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Dhangadi, Kathmandu, Gaur, Malangwa, Janakpur

Battleground Tarai

Shristi Karki in Sarlahi

Party flags and banners wave from electric poles, houses and e-rickshaws are festooned with posters. Madhes is in the grip of election fever, and in a tour through four of its districts, there is the sense that efforts by mainstream political parties at reforms have come too little too late.

Among the banners, the sky blue of the RSP is more prominent here this time, and the rallying cry for new and improved leadership is echoed on the ground.

“For the people around here, whatever these old leaders are saying has become just noise,” says a lassi shop operator in Janakpur, waving a dismissive hand at Nepali Congress flags across the street.

In Janakpur, UML nominee Raghubir Mahaseth was barred from canvassing door-to-door. Campaign posters of the mainstream parties have been torn from walls and replaced with RSP posters.

In Rautahat’s Inarwari village in the Madhes heartland, local elected officials whose party has been merged into the Nepali Communist Party hope to retain enough supporters. But not many residents said they would vote for its candidate. A first-time voter in Sarlahi’s Haripur is home on a semester break from medical school in Kathmandu, and is waiting excitedly for 5 March. “You can’t really say out loud who you’re

voting for around here,” he says, as he mimes ringing a bell. “It is time for someone new to be in-charge.”

In the highway town of Bardibas, an elderly teashop owner says that all she hears are calls for **घण्टी**, the RSP’s bell symbol. “After all, bells are rung in the house of gods,” she says. “It seems like the right choice.”

MADHES ELECTORATE

The RSP wave sweeping the nation after the GenZ movement is seen in Madhes, and the PR ballots might reflect that, notes political analyst Tula Narayan Shah.

“But the socio-cultural networks, organisational setup, and legacy of democratic movement of traditional parties might still give them a fighting chance on the first past the post ballot,” he says.

Villages like Dhankaul in Sarlahi-4, where NC’s Gagan Thapa is running against incumbent Amresh Kumar Singh, is the party’s stronghold. Singh won the election here twice before in 2013 and 2017 as an NC leader, and still had goodwill among NC voters when he won as an independent in 2022.

“I voted for him twice before, but he did not do anything for this village. Once he is elected, he has not set foot here,” says Rajiv Yadav, a voter in Dhanakul. “The RSP will get more votes here than last time, but Gagan is sure to win.”

Madhes is in the spotlight this election because two prime ministerial candidates have focused their attention in the region. Balen

Shah (pictured above, left) began his campaign in Janakpur as a ‘Son of Madhes’, and Gagan Thapa chose Sarlahi-4 as his constituency over Kathmandu-4, from where he has been elected since 2013.

Madhes has always been a battleground for Nepal’s electoral politics, and candidates from here, like Krishna Prasad Bhattarai from Parsa, Pushpa Kamal Dahal from Siraha, Jhala Nath Khanal from Sarlahi, and Madhav Kumar Nepal from Rautahat, have all been PM.

Despite electing politicians to high office in Kathmandu, districts of Madhes have consistently ranked low in development and service delivery indicators. Socio-economic inequalities have also meant that Madhes districts have the highest rate of out-migration in the country.

What is different this time is that people here have a Madhesi PM candidate who will represent them in national politics, and the main competition ultimately will be between the NC and RSP. Voters also seem to be looking beyond Madhes-based parties who have historically campaigned on identity and federalism.

“Leaders of Madhes parties have glorified their struggle for votes but failed to perform on good governance at local and provincial levels,” explains Tula Narayan Shah. “Now, Balen has become a PM candidate as a face of the region, and as someone who will deliver based on his work as Kathmandu mayor.”

If the RSP wins, it will be governing in the absence of

provincial leadership that would play a crucial mediatory role between Kathmandu and local units. On Wednesday, RSP’s Madhes province chair Mamta Sharma resigned from the party and joined the NC. There is also some underlying tension between RSP cadre loyal to Balendra Shah and Rabi Lamichhane.

“It is not prudent to predict who will win the election and whether parties will deliver on promises,” says Tula Narayan Shah. “But win or lose, there is little basis at this time to believe that the RSP will be committed to making the federal system and provinces more functional.”

Voters here at the heart of the federalism movement, however, are willing to give the RSP the benefit of the doubt. Resident Brahma Dev in Janakpur told us: “The RSP deserves a chance to prove their leadership in the next five years. If they do not deliver, we can always vote them out next time.”

On Wednesday, NC leaders unveiled the party’s 10-point election manifesto at a large rally in Janakpur (pictured above, right). Gagan Thapa began by addressing a cheering crowd in Maitihili, and said the NC was reformed, adding: “GenZ did not reject us, they told us to change our ways.”

Also on Wednesday 800km away at the other end of the country in Dhangadi, Balen Shah, in a speech that lasted just three minutes, said: “Don’t vote for us, give us work to do.”



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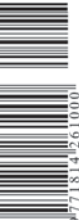
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Kunda Dixit

Besides being an election year in Nepal, 2026 is also the year of anniversaries. It is exactly 30 years since the Maoists launched their armed struggle on 13 February 1996, and it was on 27 April 2006 that the ceasefire came into effect after a month of massive pro-democracy protests.

Alas, three decades on, the conflict that claimed 17,000 lives is airbrushed from history. For survivors and families of those disappeared and killed, memories of loss and suffering are fading. The party that fought the war in Mao's name has abandoned it.

It is important to remember not to forget that violent decade so that it does not happen again, and so the youth movement that has led to this election will also not be in vain. The 8 September 2025 rally, the massacre that followed, and the nationwide mayhem the next day were fueled by anger boiling over.

Nepalis had been let down repeatedly by rulers promising revolution in the name of the 'people' — from the 1990 People's Movement I, to the Maoist 'People's War', and the 2006 People's Movement II.

There are positive residual effects of the insurgency. One-third of the Maoist militia was composed of women, empowering not just the female guerrillas but made generations of young women aware of their rights. The peace process brought the Maoists to the democratic mainstream, and the induction of guerrillas into the national army.

The ceasefire was followed by an interim



Remembering not to forget

The Maoist insurgency started 30 years ago this week. It has been 20 years since the ceasefire.

PHOTO SHOOT:

Maoist leaders Baburam Bhattarai, Hisila Yami, Ram Bahadur Thapa and Pushpa Kamal Dahal in an undated photo captured by the Nepal Army during a raid on a rebel base.

The Maoist ideologue Baburam Bhattarai was the architect of the revolution while Dahal was its executor. Attacks on infrastructure, health posts and schools pushed development back by decades.

OBJECTIVE CONDITIONS

Nepal in the early 1990s was ripe for revolution. There was inequality, social injustice, exclusion, and the political parties in Kathmandu were too busy squabbling.

We can look back as far as we want to the roots of the Maoist conflict. It can be blamed on elected leaders post-1990 who abandoned the people once in power, the 30 years of partyless Panchayat system that stifled dissent and let social pressures build up, or even 100 years of Rana rule. Prolonged indifference by rulers in Kathmandu fed public discontent, and accumulated grievances boiled over in September.

Mao Zedong once said: 'The old has to be uprooted to be replaced with the new'. That could almost be the anthem of Nepal's GenZ movement and this election.

The objective conditions that drove the Maoist insurgency 30 years ago are still evident today. How these structural problems are tackled will depend on the elected government(s) after March. 🇳🇵

Kunda Dixit is Publisher of Nepali Times and curator of a trilogy of photobooks on the conflict: A People War, Never Again and People After War.

government, and the first elected Constituent Assembly abolished the monarchy in 2008. Deadlock over federalism meant a second election had to be held in 2013, and the new Constitution finally promulgated in 2015.

That statute was supposed to devolve political decision-making away from Kathmandu to autonomous provinces, improve inclusive representation of women and hitherto excluded castes and ethnicities at all three levels of government, ensure accountability and good governance to generate jobs and lift living standards.

There were seven governments in ten years after 2015, and tottering coalitions failed to fulfil any of those provisions in the Constitution. There were gains in representation of women, but as this election shows, women candidates are still used as

proxies by patriarchal parties.

Since the two warring sides of the Maoist war both became the state, sharing power in dozens of coalition cabinets since 2006, they colluded to bury the transitional justice process. The conflict gets barely a mention in school history textbooks.

The former supreme commander of the Maoists Pushpa Kamal Dahal (Prachanda) has become prime minister three times in the last 20 years. He is contesting this election from Rukum East, where he marked the 30th anniversary last Friday.

The word 'Maoist' has been erased from the Nepali Communist Party which Dahal formed with more than a dozen other smaller leftist outfits. His main rival, Janardan Sharma, quit the Maoists and is standing for elections in Rukum West.

Trending Online

Epicentre of hunger

by Sabina Devkota
Despite improvement in maternal and child survival, malnutrition is rife in Nepal's western mountains such as Mukti Kot in Bajura where 55% of under-5 children are stunted and 51% underweight, much higher than the national average. Details in this story on our website.

f Most reached and shared on Facebook

Remembering not to forget

by Kunda Dixit
It is exactly 30 years this week since the Maoist conflict started, and 20 years since it ended. It is important to remember not to forget that violent decade -- so that it does not happen again, and so the youth movement that has led to this election will also not be in vain (see Editorial, above).

X Most popular on X



Mission (nearly) accomplished

by Namrata Sharma
PM Sushila Karki has gone about achieving her goal of conducting elections with a sense of purpose. Supporters praise her poise and decisiveness, while others fault her for not pursuing justice for the death and destruction. Visit nepalitimes.com for the full story.

66 Most commented

Map land

by Kunda Dixit
Map aficionados will be fascinated by the 40 antique maps from The Rajbhandari Collection on display at the exhibition 'Imaging South Asia: Nepal in the Making' at Kathmandu Art Gallery until 17 March. A must visit. Read the review online first.

🌐 Most visited online page

Letters

PM SUSHILA KARKI

So much appeasement of the PM that it reads like a propaganda piece ('Mission (nearly) accomplished', Namrata Sharma, #1298). Karki was most certainly not brought in solely to conduct elections. This is evident from the 10 point agreement she signed with GenZ, which clearly stated the government had a broader mandate. Under Karki's government, no efforts were made on security sector reform, education reform was dispelled, the health insurance has collapsed under her watch yet she evades responsibility, claiming it all happened before her time. And most damning is her full complicity in protecting perpetrators of violence against women and girls. I urge greater criticality in the narratives we build.

Aastha Dahal

■ Do you think the **सचिब** of all ministries, and Nepal Police officers all appointed by the three biggest and most corrupt "you-know-who" parties would let PM Sushila Karki and her cabinet work properly? Be thankful PM Sushila Karki took on this thankless job at her age, when she should have been in her retired life. Do you think she pocketed any black money or contract kick-backs outside of her hard earned salary? Don't forget that this is a provisional government. Not everything can be done through cabinet approved ordinances. Big laws and changes only come after Parliament's approval.

Aadit Shrestha

■ Salute mam. What you have done for the nation was really admirable. Because of you and the team, the nation went in the right path.

Neelam Chettri

■ She promised to capture criminals of GenZ protests in five days. Selective information is propaganda.

Aviv Adhikari

■ Right person, in right post, at the right time. We all should admire and thank her for taking on this heavy responsibility, when the country was in a very explosive state. She could have declined and stayed comfortably at home. Think and thank her, for courageously coming to serve the motherland.

Bhuban Singh

■ See how she dealt with Oil to ensure his statement was taken about GenZ protest. This could have gone so wrong if dealt with ego and power. When genz selected ministers resigned, she was there to

defend them instead of buying more time to hold the election. The GenZs who made her PM demanded her resignation but she faced the challenges. What a woman she is. I would like to see her as a PM for the next 5 years. And sadly, it's not possible.

Seller Bahadur

MAOIST WAR

From the Nepali perspective, the past 30 years have certainly been painful to forget by those that suffered, and for all Nepalis the delays in improving lives and governance are still a cause for frustration ('Remembering not to forget', Kunda Dixit, editorial). In a global lens, the scores of highly violent atrocities on most continents unfortunately have not provided us with too many optimistic alternatives.

Iván G. Somlai

Online Packages



LANGTANG CHEESE

Gyalbu Tamang spent his childhood accompanying his father to high pastures of Langtang, learning to make the famous Himalayan cheese. Watch the video and read this latest edition of Nepal Made on page 12.



RUKUM CHILDREN

UNICEF with Finnish government recently trained 15 students from Rukum West in photography, and organised an exhibition. Watch the video and read the story on page 6-7.

1,000 Words



SOCIAL MEDIA

PHOTO OP: Former prime minister K P Oli of the UML campaigning in Damak with a photo-op boat ride on Indreni Lake on Tuesday. With just two weeks to go for the polls, Oli is contesting against former Kathmandu mayor Balendra Shah of the RSP – and both parties have named them as their prime ministerial candidates. This photo was ridiculed on social media by those who recalled that Oli had promised to bring ocean going vessels up the Kosi River to the Nepal border.

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Bangladesh's post-uprising election

Out-of-country voting and rapid ballot counting hold lessons for Nepal's own polls

Mohna Ansari

Bangladesh's 12 February election carried historic weight because it was held in the aftermath of the July 2024 student-led uprising that ended the long-running regime of the Awami League's Sheikh Hasina.

Alongside the parliamentary contest, voters were asked to decide on an additional ballot referendum known as the 'July Charter', a proposal linked to constitutional and administrative reform debates.

I observed polling procedures in centres outside Dhaka, visiting 17 booths in Bancharampur and Gazipur constituencies with Muzaffar Hossain Chaudhary.

The Bangladesh Election Commission's emphasis on technology was evident. Upazila Police were deployed and equipped with body-cams, there were CCTVs at polling centres.

For the first time, the Election Commission reportedly created a WhatsApp coordination group that included human rights defenders and security officials, to enable rapid information-sharing and prompt security responses to potential incidents.

Bangladesh introduced postal voting for citizens abroad who had not renounced citizenship. The postal ballots were processed and counted with QR code technology. Similar arrangements to vote by mail were also made for government employees who could not go to their home constituencies.



DHAKA TRIBUNE

Youth participation was significant. Many first-time voters expressed enthusiasm and a strong sense of ownership over the democratic process. Their turnout and engagement suggested a generation keenly interested in shaping the country's political direction. Interestingly, as the result showed, many did not necessarily vote for youth candidates.

Women voters were also notably active. In multiple centres, women formed long queues and appeared confident about navigating the voting process. Members of the communities were also present.

In the polling centres mostly located in schools, the overall environment was calm, orderly, and peaceful. Election materials were properly arranged, voting compartments ensured procedural clarity, and no major disruptions or visible irregularities were observed

in the centres covered.

Security personnel were present but maintained a non-intrusive posture, contributing to a sense of order and non-interference.

Polling officials demonstrated familiarity with procedures, including voter identification and ballot issuance protocols. Queue management was generally in place, and voter verification processes were conducted in an organised manner.

In another lesson for Nepal, vote counting was carried out promptly. Polling booths were required to send recorded data of the ballots cast directly, which significantly streamlined and expedited the counting process.

Despite the generally smooth procedures, certain accessibility challenges were observed. Senior citizens, lactating mothers, and individuals who appeared

V FOR VICTORY:

Tarique Rahman of the Bangladesh National Party (BNP) after he was declared the winner of the election this week.

physically unwell were seen waiting in queues.

Polling officials estimated turnouts between 50-60%, showing that the ban on the former ruling party may have had an impact. What stood out most was the broader public mood. Many voters

appeared motivated and engaged, particularly given the country's recent political developments. Elections are not merely procedural exercises; they reflect citizens' aspirations, expectations, and trust in institutional processes.

One of the most distinctive features of this election was the referendum on the 'July Charter'. In some polling centres, this additional ballot appeared to generate confusion. A number of voters indicated they understood they needed to mark 'Yes' or 'No', yet some were unclear about the substance of the proposal.

Many younger voters seemed better informed about the implications of the referendum. Their engagement suggested that civic awareness surrounding reform debates may be evolving generationally. The referendum element added a constitutional

dimension to what was a politically significant parliamentary exercise.

LESSONS FOR NEPAL

Nepal also goes to the polls on 5 March, six months after its own student-led protests in September. Several of the practices seen in Bangladesh could be relevant.

Bangladesh has made notable strides in electoral reform and administrative efficiency -- especially in absentee ballots and fast counting. The country has taken a meaningful step forward in improving the accessibility and management of its electoral process.

Polling day was a crucial indicator of administrative preparedness and civic participation. The Bangladesh election illustrated both strengths and areas for continued civic education, especially regarding public understanding of referendum questions.

Historic elections shape nations. They also leave a lasting impression on those privileged to observe them closely. Democratic consolidation is an incremental process. Orderly procedures, technological monitoring, and visible participation reflect institutional maturity. At the same time, inclusivity particularly for vulnerable groups remains an essential benchmark. 🇧🇩



Mohna Ansari is an advocate, a practicing lawyer at the Supreme Court and Former Commissioner of National Human Rights Commission of Nepal.

NMB BANK एनएमबी बैंक



Turkish 500th

Turkish Airlines unveiled its 500th aircraft, an Airbus A350 named TK Family at Istanbul Airport on February 12. The plane features a livery that has photographs of the airline's 100,000 employees and retirees. The airline was launched in 1933 with five aircraft, now serving 356 destinations across six continents. The unveiling was attended by executives, former senior staff, retirees and the aircraft with call sign TK500 performed a ceremonial flight tracing the number 500 in the sky.

The airline also displayed replica aircraft representing each major fleet milestone — the 100th in 2006, 200th in 2012, 300th in 2016, and 400th in 2023. Chairman Prof. Ahmet Bolat described the 500th aircraft not as an endpoint but as the beginning of a "Second 500" era. The airline is targeting a fleet of 1,000 aircraft by 2036.

E-commerce rule

The Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies has made registration mandatory for all e-commerce businesses operating in Nepal. Firms must submit documents including PAN, domain ownership, privacy policy, and a cyber security test report. Existing platforms have seven days to comply or face legal action. Only NRB-approved payment gateways are allowed.

Punch resale

Sipradi Trading is offering a 70% guaranteed resale value on the Tata Punch EV for purchases made in February. The guarantee applies when exchanging the vehicle for any other Tata model in future.

Samsung Holi offer

Samsung Nepal is running a Holi campaign from February 1 to March 14 on washing machines and refrigerators at authorized retailers nationwide. The scheme offers up to 23% cashback on front-load and semi-automatic models, refrigerators up to 17%. Other perks include free installation, 20-year warranty, 0% EMIs, exchange options.

Zero progress

The Confederation of Nepalese Industries (CNI) reported that 27% of programs in the economic sector recorded zero progress in the first half of FY 2025/26. Of 74 projects, 9 have been fully implemented, 45 have partial progress, and the rest are untouched. Only 11.66% of Rs 407.89B allocation has been implemented.



Soaltee Manakamana

The Soaltee Hotels & Resorts has opened its newest property in Manakamana, Gorkha, five minutes from the temple. The 51-room hilltop resort offers mountain views, an all-day restaurant, spa, swimming pool, banquet hall, and event spaces. Soaltee is targeting pilgrims, corporate travellers, and leisure guests.

Ncell Super Krishak

Farmers can now subscribe to the Super Krishak digital agriculture platform using their Ncell balance with options for a Rs13 payment every 3 days, or a one-time Rs1,248 fee. The service offers tools that help with farming success such as market prices, expert advice, pest control information. Ncell hopes to get 90,000 farmers to sign up.



Land revenue up

Nepal's land revenue reached Rs26.96B in the first seven months of FY 2025/26, up from Rs24.71B in the same period last year. DoLMA recorded 50,837 land plot transactions nationwide, with Bhaktapur leading the Kathmandu Valley. Transaction volume nearly doubled after the government lifted land fragmentation restrictions in November.

Hyundai World Cup

Customers who test drive a Hyundai car until April will be entered into a draw to win a two-person trip to a FIFA World Cup 2026 match. Hyundai has an official partnership with the world cup. Vehicles booked during this period will also come with exclusive benefits.

Rose sales

Rs70M worth of roses were sold in Nepal during Valentine's week February 7-14. Floriculture Association Nepal reported that 500,000 stems were sold at Rs140 per rose on average. Domestic production meets only 30% of the demand, the rest is imported, mostly from India.

Dailekh gas

China Geological Survey has reported that the natural gas deposit in Dailekh has a volume of 80.70 billion cubic meters. Initial estimates projected only 1.12 billion cubic meters. The Department of Mines and Geology has stated that comprehensive testing is needed before commercial use to replace diesel and LPG imports.

IME edu discount

Global IME Bank is offering a 50% discount on international online transfer service fees for educational purposes. Covers IELTS, TOEFL, SAT, GMAT, PTE, ACT, ACCA, YSL exams, college fees, visa fees, insurance fees. The scheme is valid until March 31.

Veel creators

Video marketing platform Veel has announced a project to strengthen Nepal's creator economy by connecting Nepali creators with brand opportunities. Nepal's creator economy is estimated at \$30-40 million with significant growth potential. Veel aims to make the sector transparent and sustainable.

Cambridge Awards

Cambridge University Press & Assessment recognized over 47 Nepali students in its Outstanding Cambridge Learner Awards for the November 2024 and June 2025 series. Four students achieved Top in the World, 36 earned Top in Nepal, and 14 received High Achievement awards. Notable schools include Rato Bangala, St Xavier's, Trinity.



Proton EMAS 7

Proton Nepal's e-SUV EMAS 7, distributed by Jagdamba Motors, uses lithium iron phosphate cells for higher energy density and better fire safety. The car has a range of 492km or 585km depending on variant, with fast charging from 30 to 80 percent in 20 minutes. Base model starts at Rs46.99 lakh.

Migrant>returnee>entrepreneur>politician

She returned from Korea, bought a cafe, and is now standing for election



DIASPORA DIARIES 84

This is the 84th 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.

Bimala Lama

Growing up, my parents encouraged me to prioritise studies. As the youngest, I always had an inner desire to be independent.

My job at a travel agency in Kathmandu did not inspire me much. I wanted to strike off on my own but did not have money, and was reluctant to ask my parents because then they might have wanted to marry me off.

So without telling them, I started Korean language lessons. What I had read and heard about Korea appealed to me because it was safe for women, they were treated respectfully and protected by strong laws. I wanted to temporarily migrate with the sole purpose of raising enough capital to start my own business one day.

I made my passport without telling my parents. It was a hassle because they needed the consent of guardians since girls were at risk of being trafficked. I convinced them I was able to stand up for myself.

I passed the Korean exam, and only then told my parents. I was in the first cohort under the Korea G2G Employment Permit System (EPS). The work there was not difficult: I trimmed, cleaned, sorted imported flower bulbs. My monthly earnings were Rs60,000 with overtime.

I got engaged to my friend with 200 guests in attendance at a lama ceremony. We had gone as friends but realised there that we were meant for each other. Later, when we returned to Nepal, we got married in a traditional ceremony.

I stayed on in Nepal after my wedding while my husband re-migrated. We have two children, and when the younger one turned two, I was ready to go back to work. This time, as an entrepreneur.

I bought the rights to an outlet of the Burger House and Crunchy Fried Chicken franchise which was neither too posh nor too shabby, reasonably priced, hygienic and with a cosy ambience.

The outlet did well, and the lessons I picked up in Korea helped -- it taught me to value



CAMPAIGN TRAIL: Bimala Lama (in yellow sari, above) at the hustings this week in Kathmandu-7, where she is representing the Ujyalo Nepal Party.

With Korean Ambassador Park Tae-young (left) at a ceremony in Kathmandu recently to launch a book on returnee entrepreneurs.

I can be everything the situation demands: barista, cashier, trainer, cleaner, dishwasher. And that is what politicians should also be. It is about more than power, it is a service. You have to experience hunger to solve hunger, empathise with people and their struggles.

I had never seen myself as a politician, but I know that I understand people. When someone is hurting, it hurts me. People had started noticing, and I was invited to join various political parties.

INTO POLITICS

In my neighbour's house, for example, there was no water and sewage was a problem. The prolonged inaction bothered me so I lobbied to get it fixed. This made me understand how far we can go if we serve selflessly. If we have a voice, we need to use it.

Even then I did not think I would join politics, at least not directly and not for another ten years. During past elections, I used to educate people about good candidates and to think beyond parties. When I had heard that Kulman Ghising was starting a party, I trusted that he could contribute a lot based on his delivery experience.

I just wanted to volunteer for his party, but ended up joining it. I realised women do not want to enter the fray, and are satisfied with proportional representation seats. Women should not hold back, or be

every second and be disciplined. I now transfer these lessons to my trainees. As a café entrepreneur no work is too small. I clean, wash dishes, make coffee, train, and run the cash register. I do it all. I have learnt the value of work.

I was once contacted by the Korean Embassy. They wanted to understand what returnees in Nepal are up to. They put our stories in a book. The K-Hami project team encouraged me to share my story and inspire other Korea returnees, especially women.

We created the DidiBahini network for women returnees, which we have recently registered

as Sangi Nepal. There is a shared journey that binds us returnees. We know the struggle overseas. We value hard-earned money that comes with immense sacrifices, and we have learnt that hard work and dedication pays.

As a restaurant entrepreneur, I often get calls from youth asking for jobs. They are under 25 and are struggling to juggle work and study. They need skills and jobs, so I started a hospitality training centre to help young people develop job ready skills. I did not think that I would get into politics, even though my grandfather was once a minister. As an entrepreneur,

held back. We should fight, share our vision and take action. We need to be in decision-making roles too.

I wanted to see more women in Parliament. I wanted to fight direct elections and was appointed to run in Kathmandu-7. I felt proud.

We don't need to make lofty promises. Politicians do not care about the grassroots. They are stuck to their chairs. I do not have an unrealistic vision but want to help people in tangible ways.

For hungry people, food is a priority. For the uneducated, it is education. For the sick, even one medicine tablet can go a long way. Health, education and jobs are my focus. I want to promote youth self-employment and decent jobs, just as I did as an entrepreneur.

Being elected to power is not enough, you have to perform and deliver. Even in Kathmandu, there is poverty and hunger. It is hard to believe that some of these places exist in the capital — hard to reach places with no basic services. This hurt as well as inspired me.

If I am elected to Parliament, I will serve selflessly. As a returnee with a voice and the possibility to make policies and laws, I want to encourage people overseas to come back with whatever savings and learning they have and contribute to the country. It may not be easy, but it will be worth it.

I myself may not have faced challenges overseas, but there are many who do not have a positive experience abroad, I will raise their concerns. I will also continue to encourage other women to do more. As a businesswoman, a politician and a mother I will erase any doubts they have about their capabilities. I will continue to be that source of courage.

In Kathmandu-7, there are 29 candidates, I am the only female. While campaigning, people often ask me if I have money. When I say I don't, they ask how I expect to fight an election. Through my idealism, I tell them. People also ask me if I am a proportional representation candidate. That is the first impression voters have of women candidates. When I tell them I am contesting directly, many are surprised. There are challenges but I like challenges. I like a fight.

There will be winners and losers, that is part of the game. All I want to do is inspire fellow women and youth. My husband has wholeheartedly supported my business and political journey.

My children are curious what will happen if I win. Even before I stood as a candidate, they knew their mother was a fearless leader. They now recognise the green Ujyalo Nepal Party banners.

Looking at my children makes me even more committed to shape the future of the next generations of Nepalis. This is what got me into politics in the first place: to serve. 🇳🇵



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I tried taking a cool photo of this suspension bridge. **Kaman, 15**



This is a shop on my way to school. I get candies and snacks from here. **Shankar, 11**

Rukum in the eyes of its children

How the post-GenZ generation in one of Nepal's remotest districts sees everyday life

Sonia Awale

This week 30 years ago, the Maoists launched their armed struggle from the rugged mountains of Rukum, attacking a police post in Athbiskot on 13 February 1996 (Editorial, page 2).

Today, Rukum has been partitioned into East and West, and is an electoral battleground for the 5 March poll between the former Supreme Commander of the Maoist party Pushpa Kamal Dahal (Prachanda) and his erstwhile

guerrilla commander Janardan Sharma (Prabhakar).

The Maoist revolution was all about liberating the people of districts like Rukum from poverty, oppression and feudalism. The comrades promised to end inequality, social injustice, and exclusion in an insurgency they called 'People's War'.

Today, 20 years after the conflict ended with the loss of 17,000 lives, not much has changed in both parts of Rukum. A motorable road does

connect the district to the rest of the country, and it is the route many people have taken to migrate out.

In one village in Rukum West, some young men paid as much as Rs8 million to human traffickers to take them to the United States. Some reached the US, but have been deported back to Nepal.

Dahal has dropped the label 'Maoist' from his newly minted Nepali Communist Party and is contesting from Rukum East, while Sharma split from the party

and is contesting from Rukum West as a Pragatisheel Loktantrik Party candidate. Newer faces from Rastriya Swatantra Party and Ujyalo Nepal Party are also in the race.

Rukum was affected by the 2023 earthquake that killed 153 people and damaged 10,000 homes in Rukum West and Jajarkot. Many health facilities and schools collapsed, and one of them was Bheri Dovan Secondary School.

Reconstruction has been slow, but Finland and UNICEF have

built a semi-permanent transitional learning centre with a gender segregated sanitation facility.

STORIES IN PICTURES

The project gave digital point-and-shoot cameras to 15 students between ages 11-16 who were interested in photography to take pictures of their daily lives. Eight girls and seven boys got a three-day basic training in photography.

"The reason we chose this school was because it was



These are children from my village, they were playing and I made them stand in a row and look at my camera. **Birendra, 13**



A woman from my village carrying hay on her back since it is harvesting season. **Birendra, 13**



I wanted to take this photo of my grandmother and my sister because I love my grandmother. Her age is over 100 years. **Birendra, 13**



Birendra, 13

completely destroyed and they have quite a few children from marginalised communities,” says Sabrina Guruacharya of UNICEF. “We wanted to invest in the creative skills of children and provide the space for them to tell their own stories in pictures.”

The theme of the photography workshop was to reflect on how the community was rebuilding after the earthquake. But instead of photos of destruction and ruined houses, the children took pictures of their

family members, neighbours, friends, beloved pets and household livestock.

They also took pictures of bridges, roads and telecom towers, neighbours harvesting crops, family members playing.

In one frame, a girl is cooking over a traditional stove even as she scrolls through her smartphone. In another, six neighbourhood children are made to pose in a line -- a heartwarming portrayal of childhood innocence.

“We are looking at new ways of storytelling that are inclusive and where young people are at the heart of the story. It’s their story, it’s them narrating,” says Guruacharya. Selected photographs were exhibited at Patan Darbar Square in January, as well as in the Rukum West school itself.


The project is a direct beneficiary of an initiative in Finland where students raise money every time they walk to school. Finnish children then

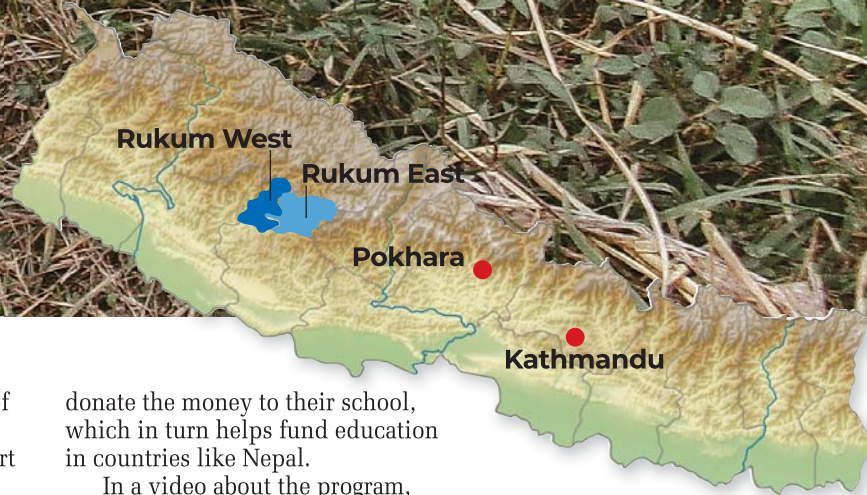
donate the money to their school, which in turn helps fund education in countries like Nepal.

In a video about the program, participating students talk about learning the basics of photography such as different image sizes and camera angles, shooting at eye level and avoiding digital zoom for better results, understanding the perspective of light and motion, rules of composition and different lighting conditions, among others.

It looks like some of the talented

students are set to become content creators when they grow up, and UNICEF is now looking to replicate this in Madhes Province.

The photographs taken by the children illustrate their everyday lives and concerns, which seems far away from the manifestos and stale electoral promises of candidates. 



This is my school by the river, seen from above. **Chitrakala, 16**



My sister was cooking while using her phone. **Srishti, 13**



Events



ākāśa

Spiritual artist Jimmy Thapa introduces a journey through zodiac signs, planets, and unseen cosmic energies in this exhibition at gallery 108. This is where myth, memory, and the cosmos quietly meet.

Until 1 March, 11am-7pm, Gallery 108, Darbar Marg

Connected Horizons

This exhibition brings together artists from Nepal and international art community, creating a platform for dialogue, exchange, and shared artistic vision across culture and geographies.

Opening on 20 February, 5pm onwards, Gallery Mcube, Laitpur

Kurakani with Kalam

An evening of meaningful conversations, pizza, and community connection, with special perks for attendees. Contact @kalamweekly on Instagram for details.

21 February, 5pm onwards, Rs500, Mandala Deck, Thamel



Bodies meet music

A collaborative session exploring the connection between body and music. Registration required.

24 February, 2pm, Taragaon Museum, Boudha



Embroidery workshop

A hands-on embroidery workshop exploring stitching techniques and slow craft, with all materials provided.

28 February, 10:30am-2pm, Rs1,200, Kalashala, Sanepa Chok

Sketch Meet

Celebrate the 50th milestone meetup with a community sketching session at Chilanchho Stupa.

21 February, 12pm, Chilanchho Stupa

Echoes of the Mandala

An exhibition showcasing reflections of Nepali artists through paintings inspired by the shared civilisational ties of Nepal and India.

Until 22 February, 11am-7pm, Nepal Art Council



Music

Nepathya in Siliguri

One of Nepal's biggest bands performs live in Siliguri for the first time, bringing their signature folk-rock sound and powerful social messaging.

28 February, 7:30pm onwards, Rs1,600, Rs2,400, Utsodhaara Teesta Township

Mukti and Revival

Catch Mukti and Revival for a night of rock music and stage power.

20 February 2026, 7pm onwards, Tickets: Rs500, Moksh, Jhamsikhel



Kanung Saajh

Featuring Trishna Gurung alongside John & The Locals with hits 'Naam K Ho' and 'Hawa Jastai'.

27 February, 6pm onwards, Rs700, BICC, Butwal



Bipul Chettri

Blending Nepali folk with contemporary melodies, enjoy Bipul Chettri & The Travelling Band live at Club Nova.

21 February, 7pm onwards, Rs1,299, Rs1,499, Kathmandu

Reggae Sundown

Spend your evening with laid-back reggae rhythms as Joint Family Internationale fosters peace, love, and togetherness through music.

28 February 2026, 6pm onwards, Tickets: Rs500, Village Cafe



Getaway



Dwarika's Sanctuary

For lunch outside the city or for a spa experience that will wash away all your worries, Dwarika's Resort is the place to go. A relaxing couple of hours in the salt room will leave you feeling rejuvenated.

Dhulikhel (11) 490612

Dom Himalaya

Dom Himalaya offers a space for visitors to indulge in traditional Nepali cuisine, relax with Tibetan singing bowls and bask in the vibrant chaos of Thamel.

Thamel (01) 4263554



Hotel Fireside

Kalinchok, a quiet village in Dolakha, is covered with a blanket of snow in the winter that makes the town as picturesque as Swiss valleys. This hotel provides one a warm refuge after a day in the winter wonderland, with heated rooms, comfortable beds and soul-warming Nepali food.

Kuri Village, Kalinchok, 9841958694

Green Valley

Just beyond Budhanilkantha, enjoy a cool breeze as you take a stroll around the Tamang Valley. Perfect for those who want a taste of home without venturing far away from the city.

Shivapuri National Park (01) 5248091

YMH Namche

Enjoy a homey stay at the Yeti Mountain Home Namche with its warm and traditional Khumbu designs, hearty foods, spectacular views of the mountains and Himalayan Healers spa.

Namche Bazar, Solukhumbu, 9813905863

Weekend Weather



FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
23° 8°	23° 8°	23° 8°	22° 8°	23° 8°

Warm and Dry

Some clouds moving across Nepal, but no precipitation yet. There is a chance that westerly front will bring some passing showers midweek next week with snow above 4,500m. Meanwhile, in Kathmandu Valley the temperature will continue to climb to 23°C in the afternoon with the minimum now approaching double digits with spring like weather. This NASA satellite photo on Thursday at noon shows considerable pollution above northern India which will enter Nepal with up-valley winds.

Our Pick



The 2026 American survival horror thriller directed by Sam Raimi follows corporate strategist Linda Liddle getting snubbed of a long deserved promotion by her new insufferable boss Bradley Preston. But when the plane carrying company staff including Linda and Bradely crashes and they become the only survivors in a deserted island, the dynamic flips between the two. Linda is the one with extensive survival skills and Bradley will have to rely on her to make it out alive. Stars Rachel McAdams, Dylan O'Brien, Edyll Ismail, Xavier Samuel, and Chris Pang.



Dining

Baker's Den

Is a loved one's birthday coming up, or need a just-because cake? Order from Baker's Den. Or get freshly baked doughnuts, muffins, or bread too.

Bhatbhateni (01) 4416560

Cibo Bistro

With simple dishes and fresh ingredients, enjoy a wide variety of pastas, pizzas, sandwiches and mouth-watering desserts. Kid-friendly options are available as well.

Pulchok (01)5541940



Mamagoto Nepal

Mamagoto is a fun Pan-Asian restaurant that serves a variety of Asian fusion dishes. Enjoy maki rolls, Satays, dumplings, ramen and more all with a side of cocktails in this new quirky eatery.

Panipokhari (01)4446299

Cafe de Tukche

Tired of trying to figure out what to cook for lunch day after day? Get authentic Thakali food delivered from Cafe de Tukche. Order the Thakali Khana set, or take a break from rice and try the Thakali Dhedo set instead.

Lazimpat (01)4536990



Kairos Cafe

With a customisable breakfast, variety of juicy burgers and an assortment of Italian, Spanish and English cuisine, Kairos Cafe is a must for foodies. It's rustic, minimalistic setting also provides the ideal background for food photography.

Jawalakhel, 9813493902

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

Scotland beat Italy, Italy beat Nepal, Nepal beat Scotland

Dramatic win against Scotland redeems the Rhinos' reputation as team heads home

Vishad Raj Onta

Nepal showed inconsistent performance at the T20 World Cup 2026 in Mumbai with flashes of brilliance, but ultimately snatched defeat from the jaws of victory.

The near-win against England, a test cricket team, by an associate country in the opening game showed promise that Nepal's cricket was on the cusp of glory.

However, subsequent losses against newcomers Italy and the West Indies were harsh reality checks: there is a lot of catching up to do in the present, and structural changes to put in place to win big in the future.

Head Coach Stuart Law summed it all up somewhat harshly: "To go from that high to then go to an extreme low four days later, that's not showing mental toughness."

He was worried about the distraction of social media and lack of focus among players: "When you're in cricket, do your cricket. It's a difficult one for me because I'm a social media dinosaur, I don't understand it. You don't have to keep showing your face if we're winning games."

Finally a late-night win against Scotland on Tuesday redeemed some of Nepal's pride. A strong opening partnership, yet another rugged Dipendra Singh Airee innings and Sompal Kami's vindictive 3 for 25 helped Nepal beat Scotland in their last group game at the T20 World Cup.

There was nothing riding on the game but honour, it means at least that Nepal do not crash out on zero.

A big part of the reason Nepal's performance was so much better against England than in the other games was the mentality going in. Against England, Nepal were clear underdogs and could play freely. Even a nasty defeat would have been forgiven.

Against newcomers Italy, these roles were flipped. Fans and perhaps the players underestimated Italy, a nation much better known for its football culture. But it had put together a smart, experienced team made up of Italian cricketers with South African, Australian, English, Indian, Pakistani and Sri Lankan heritage.

Dipendra Singh Airee
Batting Avg **56.33**
Economy **6.90**



Sandeep Lamichhane
Wicket **1**
Economy Rate **9.46**



Sompal Kami
26 off 15 v WI
3/25 vs Scotland



Nandan Yadav
5 wickets,
2/25 v England,
2/34 v Scotland



Lokesh Bam
39 off 20 vs England



SAJAN LAMICHHANE / CAN

And Nepal may have won a series against West Indies last year, but against the full strength Caribbean squad they were easily beaten.

Another key difference is that Nepal was batting second against England. Against Italy and the West Indies, having to set a target rather than chase it, there was batting failure. The front of the order — openers Kushal Bhurtel and Aasif Sheikh, captain Rohit Poudel — did not pace themselves well.

They started much too slow, not able to take advantage of the first six powerplay overs. Airee's 58 and Sompal Kami's 26 off 11 against the West Indies were the only innings of any note. The middle order of Bam, Jha, Aarif Sheikh was not much better.

Nepal really struggled with the ball too in that game, taking the one wicket against the West Indies and none against Italy. It is a huge ask of your bowling attack to defend anything below 150 in the modern T20 game. There were questionable tactical choices. Early wickets are essential when defending a low score.

But key wicket taker Sandeep Lamichhane was not brought on until the middle overs, when the opponents had made too many runs to feel any fear. So they took him on and he had a really poor tournament, going for a lot of runs.

To captain Poudel's credit, he acknowledged the bad showing against Italy: "It was not a 123 all-out wicket. We are professionals and not turning up for the game was disappointing."

Coach Law thinks that Nepal is going to get to the next step. If the team is ambitious, and hopes to compete at the elite level, then it cannot celebrate a loss against England. If it wants to win consistently, it has to shed the 'Cardiac Kids' nickname. It is better to win than to be fun to watch but lose.

The T20 game is so brisk and so it is often won in the margins. Good catching and fielding can create momentum and save a team the 5, 10 runs that win the game. Nepal were uncharacteristically poor in the field against Italy and West Indies, often fumbling and leaking boundaries.

Airee didn't get any of his usual run-outs either. Nepal lost cheap wickets through run-outs and stumpings. All these unforced errors right through the match add up on the scoreboard.

SKILL SET

Mentality is important but sport performance ultimately comes down to skill. There looked to be a large gap, and perhaps one of the reasons is because the Nepal team is so full of all-rounders.

Airee's two-way performance is undeniable, but Bhurtel, Paudel and Karan KC do plenty of both too and they do not do it super well very often.

If the team wants to get consistent, it must have consistent performers with the bat and ball. That calls for some of these players to focus completely on one skill over the other. You do not see openers bowling so much in the top teams as Bhurtel does.

The main reason for this skill gap, and one of the hardest parts about being an associate nation, is how little cricket the members of the team play compared to the test

nations.

Said Stuart Law: "The longer format is where you learn how to play the game. The shorter formats are where you have your fun. We need some sort of multi-day games."

The contrast in experience showed during the Italy game. Most of the members of the Italy team were well into their thirties, had played a high volume of domestic cricket and were more self-assured.

So, while the young Nepali team were more athletic, they seemed to lack the skill and experience to know what to do when things were going wrong. The Italians seemed to go about their game with a lot more self assurance.

In the long run, this means setting up grassroots structures, getting kids into formal training when young, and setting up a longer format domestic league.

In the short term, CAN could organise frequent series with other associate nations, and individual athletes could go play long form club cricket abroad. Surely some team in the world has to have a spot for a player like Airee, for example.

It has been Airee's tournament. Scores of 44 v England, 58 v West Indies, and now a match-winning 50 against Scotland that gives the travelling Nepali support something to cheer for. The tournament could have been a lot more, but it is wholesome to end on a win.

From Group A, bitter rivals India and Pakistan have qualified. From Group B, Zimbabwe join Sri Lanka — Australia shockingly miss out. From Nepal's Group C it is the West Indies and England, and from Group D it is South Africa and New Zealand who go through. The group stage matches finish up on Friday.

The eight teams who made it through will be split up into groups again in the 'Super 8' stage, from 21 February to 1 March. Group 1 consists of India, South Africa, West Indies and Zimbabwe and Group 2 has England, New Zealand, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Each team plays every other team in its group, and the top two of each group play semi finals on 4 and 5 March. The final, then, is on 8 March. 🇳🇵

Experience Luxury

SILK

Finish



RED ALERT: Get ready for the wildfire season

How Nepal can reduce forest fires and boost farm production at the same time

Ngamindra Dahal

Chronic winter drought and decades of unmanaged forest biomass have turned wildfires into a systemic risk for Nepal. We need to re-learn to convert fire fuel in forests into fertilizer for crops.

On 11 January, a huge forest fire spread rapidly from China into the forests of Sindhupalchok, 40km northeast of Kathmandu. The newly-opened Tatopani border checkpoint was closed. Smoke from the fire spread across central Nepal, blocking the sun.

The fire burnt itself out within a few days, but the border stayed closed for longer. Such wildfires were once rare in mid-winter, and traditionally peaked between March and May as temperatures rose ahead of pre-monsoon showers.

What is unsettling is not just the early onset of the fires, but also their scale. This shift is not accidental, the pattern has been unfolding over years due to winter drought, weakening post-monsoon moisture, and the accumulation of dry forest biomass as Nepal's forest area doubled in the past 30 years.

Together, these factors have made forests tinder dry in spring, just waiting for a spark. Nepal has experienced winter drought in eight of the past ten years (this winter

was an exception). Winter rain and snow at higher elevations play a decisive role in maintaining surface moisture, recharging shallow aquifers, and keeping forest floors damp enough to resist ignition. When winter rains fail, forests dry out months earlier than usual.

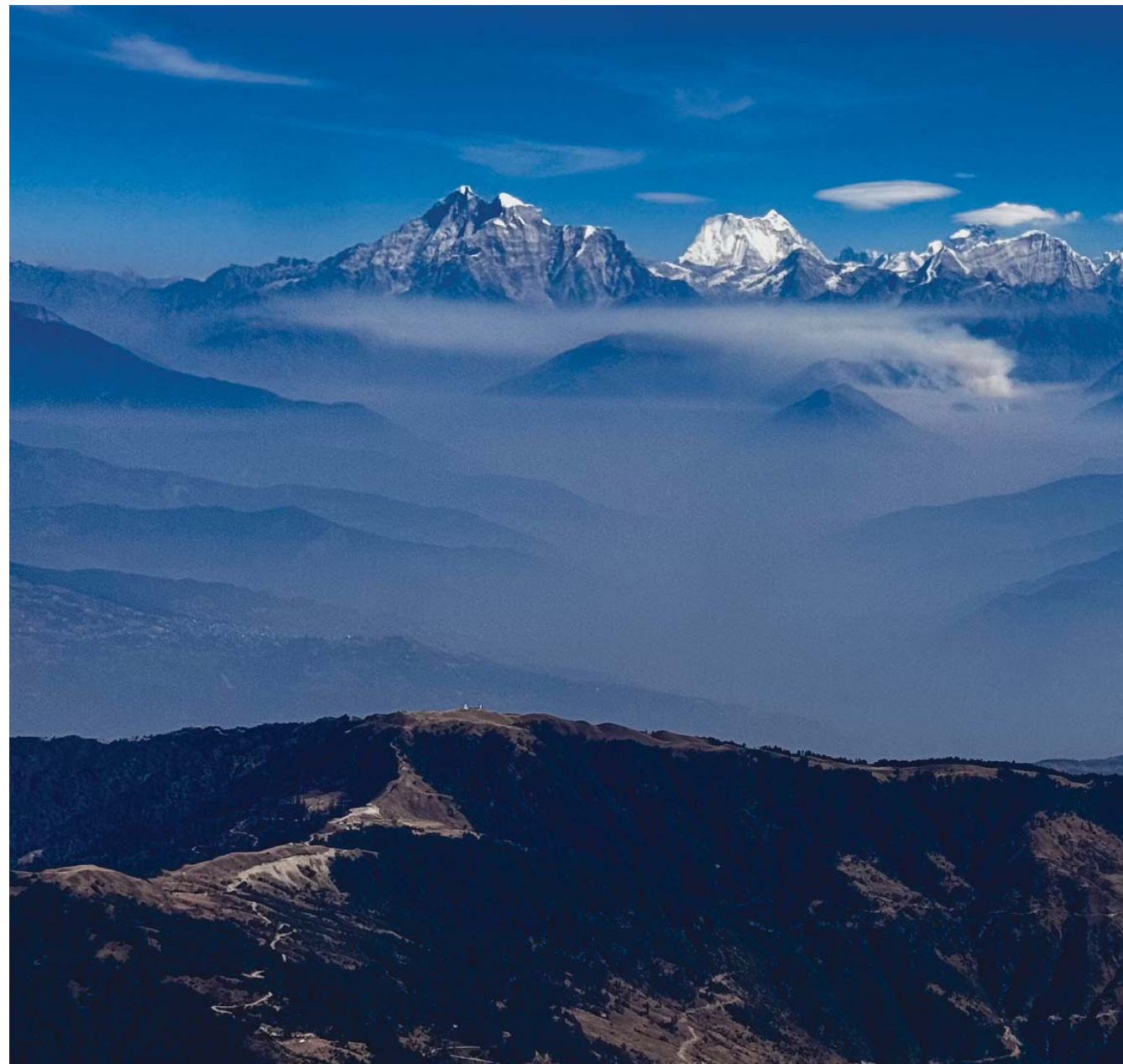
Satellite-based assessments show a steep decline in surface moisture across the middle mountains of Nepal, particularly in areas with dense forest cover but limited undergrowth management. Springs that once flowed year-round are now seasonal.

More than half of the springs in the mid-hills have either dried up or show significantly reduced discharge, a trend closely linked to declining soil moisture and disrupted recharge zones. Dry soil does not just threaten water security — it helps the vegetation ignite.

FUEL WITHOUT FUNCTION

For decades, Nepal's forests have been accumulating dry leaf litter, fallen branches, shrubs, and deadwood. Historically, this biomass was not considered waste because rural households regularly collected leaf litter for livestock bedding, which was later composted and returned to farms as fertilizer.

Forest floors were therefore relatively clean while the mulch fertilized farms. That relationship has steadily eroded due to



outmigration, changes in livestock systems, restrictions on access to community forests, and the growing availability of chemical fertilisers.

Community forests across the country today are thick with dry twigs, branches and leaves — a highly combustible carpet. When prolonged drought dries this biomass, even a small spark from a herder's intentional fire, a cigarette, or lightning strike can trigger massive fires.

Under such conditions, the question is no longer whether

fires will occur, but how intense and widespread they will be.

Forest fires are often framed as an environmental issue concerning trees and wildlife. In reality, their impact extends far beyond forest boundaries.

Smoke travels faster and further than flames. Fine particulate matter, especially harmful PM2.5, spreads across countries. In recent fire seasons, air quality monitors in Kathmandu have recorded air quality levels several times higher than WHO guidelines. The

smoke adds to Kathmandu's own pollution and lingers for days.

Flights are cancelled or delayed in cities like Pokhara, and poor visibility blocks mountain views affecting tourism. Health facilities report spikes in respiratory complaints, particularly among children and the elderly. Just as wildfires have multi-sectoral causes, the impact of forest fires go beyond forests.

One critical dimension remains largely invisible: the soil. The fires cause silent damage beneath

When conservation becomes

Increases in wildfires and wildlife attacks highlight urgent need to manage nature

Rajendra N Suwal

If nature is left entirely unmanaged, ecological succession will proceed in ways that may undermine conservation objectives. For example, grasslands and wetlands in Nepal's protected areas are being overtaken by excessive vegetation.

Grass then becomes taller, denser, and coarser, and unpalatable to herbivores. Similarly, wetlands become silted, and open water surfaces are covered by native and invasive species, reducing accessibility for grazing and limiting hunting opportunities for predators.

These habitats effectively become ecological 'blankets', unfavourable to both prey and predator — large herbivores are forced to move outside protected areas in search of food.

Predators follow prey, and stray into human settlements. Farmers in Nepal's mountains are leaving agriculture due to crop depredation by monkeys, porcupine and wild boars. Trees are taking over terraces.

Restriction on fuelwood collection, fodder

harvesting, grazing, and timber extraction in community forests and protected areas increases the accumulation of combustible forest litter. In the mountains, with fewer grazers, forbs disappear and grasses dominate, leading to wildfires.

Nepal has over 300 days of sunshine, and this dries the vegetation faster. Combined with winter drought due to climate breakdown and strong up-valley winds in spring, out of control wildfires have become more common in the past decades.

Low-intensity surface fires in late winter can control invasive species and stimulate growth of green shoots, providing forage for herbivores. In contrast, crown fires occurring from March onwards when temperature and wind speed are higher, cause severe damage to wildlife, decimating nesting birds, insects, reptiles, mammals, as well as human life and property.

Successful conservation therefore requires strategies to accommodate increasing wildlife populations by ensuring adequate food, water, and shelter within the protected areas and buffer zones. Without such measures, wildlife will encroach into surrounding habitats, corridors, and farmlands, costing human life and damage to crops. Often, there is retaliatory killing of wildlife.

Poisoning or electrocution of protected species have become more frequent. Tiger, leopard and wild elephant attacks are primary causes of human fatalities in buffer zones. The recent death of three people in Salyan



by a tiger straying from Banke National Park is a case in point. Nepal's growing tiger population tends to disperse and establish new territories beyond their natal area.

Addressing human safety is essential for sustainable and long-term conservation outcomes. Local communities should not

see wildlife as adversaries, but the carrying capacity of a protected area to determine a minimum viable population must be determined. This means adopting a strategy to retain, relocate, deter, contain, or control wildlife populations to safeguard humans and crops for food security.



KUNDA DIXIT

the ash, and the emergency does not end when the flames subside. Beneath the surface, soil suffers long-term damage. Organic matter burns away, beneficial microorganisms die. The soil structure weakens, reducing the land's ability to absorb and retain water. The scorched earth is more prone to erosion, increasing the risk of floods and landslides once the rains return.

In many of Nepal's agricultural areas, soil organic matter levels are already below 2% -- lower

than what is needed for resilient and productive farming. Repeated fires push these levels even lower, undermining soil fertility and forcing farmers to rely more heavily on chemical fertilisers, unleashing a vicious cycle of higher costs and food insecurity.

Climate breakdown is often cited as the primary culprit, and rightly so. Rising temperatures and erratic rainfall have intensified fire risk. But fires in Nepal are increasingly the result of human intervention.

The response of all three levels of government remains too little, and too reactive. Each year, resources are mobilised to extinguish fires once they have already spread. Far less attention is paid to managing the fuel load within forest undergrowth that makes such fires inevitable.

Meanwhile, forestry and agriculture policies are not coordinated, missing opportunities to address shared challenges. Forest fires are not natural disasters, but predictable outcomes



WHERE THERE IS SMOKE: Wildfire smoke billowing below Mt Gauri Shankar in February 2025 and a NASA FIRMS image of Nepal with red dots signifying fires the same week.

of governance choices.

National plans and climate pledges set an ambitious target of raising soil organic matter to 4%. The science behind this goal is solid. Higher organic matter improves water retention, stabilises yields, reduces fertiliser dependence, and enhances long-term food security. What remains unclear is the pathway.

Where will the organic inputs come from? How will they be processed and applied safely at scale? Without practical answers, the 4% target risks remaining aspirational rather than achievable.

Forest undergrowth can be turned into fuel and fertiliser. Biochar is produced by heating organic biomass in a low-oxygen environment, converting it into a stable form of carbon that can be added to soil.

When properly produced and applied, it improves soil structure, enhances water and nutrient retention, supports microbial activity, and locks carbon into the ground for decades.

In Nepal biochar addresses two interconnected problems: reducing the accumulation of combustible biomass in forests, lowering fire risk, while simultaneously rebuilding depleted soils. In doing so, it restores the broken link between forest management and agriculture.

Done well, biochar is not merely an environmental intervention. It

is an economic one, with potential to create local employment, reduce farmers' input costs, and support climate-smart agriculture.

But biochar propagation depends on improved governance. If promoted as isolated pilots or short-term projects, it will fail. What is needed is institutional clarity: standards for production and safety, quality control mechanisms, farmer extension services, and coordination across local, provincial, and federal levels.

Community forest user groups could manage biomass collection. Local governments then support safe, decentralised production units. Agricultural extension services guide farmers on application, linked to soil testing and monitoring. Such an approach would reduce fire risk, improve soil health, and generate rural livelihoods.

Poorly produced biochar or contaminated feedstock can harm soils and human health. Without training, standards, and oversight, good intentions can backfire.

Nepal needs to move beyond fire-fighting to fire prevention and confront the structural causes that make them a growing risk. It is not just a technical choice – it is one that demands political will from newly-elected leaders after March. ■

Ngamindra Dahal is a hydrometeorologist with the Nepal Water Conservation Foundation specialising on climate and water management issues.

Too much of a good thing



RAJENDRA N SUWAL

Despite Nepal's rich biodiversity and ecosystem services, the country generates limited revenue from biodiversity conservation. Although forest cover exceeds 45%, timber imports remain high, and deadwood that is not harvested is a fire hazard.

ECOTOURISM

More than 23% of Nepal's area is protected, yet only a few derive ecotourism revenue. Other protected areas receive few visitors. Limited entrance access to the protected areas also deprives the tourism economy. This limits benefits to local communities despite provisions for half the fees to be allocated to people in the buffer zones.

Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve stands out as a successful revenue model, generating income from a low number of visitors through high-value hunting tourism. Hunting permits are auctioned annually, with fees of approximately \$6,000 for Himalayan tahr and \$5,000 for blue sheep.

In Africa, surplus megafauna is hunted to control the population, thereby contributing to national economy and safeguarding ecology, and reducing human wildlife conflict. The US also has seasonal quotas for hunting and fishing.

Conservation priorities should emphasise safeguarding ecologically important species, including predators, scavengers, rodent controllers, insectivores, pollinators, seed dispersers, and aerial feeders that regulate growing populations. Economically important wild fish, reptiles, game birds, game mammals, and edible mollusks should be studied for science-based quota-regulated harvesting from designated areas for premium tourism.

The introduction of Russian wild boar in 1976 in Nagarjun and Shivpuri led to range

expansion and significant crop damage across the mid-mountains. Rhesus monkey populations have become one of the factors for outmigration of farmers.

Although the government has declared both as pest species, ambiguous regulations have hindered effective population control. Licensed harvesting of invasive wild boar, for example, could create opportunities for farm-based tourism, enhance food security, and generate revenue and reverse migration.

An example of community-led stewardship for harmonious coexistence between agriculture and biodiversity conservation is the protection of the sarus crane. This sacred species with lifelong pair bonding is informally protected by farmers who recognise its ecological and cultural value. They tolerate crop damage, and refrain from harming nesting pairs, and in some cases actively safeguard nests and chicks.

Lessons from African models, where problem animals are auctioned and their revenue support conservation and community compensation, could offer viable solutions. The National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act of 1973 provides legal provisions for hunting game mammals, game birds, pest species, and problem animals.

Problem species are defined as individual animals posing direct threats to human life within specific areas. The amended NPWC Act 1973 also permits wildlife farming for commercial purposes

for selected species.

Nepal could categorise wild animals for management and conservation and regulations. Provincial governments could take inventory and monitor and regulate the harvest of peripheral game species, pest/vermin species and control problems harmful to human and crops.

A nationwide zoological survey could classify species based on abundance, rarity, economic value, pest status, and conservation priority. There should be an opportunity to include hybridisation with wild stocks to improve domestic breeds, such as wild arna with domestic water buffalo, bison with cattle, and red junglefowl with domestic chickens.

Monitoring the zoonotic diseases, training forensic zoologists to intercept wildlife trafficking, and monitoring bird activity around airports can be used to use the expertise of zoologists.

Over the past five decades, the Central Department of Zoology at Tribhuvan University has produced more than 2,000 MSc graduates, but very few have been absorbed into the government. The Department must evolve to meet modern demands with applied research, wildlife management, and revenue-oriented conservation to regenerate fauna and prevent wildfires. ■

Rajendra N. Suwal is Vice President of Nepal Zoological Society in Kathmandu.



The series Nepal Made profiles Nepali products and the people who make them possible.

In the lap of Langtang lie misty meadows that are carpeted with alpine flowers during the monsoon. It was here that Gyalbu Tamang (pictured, right) spent his childhood accompanying his father Pasang Norbu to high pastures, to milk yak and make cheese.

Norbu himself was taught to produce Emmentaler cheese by two Swiss experts in the 1950s. Switzerland and Nepal are marking the 70th anniversary of diplomatic ties this year, and the cheese plant in Kyangjin was one of the first the Swiss were involved in.

Langtang had surplus milk, and the idea was to turn it into cheese to raise nutrition levels.

"The Swiss were very hard-working, and were not used to the laid back attitude of Nepalis," remembers Gyalbu Tamang, now 50. "The children in Langtang were scared of the tall blonde foreigners, but I got along with them."

Gyalbu remembers sleeping outdoors with his father, under the stars and gazing at Langtang Lirung luminescent in the moonlight. After the milk was boiled, he helped carry it down in 40 litre churns to Kyangjin for processing.

The plant was handed over to the state-run Dairy Development Corporation (DDC). Norbu Lama retired, but cheese making was too ingrained in him. So he bought a



Langtang Emmentaler

Future of famous Himalayan cheese looks iffy due to low milk price as yak herders age

dozen yaks and Gyalbu helped him sell the milk. At 18, Gyalbu joined the cheese plant, and 32 years later, he is still there – now manager.

"I had learnt everything from my father, so it was easy for me," Gyalbu recalls. "Trekking boomed in Langtang and there was high demand for cheese. It raised the income of farmers."

2015 EARTHQUAKE

But all that came crashing down just before noon on 25 April 2015 when the earthquake triggered an avalanche that buried Langtang village. More than 300 people, many of them trekkers, were killed.

"My father was grazing yaks, and we found him five days later, thrown off by the avalanche. My mother was buried in the

ruins of her home," Gyalbu says. Fortunately, his wife and three children in Kyangjin were safe in their damaged house.

Twenty-seven herders and 400 yaks also perished. The cheese plant was flattened. Even before the disaster, an ageing population, out-migration, and better education meant that fewer Langtangpa were interested in cheese-making. The

DDC's mismanagement also took its toll, and at Rs80 / litre, it was not feasible to herd yaks anymore.

The Swiss stepped in again to help rebuild the plant on condition that the price of milk be raised. The DDC agreed to pay up to Rs110/litre depending on fat content, and that price has remained the same.

Gyalbu Tamang was in Kathmandu this week, trying again to convince the DDC to raise the price of milk to make cheese-making a worthwhile occupation for the younger generation.

There are only three yak ranches left and the numbers of yak, nak and dzo have shrunk. In its heyday, Langtang used to produce 5,000kg of cheese per year. Today, it is down to 800kg. The cheese is sold in Kathmandu for about Rs2,000 per kg, but the plant has no savings to upgrade its 80-year-old equipment.

"We are on our own, there is not much help from the government or Langtang people overseas," laments Gyalbu. "I do not know what the future holds, but I will keep making cheese as long as there is milk, and as long as I am able." 🇳🇵

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Go online to watch video of Langtang's cheese makers.






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