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### Anil Gole, Romania

Dear Father, when I see the flag with the sun in your hands, I remember 12 years ago, your sunburnt skin in Qatar and mother's cheeks wrinkled with worry. Perhaps Uncle, too, found the Saudi heat so intolerable that he returned home. That may be why while seeking shade, he liked the NC tree symbol. Great uncle spent his whole life back home in the village, which may be why he identifies with symbols like the plough, the sickle, and hoe.

Even then, vote for the same politicians. Vote for the same politicians who have not developed the country, who have not fed the poor, whose sons have not been shot.



### Ambika Paudel, Qatar

Our parents back home are the actual voters, and we overseas are talking to them. I don't think they will be swayed just based on calls, and they shouldn't be, either. We are prioritising algorithms and words and social media boosts over vision, experience and concrete plans.

I am for the NC but I am not a blind supporter. Despite being at the forefront of every significant democratic change in Nepal's history, the party has had lapses, but it is currently on a new trajectory. Not all candidates of all parties are good, so we have to elect competent leaders and question them. Whatever promises they make need to be examined for delivery and vision.



### Jeevan Kumar Dewan, Malaysia

As a UML supporter, it is my duty to remind people to cut through the noise and to separate facts and truth. While elderly voters don't need much convincing as they are loyal to the party, I do engage a fair amount with the young voters. I have to remind them not to get distracted by the videos shared in social media platforms. All new is not good just because it is new, if there is no real political agenda.



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## Overseas vote bank

In September, under pressure from GenZ activists, Home Minister Om Prakash Aryal pledged to ensure that overseas Nepalis would be able to vote in the March election.

The analysis from experts, election officials, and much of the public was that the Election Commission was not prepared to ensure out-of-country voting in such a short time.

But just because the diaspora cannot exercise its franchise does not mean Nepalis abroad cannot influence the election outcome. The 2021 census said 2.1 million Nepalis lived abroad, but realistically three times more live, work and study overseas.

Being breadwinners also makes them decision makers for families back home. Most have left because they could not get meaningful jobs and sought opportunities abroad, which means they are not happy with the way Nepal has been governed by the established parties and leaders.

The diaspora is therefore mostly an anti-incumbent vote bank, which was one reason the political leadership blocked out-of-country voting for so long – despite a Supreme Court ruling that all citizens had a constitutional right to vote, wherever they lived.

In the 2022 polls, overseas Nepalis had already shown considerable influence by backing newer and alternative candidates like Balendra Shah for Kathmandu mayor, and parties like the RSP.

In the four years since, and especially since the GenZ

movement, support for a political shakeup has grown even stronger. So has technological reach that enables the diaspora to politically organise from overseas.

'Technology has reduced the distance in communication, but has also lowered the barrier in a way that allows overseas Nepalis to pressure family members,' author Narayan Wagle wrote in an op-ed on Setopati this week.

Indeed, all it takes for family members to be convinced whom to vote for is an ultimatum that relatives will stop sending money.

With less than a month to go for the 5 March election, many Nepalis overseas are campaigning remotely for preferred candidates, even if they cannot themselves cast ballots.

The overwhelming feeling seems to be that younger candidates should be given a chance.

Read what some Nepalis abroad have to say in Diaspora Diaries on page 4-5.



**Coffee BUZZ**  
**Java in the HIMALAYA**

**INSIDE PAGE 6-7**



### Prajwal Poudel, Saudi Arabia

I have to make sure that family members back home make the right decision this election. My cousin is also with me in Saudi Arabia and I was talking to his parents and telling them to vote correctly. They have voted for the same faces for two decades. I said if there had been changes we would not have had to migrate. That this time they should accept the masu-bhat and alcohol, say UML-Congress jindabad, take the money offered, but finally stamp on Ghanti.

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T&C APPLY

# A chance for Nepal's political renewal

The election can take us from the politics of personalised power to institutionalised collective leadership



## GUEST EDITORIAL

Radhesh Pant

This election is unfolding at a critical juncture in Nepal's democratic journey, shaped by a past of adversity but also a sense of future possibility.

Citizens are not skeptical of democracy itself, but about what it should deliver. There is frustration grounded in lived experience rather than indifference. They hold on to the belief that politics can still do better.

Nepal stands at a moment when the next generation is ready to lead, innovate, and take responsibility, but political space has not kept pace with professional capability. The urgency today is not abstract, it is immediate, and generational.

Nepal's democracy has reached a stage where competitive elections alone are no longer enough — it is mature enough now to be accountable for what it delivers.

People rightfully have qualms about established political parties, but they also laid the foundation of today's political system and deserve recognition. A political culture built around legacy and control is struggling to meet expectations. Leadership structures remain concentrated, internal decision-making is opaque, and loyalty outweighs competence. In a society that is younger,



KIRAN RAJ BISTA / RSS

better informed, and more demanding, this approach is stagnant, even anachronistic.

The most visible consequence is declining trust in governance outcomes. This should trouble all of us. When leadership renewal is resisted, when accountability mechanisms are weak, and when decisions are negotiated within closed circles, even well-intentioned policies lose public confidence.

A governance-centred political approach treats public office as responsibility rather than reward. It emphasises systems over personalities and results over narratives. Inclusion is not symbolic generosity but institutional strength.

Women's participation exposes the difference between inclusion and influence. While legal frameworks promote representation, real power often remains concentrated elsewhere.

The mixed electoral system assigns voters two distinct choices, one focused on individual representation and the other on strengthening political cultures through party selection. When voters recognise this distinction, elections become a tool for shaping standards rather than repeating habits.

Nepal's political future depends on the willingness to correct course without discarding experience. Established parties

possess networks, organisational frameworks, and institutional memory, which should not be abandoned simply because we are at a crossroads. However, without reform in how decisions are made and power shared, these strengths risk becoming constraints.

Elections should mark the start of accountability rather than its end. Democratic systems flourish when leaders expect continuous scrutiny and citizens remain engaged with a healthy dose of skepticism.

Old politics personalised power and resisted internal reform, limiting transparency and accountability. A newer political approach seeks to institutionalise decision-making, distribute leadership, and make governance visible and measurable. This election is a choice: politics as a daily democratic practice, or a periodic contest.

Nepal's talent is ready to contribute if the environment allows it. Across the world, Nepalis are competing and succeeding in technology, finance, engineering, and creative industries. Many are willing to return, or at least remain economically engaged with Nepal, if the right environment exists.

Government should not position itself as the primary creator of jobs. Sustainable employment is generated by enterprises, entrepreneurs, and innovators, not by expanding the state's payroll.

The responsibility of government is to remove barriers, invest in enabling infrastructure, and ensure fair rules so that individuals and businesses can create value. Politics should expand possibilities rather than managing scarcity. 🇳🇵

*Radhesh Pant is the chair of the VRock and Company and a former banker.*

## Trending Online



### Sky is not the limit

by Raj Silwal  
In the latest instalment of Diaspora Diaries, Raj Silwal recounts his spirited journey from dishwashing in Australia to working at a Michelin star restaurant in Doha. Go to nepalitimes.com to follow his saga.

Most reached and shared on Facebook



### Nepal's AI-generated election

by Nobel Rimal  
Four years ago, the idea that the most potent weapon in the next election in Nepal would be artificially generated clips of politicians beating each other up would have been science fiction. Yet here we are. Go online for details.

Most popular on X

### New vs New

by Sonia Awale  
The symbolic Balendra Shah vs K P Oli struggle has now been replaced by a face-off between Shah and Gagan Thapa, of the Nepali Congress (NC). This is an election for a chief executive as personality cult takes over politics. Read report on our website.

Most commented

### Time, transience, transition

by Sangya Lamsal  
We walk past familiar neighbourhoods and wonder how much it has changed. The Kalā Salon's ongoing exhibition Changing Times aims to do just that -- capture societal transformation in vibrant colours. Review online.

Most visited online page

## Letters

### ELECTION RACE

Vote on records, not on promises or ideology ('New vs New', Sonia Awale, #1296)

Forester

■ I take Balen's use of the SUV as normal — if it was not a noodle tycoon it would have been someone else. Unless our politicians don't do favours for them in exchange for what they are getting now, it should be fine.

Seller Bahadur

### EV EVOLUTION

Why is there not more financing in electric vehicle charging points? Nepal still needs investment in charging infrastructure ('Bye-bye range anxiety', Arnab Upadhyay, #1296).

David Seddon

### ANI MARYLIN

Marilyn was a dear friend of my Dad's and I grew up admiring this gentle American lady ('Just walk on', Lisa Choegyal, #1295).

Monica Shrestha

### CHOLERA

Only 7% of effluent being treated is abysmally low for a city as big as Kathmandu ('Life in a time of cholera', Ajaya Dixit, nepalitimes.com). The risk for every future disease outbreak lies right here. KTM is sitting on a time bomb.

Pandeymonium

### KALA SALON

Changing Times ('Time, transience, transition', Sangya Lamsal #1296) is a delightful exhibition.

Glen Pallier

■ Look at all the small wells and the Bagmati river featured



in the exhibition. The holy places, the home of the nagas are neglected and poisoned. That has changed and need to be reversed as a community effort.

Andreas Jarkowski

■ Wow, Changing Times has such amazing, creative art work. So very beautiful.

Shashi Tiwari

### MUKTIKOT EXODUS

Sabina Devkota, thank you for writing this story ('Mass migration from Muktikot', Sabina Devkota, nepalitimes.com).

Anup Subedee

■ This is a heartbreaking story of migration from Nepal's far-west to Indian cities.

Deepak Adhikari

## Online Package



### YARSA GOLD RUSH

In Upper Dolpo yarsagumba harvesters say quality and quantity of this lucrative Himalayan fungus is declining. Watch video on Nepali Times' YouTube channel.



### TO BEAN OR NOT TO BEAN

Coffee brewed with premium single origin beans is creating waves across the world and is finding a niche in Nepal. Watch process from picking the cherries to brewing the coffee.

## 1,000 Words



MoFA NEPAL

**YOKOSO:** Japanese Prime Minister Takaichi Sanae and president Ram Chandra Paudel inspect a guard of honour in Tokyo during Paudel's official visit to Japan this week to mark the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. The two also discussed future cooperation in trade, infrastructure, health and training. Japan had expressed displeasure at former PM K P Oli's attendance at the Victory Day military parade in Beijing in August marking Japan's defeat in WWII. There are an estimated 220,000 Nepalis working and studying in Japan, the sixth largest migrant population in the country.

**Nepali Times**

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# Nepal's non-voting migrants

Nepalis overseas may be disenfranchised, but they are engaged



DIASPORA  
DIARIES 82

This is the 82<sup>nd</sup> episode of Diaspora Diaries, a Nepali Times series in collaboration with Migration Lab providing a platform to share experiences of living, working and studying abroad.

## My Respected Parents

Anil Gole, Romania

[This letter is a letter to my parents ahead of the election. They are UML supporters, my uncle is for the Nepali Congress (NC), and my grandfather supports the Nepali Communist Party (NCP).]

My Respected Parents, I hear that election fever has picked up in the village. New faces with new ways of thinking have emerged this time. I don't really understand politics, so what I say may feel bitter.

But Father, when I see the flag with the sun in your hands, I remember the heat of Qatar from 12 years ago, your sunburnt skin and mother's cheeks wrinkled



with worry. Perhaps Uncle, too, found the Saudi heat so intolerable that he returned home. That may be why while seeking shade, he found the NC tree symbol endearing.

Great uncle spent his whole life back home in the village, which is

perhaps why he identifies with symbols like the plough, the sickle, and the hoe.

Even then, at any cost, vote for the same politicians. Vote for the same politicians who have not developed the country, who have

not fed the poor, whose sons have not been shot.

What if the country does not change? I have changed my country. When homesick, I have learnt what it feels like to suffocate in tears under a blanket. Now my younger brother is old enough. Send him here as well. We brothers will earn together. We will marry off our sister in a grand way.

So what if the country does not develop? We will build a small, cute house with a big yard. You can play with the grandchildren there. And when they grow up, they too can migrate.

But if you vote for the right people and the country gets good leaders, future generations will not have to sweat in foreign lands. They will not have to leave the comfort of a mother's lap to spend nights abroad in unknown cities. No matter how hard things get, they will not have to lie in letters to their mothers, saying, "I'm doing fine, Mother."

I have not lost courage because of your blessings. My body is here, but my mind is always back home in Nepal. Your children are here, but my children's future is in your hands. That is why vote for the same politicians whose hearts did not bleed even when the young were killed, the same politicians whose children have not come home in a box. Mother and Father, please take care of each other.

Yours truly,  
Your fortunate migrant son



## Algorithm versus vision

Ambika Paudel, Qatar

I have been in Qatar for 18 years, and work in the facilities management, engineering, shipping and logistics industry. I get to interact with people from across the world, and they are closely connected with their embassies through online systems and communities. I lead the Nepal Expatriate Community that has multidisciplinary professionals and have observed the need to revise the narrative around migrants.

We are here for our families. The sacrifices we make are for them. We are working for our own career growth and families because there were no opportunities back home. Many of us have achieved a good standard of living through our

NMB BANK  
एनएमबि बैंक



## UNDP AI report

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has launched its annual report which this year is titled The Next Great Governance, emphasising the need to address existing social and economic inequities. UNDP Nepal representative Kyoko Yokosuka told a panel on Wednesday: "AI is not something in the future, it is happening now, and Nepal needs to find out how it is going to be used and for whom."

## Nomad in Pokhara

As Nomad Hotel turns six, it is opening a new Pokhara Lakeside property this spring. Operating under Le Sherpa Concept, which currently manages nine hospitality projects, the expansion will add four outlets: three in Pokhara (Nomad Hotel, Piano Piano Restaurant, Farm Shop) and one MTR outlet in Mukhtinath, bringing the portfolio to thirteen projects.



## Mahindra in Birgunj

Authorised Mahindra distributor Agni launched its BE6 and XEV9e electric SUVs in Birgunj. The BE6 has a reported range of 543km and starts at Rs5.7 million, and the XEV9e can go 656km and starts at Rs6.9 million. Agni plans more regional launches in Bhairawa and Itahari to promote a customer base outside main cities.

## US-Nepal gastronomy

Chefs Rajeev Shrestha and Deependra Singh from Aloft Kathmandu Thamel will represent Nepal at the US-Nepal Gastronomy Exchange's return leg in Washington DC, following a successful event in Nepal in November. They will showcase authentic Nepali cuisine, emphasising indigenous ingredients and traditional flavours.



## Baglung oranges

Baglung produced 4,169 metric tons of oranges this year worth Rs270m. This is an increase of Rs4.4m from the same time last year. The fruit is sold at a minimum of Rs65/kg, and farmed on 64 hectares. Timely rainfall has helped. Farmers are gravitating towards the fruit because of high, easy returns compared to other crops.

## 1200MW waste

Nepal could be wasting up to 1,200MW of electricity this monsoon because of oversupply and not enough transmission infrastructure. The GoN taxes domestically produced transmission materials but waives duties on imports from India. Nepal's generation capacity peaks when demand in India is lowest, so export is also not an option.

## Bartending Comp

Johnnie Walker manufacturer Diageo is hosting a World Class Bartending Competition on 6 February at Old House, Darbar Marg. Participants submit their interpretations of classic cocktails, and the best 16 will compete at a national level, before going on to South Asia and Global stages.

## River flow forecasting

Blue Water Intelligence has made its hydrological forecasting and early warning systems operational under the HydroNepal Project, a collaboration between Nepal and France funded by FASEP. The system is now live across four basins: Upper Karnali, Marsyangdi, Trisuli, and Dudh-Kosi. The systems integrate Earth observation, AI, and hydrological modelling to support hydropower planning, disaster preparedness, and water resource management.

## Hyundai Creta

Hyundai Nepal has called all Creta EV owners to visit service stations for a software update for its Battery Management System. The update calibrates the car's system for Nepali roads and driving conditions, adding up to 25km to the vehicle's existing range.

## EU Fashion

The European Union Delegation to Nepal hosted the Threads of Joy fashion showcase on 31 January celebrating the artistry of Nepali pashmina garments alongside creative designs from Spanish fashion brand Chula. Nepal Pashmina Industries Association held a processing demonstration and HerCraft Nepal, a women-led social enterprise specialising in home décor and accessories supported by Action Nepal, showcased products.



## Bhatbhateni reopens

The Koteswor Bhatbhateni outlet is set to resume operations on 10 February after months of repairs following damage during the Gen Z protests. The Maharajganj store is also reopening soon. Of its 28 stores nationwide, 21 were looted and burned down with Rs15 billion in losses.

## Women in politics

Excluded by Design: Women, Politics, and Ethical Failure, an open public dialogue jointly organised by WOW Magazine, Project Abhaya, and She Leads Icon on 31 January, brought together women leaders, political and GenZ representatives, civil society members and journalists to examine why constitutional guarantees of inclusion have not translated into equal participation in policy and decision making. Speakers included educator Reshu Aryal Dhungana, political leaders Hisila Yami, Sumana Shrestha, and Astha Laxmi Shakya, GenZ activists Raksha Bam and Prakriti Dhaka, as well as gender equality experts Bharti Silwal Giri and Sharu Joshi Shrestha.



## Hyatt Butwal V-day

Hyatt Place Butwal is offering couples a Valentine's package, An Evening That Lingers, at Rs14,999 per couple that includes a one-night stay, breakfast in bed, a romantic buffet dinner, sparkling wine, shots, and a discounted couples spa at its new 109-room property in Lumbini.

## Aloft gym party

Aloft Kathmandu Thamel closed its Partner Appreciation Series by hosting an evening for its gym members on 30 January. General Manager Vikram Singh noted that gym members have become part of the Aloft community. The hotel promises continued investment in its fitness and wellness offerings.

## Samsung Holi

Samsung Nepal is running a Holi offer 1 February – 14 March. Customers can receive up to 23% cashback on washing machines and up to 17% on refrigerators. All products feature a 20-year warranty on DIT motors and voltage protection, with free installation included.

hard work and merit. When I send money to Nepal, it is for my family and the benefit to the government is a byproduct.

It would have been good if we got to vote, too. That possibility and promise got lost somewhere in the policy confusion and lack of technical capacity. Overseas Nepalis are also deeply invested in the election, but it is largely algorithm based. We are not questioning the vision of the candidates.

Our parents back home are the actual voters, and those overseas are talking to them. I don't think they will be swayed just based on calls, and they shouldn't be either. We are prioritising algorithms and words and social media boosts over vision, experience, and concrete plans.

I am for the NC but I am not a blind supporter. Despite being at the forefront of every significant democratic change in Nepal's history, the party has had lapses but it is currently on a new trajectory. Not all candidates of all parties are good so we have to elect competent leaders and question them. Whatever promises they make need to be examined for delivery and vision.

There are also Congress loyalists who are swayed and influenced by the new, but I let it be — it is their right, their choice. Change requires vision and experience, it should not be based on hype. I remind them. Over online conversations, I tell them to vote wisely so they don't regret it later. I returned from my break just recently so cannot come home to vote as it will be too expensive.

There are good human resources back in Nepal and in the diaspora which can be used. There are people in decision-making positions in their companies who are very capable and intelligent who could contribute to Nepal. These are missed opportunities in our policymaking and governance: Nepal needs to create opportunities for capable Nepalis.

The new government can make the investment climate better through a one-door system so that services are accessible, quick and there is no need to go to multiple offices to start a company or pay taxes. This would also stop unnecessary bribes and other hassles.

I don't have plans to return in the near future. I have a good job and am earning well. I came to Nepal between 2016 and 2019 and remigrated after things did not work out.

## The young need convincing



Jeevan Kumar Dewan, Malaysia

I have been living in Malaysia since 2001, and am an active member of the UML wing here. There is excitement about the upcoming election, but we are bound by contracts so cannot go home to vote.

There was hope that we would be able to vote from overseas, but there were questions of security. Even though we won't be able to vote, people are actively participating online and using social media to show their support to their candidates and parties of choice.

Political parties prioritise organisational expansion overseas but there is no direct campaigning during elections. It is through conversations and social media

engagement that people are participating, debating and expressing their support and loyalty.

As a UML supporter, it is my duty to remind people to cut through the noise and to separate facts and truth. While elderly voters don't need much convincing as they are loyal to the party, I do engage a fair amount with the young voters. I have to remind them not to get distracted by the videos shared on social media platforms. All that is new is not good just because it is new if there is no real political agenda.

There is no doubt that we need change but being new is not enough nor can we overlook the contributions and experience of the

old parties. All we can do is talk to the voters and try to get our message across.

It is important to prioritise better managed migration and also to ensure migrants have proper guidance on how to invest their hard-earned money in productive sectors, so they have something to fall back on after returning.

I don't have plans to return immediately, I go back and forth quite frequently. I have a stable job and I have seen how my friends who left secure jobs to return home ended up remigrating after their investment failed. I will stay here and continue with my job which I am happy with. 🇳🇵



## The old need convincing

Prajwal Poudel, Saudi Arabia

I work as a data entry analyst in Saudi Arabia. People overseas have seen development, but have also experienced challenges of being away from home. Politicians are aware of this and didn't want us to vote.

When I was in Nepal, I did not care much about politics. It was not for me. But overseas we care about Nepal even more. Perhaps you don't know the value of something unless you lose it.

Perhaps distance makes hearts grow fonder. I am definitely more invested in Nepali politics after leaving.

So I have to make sure that family members back home make the right decision this election. My cousin is also with me in Saudi Arabia and I was talking to his parents and telling them to vote correctly. They have voted for the same faces for two decades. I said that if there had been changes we would not have had to migrate. That this time they should accept the masu-bhat and alcohol, say UML-Congress jindaawaad, take the money offered but finally stamp on Ghanti.

My cousin posted a recording of that call spontaneously on Tiktok. It went viral perhaps because it resonated with the youth. We cannot vote but we have to make sure at least our close family members vote correctly. My mother also seems ready for a change despite her loyalty to the UML, but I tell her she



does not need to change her party, just change her vote this year.

We need to give the new ones a chance. But it's also true that the new will not bring dramatic changes overnight.

Conversations here are all about the election back home. We talk about who is getting elected from their areas. Who they think will win. But the hottest topic of conversation is of course Jhapa.

For those of us abroad, the government should make our embassies stronger. Back home, I hope corruption will be curbed and that good roads will

reach all corners of the country. This will allow people to develop the country themselves.

I am the son of a Malaysia returnee. I even worked as a teacher in Nepal. I could not even afford decent clothes so I left everything and came here. I don't know when I will return.



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# Caffeine BUZZ

Nepali culture is steeped in tea, but coffee is making rapid inroads

Vishad Raj Onta

Kathmandu Valley alone now has over 700 cafes serving mugs made from freshly ground beans. ‘Americano double shot’, ‘Cappuccino’ and ‘Mocha’ have entered the Nepali language.

It has also become a cash crop for thousands of farmers with near-perfect growing conditions along the Himalayan foothills.

Yet, annual coffee production has declined by 15% to only 550 tons in the past years, and this meets only a fraction of the domestic demand of 6,000 tons.

Nepali coffee fetches \$22 per kg in the international market, but Nepal only exports 3% of its crop. If cleverly promoted, the international demand for Nepali coffee can be 8,000 tons.

“Coffee is all about storytelling,” explains Gagan Pradhan, founder of Himalayan Java Coffee (see Nepal Made, right). “Nepali coffee has brand value because it is grown in the highest elevations on earth and is a cash crop for cooperatives and small farmers. There is tremendous potential for growth.”

The reason for the decline in coffee production lately is attributed to erratic weather caused by climate change, but mostly it is because it is manual-intensive, needing initial capital and patience for a return on investment.

The strategy that makes most sense for Nepal’s coffee industry is to sell it as a rare, specialty product.

Says Raj Kumar Banjara, master trainer at Nepal Coffee Academy and originator of the Himalayan Arabica brand: “There is no better crop for Nepal because we have the ideal soil and weather to grow specialty coffee, which can be exported to third countries directly instead of sending it through India like with ginger, cardamom, or tea.”

These favorable conditions are at altitudes between 800m to 1,600m along the mid-mountains and temperature not exceeding 22°C, which allows cherries to develop slower, giving it a denser taste with complex flavours of fruits and nuts.

This is ‘Arabica’ coffee, and it is also considered ‘organic by default’ because farmers have limited access to chemical pesticides and fertilisers, adding to its premium.

All of Nepal’s coffee is grown in only 4,300 hectares total, and this is just 0.36% of the area suitable for coffee farming. Still 31,000 households across 44 districts

depend on this cash crop.

Challenges include out-migration, limits on land ownership, and climate breakdown leading to colder, drier winters, droughts and heat stress.

Shreeyanch Shrestha is the founder of Samparka Cloud Loyalty, a startup that helps businesses retain customers by giving them insights about customer behaviour. Among the services offered is a digital loyalty card for coffee shops, one of his biggest clientele.

Shrestha is also a coffee enthusiast, and recently collaborated with Baato Maps on the playfully designed ‘Kathmandu Coffee Map’.

“This was a marketing campaign but also a way to pay tribute to cafe owners we worked with,” he says. “A new generation of coffee farmers, processors, roasters and consumers seem to want to invest in upgrading their coffee experience.”

## COFFEE CULTURE

Operators such as Raj Kumar Banjara have been in that game for over 30 years, even earning a PhD in Coffee Agriculture, running farms and teaching roasting and barista courses. Now, he makes short how-to videos on social media. Banjara’s Academy is run by Specialty Coffee Association certified Q Graders and Authorised Trainers.

Also promoting a coffee culture through social media is Santosh Shah of Bariko Coffee. He documents his process on Instagram, from hand picking

and processing coffee cherries to brewing.

Nepal appears to be riding the Third Wave of Coffee (see box) as the beverage moves away from the café chain culture to one that values knowledge of the cherries, beans, the roasting process and brewing -- right from the plant to the cup.

Along the way, there are tales to be told about where the coffee is grown, who grows it, and how farmers get a fair price for the product. Coffee then becomes a shared social experience that directly connects the consumer to the producer.

Nima Tenzing Sherpa returned to Nepal from the United States to start Lekali Coffee Estate in 2018, and produces fine single origin coffee beans so that the quality of the product improves the quality of life of the growers.

He told Nepali Times: “Specialty-grade beans are the only future for Nepal’s coffee industry. I am continuously hunting for the best coffee origins in Nepal.”



LEKALI COFFEE ESTATE



## What is the Third Wave?

**First Wave:** Profit-driven, mass marketing, air tight containers and instant coffee. Consumption of coffee worldwide starts growing.

**Second Wave:** Artisan-driven, origin and roasting style become important, epitomised by Starbucks and espresso.

**Third Wave:** Characteristics of the beverage take centre stage: origin of the beans, consistent processing techniques, and roasting style. Independent coffee shops demonstrate craftsmanship and knowledge of coffee beans from plant to the cup, promoting ethics and transparency.



- Major coffee plantation areas
- Some coffee plantations
- Few coffee bushes

# HISTORY OF COFFEE

Human consumption of coffee began in Ethiopia when herders found their goats became perky after eating beans from a wild Arabica bush. The first commercial cultivation of the brew began in Yemen 600 years ago.

Nepal's coffee history is much younger. A holy man is said to have brought coffee seeds from Burma in 1938, and planted them in Gulmi, the district in the mid-mountains where the first coffee nursery was set up in 1981.

The Nepal Coffee Company was founded in 1983 by Krishna Ghimire in Manigram near Butwal which educated

farmers about the crop and recruited them to cultivate it. He then roasted the beans, and convinced the BhatBhateni stores, which had just opened, to sell it.

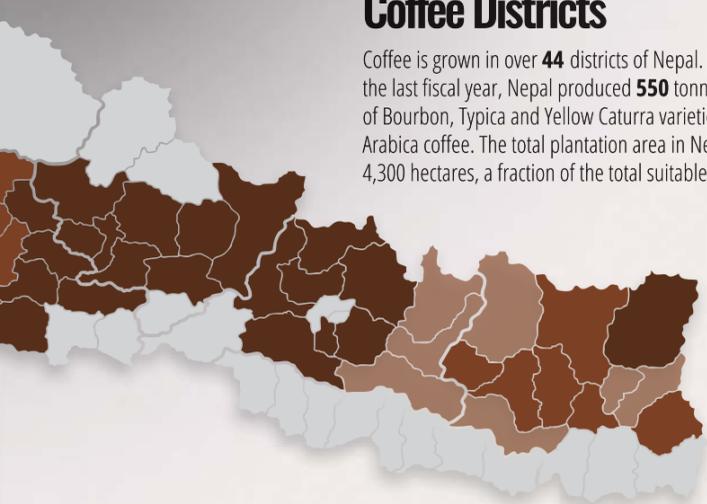
The company still supplies coffee to cafes and has its own brands and farm. It supplies green beans to those who want to self-roast, or build a brand.

In the 1990s, the National Tea and Coffee Development Board was established, and Himalayan Java Coffee (Nepal Made, right) opened its first shop in Kamaladi before moving to Thamel. It now has nearly 100 franchises across Nepal and overseas.



## Coffee Districts

Coffee is grown in over **44** districts of Nepal. In the last fiscal year, Nepal produced **550** tonnes of Bourbon, Typica and Yellow Caturra varieties of Arabica coffee. The total plantation area in Nepal is 4,300 hectares, a fraction of the total suitable land.



SOURCE: NEPAL NATIONAL SECTOR EXPORT STRATEGY COFFEE 2017-2021, ITC



The Dutch colonised Indonesian island of Java in 1596, and found that the coffee plant thrived in its fertile volcanic soil. Java had become the primary source of coffee for the world by 1720, and the place name became synonymous with the beverage.

Four hundred years later, in Kathmandu an entrepreneur named Gagan Pradhan founded Himalayan Java Coffee. After returning from Australia in 1990, he found that opening a café was the most affordable investment. Now, 27 years later, there are 100 Java franchises in the Kathmandu Valley, Pokhara, Kurintar, Itahari and even Toronto and Lhasa.

The story of Himalayan Java is pioneering, yet simple, combining consistent delivery in tastefully designed cafes at strategic locations to create a juggernaut of a brand. New Javas seem to pop up exactly where you would expect them to.

"It all started as a passion, a hobby, and I never expected this venture to spread so widely so rapidly," founder Pradhan told us at the Thamel outlet, where Himalayan Java moved in 2000 after opening the first small café in Kamaladi.

Located on the first floor of a North Face showroom opposite Fire & Ice Pizzeria in Thamel, the cafe has seating overlooking the street, and a spacious, bright indoors that is packed with locals, tourists, furniture, staff, baked goods on display, Himalayan Java merch, and coffee paraphernalia.

On a recent Friday afternoon, there were Nepalis, tourists from India and China in groups and solo, and monks in maroon. Westerners lounged on sofas, focused intensely on their laptops with headphones on. On an isolated balcony corner, two UML cadre could be overheard planning a campaign rally for the March election.

### CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Nearby in Darbar Marg is another Himalayan Java on the top floor of a building overlooking Narayanhiti Palace. On Mandala Street up a flight of stairs and in JP Marg is another Java outlet. That makes four outlets within a 400m circle in Kathmandu.

Over in Patan, the density of locations is even higher: within 1sq km in the Sanepa-Jhamsikhel-Pulchok area are eight Himalayan Java outlets.

Himalayan Java's franchise business model is unique for Nepal: there is no other food or beverage business that has pulled it off on this scale.

"We want Java to become a part of the customers' life, as a casual place to meet or rest," says General Manager Diwakar Ojha, explaining that an interested party applies, is vetted and can buy a franchise for a certain location. The criteria is whether the franchise has the resources and capacity to handle running the outlet long-term.

The investor must follow rules and regulations to ensure quality of the product, standard of service and interior décor. But the management, marketing, staffing and supply chain are all handled by Himalayan Java which charges a franchise fee and a percentage of sales.



# Java in the HIMALAYA



PHOTOS COURTESY OF HIMALAYAN JAVA

Some investors are prolific – there is one in Kathmandu who opened three franchises in two years. The outlets have a common ambience, but each location has its own unique vibe as well.

"Same same, but different. We put a lot of thought into it," Ojha says. "We are careful about location, and getting the design and feel of the cafe to gel with the surroundings. We integrate core things like furniture, bar counters, colours, but each one is unique."

A key value of the brand is consistency, and the main challenge is managing the supply chain. There are sister companies under the Himalayan Java brand: The Bakery, Bakery School, Roastery, Barista School, Import and Export, and Brewshala, where coffees and drinks are trialed and experimented.

The hub of the operation is the Roastery and the Bakery in Bluebird Mall from where all beans and baked goods are sent to the outlets. Java now also has its own coffee farm in Ilam, and

the rest of the beans are sourced from the Nepal Coffee Company, and it sells only Nepali coffee sourced from small farmers.

Java has also evolved into co-working and lounge-type spaces where customers can meet, explore and follow social media trends like Matcha the green-tea based beverage that Java modified into the popular Blended Matcha, a Matcha Latte, and a Strawberry Matcha drink.

Himalayan Java Coffee recently received a large investment from NIBL Equity Partners who acquired a 28.8% stake opening the way for more expansion (pictured). Plans are afoot to open more franchises across Nepal and in New Delhi.

Despite its popularity, one criticism is the price point. An Americano can cost up to Rs355. Ojha justifies this saying the price reflects the high overheads.

One solution is Himalayan Java Express, designed much more pragmatically, mainly for to-go orders where drink prices are slashed by half. ☑



## Events



### SAFF U-19 Women

South Asia's rising football talent takes the field as national U-19 women's teams compete in a regional championship. Check the fixtures and book tickets.

**31 January-7 February, 11am onwards, Tickets: Rs200-Rs500**

### Meditation camp

Join Life Coach Sanjiv Malik for a transformative one-day meditation camp focused on refreshing the mind, finding inner peace, and embracing positivity.

**14 February, 9am onwards, Rs1,500 per person, Royal Mystic Events & Restaurant, Tinkune**

### Galentine's Workshop

Spend time with yourself this Galentine's Day at a special workshop for women. Learn to craft handmade flowers and create your own jewelry.

**Contact: @kalashala.nepal on Instagram**



### Filmmaking Workshop

Rotterdam-based artist and filmmaker Mays Rukel leads a two-day hands-on workshop exploring low-budget filmmaking through memory, conversation, and everyday surroundings.

**8-9 February, 2pm-5pm, Rs1,600 per person, Loft @ Sattya**



### Himalayan Haat

The second day of the Himalayan Future Forum 2026 organised by Nepal Economic Forum showcases a variety of local, indigenous, and sustainable crafts and products from Nepal and the region. Don't miss out.

**7 February, 10am-5pm, International Club, Sanepa**

### Sanskaran

Siddhartha Art Gallery presents a Sanskaran, a printmaking exhibition by students at Kathmandu University.

**Till 11 February, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited, Kathmandu**

### Kathmandu Art Biennale

The Kathmandu Art Biennale 2026 will be a celebration of ideas, imagination, and cultural dialogue featuring never-before-seen artwork from more than 50 Nepali artists.

**6 February, Museum of Nepali Art, Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel**



## Music

### VTEN Live

VTEN brings a night of hip-hop with powerful beats and high-energy performance at Club Nova this weekend.

**7 February, 8pm onwards, Tickets: Rs799-Rs999, Club Nova, Thamel**

### Melody in Motion

A musical event celebrating rhythm and culture, featuring Swar, Purna Rai, Kuma Sagar, and other artists.

**7 February, 4pm onwards, Tickets: Rs500-Rs1,000, Itahari Rangasala**



### Maan Panu

Maan Panu of IPOSTAR fame takes the stage for a Valentine's Eve concert filled with chart-topping hits and powerful vocals.

**13 February, 7pm onwards, Tickets: Rs999-2,500, XO Club Kathmandu, Thamel**



### Lovers at Patan

Take a loved one for a romantic evening out and watch a soulful live performance by Swoopna Suman & The Asters, set against the timeless heritage of Patan Museum.

**14 February, 5pm onwards, Tickets: Rs1,500 (Single), Rs2,500 (Couple), Patan Museum**

### Lost in Love

Celebrate Valentine's season with India's celebrated DJ duo Lost Stories, joined by Jai Dhir's live performance.

**7 February, 8pm onwards, Tickets: Rs2,000-Rs2,500, Lord of the Drinks, Bhagwatisthan, Thamel**



## Getaway



### 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**

### Bandipur Safari Lodge

The town of Bandipur is famous not only for its cultural assets but for its wild terrain, with animals like elephants, deer and tigers. Bandipur Safari Lodge is the optimal gateway for this jungle experience. You can enjoy activities like Wildlife Safari, Bird Watching and Nature Walk.

**Bandipur, 9449597880 / 08229-233001**



### Chhaimale Village Resort

Adorned with pear trees, the Resort is an ideal destination for anyone seeking to escape the madness of Kathmandu city.

**Chhaimale, 9851181409**

### Mount Princess Hotel

The hotel offers magnificent views of the surrounding valley and mountains and is a peaceful retreat amidst nature for those wishing to escape the city's madness. Make reservations at OYO 256 Mount Princess Hotel through the OYO app.

**Dhulikhel (011) 490616**

### Kantipur Temple House

With its red brick walls, woodcarvings, floor seating and traditional courtyard, Kantipur Temple House resembles the palaces of old Nepali kings right at the outskirts of Thamel.

**Thamel (01) 4250131**



## Dining

### Pakistani Food Feast

Discover the true flavors of Pakistan at the Pakistani Food Feast at Nook. Enjoy a buffet lunch and dinner prepared by three chefs visiting from Pakistan along with chefs at Aloft. Children below six dine for free, and those aged 6-13 dine for 50% off.

**Till 7 February, 12pm (Lunch) / 6pm-10:30pm (Dinner), Rs3,500 per person, Aloft Kathmandu**

### Fire and Ice

One of the first pizzerias in Kathmandu, Fire and Ice offers genuine Napolitana pizza and dozens of variants to choose from. Try the paesane, a combination of mozzarella, spinach, courgette and bacon.

**Thamel (01) 5350210**



### Bricks Café

A multi cuisine restaurant in the heart of Kathmandu offering flavourful dishes in a pleasant surroundings. Their lasagna is a must-try.

**Kupondole, 9801179333**

### Haadi Biryani

Craving Biryani? Haadi is the place to go or order from. Their slow-cooked biryanis are seasoned with a secret spice blend and the clay pots that they come in enhances the experience.

**Kumaripati (01) 5422197**

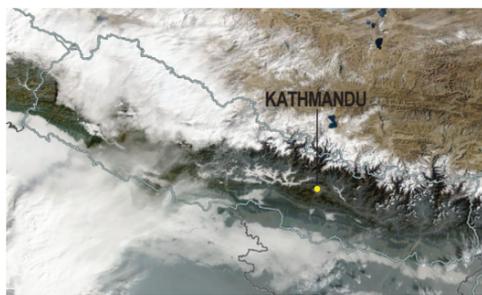


### Erma Restaurant

Erma Restaurant offers an upscale fine dining experience with chef-curated continental dishes. With a farm to table approach and an assortment of wines, Erma turns every meal into an experience.

**Bansari, 9803867240**

## Weekend Weather



FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
☀️ 21° ☁️ 5°	☀️ 20° ☁️ 5°	☀️ 20° ☁️ 5°	☀️ 21° ☁️ 5°	☀️ 21° ☁️ 5°

### Hazy Sunshine

That winter westerly front this week fizzled out by the time it got to Kathmandu. But it did drop a lot of precipitation on top of last week's rain and snow in western Nepal and in the higher elevations. The temperature in Kathmandu is getting milder, although the sun will be filtered by Indo-Gangetic smog blowing in from the south. There is another weak front that will push into Nepal midweek next week, and there might be some passing light showers.

## Our Pick



In Netflix's *Black Rabbit*, Jake Friedken is the owner of the eponymous New York City hotspot, whose troubled brother Vince suddenly comes back into his life. As Jake allows Vince into the business that he has built, he opens the doors to dangers from his brother's life that threaten to upend the lone he has built for himself. Based on controversies surrounding a real-life, infamous New York City gastropub, the 2025 crime thriller miniseries stars Jude Law, Jason Bateman, Cleopatra Coleman, Sope Dirisu, Amaka Okafor, and Troy Kotsur.

## 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



PHOTOS: HIMALAYAN FUTURE FORUM



Hotel Himalaya  
6-7 February

**DAY 1: OPENING SESSION**  
9:30 AM - 10:15 AM

**Speakers**  
Veronique Lorenzo (EU Ambassador to Nepal)  
Mahendra P. Lama (Advisory Board Member, HFF)  
Mahendra K. Shrestha (Advisory Board Member, NEF)

**UNLOCKING THE CARBON MARKET**  
10:15 AM - 11:00 AM

**Speakers**  
Jaikrit Pratap Rana (Value Network Ventures)  
Keisuke Iyadomi (Senior Climate Change Specialist, World Bank)  
Semanta Dahal (Advocate)  
**Moderator**  
Binija Nepal (GIZ)

**HIMALAYAN DISASTERS: ADAPTATION AND MITIGATION**  
11:30 AM - 12:25 PM

**Speakers**  
Sudan Bikash Maharjan (Geologist and Remote Sensing Analyst, ICIMOD)  
Jini Agrawal (Miyamoto Nepal)  
Madhukar Upadhyaya (Watershed Expert)  
Rahul Bhushan (Founder, NORTH)  
Reena Bajracharya (Danish Red Cross)  
**Moderator**  
Sonia Awale (Editor, Nepali Times)

**CLIMBING THE TECHNOLOGY HILL**  
12:25 PM - 12:45 PM

**Speaker**  
Nitin Pai (Co-Founder and Director, Takshashila Institution)

**WHY PEOPLE MOVE**  
1:45 PM - 2:30 PM

**Speakers**  
Anita Ghimire (Nepal Institute for Social and Environmental Research)  
Giuseppe Savino (Migration Protocol, Advisory Board Member, NEF)  
Ramesh Bhushal (Earth Journalism Network)  
**Moderator**  
Manju von Rospatt (Research Fellow, NEF)

**TAKING HIMALAYAN BRANDS GLOBAL**  
2:30 PM - 3:15 PM

**Speakers**  
Sahas Shrestha (Nepal Tea Collective)  
Akanchha Joshi (Co-Founder, SnackOn)  
Navroze Dhondy (Founder, Creatigies)  
Upendra Singh Thakur (Founder, BeanstalkAsia)  
**Moderator**  
Saloni Sethia (VIE TEC Pvt. Ltd, Advisory Board Member, NEF)

**DIGITAL FUTURES FOR HIMALAYAN LANGUAGES**  
3:45 PM - 4:45 PM

**Speakers**  
Marie Caroline Pons (Linguistics Researcher, CNRS)  
Shahani Singh (Doctoral Researcher in Linguistics)  
Lalima Shrestha (Nepalbhase Google Translate Project)  
Nitu Dangol (Callijatra Foundation)  
Swornim Nakarmi (Founder, Newa ASR Project)  
**Moderator**  
Alisha Sijapati (Nepal Heritage Recovery Campaign)

**CLOSING PANEL: GEOPOLITICS AND THE HIMALAYA**  
4:45 PM - 5:30 PM

**Speakers**  
Apekshya Shah (Tribhuvan University)  
Rensje Teerink (Former EU Ambassador to Nepal and Bangladesh)  
Tariq Karim (Former Bangladesh Ambassador to India and the US)  
Thibault Danjou (Managing Director, Augusta)  
**Moderator**  
Sujeev Shakya (Convenor, HFF)

**DAY 2: HIMALAYAN HAAT**  
9:30 AM - 10:15 AM

# Himalayan Future Forum 2026

## Climate, Community, and Connectivity

### Sujeev Shakya

The Himalayan mountains are also known as the Third Pole because it is the largest repository of water stored as ice outside the two polar regions.

However, it is divided by political boundaries that nature does not recognise – be it the air pollutants that flow or migratory birds that fly over the peaks. The Himalaya is also a geopolitical and climate change hot spot.

In these geopolitically and environmentally challenging times, it becomes even more important to create oases of conversations, where candid and future-oriented discussions can take place at a people-to-people level. Platforms dominated by inter-governmental agencies have been able to do little.

The Himalayan Future Forum (HFF) aims to be a platform that stands at the crossroads of climate, community, and connectivity, fostering dialogue and promoting citizen-led action.

Growing up in the Indian Himalayan town of Kalimpong and spending the nascent stages of my career helping in setting up offices of the award-winning Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) that fostered community involvement in conservation, I have witnessed transformations both good and bad.

There are initiatives like Nepal's forest cover doubling in 30 years, or Bhutan's drive for high-end sustainable tourism. At the same time, I have seen landscapes destroyed by bulldozers and tall buildings competing for air and sunlight in expanding cities.

From crony capitalists patronised by political leaders



engaged in plundering natural resources to citizen-led initiatives on cleanliness drives and waste management, the Himalayan region is full of stories from both ends of the spectrum of disappointment and hope.

Life is about observing and, in one's little sphere of influence, taking baby steps towards catalysing positive transformation. This is why, Nepal Economic Forum (NEF) had been hosting the Himalayan Consensus Summit in Nepal from 2014 to 2020 following which the Himalayan Future Forum (HFF) was incubated since 2023.

HFF is an initiative to encourage multi-faceted dialogues on the topics of climate, community, and connectivity in the Himalayan region by bringing together leaders, experts, institutions, and practitioners from different countries and sectors.

In this year's edition, there are a series of sessions on 6 February

with 34 speakers including ten international panelists. On day two the Himalayan Haat aims to showcase a variety of local, indigenous, and sustainable products.

As in 2024, it is believed that the conversations and interactions at the HFF will lead to more partnerships and collaborations from climate financing to managing disasters to taking Himalayan brands global.

#### YOUNG FELLOWS

Beyond this, there are sessions on topics such as geopolitics and the Himalaya, as well as on migration which are especially relevant considering the past few years that have seen many events which impacted the global world order.

One of the key features of HFF, guided by our ethos of bringing together experts, experiences, and enthusiasm, is also to ensure stronger youth representation through the

HFF Youth Fellowship.

This year, following a rigorous screening process, youth fellows were selected out of an overwhelming response.

Those chosen will be able to attend the events as well as collaborate in future research and publications. Selected fellows will also be provided with full scholarships to the public policy program at Takshashila Institution, an independent centre for research and education in public policy in Bangalore.

In a region where half of the population is under 25 years, it is important to get the future generations also in the room.

Nepal presents an ideal location to hold meetings such as this, where no-holds-barred conversations can take place face-to-face. The country has good air connectivity and one of the most liberal visa policies in Asia.

And while Davos is a good example to follow for convening global voices, we need not have so many private planes burning fossil fuel, as we can have participants take scheduled commercial flights or have regional participants simply take a road trip.

Ultimately, the Himalayan region is also about festivities. No exchange of ideas is complete without immersing in art, culture, culinary experiences, and music.

This is why HFF envisages graduating to a Himalayan Jatra, rooted in a region where people smile from the heart, and teach the world to smile with them. Join us at HFF 2026 as we move closer to this vision. 🇳🇵

Sujeev Shakya is Chair of Nepal Economic Forum and Convenor of the Himalayan Future Forum.

## Reverence and traditional practices have helped preserve valuable wetland ecosystems in the Himalaya

Sunita Chaudhary

On full-moon nights in October and the Nepali New Year in April, hundreds gather to worship at the sacred pond of Mai Pokhari in Ilam. According to legend, the pond was born thousands of years ago from the union of the holy Mai and Tamur rivers in eastern Nepal.

Another story tells of an elderly couple whose death gave rise to a life-giving pond meant to quench human thirst. The nine corners of the pond are each believed to house a goddess capable of granting health, fertility, good harvests, and protection from landslides and storms.

In every version, one message is constant: when people polluted the water, the goddess moved away. Fear of losing her protection still shapes how people treat the sacred water body today.



# Where culture meets ecology

JITENDRA RAJ BAJRACHARYA / ICIMOD

Besides ponds, wetlands are areas that are saturated with water, permanently or seasonally, including marshes, swamps, and bogs – representing some of the world's most biologically diverse ecosystems, with distinctive soil, plants and animals.

In 2008, Mai Pokhari earned the status of a Ramsar site – a wetland of global importance – for its

ecological significance.

Its mid-elevation broadleaved forests provide habitat for many epiphytic orchids that grow without soil, attaching themselves to trees, and protected species such as the white-rumped vulture (*Gyps bengalensis*), leopard cat (*Prionailurus bengalensis*), and Eurasian Otter (*Lutra lutra*).

For the people of the area, this

is more than a wetland. It is a living mother, an ancestral guardian, and at the heart of their cultural identity. But long before it was recognised internationally, it was already being protected through belief, respect, and traditional knowledge passed quietly from one generation to the next.

This pattern of faith-based stewardship is repeated across the

Himalaya. Spirituality has shaped conservation in ways no law ever could. Fishing, hunting, and polluting wetlands and rivers are strictly forbidden, not by force but by faith.

When erosion threatened the pond in the 1930s, villagers planted pine trees along its edges. As forest degradation increased, the community organised itself,

## Nepal's vanishing wetlands

A call to protect migratory birds and their habitat along the Narayani River

Rajendra N Suwal

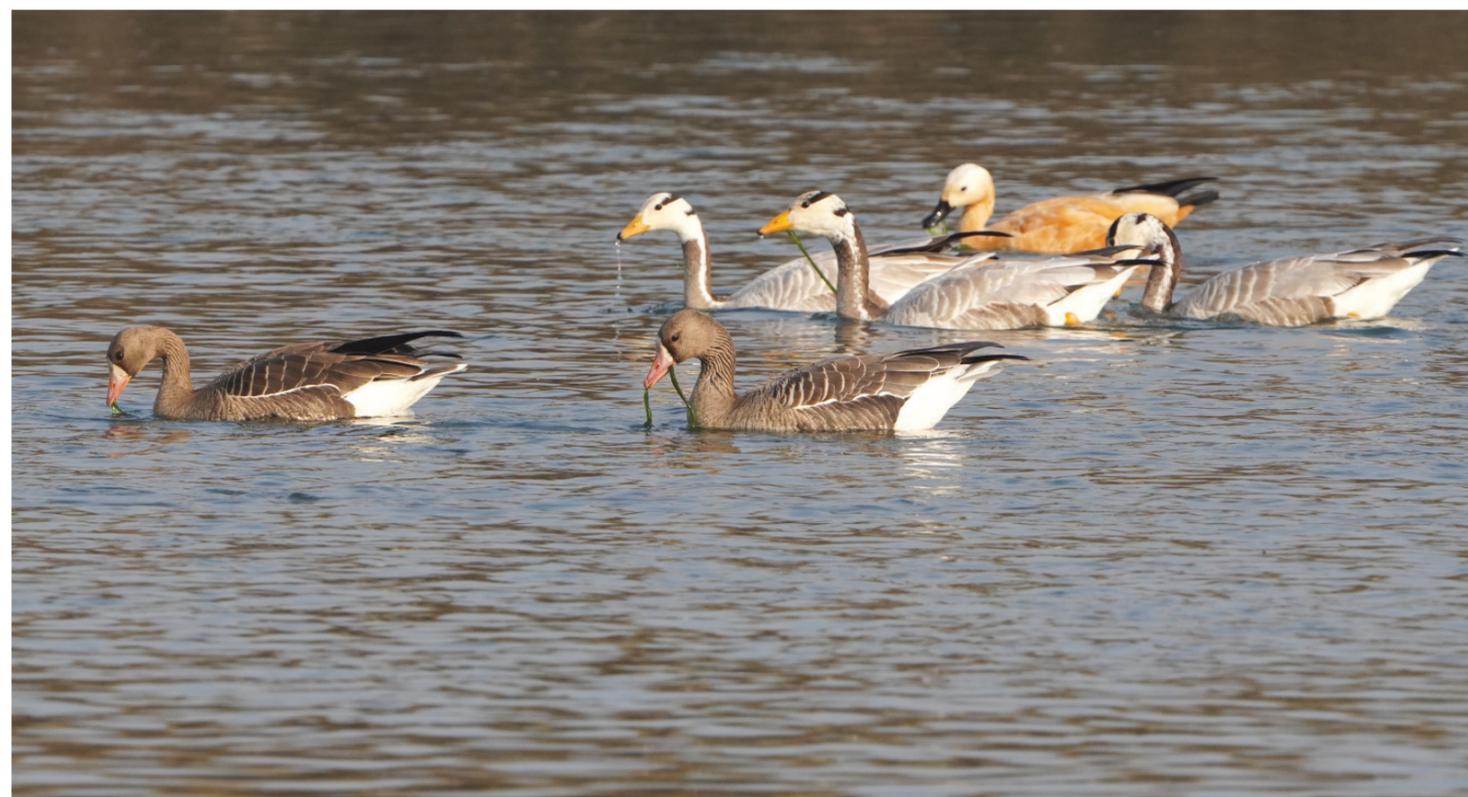
The Narayani River is one of the most important biodiverse hotspots among Nepal's three major river systems. It is inhabited by critically endangered gharial crocodiles, gangetic dolphins, Bengal tigers and the great one horned rhinos.

The river drains the watershed of central Nepal and is fed by glaciers from the Annapurnas to the mountains in Tibet. Nepal is among the 30 countries on the route of the Central Asian Flyway, making the river a significant site for the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Wetlands for Asia Flyways.

Migratory birds from the north cross the Himalaya along the tributaries of the Narayani in winter as the river and surrounding areas provide safe resting and feeding habitats for the waterfowls where the river enters the plains.

In the post-monsoon receding rivers, oxbow lakes, and marshes supply food to migratory birds and other wildlife.

In the 1960s, entire villages from Nepal's mountains were translocated to the Tarai once malaria was eradicated. Vast stretches of forests and grassland were cleared for farming



RAJENDRA N SUWAL

for the settlers in areas like Chitwan.

The influx of population continues due to accessibility, infrastructure and livelihood opportunities in the Tarai. Chitwan's population has increased by 37% since the 1981 census. Human settlements are now getting ever closer to the river boundaries of the Chitwan National Park.

People used to grow single paddy crops, and much of the post-harvest paddy field was left fallow. These moist fallow fields with marshes were prime feeding habitat for geese, ducks, cranes, storks, ibis and many waders. Today, Chitwan is one sprawling metropolis.

The construction of dykes, spurs and high embankment to avert floods now prevent the farms from getting replenished with alluvial deposits. The deepening river channels have also deprived uplands of groundwater and

farms of moisture.

In 1973 Chitwan National Park was established as Nepal's first protected area, and in 1996, the government introduced the Buffer Zone Management Rule to manage forests surrounding protected areas, and ensure local participation in parks management.

Behaviour Change Champions' bi-annual bird monitoring in the Narayani floodplain recorded 145 bird species in February 2025, and 148 of them in December. Rare migratory birds included a single Sarus Crane, one Spot-billed Pelican, and about 20 Greater White Fronted Geese.

In January 2005, two Bar-headed Geese were fitted with satellite radio telemetry. Both the birds were tracked flying over the Himalaya to Dingmo Co lake, 500km north of Mt Everest. Their return destination was in

the wetlands of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh in India.

According to field ornithologists DB Chaudhary, the number of Bar-headed geese increased over 60% from 576 in 2024 to 946 in 2026. Similarly, the number of Ruddy Shelducks also increased by nearly 60%, from 5,091 in 2024 to 8,523 in 2026.

In contrast, Common Cranes saw a gradual decline in the early 2020s and their numbers have just begun to rise once again. Only 17 common cranes were observed in the Dibyanagar farms in 2024, compared to 242 in 2020. In 2026, they number only 43.

Fallow farms, the feeding habitats of birds like the Bar-headed Geese, Ruddy Shelducks, and Common Cranes are shrinking rapidly. Meanwhile, transmission lines pose risks of collision to migratory birds.



ALEX THREADWAY / ICIMOD



along with new external pressures, now threaten them. Many are now increasingly under threat due to growing human intervention – including misplaced practices such as the ritual release of exotic fish by the faithful. Some religious bodies now advise against these practices.

Many others are drying out, silting up, or polluted by upstream activity. As these changes intensify, there is concern that not only biodiversity, but also the cultural practices and spiritual values tied to the wetlands may begin to fade.

The theme for this year's World Wetlands Day on 2 February was 'Wetlands and Traditional Knowledge: Celebrating Cultural Heritage' which is a reminder that wetlands are not only ecosystems – they are rich cultural spaces.

Traditional knowledge and belief systems have quietly conserved these wetlands for centuries, showing that when people revere nature, protection becomes a way of life. It is this profound connection, where culture nurtures ecology, that we must safeguard to ensure neither wetlands nor the heritage they hold fade away. ■

Sunita Chaudhary is the Biodiversity Lead at the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD).

establishing community forests in 1992 and 2001. In 2004, the area surrounding the pond was formally recognised as a religious forest – a recognition based on local devotion rather than outside instruction.

In the lowland forests of western Nepal lies Ghodaghodi, a wetland complex consisting of large and shallow oxbow lakes with 13 associated marshes and meadows surrounded by tropical deciduous forest on the lower slopes of the Siwalik range along the southern edge of the Himalaya. These wetlands and forests serve as a critical wildlife corridor between the lowlands and the Siwalik, supporting several globally threatened species of plants and animals, and rare wild rice.

To the people who live around it, especially the Indigenous Tharu,

Ghodaghodi is alive – a sacred presence shaped by gods, ancestors, and centuries of belief. The name Ghodaghodi, which means horse and mare, carries ancient memories. Elders tell stories of divine beings who once moved through the landscape in animal form, leaving behind a lake infused with spiritual powers.

**HOLY RESPECTED SPACE**

The waters are believed to be the dwelling place of gods and goddesses, particularly Lord Shiva. This belief has shaped how the wetland is viewed: not as property to be owned, but as a holy space to be respected. Each year during the festival of Agan Panchami, thousands of pilgrims gather at Ghodaghodi, walking barefoot along forest paths with offerings of

flowers, fruits, milk, and water. Polluting the water or harming its creatures is believed to invite misfortune. These unwritten cultural rules have conserved the wetland for generations, long before it was declared a wetland of global importance.

In the central highlands of Bhutan lies the Gangtey-Phobji in a wide glacial valley. The Ramsar site is the prime wintering habitat for the globally vulnerable, black-necked crane (*Grus nigricollis*).

An annual festival at the Gangtey monastery welcomes the arrival of the cranes in November. Locals revere the birds as sacred messengers, and they are believed to bring blessings and prosperity. It is these beliefs that have helped preserve Bhutan's flagship Ramsar site.

In West Sikkim, the Khachhodpalri wetland was declared a Ramsar site in 2025. This Himalayan high-altitude wetland ecosystem and its surrounding temperate forests provide critical habitat for many species of flora and fauna, and the wetland serves as an important habitat and stopover site for migratory birds.

But more importantly, it has religious significance as a pilgrimage site and is revered by both Buddhists and Hindus as a wish-fulfilling lake. It is these values that have supported its conservation from time immemorial.

These wetlands are recognised internationally as Ramsar sites for their ecological and other attributes. However, the very cultural practices that preserved these wetlands,

Growing population along the Narayani floodplain upstream continues to pollute the river with garbage. Fallow farms, which are feeding habitats of geese, ducks, and cranes, are shrinking rapidly from extensive farming, expansion of settlements, and industrialisation.

**FOWL-FRIENDLY**

Protecting Nepal's migratory birds requires safe feeding areas with vast expanses of open marshes and meadows inside the Chitwan National Park and the buffer zone to mitigate the loss of their feeding habitat. Divisional Forest Offices and Bharatpur Municipality could set aside large open marshes and wetlands as a sanctuary for migratory birds.

Similarly, reduced availability of water will be a limiting factor for the conservation of wetland birds. Harvesting and working on groundwater recharge will ensure food security, habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife, and will help local communities combat the impacts of the climate crisis.

Seasonal wetlands are particularly important for birds, with their receding water, they provide succulent grass and roots for dabbling ducks and for grazers and filter feeders such as geese, shelduck, pintails, mallards and gadwalls.

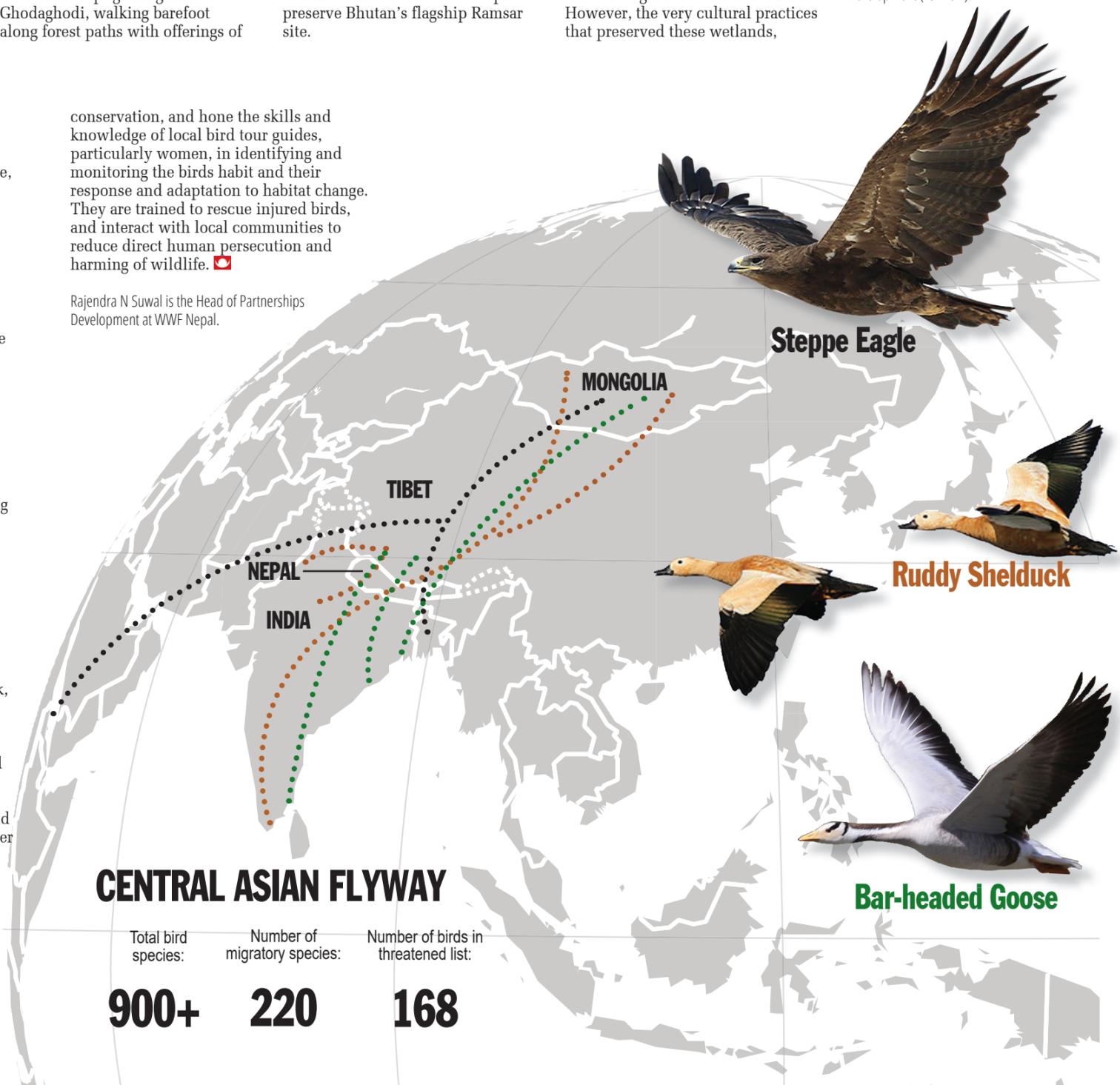
Enhanced shallow wetlands and surrogate feeding habitats with low angles of approach thus enable birds and mammals to feed. Once these wetlands dry, they expose worms, freshwater shrimps, mollusks, fishes, frogs, roots and tubers, making it easier for birds and other wildlife like rhinos, hog deers, fishing cats, otters, and tigers to forage.

WWF's two-year community-led conservation of wetlands and migratory birds in Narayani project aims to reduce the threats to the migratory birds by enhancing wetlands, capacitating local youth through Behavior Change Champions, and expanding surrogate feeding wetland habitats.

The program is working to sensitise and enable indigenous and local communities towards migratory bird

conservation, and hone the skills and knowledge of local bird tour guides, particularly women, in identifying and monitoring the birds habit and their response and adaptation to habitat change. They are trained to rescue injured birds, and interact with local communities to reduce direct human persecution and harming of wildlife. ■

Rajendra N Suwal is the Head of Partnerships Development at WWF Nepal.





# T20 World Cup 2026 curtain raiser

Nepal is playing its third T20 World Cup this month in India and Sri Lanka

Vishad Raj Onta

In the 2024 edition, Nepal's Rhinos surprised fans with outstanding performances against established cricketing nations such as South Africa and Bangladesh, ultimately crashing out of the competition with just one point.

The team has matured since. It is a more settled, confident squad, still young. Two seasons of the Nepal Premier League means that key players have spent more time leading, performing, making decisions in high pressure T20 scenarios. The tournament has also created many more Nepali cricket fans, which means the team will also be playing to visiting Nepalis and the home crowd on live feeds of the matches at the 2026 T20 World Cup this month.

And the historic 2-1 series victory over the West Indies in September 2025 means that the players know they can compete at the highest level. England, Italy, West Indies and Scotland are the other nations in Nepal's Group C, and none of those teams will be going into their matches against Nepal expecting an easy victory.

The team also won all of its games in the qualifiers for this tournament, and comfortably defeated the UAE in a warm-up match on Tuesday. Nepal seems to be in a buffer zone between being an associate nation and at the level of Full ICC members like Ireland, at least in T20 cricket. This



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tournament will be the test.

After a further warmup game against Canada on 6 February, Nepal play heavyweights England two days later at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai, before the much easier contest against Italy on 12 February. The Wankhede is usually friendly to batters.

Then the team plays the West Indies on Valentine's Day, and Scotland two days later. The Windies team this time will be a much stronger one than the one Nepal beat in the series. After all, they have won this trophy twice.

Eden Gardens is traditionally spin-friendly later in matches. Which is good news for Nepal's bowling attack, especially the

pair of leg-spinner Sandeep Lamichhane and left-arm orthodox Lalit Rajbanshi who will be important in the middle innings, to bring down the run rate and take wickets after the powerplay overs are done.

Dipendra Singh Airee is an important cog. While his batting is a little inconsistent, Airee barely gives away any runs with the ball and gets important breakthroughs from the field. His skills were on full display in the warm up match against the UAE: 1/12 from three overs with the ball, a signature direct hit runout, and most importantly a 50 off 31 to stabilise the innings with Arif Sheikh after the top three were sent back

underwhelmingly.

This strong top three of openers Kushal Bhurtel and Aasif Sheikh, and captain Rohit Poudel will be crucial to Nepal's success. If two out of the three can do well in a particular game then the team has a great chance of putting up or chasing down a high score.

Gulshan Jha, 19, will play the critical finisher role in the later overs. Jha chases boundaries from the first ball he faces and reliably gets, say, 18 off 8. If he can figure out how to turn this into 35 off 16, then Nepal would be defending scores in the 160s or 170s instead of the 140s -- a huge mental difference.

A unique thing about the Nepali

squad is how many all-rounders there are. Airee is the sixth best T20 all-rounder in the world as per ICC rankings. Bhurtel, Paudel, Arif Sheikh, Karan KC, Gulshan Jha and Sompal Kami are all fixtures in the starting lineup and they can all bat and bowl. This gives the team many options to throw at the opposition's batting attack, even though perhaps in the long term the team would be better off if most of these players focused on their main skill.

Another strength is Nepal's fielding. Catching standards have drastically improved in this young Nepali side coming into its prime. Avoiding dropped catches is also important for in-game momentum and morale. The top two teams from each group go through.

For Nepal to get through, a realistic scenario would be to beat Italy and Scotland, the first easy, the second competitive but very possible. Scotland are in the tournament only because Bangladesh were kicked out over refusing to play in India over security concerns. They would also have to win against either West Indies or England, which would be a major statement to the cricketing world. With a bit of luck, West Indies seems the more likely upset, and England might just feel the pressure of the opening match and of being the heavy favourite.

With matches in neighbouring India, a lot of in-stadium support is expected at the games. A strong performance at the competition would help in keeping Nepali cricket on its current upward trajectory. 🇳🇵




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