruitment loans. The elder son built this house for us.

Before this, we lived in a mud house which I had built with the earnings when I worked in India. Money is important but I miss my sons everyday. I have a lot of love for them. When you have your children, you have the world. We talk in the mornings and evenings via video calls.

They had to move overseas because we could not survive on their earnings here. We can now afford the school fees of our granddaughters, but their dads around would have been better for them. But what can we do? We had no choice.

The recent GenZ protests gave us some hope that things will be better, but it is still unsure. When will the day of the poor come? Will we ever get to live a decent life? No matter what happens, no matter who is in government, it is the poor like us who suffer. So many governments have changed but we are stuck where we were. If our children got good jobs, we would be happy.



# Nepali artists at India Art Fair

Danfe Arts is taking works by six Nepali artists to the prestigious New Delhi event next month

Niranjan Kunwar

The India Art Fair (IAF) advertises itself as 'the biggest event in India's cultural calendar ... a leading platform' for art collectors who can discover modern and contemporary art from South Asia.

For this year's ticketed event on 5-8 February in New Delhi, more than 133 exhibitors from 14 countries will be representing top artists from their networks. Danfe Arts, a touring art space from Kathmandu, will participate in the Galleries Section of IAF's 17<sup>th</sup> edition featuring a booth with works by six Nepali artists.

One of them is Sanjeep Maharjan, Assistant Professor for Sculpture at Kathmandu University, who will showcase his claywork as part of Danfe Arts' entourage. In 2024, Maharjan curated a show for Danfe Arts at Takpa Gallery titled, 'Unfolding the City'.

The IAF prefers to showcase skilled artists who have honed their practice over many years. Unlike various biennales and residencies that have been popping up increasingly in Asia, the Fair is not particularly concerned with sociopolitical issues.

As the name implies, it is a grand bazaar where artists and their agents show up, to be seen — a powerful regional platform where creativity merges with commercial interests. This is not necessarily a bad thing. Artists have a reputation



for being weak at business.

And in Kathmandu, where the contemporary art scene has been steadily expanding since the early aughts, more and more creatives are seeking platforms like IAF and collaborators like Danfe Arts in order to boost their portfolios.

#### A NEW COURSE

In 2022, I was invited to participate in a formal group discussion by Shivangi Bansal who was preparing to chart a new course with her Danfe Journal. The journal included photos of artworks as well as writings about art and helped bridge the gap between art and the Nepali public's understanding of associated processes.

Contemporary art and literature

is considered a niche activity. Proper marketing and outreach is required to make the product accessible to the average consumer. Besides, consistency can also be an issue. Too often, energetic graduates might register organisations and launch initiatives only to burn out within a year or so. Nepali society would benefit more from a sustained effort with a long-term vision rather than trendy initiatives that look bright and shiny.

Danfe Arts discontinued the journal but continued to engage with Nepal's art community, like facilitating a commission for Mini Tamang by the India Art Fair (IAF) in 2025, as part of IAF's Young Collector's Program. Tamang's artwork, 'Evocative Waves', was



installed at New Delhi's Stir Art gallery last year. In 2024, Danfe Arts had organised a group exhibition called 'A Lake That Once Was' in New Delhi's Bikaner House to coincide with the India Art Fair, which listed the exhibition as part of its parallel programs. This meant the Nepali artists received more visibility and value among IAF's much larger audience.

Since its inception, Danfe Arts has put out an eclectic mix of programs, demonstrating innovative thinking and effort. With its multi-platform approach, Danfe Arts

has collaborated with restaurants like Mezze, putting up an exhibition in November 2025, 'Bhoye - The Feast'. Danfe Arts is also cultivating relationships with specific artists based on synergies and sensibilities.

The history of art practice in Nepal is long and illustrious, but due to political and geographical constraints, esteemed artists have been sheltered and confined within our national borders.

By featuring these six artists for the 2026 edition of IAF, Danfe Arts is helping them make regional connections. And as our artists and gallerists show up on global platforms, they might in

turn compel Nepalis to view more critically the value of art and how creative practices can contribute positively to society.

As technology takes over and AI bots spam the Internet, the issue of originality might become tantamount to survival. We should take risks in our professional pursuits in order to design new communal models of exchange. 🇳🇵

India Art Fair  
New Delhi  
5-8 February




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