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NT ARCHIVE

## Select Who To Elect

Sonia Awale

Of the nearly 19 million eligible voters in next week's election in Nepal, an estimated 5 million are abroad and cannot cast their ballots. Many others within Nepal must travel to their home districts, and might decide not to because of the cost. Flights into Kathmandu these days are full of global Nepalis returning just to vote, but almost as many are leaving for overseas jobs. Most of those coming or going are in the 20-40 age group, and a majority want Nepal to see a change in leadership (page 10-11).

Bangladesh held an election this month in which citizens overseas could vote by mail.

"Bangladesh made maximum use of technology not just for campaigning but also for polling

itself. We could have also managed this, so people within Nepal did not have to travel to their home districts to vote," says Mohna Ansari, former head of Nepal's National Human Rights Commission who was an election observer in Bangladesh.

A 3-day holiday has been declared so people can travel to their home constituencies to cast ballots. Even if there was not enough time to manage ballots for overseas Nepalis, it could have been done for Nepalis within Nepal.

Former Election Commissioner Bhoj Raj Pokharel reckons that physical voting in countries with a large Nepali diaspora would have been a logistical nightmare, but electronic voting could have been organised in some places.

"First of all, there needs to be political will ready to undertake that level of investment and it is not a one-time cost," Pokharel says. "A government formed by the GenZ

could have managed out-of-country voting where possible and built on that for the future. It would have given people overseas hope. It is a lost opportunity."

All major political parties called for voting rights for global Nepalis in their manifestos, but these very leaders blocked legislation allowing it despite a 2017 Supreme Court ruling out of fear that it would be anti-incumbent. 🇳🇵



INSIDE PAGE 6-7

### Why so late?

Bangladesh delivered election results in just one day, but the final results of Nepal's last local polls in 2022 including that of Kathmandu constituencies took nearly a month.

Acting Chief Election Commissioner Ram Prasad Bhandari said this week that the results of the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) ballot counting would "likely" be published within 24 hours of the poll closing at 5PM on 5 March. But many are skeptical.

"I wonder if we lack the capacity or know-how to announce results as quickly as possible," says Mohna Ansari.

Former Election Commissioner Pokharel says ballot tallying in Nepal is inherently slow because of the counting mechanism, political behaviour of the parties and poor management of polling booths.

"For the first-past-the-post, our policy requires taking ballot boxes to district headquarters. This takes time and there have been cases of ballot box theft during transport. We could airlift them but party representatives all want to join in," explains Pokharel. A solution could be counting ballots at the very booths where they are cast.

Another reason for the delay is simply the number of political parties, and the need for each ballot paper to be examined by booth representatives for consensus. In close races, the smallest difference can lead to tense situations, further delaying results, even though counting centres are protected by metal fencing so there is no disruption.

After this, then it is the turn of Proportional Representation (PR) ballots to be counted. Weeks pass by the time the results of candidates and parties are tallied and verified. But the most common delay is because election officers think ballot counting is a nine-to-five job.

"The efficiency of poll station officers is most important, and they are incentivised for this," says Ansari, adding that counting can even start within an hour after voting closes.

In remote areas, local resources could be mobilised to make counting quicker, but there is a crisis of trust, adds Ansari.

That could be easily solved with electronic voting which the EC implemented in the 2008 polls but discontinued because political parties felt the machines could be hacked or manipulated.



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# A life or death election

Nepal's next government should be judged by the lives it saves

Yugottam Koirala  
and Yugeshwor Koirala

Early on 23 February, a bus from Pokhara to Kathmandu plunged off the highway in Dhading killing 19 passengers. Two weeks ago, another bus fell into the Tama Kosi in Manthali, killing 12. A few days before that a bus crash in Baitadi killed 13 people.

In just the month before election, more than 50 people have been killed in road traffic accidents. Most of these cannot be called 'accidents' -- they are a direct result of poorly maintained highways and lack of enforcement of traffic discipline.

Political parties in Nepal have rolled out their election manifestos listing megawatts and microcredit, highways and airports, jobs and investment. Growth is quantified, projects itemised, revenue forecast — and there are even threats to beat up contractors who do not finish their jobs.

The main job of any accountable government is to protect its citizens, not so much from foreign enemies but from domestic mismanagement. The most basic test of the new government should be whether it can save Nepali people from premature death.

An estimated 41,000 Nepalis die each year because of air pollution. In the past year the country's roads and highways claimed more than 2,300 lives. Non-communicable diseases now account for more than half of total deaths. Even where survival has improved, deprivation remains, despite progress in maternal and child health.



RSS

A rising GDP, in and of itself, does not make roads safer, clean polluted air, or provide enough nutrition to children. Such outcomes demand intentional, granular policies that confront the specific, everyday problems shaping people's lives.

## LIFE FIRST

Impact on life is the unit in which ordinary Nepalis calculate progress -- a governing philosophy measurable in these same terms: a 'life-first' standard where every policy,

budget, reform can be measured by its impact on protecting and extending human life.

A death is termed preventable if vaccines, road safety, clean drinking water could avoid it. A newly built six-lane highway can be a death trap due to poor design or lax enforcement of safety rules. If neonatal deaths continue in a district despite hospitals, or if malnutrition claims lives in agricultural regions, they too are failures.

Preventable deaths also cluster where accountability is less direct. Last year, Nepal

recorded 6,866 suicides, with nearly 20 lives lost every day. The same holds for fatalities in domestic or communal violence, alcohol and substance misuse, or 'natural' disasters.

But when avoidable loss of life recurs at scale, isolated incidents become patterns, and patterns reveal systemic neglect. Saving lives is only the first step, what matters just as much is the quality of years lived. Accountability means politicians and bureaucrats eventually recognise that their work converges on the same human endpoint.

Extractive institutions concentrate power and wealth in the hands of a few while keeping the majority trapped in neglect. Nepal's governance has remained a striking example of extraction. If lawmakers in the new Parliament continue to resist changes that would save and improve the lives of ordinary citizens, the same systemic rot will persist for generations to come.

A life-first mentality can cut through this inertia by clarifying the moral centre of governance and reminding policymakers that behind every policy failure lies human cost.

The Gen Z protest that toppled the government last September was a demand for accountability and a rejection of politics as usual. But as the country edges closer to the polls, that clarity has started to dissipate.

Parties are now echoing the language of reform, but the public discourse remains dominated by promises that feel disconnected from Nepal's most immediate and basic priorities.

Every preventable death, hungry child, and neglected elder becomes a direct failure of governance and a moral debt the state must answer for. It is how we can make sure we keep the next government in check. 🇳🇵

The writers are Nepali GenZ students of biomedical engineering at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

## Trending Online

### Langtang Emmentaler

Pasang Norbu was taught to produce cheese by Swiss experts in the 1950s. The plant is now managed by Norbu's son Gyalbu Tamang but the future looks iffy due to low milk price as yak herders age. Details in our website.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

### Rukum in the eyes of children

by Sonia Awale  
15 students from Rukum West between 11-16 were trained in basic photography and given digital cameras to take pictures of rebuilding after the 2023 earthquake. Find out how the post-GenZ generation in one of Nepal's remotest districts sees everyday life. Go online for the photos.

Most popular on X



### A life or death election

by Yugottam Koirala and Yugeshwor Koirala  
The main job of an accountable government is to protect its citizens. This means the most basic test the new government should be whether it can ensure well-being for all its people. More on the Guest Editorial, above.

Most commented



### RED ALERT: wildfire season

by Ngamindra Dahal  
Nepal needs to move beyond fire-fighting to fire prevention and confront the structural causes. Wildfires can be prevented by managing forests better to produce biochar as fertilizer. Visit nepalitimes.com for the full article.

Most visited online page

## Letters

### ELECTION AGENDA

An excellent synopsis of where future Governance in Nepal should focus its attention ('A life or death election in Nepal', Yugottam Koirala and Yugeshwor Koirala, page 2). I applaud the authors for this sincere and well-thought-out description of the parameters of how to judge the success of future governments. And my best wishes for your upcoming elections.

Michael J Shean

■ Nepal's road accident statistics are horrific - road conditions, vehicles condition, driver capability, loading etc all can be improved.

David Seddon

■ As a non-resident but frequent visitor for nearly 3 decades, I am

not the least bit surprised by the statistics. I hold my breath every time I get into a vehicle (bus or car) and thank my lucky stars when I arrive at my destination unscathed.

Per Helmersen

### WILDFIRES

Correct that preventive measures are paramount ('RED ALERT: Get ready for the wildfire season', Ngaminda Dahal, #1299) But they need to be guided, implemented and monitored. As you note, increased outmigration from some areas makes this difficult. But fire fighting must not be relegated to an afterthought. Since the early 1980s, fire fighting has also been noted as being essential. So from about 40+ years ago, both essential components of forest preservation have been in scores of professional articles, as well as in government documents.

Iván G. Somlai

### MIGRATION

This sadness of Nepali migrants and their hopes for a better future is reflected in so many communities around South Asia, where families depend on remittances for survival ('Nepal's voters are migration', Diaspora Diaries, pagw 10-11).

Kusum Athukorala

### FAR WEST NEPAL

I would happily invest my time and effort here to use various methods to improve lives here if given the right resources and opportunity ('Epicentre of hunger', Sabina Devkota, #1298).

Gyanendra Banks

### UNSTABLE NEPAL

There are two reasons for unstable Nepal: a lack of good governance at all levels, and the 'foreign hands', also known as the Himalayan Frontier policy of British India (1923 and 1950

treaty), and evil eye on water and natural resources ('Foreign hands, or homegrown failure?', Alok K Bohara, #1298).

Indu Bhushan Gautam

### NRN CARD

There was and continues to remain valid the provision for NRN card, but this provision for NRN citizenship was legally approved just a few years ago. This document (for those who had relinquished former Nepali Citizenship and like the one here who had right for getting a Nepali Citizenship earlier by birth but somehow didn't possess it) entitled property inheritance (no voting rights though) without acquisition of the NRN card for a fee ('How I got my NRN Citizenship in Nepal', Sonia Miyahara, nepalitimes.com). So this success story is very impressive and encouraging for others eligible for NRN Citizenship.

Pitambar Gautam

## Online Package



### NEPALI IDENTITY

Born to Nepali immigrant family in Japan, eight-year-old Ayan Dallakoti was brought to Nepal to receive better English-medium education. Watch how he learns to integrate in Nepali society.



### NEVER TOO LATE

Education wasn't always accessible for Nepali girls. But now, inspiring grandmothers are breaking barriers and enrolling in school. Subscribe to our YouTube channel

## 1,000 Words



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**HORSE SENSE:** The new Chinese Ambassador Zhou Maoming being taken in a ceremonial 4-horse carriage to Sital Niwas on 24 February to present his credentials to President Ram Chandra Paudel. In a post on X, Maoming said: 'As the 23<sup>rd</sup> Chinese Ambassador to Nepal, I look forward to working with all Nepali friends to deepen our everlasting friendship and advance practical cooperation for China-Nepal.'

The new Australian Ambassador Simon Ernst, Ambassador of Saudi Arabia Fahd Mohammad Ajmi Mnikhr, non-resident ambassadors of the Maldives Aishath Azeema and Ali Murat Ersoy of Turkey also presented their credentials.

**Times**

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# AI takeover of all media

Novels, photography, art, music and journalism face a reckoning with artificial intelligence

Charles Ferguson

AI is coming for 'content' -- everything from advertising and novels to movies and journalism. The result is likely to be simultaneously horrific, wonderful, depressing and exciting. There will be not only creative destruction, but also lots of plain old destruction.

You ignore the potential of this technology at your peril.

First, consider the prospects for film and television industry which have been contracting for years, owing to streaming on the internet.

Yet throughout this decade of painful contraction, the fundamental techniques of video production did not change much. You still used real cameras to film real people and things.

## DAY AFTER TOMORROW

Soon, though, all these real-world inputs will be obsolete, replaced by AI. The pioneers of this new world will be startups, some of them less than a year old.

The AI revolution is coming to the arts and the carnage in legacy industries will be awful. What the day after will look like, however, is a far more complicated question.

Personally, as a once and future filmmaker, I am excited about AI filmmaking. I would love to be able to write treatments and screenplays, feed them to my AI 'studio', get back a good rough cut and then hone and hone with AI until I have exactly the film I want to make, with every character,

setting, movement, line of dialogue and camera angle perfect.

There is, however, an urgent need for new laws, system and institutions to protect intellectual property and its creators.

Far more frightening is what is happening to news. There is a blurring of the boundaries between fact and fabrication.

While the AI era of art excites me more than it worries me, the balance is different in the realm of truth and reality.

Journalism, like Hollywood, has already contracted. After multiple near-death experiences, some high-quality English-language news organisations emerged even

stronger and with larger global audiences than before: the New York Times, the Financial Times, the Guardian, Politico and the Reuters and AP wire services. But these outlets reach only a small minority of the population.

The most frequently discussed issue is AI deepfakes. These are indeed a huge problem, considering that YouTube, Facebook, Snap, X and TikTok face few obligations with regard to truth or accuracy. Soon, it will be possible to synthesise nearly undetectable fake versions of almost anyone and almost any event.

Even the most carefully trained AI models can be misused and

some open-source AI models have no controls whatsoever. Yet at the same time, AI has greatly improved the quality of news and information available to the public, at least for anyone interested enough to look.

The major models (mainly OpenAI, Anthropic and Google), and many value-added services enabled by them, are now remarkably good. Hallucination is still a problem, but far less so than even a year ago.

Already, AI models provide a miraculous portal to knowledge for more than a billion users. I use Perplexity at least a dozen times a day, and I used it repeatedly in writing this essay — far more often

than I referred to legacy publications (or Google Search).

But there is a dark side. AI models do not create knowledge. They harvest and distribute knowledge superbly, but they are totally dependent on information created by others. We (and the models) still need news organisations. As much as AI models depend on legacy journalism, they also profoundly threaten it because the legacy industry isn't paying attention.

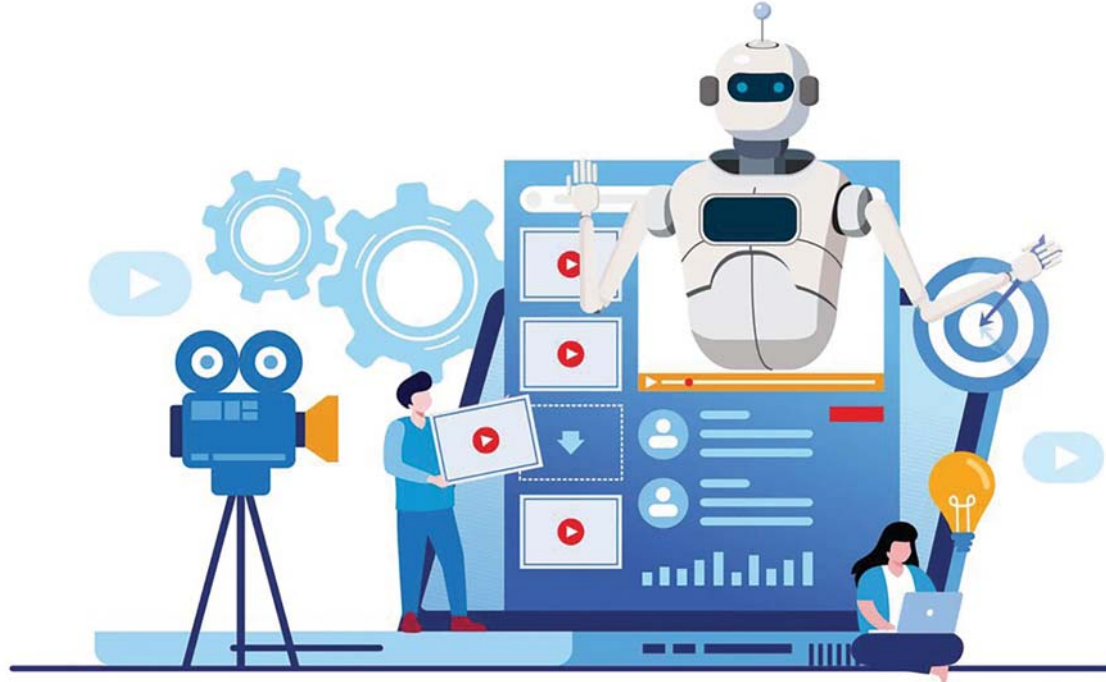
If you want to know something specific, or want to stay current with some issue, you don't need a news publication anymore, you can just ask a model. They are cheaper than journalism because they do not pay for most of the information they use.

There is a very real risk that unless news organisations, journalists, writers and documentary filmmakers are compensated sufficiently, the AI industry will eventually kill the very sources on which it depends to provide accurate results.

This brings us to the second problem posed by AI: the potential destruction of trustworthy news sources as a result of overwhelming pollution from AI junk and fraud.

So far, the models have been trained on reality, but soon, most training 'content' will also be AI-generated. One can hope that AI will give rise to a new industry of high-quality journalism.  © Project Syndicate, 2026

Charles Ferguson is a technology investor, policy analyst and documentary filmmaker, including the Oscar-winning *Inside Job*.



## NMB BANK एनएमबी बैंक

### US-Nepal startup

The US-Nepal Startup Weekend Challenge concluded on 21 February after a three-day accelerator-style program that drew 283 applications from across Nepal. Twenty-five teams were shortlisted to participate in



workshops on business fundamentals and one-on-one mentorship sessions with Nepali and US-based experts. Nine finalists presented to a panel of judges, with GarudX claiming first place and Rs350,000 in seed funding.

### Startup loans

Nepal's government-backed startup loan program is seeing delays. Over 10,000 applications submitted in November are still under review, because of the introduction of a new field inspection step. The Industrial Enterprise Development Institute is coordinating with the Ministry of Industry to deploy local inspectors. Officials aim to complete the process within March and release loans by April.

### LPG import

The Nepal Oil Corporation has increased cooking gas imports ahead of the upcoming election, with a record 138 gas bullets entering the country in a single day, equal to about 173,800 cylinders. NOC Executive Director Chandika Prasad Bhatt confirmed that the surge was to address shortage and prevent stockpiling.

### Samsung Pre-Reserve

Samsung launched a pre-reserve offer for its upcoming Galaxy smartphone from February 23-26. Customers can exchange an eligible device like Samsung Galaxy S23, S24, S25, or iPhone 14, 15, or 16 to get the new phone early and receive Rs20,999 of benefits including a memory upgrade and a fast charger.

### Nepal Police AI Cell

Nepal Police has established an AI and Advanced Analytics Cell at its headquarters to address security threats stemming from the misuse of digital technology. It is tasked with monitoring disinformation on social media platforms and conducting surveillance on content that could pose public safety risks. The body will also analyse data collected from CCTV cameras installed in critical locations, recognising the growing role of AI in law enforcement.



### Brian Hodgson Award

The Brian Hodgson Award for Nature Conservation 2026 was awarded to Hemanta Raj Mishra, Nepal's leading wildlife biologist, at a ceremony held on Sunday, 22 February 2026, at the Aloft Hotel. The award was instituted by Pande of the Nepal Britain Society, and Hem Sagar Baral of Himalayan Nature. The award honours Brian Houghton Hodgson, the renowned British naturalist, ethnologist, and early Himalayan scholar, who discovered 39 new mammal species and 124 bird species from the Himalayan region and whose zoological collections were presented to the British Museum in 1843 and 1858.



### Rice imports up

Nepal spent Rs25.12b on paddy and rice imports in the first seven months of the current fiscal year, Rs 110m more than the same period last year. This increase was largely caused by a decline in domestic production due to erratic rainfall and floods in October. Paddy production is projected to fall 4.2% to around 5.5 million tonnes this year.

### InDrive super app

Ride-hailing service InDrive is looking to become a super app by adding services such as courier delivery, intercity travel, grocery, and fintech. The underlying goal is to extend its 'fairness-driven approach' beyond transportation. Its fintech product, InDrive Money, gives out small loans to users who may lack access to traditional banking.

InDrive also held a Kathmandu Clean Air Dialogue with government, civil society, private sector, and individuals to coordinate action on the capital's worsening air quality. The household and the transport sector were identified as key sources of emissions. The event also launched the Nepal Taza Initiative which focuses on data systems, public awareness, and policy reform for cleaner air.

### Ethanol in petrol

The GoN is preparing to implement a policy requiring 10% ethanol to be blended into petrol, a step that officials say could reduce annual petroleum import costs by Rs 6B. The policy follows nearly two decades of study. Ethanol production would also boost demand for sugarcane. Full implementation could take up to 18 months. Experts stress the need for transparent pricing, strict quality control.

### Bharatpur fuel service

Nepal Oil Corporation has launched a new aviation fuel refilling service at Bharatpur Airport in Chitwan to accommodate the growing air traffic in the region. Two refilling counters have been installed, capable of supplying up to 22,000l daily. Aircraft from Kathmandu and Pokhara will no longer need to carry extra fuel, allowing them to accommodate more passengers on take off from the short runway.

### Lofty economic plans

Political parties contesting the 5 March election have released economically ambitious manifestos. The NC promises collateral-free loans of up to Rs5m, 1.5 million new jobs over five years. The CPN-UML pledged to triple export earnings, waive small household loans, and raise the minimum wage to Rs25,000. The RSP committed to 500,000 direct jobs over a decade and cooperative funds. The NCP proposed reducing poverty to 5%, generating 15,000MW of electricity, and introducing a Kathmandu metro. Experts warn that these promises lack a realistic assessment of budget and capacity.



### Jyoti + Riches India

Padma Jyoti Group is extending its partnership with food company Riches India beyond distribution. They plan to add technical training, live demonstrations, and direct engagement with chefs, bakers, and food service operators across Nepal, aiming to elevate culinary standards by integrating global trends, improving consistency, and supporting innovation.

# Spot AI generated election videos

You do not need a cyber forensics degree, you need a different set of instincts

Nobel Rimal

Last year, an audio clip of Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) vice-president Swarnim Wagle surfaced on Facebook in which the potential future finance minister appeared to be having a private conversation with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi about Nepal-India border issues.

The clip racked up 1.5 million views. It jumped through Viber family groups without caption or context, the way political gossip always does in Nepal. By the time Wagle walked into the Cyber Bureau office in Bhotahiti to file a complaint and confirm the audio was fabricated using AI, the clip had already done what it was designed to do.

This is the problem with fake AI videos — the damage is not in the content, but the damage is in the lag between the share and the correction.

Some videos are partisan, but so funny that millions share it: like the one of K P Oli running away carrying a huge bell while his rival Balendra Shah chases him to possess his election symbol.

Google 'how to detect AI videos', and there is a tidy checklist. Look for jerky motion. Count the fingers in the hand. Check if the eye blinking looks unnatural. Inspect the lighting. That advice made sense two years ago, it does not anymore.

On TikTok, the account 'AI Nepal' recently posted an entirely AI-generated video of a young Nepali living abroad on a video call with his parents and sister, encouraging them to vote. The footage looked like any other family video call. No glitchy fingers. No uncanny valley. No visual tell whatsoever.

The tech industry's response to hyper-realistic AI generated videos has been cryptographic watermarks and metadata trails embedded in files, solutions that require software to detect and that no voter scrolling through their feed eight days before the 5 March election will ever use.

### RED FLAGS

So, forget the checklist. The fakes now pass the eye test. What has not changed is the ecosystem around them. Here are a few things to look out for this election cycle.

- Look at the source, not the spectacle.
- Before you look at the content of a video, look at who posted it.
- What does this account usually share?

If a profile known for uploading grainy, shaky smartphone footage from political rallies suddenly drops a cinematic, flawlessly lit clip of a private scandal, that gap between the account's history and



the production quality is the first red flag.

Is the profile tied to a verifiable person, or is it a faceless account that appeared three weeks ago and posts exclusively about one candidate?

In Nepal's current election cycle, AI-generated images of Nepali Congress (NC) president Gagan Thapa being chased away by crowds were traced back to exactly these kinds of disposable accounts.

Fact Checkers confirmed the images were fabricated. But by then, the images had already been screenshotted and forwarded thousands of times.

Look at the cuts. This is the tell that still works, even as the visuals get better. Despite all recent advances, the best AI video generators top out at five to ten seconds of high-fidelity footage per prompt.

A longer AI-generated video has to be stitched together from multiple short generations, which means frequent, awkward cuts every few seconds. If you are watching a tense two-minute 'leaked' recording and the camera conveniently cuts every eight seconds with no logical reason for the edit, you are watching a patchwork of separately generated clips glued into a sequence.

Evaluate at your own reaction. This is the one nobody talks about, and it is the most important. The algorithm does not care about truth, it feeds on emotional resonance.

A clip that makes your blood boil within five seconds, that perfectly validates something you already believe about a politician, that gives you exactly the outrage you were looking for, that precision is the red flag. Real events are messy and ambiguous.

They do not arrive in 15-second packages engineered to confirm your worldview. The instinct we need before the election is the pause between seeing and sharing. That cognitive pause, the two seconds where you ask yourself why this video is making you feel exactly what it wants you to feel, is the only defence that scales against a technology that is evolving faster than any detection tool.

Nepal went from masu bhat to digital masu bhat. The plate of mutton curry that once bought votes has been replaced by AI-generated dopamine hits served through the feed. In both cases, the target is a voter who reacts before thinking. 🇳🇵

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Think you have the instincts to tell AI from reality? Test yourself. We built AI OR NOT, a challenge where you listen to audio clips and watch footage and vote on what is AI-generated and what is not. Try it out online.



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# Voters outbound ...

With just days before the election, many are voting with their feet



## DIASPORA DIARIES 85 & 86

These are the 85<sup>th</sup> and 86<sup>th</sup> episodes of Diaspora Diaries, a Nepali Times series in collaboration with Migration Lab providing a platform to share experiences of living, working and studying abroad.



in Nepal, if we got paid on time for work we complete?

We work for a month and wait almost a year for the salary. A labourer earns Rs21,000 and a carpenter Rs28,000 in Nepal. But even for that we are made to wait. There are no savings. We leave so we can save.

Overseas life is not always what we imagine it to be. Recruiters and their agents cheat us. We rely on them because we are unable to find jobs ourselves. We have little education but even the educated are cheated.

My appeal to recruiters is not to overcharge us, we are the sons of poor fellow-Nepalis. We migrate so we can support our families.

I hope some day we Nepalis can fly out as tourists and not migrant workers. That will be the day when we can make enough money with pride in Nepal so we can go overseas for a holiday.

As migrant workers abroad, we work hard. The tiredness after a long day's work is worth it when we get our salary promptly every month. That money goes back home to raise our children.

I am hoping good luck will follow me this time and my dreams will come true.



## I have never voted Shreejana Lama

I am from Sindhupalchok, headed to Cyprus because there are no jobs in Nepal. Prior to this, I was in Jordan. I did not vote in the past because I was too young, but even though I am now of voting

age I have to migrate just as election day approaches.

I feel sad about it. I hope the new government will work to create meaningful jobs at home so we do not have to leave. There are jobs in Nepal but the pay is not enough even for rent and food. For us it is important to get overseas jobs without paying high fees. We are leaving precisely because we do not have that kind of money.

Migration makes sense if you learn the language and have skills, or else it will not be enough overseas either. It would also be good if migrants got jobs with salaries that are promised. In many cases, they find out the jobs were not

what were promised by recruiters. If we face any problem overseas, the Nepali recruiter should be responsible and the government should help us.

I am going to Cyprus for two years. When I am back in two years, I hope there are jobs in Nepal so I do not have to go off again. I also hope Nepal is cleaner.

## Another country called me, Nepal told me to leave Ambar Bahadur BK

I am headed to Dubai. Prior to this, I have worked in Qatar, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia. I am re-migrating.

My family members have all voted in the past, I never got a chance to vote myself. I have never seen a voting booth. Because I have always been away during elections.

My ticket is already issued. A

foreign country called me, Nepal told me to leave and not be around on election day. Nepal is not changing its face, but we migrants change the face of other people's countries.

We are leaving, but when we return we want Nepal to be how we have imagined it to be – as developed as the countries we work in. That would make us happy.

What more can I say? I am going abroad again. I will again have to work hard. This is not a choice, it is a compulsion. Why would we leave the country if there were jobs

# ... and voters inbound

Many disenfranchised Nepali workers overseas have come home to make their votes count



## Thinking about the country Pappu Mahara, Malaysia

I came to Nepal on vacation and managed to time it for the election. In Malaysia where I have been working for over two years, it is all about elections. In our rooms, and online. In fact, the discussions around elections felt more heated in Malaysia than here at home in my village in Mahottari.

Even when you find out someone is going home, Nepalis who are unable to return ask who we are voting for and remind us to tell everyone to vote for Balen. I gave my colleagues a thumbs up and assured them: only Balen. That is the message we come home with. And that is the reason I pasted Balen even on my checked-in suitcase. I wanted to show the world that those of us who are working hard overseas support him.

In the past, my family voted for another party, but they failed us. Even to get jobs we qualify for we need connections. Where are the jobs? The factories? Development?

Unemployment is high. Costs are rising. It is not just jobs at home, even to get access to good overseas jobs, we need connections now. And money. There is corruption everywhere.

Our expectation from the new government is to think beyond only their close networks and personal gain, to think about the country. What is the point of repeating mistakes from the past if those who are going to benefit are the sisters, nieces and nephews of those in power? It is good that some of us got to come home, even one vote can make a difference.

Each ballot can create a mountain, that is why we have come home to vote.

## Coming home to support my son Rishiram Khanal, Bahrain

कोही छन् विदेशमा, कोही यता शहरमा,  
जीवन उकासन भोन्दे कहरमा।  
शून्य भयो गाउँघर, मान्छे लाखपाखा हुँदा,  
जुनकीरीको पिल्लिपल् हरायो सुनसान डहरमा।

*Some are abroad, some here in the city,  
Enduring hardship just to lift lour lives.  
People scatter all over, emptying villages  
Fireflies don't flicker over barren paths  
Anymore*



I came home to Nawalpur from Bahrain to support my son, Manish Khanal, who is contesting the election as an RSP candidate.

I migrated to Bahrain 15 years ago where I work as a security guard. It was for my children's education and future. That is the story of most of us.

It would have been better if we did not have to leave our families behind. But we migrate to secure a future for our children.

Mine have done well for themselves, they are educated and disciplined. This motivated me to stay on overseas. And now my son's achievement has further motivated me.

From childhood, Manish was a hard-working student who did well

throughout his school. He got into politics through Bibeksheel and has now made his way to RSP where he is contesting from Nawalpur.

Everyone has their reason for joining politics. My son was drawn to it because the country is deteriorating and corruption is rife. Many youths are leaving. The Gen-Z revolution in which many young lives were lost made him even more committed to run for office.

I come home every two years on vacation, but this time it was special when I arrived three days ago. I was overjoyed. Even on the plane, people recognised my son on videos. He is from an ordinary Nepali family, but is getting noticed globally. I had never imagined this reality is possible, such a life-changing opportunity has opened up for him at such a young age. He is the second youngest candidate running for office.

I want to see him run the country. I want him to ensure that the youth can get decent jobs in Nepal itself. I am encouraged by the feedback I have received from fellow workers in Bahrain. They support me and congratulate me for raising a son with such integrity. Here in Nawalpur, the environment is positive and I am also helping campaign for my son.

The support for the RSP abroad is high. People are calling up family members back home to tell them to vote for the RSP's चन्डी symbol. We have long duty hours so don't travel around much but from what I saw, there is a lot of support for the party.

No matter who is running from whichever party, I hope that the priority will be Nepal's prosperity, on building the nation. Nepalis should not have to leave in such large numbers.

As for my son, I wish him the very best and hope he goes far. I want him to win and become Nepal's son, not just mine. I want the world to know of him as an honest, selfless Nepali who will fulfil his duties for the nation earnestly.



## Possibility of real change Sachin Thakur, Malaysia

I am coming home for the first time after working 40 months in Malaysia. I came to vote for Balen. I went overseas looking for jobs, just like my father who had spent five years in Qatar as a construction worker and who returned prematurely from the UAE after a failed migration experience.

Malaysia is filled with Balen supporters. We have a company canteen where ten of us meet constantly to discuss politics. We talked about corruption and the need for better jobs back home. The non-RSP supporters are in the minority at our workplace and perhaps across Malaysia. I came home to vote. I was lucky to be able to time my vacation that way. I look forward to spending time with family but also have plans to get together with the boys to campaign for RSP.

For those of us who are overseas, the expectation is that the government will negotiate better terms of employment including higher pay. And that we can eventually come home. I want to resume my business making gold jewelry.

What Nepal needs is leaders who focus on improving the basics: education and health, and everything else would work out on its own. We are betting on Balen because he has made a difference in Kathmandu as mayor, and now it is time to think about the whole country. It is not guaranteed how much he will be able to accomplish, but there is an actual possibility for real change this time and that is what matters.



## What will we gain by voting?

Hira Kaji Tamang

I am from Sindhupalchok, and am headed to Malaysia. Prior to this, I had gone to Dubai but it did not work out and I returned after 7 months. I then re-migrated to Malaysia and was home for a vacation.

I migrate because there are no jobs in Nepal. At least in an overseas job you can save some money. I have to take care of my family. All responsibilities are on my shoulders, so I have to go.

I have voted once in the past during elections. There was no point to it. For people like us, votes don't matter. It is for party cadres, not for simple people like us. There are no jobs, there is

nothing.

Elections would have mattered if there were good people to vote for. Let us see how the new candidates do. My two month vacation is over, but I have to fly out just before election day.

The new government should create jobs so people like us do not have to migrate. We are not even asking for much, jobs that pay up to Rs20,000 would be good enough for people like us. The government should help Nepalis stranded overseas, their voices should be heard.

When I come home to Nepal next, I hope good roads will have reached remote places in Nepal and everyone has access to basic services. I hope we will have factories and jobs, good health posts in remote areas so people don't have to go to the cities.

## I can't afford to wait for elections

Chandra Bahadur Sunar

I have been living in Bahrain for eight years, and before this I worked in Saudi and India. I never had a chance to vote. My three-month vacation is over. I have to resume work and could not wait for the election.

Do I vote or do I work to pay my children's school fees? How will I pay for household expenses in Nepal if I stayed to vote? I could not afford to wait.

The new government has to address unemployment so

that people can stay in Nepal. There are no jobs, expenses are high. Education and health should also be made affordable and accessible.

Overseas, Nepalis are generally paid less than other nationalities. Nepal can negotiate for better salaries for its citizens abroad. It should also increase to keep up with inflation.

I will come back in 2-3 years. When I return I hope it will not take me 17 hours to get to Kathmandu from Nepalganj. Roads should improve, there should be jobs for the jobless, education for the uneducated.

That's all, isn't it?



## My prayer for Nepal

Shyam Bahadur Tamang

I am from Kavre. I am headed to Malaysia. I have worked there before, after which I went to Saudi Arabia for three years. Foreign employment has worked for me so far.

I have voted once. This time, I could not wait for election day since my visa arrived. I will vote in future elections once I am back.

I hope the new government can create an environment so we do not have to leave. If we could work in Nepal, we would be close to our families and happy. The new government should focus on

jobs. And for those of us who migrate, the government should prioritise free visa and free ticket jobs so that migration is affordable and we can save.

At the moment, no matter which recruiter we go to, they say it is free, but there is always a huge fee. The government should stop this malpractice.

When I come home in a few years, I hope to see a new Nepal that has a strong government. I want to see reforms and big changes. There are too many protests and much instability. Even small issues lead to demonstrations, and lives are lost. I pray that this does not happen again. That is my prayer for Nepal.

## If not now, then when?

Narendra Baral, Oman

Just like elections have taken over Nepal, those of us abroad are equally excited and engaged. After the GenZ movement in particular, we Nepalis abroad have become even more involved. Friends are also keen to return to Nepal to vote. The mentality that no matter who wins it won't matter and nothing will change has now been replaced by: if not now, when?

There is a growing consensus that youth need to lead the nation. In that regard, the leadership change in the Nepali Congress (NC) has encouraged overseas Nepalis because we view Gagan Thapa, with his experience and sacrifices, as the right person to lead the nation. What he did recently to change the face of the NC has rejuvenated hope. For far too long, the musical chairs among the same old people had led to a sense of disgust with the state of the politics.

Now, with new parties and new leadership in old parties, we feel emboldened to talk and engage positively and with hope. He has already won people's confidence by allowing new faces to contest the elections, and even those who had started feeling skeptical or discouraged with the NC are now strongly supporting the party.

I first migrated to Dubai in 2006 and returned five years later to start a poultry farm and cold store in Nepal, but it did not go very far, so I decided to remigrate to Oman in 2016. It is a pity that overseas Nepalis



could not vote in this election either. We saw Bangladeshis mail their votes just recently, while Filipino colleagues do so online.

We even submitted a petition to the embassy on this issue, and the ambassador was positive given that there are just 25,000 Nepalis in Oman. Let's hope the next election will be different. I am glad that this issue has been addressed in recent manifestos shared by the parties.

Other than allowing diaspora voting, the government should also create a platform for those of us abroad so we can channel our investment and skills back home. We are investing in Oman and would like to do the same back home and create jobs for youth.

Those of us who can manage are coming to Nepal to vote. Some of us have timed our vacations that way. Others have taken a week's leave.

## Every vote counts

Prajwal Poudel, Saudi Arabia

I was not sure if I would come to Nepal from Saudi Arabia for this election. But as voting neared, I could not stay away. I feel every vote matters. It is a basic right of every Nepali citizen and this is the right time now in Nepal where things are building up for change.

All five of us roommates are returning. We all came together to Saudi Arabia to work and are going back together to vote for RSP. Our contract was about to end a couple of weeks after the elections so my roommates decided to forfeit a few weeks of salary to come home to vote.

My situation was a bit different because I had made up my mind to stay on. I can always migrate overseas, if I have to go again, I can arrange it but the GenZ movement is a once in a lifetime event and this positive environment for change might not come again. I have resigned from my job with the slogan: each vote counts.

I also am hopeful that the same employer will bring me back if needed as I have built a good rapport with them and worked hard throughout my contract. I am supporting Ghanti this time but if they do not deliver I will choose another party next time.

For me it is about selecting the right



leaders. Some of my colleagues are telling me I should not have returned.

My father was telling me to remain overseas so I have not told him properly that I am coming home with no return plans. My mother knows the reality and seems excited, and she brought my citizenship card to Jhapa.

If things don't pan out as I have planned and the same old faces win, I will again migrate. Perhaps that is why I am coming home to avoid that possibility. The stakes are high this time.



## I am coming home to vote

Bimal Subedi, Qatar

The political ups and downs in Nepal brought me to Qatar 21 years ago, but even from the diaspora, I have continued my engagement with the NC in various capacities. The democratic change of 1990, led by the NC, opened Nepal to the world.

From a country that did not even allow ordinary people to have passports, the government took steps to provide unemployed youth access to overseas jobs and the international market. This outmigration intensified after the Maoist conflict, and now there is a significant population overseas. Foreign employment has helped us send money back home, which has improved our living standards and

helped us come out of poverty.

Foreign employment can be beneficial if we make good use of it to maximise our skills and capabilities. I have been able to establish myself as a senior accountant in an international travel company and have also improved my family's living standards. In the past two decades, I have come home 70 times, in fact, it is easier for me to travel to Kathmandu from Qatar than for someone from Dolpo.

The recent GenZ movement was a fight for equal access to education and basic services. Someone in Dolpo should have access to the same opportunities as someone in Kathmandu. But inequality transcends borders. Someone working in the same five star hotel overseas versus in Nepal sees a large salary difference. Only the one abroad can make meaningful savings. How do we create a labour market

in Nepal that provides quality jobs so people can afford a decent living?

The narrative being painted, especially on social media, that only the new is good is misleading. We have long advocated for change that touches the grassroots level and provides equal access to opportunities and services. The latest changes within NC leadership and the manifesto have made it evident that reform is coming, and we are coming home to show our support. Some are returning just to vote, while others have arranged their vacations during election time.

This time I am coming home with the hope that the new government will ensure everyone has equal access to healthcare and education. That Nepali diaspora overseas will be provided a platform to invest in Nepal and help create world class jobs.

I am coming to vote for a Nepal that we can all be proud of.



## Events



### Mokshada Dance Drama

A dance-drama reimagining the Panchakanya myths through themes of resilience, resistance, and liberation.

27-28 February & 1 March, 5:30pm onwards, Tickets: Rs500-Rs1,000, Mandala Theatre, Thapagaun

### Women Walk Midnight

Women Walk At Midnight is a midnight walk creating a safe and inclusive space for women to connect and walk together in solidarity. Contact @wewalkatmidnightktm on Instagram for details.

27 February, 9pm onwards, Swayambhu

### TOKYO Before/After

The exhibition portrays Japan's capital as a living, evolving organism in 80 selected artworks of photographs.

28 February-18 March, Nepal Art Council, Baber Mahal



### Blood Moon

People in Asia, Americas and Oceania will be able to witness a total lunar eclipse as the sun, earth and moon align next week. The entire lunar disk will take on a reddish colour for a few moments, making it a blood moon.

3 March, 5:51pm-8:08pm

### Festival of Colors

Celebrate Holi with live music by Crazy Knot Band, food and beverage stalls, colour stations, and dancing at the biggest Holi event of the year.

2 March, 12pm-6pm, Tickets: Rs300-Rs600, Grand Norling Resort



## Dining



### Tip Top

Enjoy South Indian cuisine at Tip Top: the Chola Bhatara is a must-try. Sample their large selection of sweets.

New Road (01) 4240470



## Music

### Kuma Sagar and The Khwopa Band

Catch Kuma Sagar and The Khwopa Band live for an evening of soulful music. Table bookings available via the eSewa app.

13 March 2026, 7pm onwards, Tickets: Rs1,000, Infinity Lounge, Bhaktapur



### KatJazz Sessions

A special edition of KatJazz Sessions honouring Eric Chandra Shrestha, featuring members of Ser O Duo and Walkman.

26 February, 7:30pm onwards, Tickets: Rs800-Rs1,000, Moksh, Jhamsikhel

### Nepathya in Siliguri

One of Nepal's most acclaimed 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



### Nepal Tour 2026

Among Nepal's biggest bands, Albatross and Pahelo Batti Muni, hit the road together for a multi-city tour across the country. Details to be released.

March-April



## Getaway



### Hotel Kido

This Japanese-style hotel offers a humble and comfortable stay. Their in-house restaurant, Tamura, also serves one of the most authentic Japanese dishes in Kathmandu.

Prashuti Griha Marg (01) 4243189

### Hotel Vajra

Beyond the service and the food, Hotel Vajra is an architectural marvel. With its painted Tibetan ceiling, wood and terracotta carvings, Pagoda style building and brick accents, the hotel is the pinnacle of traditional designs. And if you're there, ask Dev at the rooftop bar for his signature cocktail.

Swayambhu (01) 4271545



### Hotel Barahi

Located just beyond the banks of Phewa Lake, Hotel Barahi offers stunning views and luxury rooms. The rooms are decorated with rustic pieces, earthy tones and a clean design that will leave you feeling relaxed.

Lakeside, Pokhara (61) 460617

### Jagatpur Lodge

The lodge nestles in 8 acres of jungle grassland. Choose to stay in special tents which are no less than 5-star rooms consisting of a private viewing deck to relish the nature.

Jagatpur, Chitwan (01) 4221711

### Bandipur Kaushi Inn

A small, rustic place to stay in the idyllic village of Bandipur, replete with cultural diversity and traditional architecture.

Bandipur, Tanahu (065) 520083

### Garden Terrace

A wide selection of international cuisine including Nepali, Indian, Continental, Oriental, Japanese and Italian. Relish delicacies from the hotel's lavish buffet spread or order A la Carte dishes from the elaborate menu.

Soaltee Crowne Plaza, Tahachal (01) 4273999



### Nylgiri

Indulge in refined flavors and skyline views with an exclusive midweek and weekend offer, where men get 50% off all food and beverages on Super Man Sundays, and ladies on Wonder Women Wednesdays.

5pm-11pm, Nylgiri, Aloft Kathmandu Thamel, 9705568643

## Weekend Weather



### Balmy Election Week

We are headed for warm spring-like weather on election day on 5 March. The temperature is reaching the mid-20s in Kathmandu, and while there has been snow in the higher districts it will probably all melt by next week. Central Nepal will see some cloud cover on Friday and Saturday, with some scattered local showers possible. The trans-boundary and the Valley's own pollution haze is intense (see satellite picture taken on Thursday) and is blown up into the mountains to elevations of 4,500m. Please vote for candidates that have a plan to end air pollution.

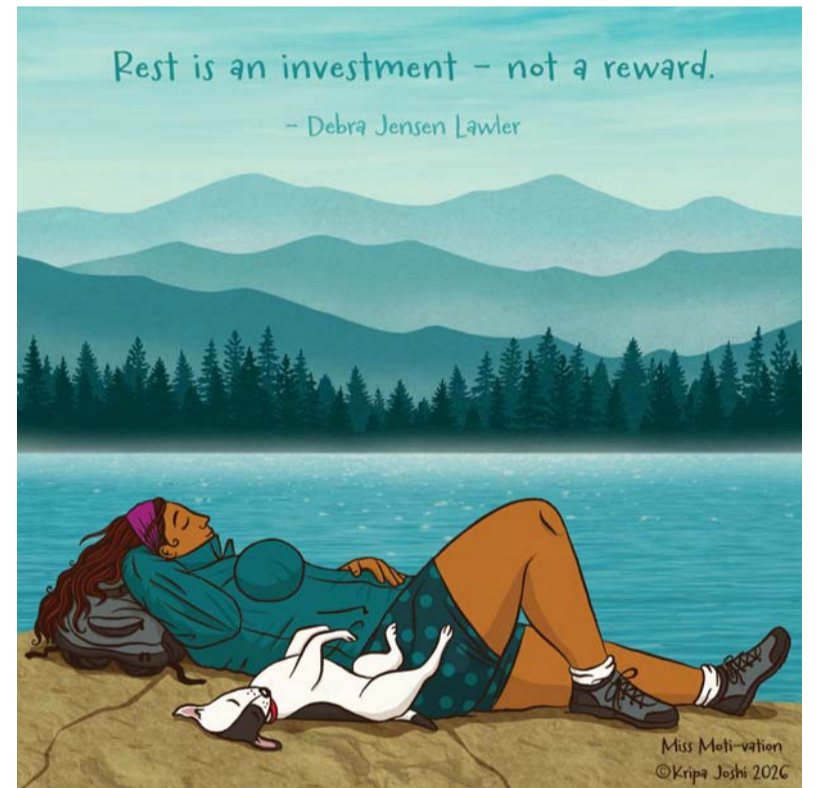


## Our Pick

The 2025 American black comedy action-thriller follows an ex-revolutionary living with a stolen identity with his daughter in California. But when a former enemy, a corrupt white supremacist military officer, pursues his daughter, he is forced back into his former combative lifestyle. Fresh off its six wins including the Best Film at the British Academy Film Awards this week, One Battle After Another stars Leonardo DiCaprio, Sean Penn, Benicio del Toro, Regina Hall, Teyana Taylor, and Chase Ininiti.

## MISS MOTI-VATION

## KRIPA JOSHI



## 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

# Now for something completely different

Unko Sweater is a tender love story, a nostalgic portrayal of ethnic harmony in rural Nepal

Sudiksha Tuladhar

If you did not watch the understated movie उनको स्वीटर (The Woolen Sweater) after it was released in May last year, you missed a major turning point in Nepali cinema. Much-hyped films fall short of expectations, but here is an exquisitely acted and directed production with a strong underlying message of tolerance.

What a contrast from formulaic melodramatic Kollywood fare — a love story so simple, cinematography so subtle in capturing the beauty of the monsoon on mountain pastures, and a background folk song accompaniment that evokes the flavour and tenor of multi-ethnic eastern Nepal.

Since its release, Unko Sweater received praise in Nepal, but it was in multiplexes across Nepaliphone India where the movie became a rage. Positive reviews spread by word of mouth on social media, where the script, performance and camera work were praised for reflecting a genuine and unsullied rural Nepal.

The movie is a layered portrayal of caste, ethnicity, gender and culture with the tender romance between the shy Dharanidhar Kafle (Bipin Karki) and Phool Gurung (Miruna Magar) in which the two, despite being soulmates, have to deal with societal norms and gossip. They do this without rebelling, in their own quiet way.

In the first scene in a crowded jeep, people are seen discussing an election. An elderly greying Kafle is headed home, and the rest of the movie has back and forth flashbacks revealing the story of his unspoken affection for Phool. But there is an undercurrent of ethnic rigidity.

When Kafle's brother Dambar elopes with Iksha Limbu, the repercussions are borne by both families. Then Kafle's uncle is banished for being an outcast.

Miruna Magar as Phool, as an ebullient woman, is in contrast to the introverted Kafle, who does not say much but has a melodious singing voice. As the plot thickens, Kafle is shown to be bound by circumstances that pose obstacles to his love for Phool.

The storyline delicately shows how life and situations constantly force people to shift direction.

Despite underlying differences, the various castes and ethnicities in this fictitious village near the Sikkim border get along because they have to. There is an interdependence between highland farmers and other ethnicities living down the valley that is at the heart of Nepal's ethnic harmony.

Despite taboos about interethnic and intercaste relationships, people still have trust and faith amongst each other. There is no time reference to the story, but it does speak of a nostalgic era decades ago when rural Nepal was not yet connected by roads and phones, when people had no choice but to get along. Things have changed now with outmigration, and education has blurred ethnic lines.

#### A QUIET LOVE

Director Nabin Chauhan is not in your face with his message, giving viewers a hint of deep rooted traditional values that still govern society. Each character adds to the storyline, validating the way they behave, pushing the plot forward.

There are many emotions that are intricately woven into the plot, and the most prominent, of course, is love. Not the showy, lustful way it is shown in flamboyant formula films, but a quiet bond that does not need words, a silence, a glance and a gesture conveying the universe of love.

When Phool asks Kafle what he will do if they cannot be together, he says he will build her a house with a beautiful garden of flowers in the meadows where he herds livestock. He builds it awaiting her return, while Phool knits him a sweater, the symbol of their interwoven love.

In screenings of the film in Nepal and India, there has not been a dry eye in the audience. The background score and music by Kobid Bazra and the powerful rendition by Jhuma Limbu of the 'Kafle' strike a strong chord.

The cinematography by Chintan Rajbhandari does not glamourise Nepal's rural landscape, it is shown in its raw misty beauty as a constant backdrop. The viewer is uplifted by the notion that love transcends social restrictions and orthodoxies.

The ending is left deliberately unfinished, possibly to make way for a sequel which we can only hope will be as compelling as उनको स्वीटर। 🇳🇵



उनको स्वीटर (The Woolen Sweater)  
Artmandu Nepal, 2025  
Directed by Nabin Chauhan  
145 minutes  
Available now on YouTube

vianet

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# Who is accountable for

**“I was groomed, then I was sued for defamation,” says university alumna about a faculty member**

**Subeksha Poudel**

As a new student at Kathmandu University (KU) Bachelor's in Fine Arts in 2014, Mukta, who was 25 then, thought she must be doing something good when her teacher singled her out for attention.

Her teacher was Sujan Chitrakar, then 40, the senior-most faculty, and a celebrated artist. Chitrakar has taught many contemporary Nepali artists, and played an important role in establishing what is now KU's Department of Art and Design (pictured, right).

In between messages to Mukta about schoolwork, he texted to say he missed her, or that she looked beautiful. She recalls being taken aback by a particular text that said: 'I'm going for a bath' followed by a cartoonish drawing with 'Nude' written next to it.

Mukta awkwardly replied with a laugh, unsure how else to respond to a teacher whom everyone placed on a pedestal.

She says Chitrakar continued to shower her with gifts, asked her out for coffee, and insisted on driving her around. Once, when she was on his motorcycle returning home, Mukta remembers Chitrakar asking her to kiss him on his shoulder.

When she refused, he apologised profusely, then asked if she was trying to seduce him. Seeing how shocked Mukta was, the teacher grabbed her hand and rubbed it against his chest, saying it was just a joke.

Weeks later, Chitrakar told Mukta that he could not live without her, that they should be in a relationship. Having only looked up to him as a teacher, Mukta was uncertain about her feelings.

When the 2015 earthquake struck, Chitrakar came to check on Mukta. With her guards down, she felt perhaps his love was genuine. A decade later, still reeling from psychological trauma and career setbacks from the relationship, Mukta broke her silence, accusing Chitrakar of abusing his power and grooming her.

He had the duty of teaching and evaluating her, instead, Mukta says he used her for sex and emotional support from 2015 to 2019, while she was a student at KU.

## DEFAMATION SUIT

She has been urging KU and art institutions to safeguard its students against sexual misconduct, but Chitrakar slammed a defamation lawsuit against her in January 2025 stating she damaged his reputation over what he described in court filings as a 'consensual relationship'.

This week, the Kathmandu District court ruled that Chitrakar's defamation claim could not be proven.

We asked Chitrakar after the verdict about his conduct. His reply: "I'm sorry for the students who felt uncomfortable, but I did my duty well and good. It is ungrateful of the students to say that. Not everyone has to like me."

In answer to a query about his stance on staff-student intimate relationships, he said: "For me it is a big no to date a student. Consequences arise and I am facing them now. Many staff-student intimate relations, including in my department, have ended in happy

marriages. It's a choice based on their personal and social ethics, and something to be determined by university policy."

Chitrakar said he now draws personal and professional boundaries with students, adding that his relationship was not planned. He says, "I should not have dated a student because I'm a married man. If I was unmarried it would have been ok."

There is no definitive data on sexual misconduct in Nepal, but interviews with more than 23 faculty and students from KU and Tribhuvan University (TU) for this story reveal that intimate staff-student relations are normalised, and in some cases even encouraged.

The lack of university policies, power imbalance between staff and students, fear of retaliation, breaches of confidentiality, and the protection of perpetrators all contribute to impunity.

After students alleged sexual harassment, bullying, and homophobia against Yubaraj Sangroula of Kathmandu School of Law and other faculty members in March 2025, the university filed slander lawsuits targeting a student whistleblower and alumna. Sangroula is contesting as an independent candidate in next week's election from Jhapa-2.

Seven years after complaints surfaced against retired lecturer Krishna Bhattachan for sexually harassing women students, TU is still drafting its own policy and complaint procedure.

And noted sculptor and former KU faculty member Gopal Kalapremi is yet to appear at Kathmandu District Court, after he was issued a summon on sexual harassment charges in 2024.

Nepal's Sexual Harassment at Workplace (Prevention) Act (2014) and the National Criminal (Code) Act, 2017 both forbid sexual relations with anyone under one's care or receiving one's professional services. These laws are binding on all educational institutions, even if they do not have internal policies.

While sexual misconduct can constitute harassment, inappropriate comments or gestures, unsolicited sexual advances, adult 'grooming' often goes unrecognised because of its subtle nature. It occurs between individuals with unequal power, such as a faculty and students -- compromising on genuine consent due to traditional respect for teachers in Nepal, and also violating professional ethics of academia.

Adult grooming involves a series of 'boundary-blurring' behaviour that starts with building the victim's trust through attention, flattery, or sharing personal details. It gradually escalates to testing how they respond to sexual communication. Once perpetrators are confident the victim will not speak up, they initiate sexual contact and maintain control.

"If he had said outright, 'I want to have sex with you', it would've been easier to identify his actions as red flags," says Mukta, now 36.

Mukta alleges that Chitrakar took her to his studio in his home and made sexual advances. She shoved him away but recalls him saying, "Even if you're saying no, I know you'll like it. Trust me." Not wanting to make a fuss, she gave in.

This set a pattern for their relationship for the next four years.



Chitrakar is said to have confided in Mukta about how he was sexually frustrated in his marriage. When he argued with his wife, he is said to have made her listen in on the call.

Chitrakar would urge Mukta to spend all her time with him, she remembers. "He would be upset for days if I went out for lunch or to exhibitions with friends." If anyone enquired about their relationship, Mukta repeated what Chitrakar had instructed her to say: "This is my personal life. I'm an adult and I make my own decisions."

This kept others from interfering. Over time, Mukta's friends started avoiding her, calling her "Sujan Sir's girlfriend".

Right after completing her undergraduate, Mukta joined KU as a visiting faculty on Chitrakar's request so they could continue to spend time together. But soon after,

in August 2019, he abruptly ended their four years long relationship.

Mukta felt Chitrakar needed space because of his marital problems and tried to support him as he had asked in the past, and sent him consoling messages. But when she learnt that Chitrakar was involved with another undergraduate student, she started to understand what he had done to her. Unable to face anyone, she described feeling suicidal.

Another student who graduated in the early 2020s said Chitrakar caressed her back and thighs whenever he sat on her scooter.

She was 20 at the time, and recalls: "He would ask me to give him a ride because he had back pain and couldn't drive his own motorcycle. But he would be very touchy-feely throughout. I ignored the warning signs because he's a

respectable person and couldn't possibly have bad intentions."

Another survivor, also a former student in her early 20s then, described Chitrakar as 'dangerously manipulative'. She said he sent her inappropriate texts and offensive photos. Despite saying she was not comfortable with it, Chitrakar is said to have continued pursuing her, affecting her mental health and professional life.

Mukta's classmate, now 32, says there were other teachers at KU involved in sexual misconduct. "Since he was senior-most faculty, what he did gave license to other teachers to do the same," he said, adding that older teachers often date young women students.

A former teacher at the KU art department said, "Several faculty members dating students would message me to say that their

# teacher-student relationships?



workplaces, including schools, banning intimate relationships between teachers and students. The National Criminal (Code) Act, 2017 also forbids such relationships.

Advocate Indu Tuladhar says, "Section 222 and 223 clearly state that you cannot have sex with someone who is under your protection or security, where you have a duty of care. It also adds you cannot have sex with someone who is receiving your professional service."

She adds, "Even if a student is over 18, it's not truly consensual because the teacher is providing a professional service of education and the student, the weaker party, is coming to seek education. The responsibility here is on the teacher to teach, and protect the student, not pursue them."

The Supreme Court set a landmark precedent in 2019 recognising the role of power differences in determining 'consent' when Justices Sapana Pradhan Malla and Purushottam Bhandari ruled that there cannot be free 'consent' when there is a power imbalance between victim and perpetrator.

The Sexual Harassment at Workplace (Prevention) Act (2014)'s Section 6 and 7 require universities to establish mechanisms to address complaints, including forming an internal committee to investigate and resolve cases.

When Mukta learned during a reflective session at an arts workshop in 2023 that what had happened to her was still happening to others at the art school, she decided to speak up because "there's nothing protecting the students".

In 2024, Mukta, other artists, and KU alumni had a confidential meeting at the School of Arts with the leadership including Dean of the School of Education Bal Chandra Luitel calling for a policy on sexual misconduct. Mukta says Luitel breached confidentiality and divulged private details of the complaint in an email to Chitrakar.

Mukta and several other artists also met Sangeeta Thapa of Siddhartha Arts Foundation and member of the Masters in Fine Arts subject committee at KU, and who organises the Kathmandu Triennale. Chitrakar at the time was co-artistic director for the Triennale.

Thapa emailed Chitrakar seeking clarification about the abuse, and is said to have

disclosed that it was Mukta who had made the allegations of sexual misconduct. This put Mukta at risk of retaliation and further harm.

The two emails from Luitel and Thapa were provided as evidence by Chitrakar in a defamation suit at Kathmandu District Court against Mukta and another KU alumna whom Luitel had named.

Responding after the defamation case, the artist named in the lawsuit said, "I felt extremely unsafe. I never imagined that a discussion on securing safety for students and staff would be used as evidence in a defamation lawsuit. And the person breaching confidentiality was the Dean himself."

Defamation litigations are often used as tools to silence, intimidate, and shame survivors while draining them emotionally and financially. It discourages people from speaking up and weakens the

collective support survivors receive from allies. Indeed, after Chitrakar filed the defamation case, another survivor, a former student who had accused Chitrakar of sexual misconduct, declined to be part of this investigation.

In the lawsuit Chitrakar admitted he had been in a romantic relationship with Mukta who was a student at KU. He added that while they were together 'whatever conversations and acts that take place between lovers, happened...'

Nepali Times questioned the Dean of School of Arts Uddhab Pyakurel, about the breach of confidentiality from the school and its impact on other survivors. "We realise one must be very sensitive. And that is why we have developed a guideline that focuses on creating a safe environment for survivors to open up," he said.

He added that the school had finalised the guidelines but was yet to endorse it. "Staff-student intimate relationships are prohibited in our code of conduct. It is not acceptable in academia," he added. In the meantime, the school has requested to submit any grievances in writing to the office of Dean.

A spokesperson for Siddhartha Arts Foundation admitted, "All of us felt unsettled when we heard the allegations. We do not condone people who abuse their power. In hindsight we could have just listed the allegations instead of naming the survivor and attendees. This was a big lesson for us. We need to step back, retreat, reevaluate. We want to repair so much. That's the only way."

The absence of reporting mechanisms, breach of confidentiality, and inadequate institutional response to sexual misconduct push survivors and their allies to seek justice on their own. Former students, peers, and even donors of KU have reportedly been alerting the art community in private about Chitrakar for years.

Wary of how such warnings are stigmatised as gossip or framed as attempts to ruin Chitrakar's and KU's reputation, they relied on 'whisper network', a grassroots resistance method against powerful systems that enable sexual predators.

Among them is Stefanie Lotter from SOAS in London who organised the 2022 international summer school 'Introducing Documentation and Archiving of Heritage in Nepal', where Chitrakar was a lecturer.

She had been warned about the allegations against him, and told Nepali Times: "I watched his interactions with students closely, and I took a student aside when I overheard that he had asked her if she wanted a ride back in his car."

She added: "Professional boundaries exist for a reason. Having sexual predators in a teaching environment is catastrophic. As a young female academic, you must know you are valued for your academic contributions and not your looks."

The last thing you want from a lecturer is sexualised attention, as it is both an ethical and pedagogical failure and not only harms your career but also affects your relationships with fellow students, who may start to see you differently."

Eight women artists from Nepal and abroad interviewed for this story said they dropped out or declined projects when they learnt Chitrakar was part of them.

Some names have been changed to protect the privacy of the survivors. Subeksha Poudel is a freelance journalist working on social justice issues.

advice on how to push for policies and accountability measures within their institutions. "A lot of these things are happening quietly behind the scenes, but we need to find ways to talk about harassment and abuse of power openly and honestly," says NayanTara Gurung Kakshapati of Photo Circle. "How to ensure everyone feels safe and respected? That is the end goal." 🇳🇵

Some names have been changed to protect the privacy of the survivors. Subeksha Poudel is a freelance journalist working on social justice issues.

## SPOT AND STOP GROOMING

### 1 EDUCATE

Regular conversations and training on identifying grooming tactics, nuances of consent, and unlearning unconscious biases such as victim blaming and normalisation of misconduct is needed.

### 2 ESTABLISH BOUNDARIES

Universities must define what is professional behaviour. Sexual misconduct begins with seemingly benign boundary-blurring behaviours.

### 3 ZERO TOLERANCE

Universities need to classify grooming as sexual misconduct, have a zero tolerance policy against staff dating students and clearly state consequences for staff who violate the policies. Institutions should also be held accountable through transparent processes, regular public reporting, and enforcement of policies.

### 4 EVALUATION

Faculty performance reviews should assess not only teaching, but also their role in fostering a safe, respectful, and inclusive learning environment. Sexual misconduct or enabling behaviour should be factors in evaluation.

### 5 OPTIONS

Institutions should provide options of formal and informal channels for reporting sexual misconduct, allowing students and bystanders to find language to describe their experiences, discuss concerns, learn about actions they can take without launching an official investigation.

### 6 RESOURCES

Free mental health and legal counselling should be offered both on and off campus for anyone reporting misconduct. Support should include practical assistance like accompanying survivors to police stations and attending court hearings if needed.

### 7 COMMITTEE

An internal complaints committee should be formed to include elected members that are committed to gender issues, have legal knowledge and represent their own community such as the student body. The committee should also include an external expert to ensure the process is unbiased.

### 8 STUDENT LEADERSHIP

Students must play an active role, from policy development that centers their needs to collecting feedback from survivors after investigations conclude.

girlfriends, who were also my students, were running late for class. This meant I couldn't mark them as late." However, the teacher said it was pointless to complain.

Speaking to Nepali Times, a current faculty of the KU art school said he sees no issue if a teacher-student relationship ends in marriage. "If they truly love each other, I don't have any problem with that, many students and teachers are married. But if the teacher is married and is lying, flirting or hurting the student then it's wrong," he added.

Such relations seem to be not just normalised in Nepal's higher education, but even encouraged, making it difficult to report.

Rajib Timalsina, a faculty at TU says, "I'm unmarried and people tell me to find a decent student to get married to. They see

all master's students as adults and don't talk about power dynamics and consent."

### THE LAW

Back at KU, some faculty members who saw Chitrakar dating Mukta dismissed it as a personal matter between two consenting adults. Those who raised ethical or professional concerns were often shut down by colleagues as engaging in idle gossip.

Another faculty member teaching at the art school says, "Even if I complained, he is a big name and the art community is very tight knit and quiet about it, so nothing will happen to him."

The law is clear. Nepal's Sexual Harassment at Workplace (Prevention) Act (2014) was enacted in November 2014 to prevent and address sexual harassment at



# Letter from Norway

Democracy is at stake all over the world, and Nepal will face its own test on 5 March

Marit Bakke in Oslo

It was inspiring for me here in Norway to read Radhesh Pant's Guest Editorial in Nepali Times on 4 February titled 'A Chance for Nepal's Political Renewal'.

Now the time has come, we hope. Youth groups have decided to stand firm in the process of making Nepal a more democratic society. They are concerned, they have the competence and talent, and they are dedicated.

For many years, I have followed the ups and downs of Nepal's politics: the re-introduction of multi-party democracy in 1990 allowing civil society organisations, the Maoist insurgency ending in 1996, the palace shooting in 2001, king Gyanendra abdicating in 2006, Nepal becoming a republic in 2008, and the ratification of the new Constitution in 2015. Right up to the demonstrations and violence in September last year.

All these upheavals took place in Nepal within just over three decades. Defining democracy as a system in which every citizen can vote, we must remember that it took 100 years for many European countries to become democracies, in some countries even longer.

Norway is one example of the latter: after 400 years as a Danish colony, Norway was an autonomous country (except for foreign affairs) in a union with Sweden, meaning we had a common king with Sweden, but a



KIRAN RAJ BISTA / RSS

Parliament with Norwegians.

This status changed in 1814, Parliament gathered at an estate north of the capital to declare independence from Sweden and pass a new Constitution – it could be called a silent coup d'état.

Norwegian women obtained the right to vote only in 1913. It took us 400 years to become independent country, and nearly a century for its citizens to obtain the right to vote.

A democratic process therefore can last long, it is filled with

frustration, anger, optimism, pessimism. In Nepal, I have noticed all these emotions, in the media as well as among people.

Since 1999, I have been fortunate to meet Nepalis, many of whom have become good friends, who have told me about personal experiences and their views on politics and on local conditions.

Nepal is a complex society, and many aspects are still difficult for me to understand. But I do indeed feel confident to agree with

Radhesh Pant that political renewal in Nepal is possible.

## GLOBAL AUTOCRATISATION

Elections alone do not guarantee a functional democracy, however, and Nepal is not the only country that must cope with political and social challenges – just look at historical and recent events throughout the world today.

Corruption has been a stubborn challenge in countries on every continent, reducing people's trust

in politicians and the political system. Power sharing cannot be taken for granted any more, political and administrative decisions are made without concern for the rule of law, and autocratic leaders contribute to public institutions being broken down from within.

In the US and Europe, migration has become a polarising issue and has stoked conflict among citizens which can be exploited for political gain by populists to navigate among power positions.

With all this happening, it is encouraging to observe that citizens, especially the young generation, are mobilising against such trends and to save democracy.

The GenZ movement in Nepal followed youth uprisings in Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Nepal itself was followed by similar ones in Thailand, Morocco, as well as in other parts of the world – just a few weeks ago, also in Albania.

The election on 5 March, and the negotiations that will inevitably following to form a government with clear policies for the future will be an indication that our optimism is well founded, and that every Nepali – young and old, poor and rich, male and female living in the centre and periphery -- will obtain better possibilities to participate in political decision-making.

Ultimately, this will make it possible for Nepalis to improve their social condition, as well as contributing to their country's democratic development. 🇳🇵


Marit Bakke is a retired Professor of Sociology. Since 1984, she has been in Nepal regularly, to collaborate academically with Nepalis, including as a member of the International Board of Patan Academy of Health Sciences (PAHS).




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