



standard chartered

AAA

ISSUER RATING BY ICRA [NEPAL]

Nepal's safest bank-four times in a row.



PROMPT: Ultra-realistic, insanely high-resolution photo of Kathmandu in graphic detail. Create a cinematic view, city lights, white clouds over the hills, hazy atmosphere, concrete buildings

AYO AI

The pace of progress of generative AI is faster than any new technology in history. Even AI gurus and scientists are worried, and governments are scratching their heads about regulation.

The image of Kathmandu Valley (left) is an example of AI art, and in page 6-7 we have other illustrations of what this technology can do, including producing a prompted promotional video for this paper in both Nepali and English.

Nepal is gearing up to join the AI bandwagon with user-friendly apps becoming more advanced than Tiktok, Facebook, Instagram. Many young Nepalis are learning and adapting quickly. Parents and teachers now need to pay attention to guide children to use the apps safely.

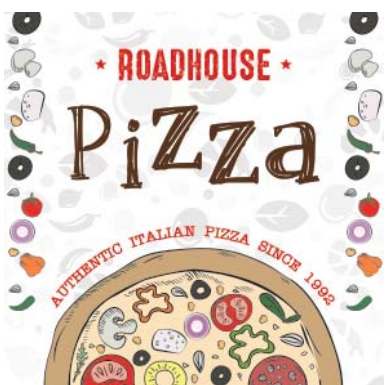
The number of apps has grown from just 3 generative AI apps in 2015 to 33 in 2022, and in just five months of 2023 until May, 640 new apps have been created.

Covid-19 pandemic was a key factor in accelerating AI growth, as businesses adapted to remote work. We are seeing the rise of AI apps that can transform text to high quality, ultra-realistic photographs, art, videos, audio, voices and much more are coming. Most are only in Beta versions and their full potential is yet to be unleashed. That will not take long. 🇳🇵

Naresh Newar



MORE ON PAGE 6-7



ROADHOUSE

Pizza

Authentic Italian Pizza Since 1992



19 YEARS

Outsource your Non-Core Staff through **Suvidha Staffing**

- licensed company by DoL, MoLESS
- 100% Labour Law Compliant

+977-9851247213
www.suvidhasewa.com.np



The Chinese Room

FREE PARKING AVAILABLE AT HOTEL ANNAPURNA

Full Restaurant
☎ 9815597346
📍 Durbanmarg



Dhunge Dhara, Banasthali, 12 Anna

Lainchour, 8 Anna

FOR SALE

Contact Us for detail: **9818137771**



eScan Anti-Virus

#1 Security in the World

TOTAL PROTECTION for Computers, Mobiles & Tablets

An ISO 27001 Certified Company

Contact no.: **01-4330980**

www.escanav.com



easy summer

Step into the summer with our light collection of cashmere wears, silks, blankets and throws.

NATUREKNIT
CASHMERE REDEFINED

☎ 01-5354812 | Sanchaya Kosh Building, Thamel, KTM | Shop #205-206
 🌐 fb.com/natureknit @nature_knit info@natureknit.com www.natureknit.com



Losing our moral compass

The fake refugee scandal that is rocking the government is only the latest outrage that Nepalis have witnessed. Indeed, they are so inured to corruption in high places that most have taken it as a given.

But even by the standards of Nepal's kleptocracy, this one is blatant in its planning and execution, implicating the very ministries entrusted with internal security, and one that has tainted Nepal's global standing. It is proof that Nepal's ruling class has lost its moral compass.

For the moment we can only take some comfort from the fact that Nepal's independent media is taking its check and balance role seriously at a time when the three other pillars of our democracy are tottering. The Police has also so far been conducting their investigations diligently.

Because of the intense scrutiny by the media, civil society and individual Nepalis on social media platforms, any attempt to prevent the prosecution of the culprits will now be seen as an even bigger crime than the scam itself.

In so many ways, the fake Bhutanese refugee scam is a reflection of everything that is wrong with the people who have ruled Nepal since 1991, and they tend to be the same people and parties.

The attempt to trick desperate Nepalis to pay up hefty sums to go to America when third country resettlement of Bhutanese was closed seven years ago itself speaks to the brazenness of the crime.

As Nepal's newest MP, Swarmin Wagle of the RSP, put it during a discussion in Kathmandu this week: this is fraud, corruption, human trafficking, transnational organised crime, and sedition, all rolled into one.

"There has been a meticulous legalisation of corruption through amendments in Parliament. So we seem to be creating a corruption-friendly regime," said Wagle. "Our legal system needs to be able to catch up with those who are corrupt."

The scam was possible in the first place because Nepal's legal system allows it. Our Parliament is a farce, the judiciary is guilty of abetting the guilty, and impunity prevails upon the land.

Despite widespread concern, the Transitional Justice Bill which allows war criminals to literally get away with murder was rushed through Parliament. It gave a clean chit to Maoists and state-side perpetrators of conflict-era atrocities. The

Bill even made the disingenuous distinction between 'murder' and 'extreme murder'.

In 2020, then communication minister Gokul Baskota was caught on tape soliciting a Rs700 million bribe for a security printing press. Less than two years later in the 2022 November federal elections, Baskota was voted to Parliament from Kavre-2.

There are scandals involving Maoist leaders pocketing compensation money meant for their guerrillas, kickbacks on international airport deals, payoffs for hydropower licenses. The list is so long it will exceed the word length for this Editorial.

Despite all these elephants in the

room, Nepal's conservative male politicians are obsessed about what RSP MP Sumana Shrestha wears in Parliament. The fact that her t-shirt and Chino was even a topic for discussion exposes not just blatant misogyny, but also a collective inability to discern our priorities and address the real issues affecting Nepalis. The contrast to a male MP who dared disrobe on the floor of the House not being an issue could not have been more stark.

When impunity is rife and morals become elastic, we cannot fault desperate Nepalis attempting to break the law by trying to make fake refugee documents.

The scandals are coming thick and fast. A respected 75-year-old agriculture expert in Khotang is caught in a Setopati exposé

abusing girls in a school he founded. Elsewhere, rapper Balen Shah who campaigned as the voice of the impoverished has since started upsetting the apple cart of street vendors in the name of cleaning up the streets. What happened to his election promise of segregating Kathmandu's garbage at source?

The media also needs to self-reflect. Although it was the relentless pursuit of the story by Kantipur and other media that the fake refugee scam is throwing up more high profile guilty, the proof of the pudding will be in the persecution of the guilty.

The media cannot be an island of integrity when society has been hollowed out by corruption and wrongdoing. Journalists need to be even more careful to be objective, and not become mouthpieces for the highest bidders. This is even more crucial at a time when populism and ultranationalist sentiments have permeated all sectors of the state.

Sonia Awale



SUBHAS RAI

The fake refugee scam is a reflection of everything that is wrong with Nepal and the people who run it

ONLINE PACKAGES



AI WITH NEPALI TIMES

Major publications around the world have experimented with AI platforms like ChatGPT which in just a few months have revolutionised content production. Some other AI apps go a step further to create realistic portraits and videos. Watch entirely AI-made videos prompted to promote this paper, in English and Nepali. And view some AI-generated images on page 6-7.



A RURAL LIFELINE

Bayalpata Hospital represents a functioning model of accessible and affordable medical care in remote Nepal having treated 1.2 million people free of cost in the past 14 years. Other government district hospitals have larger budgets, treat fewer patients and charge fees. Take a trip to far west Nepal and watch video made by Nyaya Health Nepal.

REFUGEE SCAM

When shamelessness and power come together, corruption seems to thrive ('Rot at the top', Shristi Karki, #1161). Hopefully, this investigation is not just driven by a political enemy but is rather a step towards change for the greater good.

Ngawang Tenzin

■ Meanwhile, real Tibetan refugees are subjugated in Nepal.

Ritu Angmo

■ This is shameful ('In a Federal Kleptocratic Republic of Nepal', Shristi Karki, nepalitimes.com). Will this too be brushed under the carpet?

Bandana Sharma

DEMOCRACY

Democracy can also be corrupted when there is a control of media ("Democracy gives you a chance to throw rascals out", #1161).

Slow Trekking

■ Democracy can also be a breeding ground for rascals. It is up to the quality of the general public.

Ritu Angmo

MIGRATION

After more than a quarter of a century, Nepal's remittance economy has proven to be a mixed blessing ('Human flight, Editorial', #1161).

David Seddon

HITI

Schools should teach students about hiti as a part of Nepali history ('Water for the ages', Anita Bhatwal, #1161). I feel like Nepalis only have access to the periphery of our own history.

Diwas Pathak

■ There could be a lot of alternatives to Melamchi, not just groundwater. Recharge points/ponds should be prioritised for groundwater as per the land area and appropriate recharge plan and policy. For securing alternative sources, peri-urban water security is most important. I have worked on a project on peri-urban water conservation in Kathmandu Valley in the past. I realised that an abundant amount of water is just wasted.

Quixote

Times.com WHAT'S TRENDING

Water for the ages

by Anita Bhatwal

Centuries after they were built, Kathmandu Valley's hiti still support its growing urban population because modern water mains are so unreliable. But unplanned urbanisation of Kathmandu in recent decades has threatened this historic network of water channels. Watch video online.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Deciphering Thangmi

by Ashish Dhakal

Thangmi, historically unwritten and genetically related to Nepal Bhasa, Rai is among the least documented languages in Nepal. But this will change thanks to a new two-volume monograph by Vancouver-based anthropologist and linguist Mark Turin.

Most popular on Twitter

Rot at the top

by Shristi Karki

The fake Bhutanese refugee scandal has confirmed what most Nepalis already knew, that their government is rotten to the core. Nepal's international image has been seriously dented, and its moral high ground on the Bhutan refugee question has been undermined. Join discussion online.

Most commented

Kesang Tseten is silent, but not absent

by Sonia Awale

Kesang Tseten, Nepal's foremost documentary filmmaker is back with two new films chronicling diversity and transition: one about people in remote corners of the Himalaya, and another profiling Nepalis in the heart of New York. Read the profile at nepalitimes.com

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Kesang Tseten's trademark is his ability to deliver the most impact while keeping himself in the background: silent but not absent.

Aditya Khare @Mr_Khare_
Kesang Tseten's 'Castaway Man' is absolutely a must watch. An investigation on the pioneer of Nepali Anthropology and Brahman cynicism who vanished along with the vile air of conspiracy around.

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
"We owe it to ourselves to have a truly global conversation about what democracy means in different places. We might not be talking about the same thing. So a little more humility, and more sensitivity is called for."

Krishna Joshi @krishna_joshi01
Nepal has had to live with its rascals for the last 35 years and only providence can rid it of these rascals, not democracy. Democracy works only if the people are prepared for it & understand there's an accountability side to it as well. Otherwise, it becomes free for all crazy.

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Kathmandu's ancient water spouts provide more reliable supply than the \$700 million Melamchi project.

Jan Brunson @jan_brunson
I've always wondered how the spouts worked.

Sumit @spiya147
The technology is reliable but not abundant with today's urbanization.

1,000 WORDS



NABIN PAUDEL / RSS

UNDERFINANCED MINISTER:
Finance Minister Prakash Sharan Mahat speaking at the 55th anniversary of Nepal Insurance Authority in Kathmandu this week.

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Cash-rich, Development-poor

In a story published in Nepali Times in May 2003, we reported that 30% of the development budget was unspent with just six weeks to go before the end of the fiscal year. Twenty years later, we have managed to spend only 33% of our capital expenditure 10 months into the current fiscal year. Things are not just the same, but getting worse.

Of the Rs380.38 billion allocated for the development budget, the government has managed to spend just Rs125.68 billion. Underspending is a chronic problem and to make up for it, much like every year, there is going to be a spur of hasty construction in the last months of the fiscal year. Poor planning starts right here.

Excerpt of the report published 20 years ago this week in issue #145 16-22 May 2003:

With only six weeks to go till the end of the fiscal year, 30 percent of the development budget is unspent. Donors, who foot three-quarters of this money, are getting worried about the government's inability to spend money when the need


is so great.

The irony is that the country's macro-economic situation has never looked better. Buoyed by remittances from Nepalis abroad, our foreign currency coffers are enough to pay for 11 months of imports. Liquidity grew by six percent compared to last year. The government's cash savings have gone up from Rs740 million overdraft last year to a surplus of Rs1 billion. Remittances have more than made up for the fall in tourism receipts and export.

Development expenditure is down, but regular expenditure (salaries, civil service, overheads) is up by Rs3 billion from last year. Defence spending is up by Rs1 billion to more than Rs7 billion this year. As happens at the end of every fiscal year, the development section of the Finance Ministry is a busy place these days. Up to Rs700 million is being released every week as various agencies try to beat the deadline to prevent their allocation from lapsing.

From archive material of Nepali Times of the past 20 years, site search: www.nepalitimes.com



A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER 

WE'RE ALL CONNECTED: KRAKOW

Connecting more countries than any other.



TURKISH AIRLINES

POLAND

01-4538363 | 4538436 | ktmsales@thy.com

A RURAL LIFELINE

One far-flung hospital shows that it is possible to provide free quality medical care to isolated communities in Nepal

■ **Sonia Awale** in Achham

It is nearing 6PM and Mandeep Pathak is on the daily evening round of the in-patient ward at Bayalpata Hospital in Achham District. The section is crowded with patients young and old.

Most have respiratory problems, women with limbs broken in falls from cliffs, some have diabetes, and there is a psychosis patient in an isolation ward. There is wailing from the delivery room of the maternity ward.

Pathak's mobile phone buzzes. He listens, and rushes off to the emergency room. A crowded tractor has fallen off the road and there are mass casualties. The wounded soon arrive, and Bayalpata's staff go into practiced triage mode.

The team declares a 12-year-old boy dead on arrival. Others are rushed into x-ray and readied for splints and plaster casts. Some are discharged after treatment to join crowds of waiting relatives outside.



PHOTOS: SONIAAWALE



Patients in this isolated hospital in a corner of one of Nepal's most remote districts are from all over Sudur Paschim and Karnali Provinces. One 8-year-old girl with a broken arm has been brought here by her father from Humla, after walking four days to get to a road.

In the 14 years since it was established, word has spread that Bayalpata provides high quality service free of cost, and the hospital is treating 100,000 patients a year with a team

of dedicated staff, surgery, lab, pharmacy and a high dependency unit.

In the maternity ward is a 35-year-old new mother who is quietly taking her supper. She has a shining smile as her husband fusses over her. They are now happy parents of twin boys, their fourth and fifth children.

A few beds away is another young mother recuperating from a caesarean delivery. The husband is not happy — the baby is a girl and they already have two daughters.

NMB BANK एनएमबि बैंक

Higher spending



New data released by the Financial Comptroller General Office shows that government expenditure is Rs250 billion more than its revenue. The

government has only collected 54% of the revenue target of Rs1.4 trillion at Rs756 billion. Demands have declined, imports are low and revenue is also low. Nepal has invested only 12% of capital on development activities and the rest goes to salaries, grant and debt repayments. Nepal will be borrowing Rs498 billion this year.

Australian aid

Australian Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs Tim Watts visited the Tilganga Institute of Ophthalmology in Kathmandu that has restored the sight of millions and treats more than 6,000 patients each week.



Watts also handed over an Australian-made Portable Altitude Chamber (PAC) to the Himalayan Rescue Association (HRA) for use at Pheriche Aid Post and the Everest ER Clinic at Everest Base Camp on Wednesday.



Turkish to Krakow

Turkish Airlines has launched flights to Krakow in Poland as its second destination in the country after Warsaw. The flights are three times a week, on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays to and from Istanbul.



Project Buddha

South Asia Foundation-Nepal and Lumbini Development Trust have launched a Light and Sound project on the life of Gautam Buddha and a website www.lumbininepal.org. With designs by Indian filmmaker Shyam Benegal, offers visitors an immersive experience of the life and teaching of Buddha.

Tata Bhaktapur

Tata Vehicles opened a new showroom at Radhe Radhe in Bhaktapur. Customers can visit for the latest models and deals.

Helping hands

Indian Embassy has provided a grant worth Rs80.33 million to the Ministry of Federal Affairs in Kathmandu to construct Malagiri Shanti Yogashram in Ramechhap and Kedar Jyotipunjya Multiple Campus in Doti. The two High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDPs) are expected to provide better health care as well as improve education facilities for the local community.



Soaltee in Itahari

Soaltee has opened an 80-room Sundari Soaltee Westend Itahari which will be operated by an associate company of Soaltee and owned by Hotel Garima.

Biz Conference

Investment Board Nepal and Standard Chartered Bank with the Society of Economic Journalists held an International Conference on Financing in Nepal this week with sessions on macroeconomics of investment and tools related to financing in Nepal.

eSajha

Sajha Yatayat has added three new electric buses for the Patan Dhoka-Rarnapark-Gaushala-Jorpati route. Patan Metropolitan is also providing Rs90 million to Sajha to start small bus services and set up charging stations.



HEALTH FOR ALL: (Clockwise) Jamauna Saud distributing eggs to a members of mother's group in Pataalkot village.

Orthopaedic oncologist Mandeep Pathak consulting a patient at Bayalpata. In 14 years, Bayalpata hospital has treated 1.2 million patients free of cost. Program Associate Bhawana Bogati during a community visit.

Hospital staff try to persuade him to get a vasectomy, but he still wants to try for a son.

Unlike private hospitals in Nepal, some of which have up to 80% caesarian deliveries, at Bayalpata most births are natural. Doctors do caesarians only on complicated deliveries, or on referral patients.

In one recent case a 17-year-old mother died on the way to Bayalpata from Bajura district. She had twins, only one of whom survived. Another woman who was 30 weeks pregnant suffered a stillbirth, but because it was a girl, the mother-in-law and husband did not look too perturbed.

A mother who gave birth after a difficult delivery was nearly bleeding to death from postpartum haemorrhage. While doctors tried frantically to save her life, the family was celebrating the birth of a son.

Despite improved literacy, patriarchy is still entrenched in these remote mountains of far west Nepal. Boys are sent to school while girls help with house chores and raise their little brothers. When children fall sick, the boys are likely to be taken to an expensive private hospital in Dhangadi, while girls are brought to free institutions like Bayalpata.

"The paradox here is that girls are getting world-class treatment while boys have to settle for less

than optimal healthcare at private facilities," says Mandeep Pathak, one of few orthopaedic oncologists in Nepal who has been working at Bayalpata for eight years.

Pathak examines a 14-year-old girl from Mugu on whom he operated to remove a benign but complicated tumour that had restricted her mobility for the past two years.

As he does his evening rounds, Pathak tells us: "Our patients are among the poorest and neediest and from the remotest part of the country. They would not have got a correct diagnosis, let alone get timely and affordable treatment otherwise."

The only cost families have to bear is for transport to the hospital. The hospital even provides free food for one relative accompanying the patient.

Community Care

Bayalpata Hospital is managed by the non-profit Nyaya Health Nepal (NHN) in partnership with the provincial and municipal governments.

Although the hospital gets much of the attention, NHN's emphasis is on the community that provides door-to-door care to families in Achham. There are up to two Community Health Workers (CHW) for every ward who regularly visit families to monitor the condition of pregnant women, provide ante-natal care, or check up on those with

chronic conditions. This reduces the pressure on the hospital, and also saves families money.

CHW can even assist while community nurses perform lab tests including for HIV, hepatitis, urine, sugar, protein, pH level, haemoglobin so patients do not have to come to hospital. The nurses even provide psycho-social counselling, since mental health is still not discussed openly.

Aside from healthcare, the female CHWs also demonstrate the important role women can play in this socially conservative society. Jamuna Saud, a 24-year-old CHW, is visiting families in the village of Pataalkot, and recording data of patients on her Electronic Health Record app that provides physicians at Bayalpata with instant information on the medical condition of patients in case they need to be taken to hospital.

"We are still a male-dominated society here, as you can see, but things are improving," says Saud, as she climbs up the trail to another family's homestead. "I have seen families sending daughters to school because they see us being respected for our job. They are starting to treat their own daughters better."

The work of NHN's community health program is already seen in Achham district's health parameters. After a dip during the pandemic, institutional deliveries have climbed again to 80%, and this has sharply reduced maternal and child mortality.

"Mother and child health is our main focus and ensuring that we follow the progress of pregnant women means most now go to Bayalpata to deliver," says Program Associate Bhawana Bogati, 28.

The hospital which recently marked its 15th anniversary has so far treated 1.2 million people free of cost, and sustainability continues to be the biggest challenge for Bayalpata's public-private partnership with the local government. Half the annual budget still comes from international donors.

But more than anything else, Bayalpata is a working example that free quality medical care is possible. Other government district hospitals have larger budgets, treat fewer patients and charge fees.

Given the remoteness of Achham, the other challenge is retention of doctors and paramedics. Flights to Sanfebagar are unreliable, and a jeep ride to Dhangadi takes 10 hours.

Says surgeon Bhaskar Koirala of HAMS Hospital in Kathmandu and a board member of NHN: "Bayalpata is a rural lifeline, we need hospitals like these in the remotest corners of Nepal and to run them we need medical staff who are willing to be posted here." 🇳🇵



nepalimes.com

Watch a video about Bayalpata Hospital.



Jamuna Saud

Her baby son is only nine months old, but Community Health Worker (CHW) Jamuna Saud is already back to making door-to-door visits to advise other expecting mothers about safe delivery. Her visit today to Pataalkot village, a 3 hour drive through rough roads from Bayalpata, is hindered by a sudden thunderstorm, but she is not bothered.

"You need to eat for two now, it will not be good if you skip meals," says Saud as she counsels Pabitra Auji who is six months pregnant with her first baby and looks undernourished. "Fruits, leafy vegetables, meat and egg, and don't forget to take your iron capsules."

Saud has been a CHW for four years. She had originally wanted to be a doctor or a nurse, and was a class topper in school, but her family could not afford medical school fees. Moreover, young

women in her community were expected to get married, not go to college.

"Mine was the only family in the neighbourhood that let girls go to school," recalls Saud. "But my parents passed away when I was in the 9th grade and my brothers were not planning to educate me further. I cried until they admitted me to +2."

Saud moved to Sanfebagar and paid her own way through college, supporting herself by doing odd jobs. She is happy to have been accepted by Bayalpata's community health program, and feels a personal sense of achievement that childhood diarrhoea, malnutrition and respiratory infections among babies is decreasing, while more women accept family planning advice.

Over the years, Saud has seen changes among women like her in Achham. Girls are no longer restricted to just doing housework and producing babies. She says, "I am proud to have contributed to raising the living standard of people here even if by the tiniest bit."

Ramita Bogati

The story of Florence Nightingale was the inspiration for Ramita Bogati, who always wanted to be a nurse herself. Back in her village, girls were actively discouraged from going to school, and were married young so as not to be a drain on the family.

"My parents did not actually want to send me to a school but my mother's side of the family were educated, and many of them were in medicine," says Bogati. "But I had to prove myself to change my father's perceptions about what women should be allowed to do."

Today, Bogati is one of 10 Community Health Nurses at Bayalpata overseeing 70 community health workers with her colleagues. Her passion for the job and the importance of the service she provides is all the encouragement she needs. She does not envy her staff nurse classmates who have flown to Australia and other countries.

On a typical day, Bogati is involved in early detection of chronic and infectious diseases, tuberculosis and hypertension so that the poorest in the community do not have to borrow money for treatment or, worse, have their lives shortened due to the lack of diagnosis and treatment.

Bogati has seen tangible impact of her work in birth spacing. In the past, women here used to give birth to as many as 15 children, and most died young. Now, they give birth to fewer but healthier children.

"As a nurse, the concept of community health was new to me but I have seen that we need to look beyond those who are able to come to Bayalpata. If they cannot come to hospital, the hospital needs to go to them."



हिमालको जेठ अंक बजारमा



हिमालमिडिया प्रा. लि.
पाटनढोका, ललितपुर



1 PROMPT: Create a full body graphic art of 2 female samurai with sullen expression, silhouetted and volumetric light.



2 PROMPT: Create a hyper-realistic, 8K close up photograph with a cinematic view of a young Nepalese mother holding her baby.



3 PROMPT: Hyper realistic super resolution, full body, wide lens photograph of young high cheek bone Nepali, brown skin tone, holding a white glistening Yak, wearing mountaineering outfit with Chiaroscuro dramatic studio light, night, silhouette, extremely detailed. Pretty eyes, sparkling Mount Everest and glistening moon.



4 PROMPT: Award winning photo of a Nepali girl, 35mm, F/2.8, insanely detailed and intricate, character, hyper-maximalist, elegant, ornate, beautiful

AI & I

Diving into the deep end of art with generative artificial intelligence

■ Naresh Newar

Let's suppose Leonardo da Vinci was alive, and he agreed to paint a masterpiece for me. As a Samurai fan, I would tell him to paint a super detailed, ultra-realistic artwork of two female Samurais with sullen expressions under volumetric light with matte texture. In just five seconds, da Vinci creates a spectacular piece beyond my wildest imagination (Image 1).

The only thing is: it was not da Vinci who painted that image, but <http://leonardo.ai>. That striking portrait of two Samurais was created on my laptop by the advanced generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) application that creates images from natural



Beautiful, exotic, revealing, appealing, amative, hyper-realistic, super-detailed.

language descriptions, known as 'prompts'. Leonardo AI converts text into any kind of image: painting, pencil drawing, cartoon, photograph or diverse art forms. It is one of many advanced AI-powered image generators that have come up in recent months. Since its release in February, Leonardo's users have increased from 1.5 million to 11 million and on 1 May, it was released to the public. I got early access and since then I have created nearly 5,000 images.

There are other advanced image generation applications like Midjourney, DALL-E 2, Stable Diffusion, Lexica Art and BlueWillow. One of the latest entries is Microsoft's Bing Image Creator, released publicly in April.

Some of these programs even provide subscribers with a copyright licence to publicly share and sell art online as NFTs (non-fungible tokens sold as unique digital assets and proof of ownership). Some of the biggest online stores like Etsy, Open Sea, Rarible, Mintable etc have offered services to sell AI art as NFTs.

Text-to-image generation is not new. But recently there has been an explosion of user-friendly, low-cost and free generative AI apps that have taken the world by storm.



6 PROMPT: Make a hyper-realistic Gurkha warrior with Chiaroscuro dramatic studio light, night, silhouette, extremely detailed, super resolution. Sparkling Mount Everest and shining moon.



5 PROMPT: Ultra-realistic, insanely high-resolution satirical cartoon of global warming for a newspaper

A game changer
On 11 May, Google's new chatbot Bard was released in 180 countries, and dropped the 'waitlist,' which means that people do not have to register anymore for access. One of Bard's notable features is Adobe Firefly, which is integrated into its web app and is already predicted to be better than other apps. What makes it different is that the app models are trained on openly licensed stock images and user-generated contents.

Although this will be a game changer, artists have started to question the ethics of text-to-art generators. Like chatbots, arts generators are also AI-powered and trained on massive datasets of images and texts.

Low-intensity warfare has already broken out as artists identify their niches, styles and trademarked characters in AI-generated images. This is not yet an issue for Nepali artists who are not concerned that AI art will replace them.

"Artists have survived technological advancements. The medium has changed but the passion, imagination and creativity process of artists have always remained unchanged," said Kailash Shrestha, contemporary visual artist and initiator of Artudio.

Some artists in the USA have even started suing AI companies for copyright infringement. In January, a group of women artists in California filed a case against Stability AI, Midjourney and Deviant Arts for stealing intellectual property. In February, Getty sued Stability AI for infringement for copying more than 12 million copyrighted images without permission.

The companies asked the courts to withdraw the cases arguing that AI-created images are not similar to their work, and did not note any specific misused images. There has also been a backlash from generative AI users' community against critics.

A Twitter war is going on between artists and AI app users. But only a handful of artists are raising their voices. There are now already 300 generative AI programs and apps, and many of them are free to use. Despite appeals from some artists to be sensitive and join them in their fight against intellectual property theft, there has been little response.

The generative AI arts community is expanding by millions every month with the majority of users from USA, China, India and Brazil. In Nepal most AI users are using Midjourney.

Calling themselves AI 'artists', they have created their own networks, online forums and on social media platforms especially Instagram, some have become AI stars. YouTube has become the preferred platform to share AI art, creative ideas and tips for improving their text prompt skills. There are already books on text prompts which are flying off the shelves.

Many users are selling their work, even though most are doing it more for fun than commercialising the creations.

Over 83% use it as a form of art therapy, and mostly posted on Instagram to share within their own community. 🇳🇵

HOW DO I JOIN?

- Ethics:** Despite criticism by artists they do not oppose this innovative technology, but they are frustrated with Big Tech stealing intellectual property. While using any app, read the terms and conditions before publicly sharing or commercialising anything.
- AI Tools:** There are plenty of videos on YouTube that provide tutorials on AI art generators. Microsoft's Bing Image Creator is one of the most user-friendly. Mage Space, Lexica Art are also simple to use. Leonardo AI gives a lot of tokens without a paid subscription, and I created all the images on this page using it. These images are just for educational purposes. There are tons of other apps on Future Tools.
- Be Creative:** Prompt texts creatively. Don't just write 'monkey' or 'dog'. Get to know artistic concepts, especially styles and techniques. Study and learn the parameters: lighting, types of cameras, colour palettes, dimensionality. Describe objects, people or scenes. Make your own list of different photo lightings, colours, style, textures, moods, expressions etc. Prompt Hero gives ideas and examples.
- Join a Community Platform:** Create a Discord account. To use other tools like Midjourney and BlueWillow, you have to register with Discord anyway.
- Niche List:** Create your own niche to make images stand out. For ideas, join chatbots like ChatGPT, Bard, Bing Chat and Hugging Face.

AI generated promo video for Nepali Times

Chatbot generated script to voice narration and model to create an AI generated promotional video for Nepali Times. Edited via CapCut.



Create a video with a generative AI friend to do the same video in Nepali through the beta version of <https://www.kreadoai.com>. Sign up with Google and click 'oral broadcast video creation' on the dashboard. Choose language (Nepali is also included!) language style (there is also a shouting version), character and model. Translate text with chat.openai.com. Bard doesn't speak Nepali yet, but it apologised and promised it will be included soon, haha. The app won't let you generate unless you have listened to the whole thing. Generation takes some time and AI will email you once it is done. Go online to watch both videos.



EVENTS

**Hike furr paws**

Attention to all furry paw lovers: charity hike event Hike Furr Paws to Shivapuri is coming to you. Participate and contribute to the cause.

20 May, Buddhanilkantha Temple entrance, Rs3,000-4,000, 9808645023

The Belle of Amherst

A play based on the life of American poet Emily Dickinson to be portrayed by Kathleen Mulligan.

19 May, 5.30pm onwards, Shilpee Theatre Nepal, Battisputali Marg, 9861339060

**Mrityukunda**

Don't miss the new play 'Mrityukunda' coming to Ojas Theatre and Film Studio. 19-31 May, 5:15 onwards, Ticket: Rs200-300, Kalapul

Taragaon Talks

Taragaon's 'Echoes of the Past' exhibition will bring thoughts of artists on heritage and culture.

19-30 May, Taragaon Next, Boudha Road, 9849278222

**Bird watching**

Gear up ornithophiles for a bird watching event this weekend. Call for more details.

20 May, Godavari Bus Park, 7.30am onwards, 9851129773

DINING

**Dokdo Sarang**

A variety of Korean dishes from Tteok-bokki, Gimbap and Bibimbap to a full set. Head to Dokdo Sarang now.

Kupondal Heights, 9803472187

MUSIC

**Live music**

Enjoy live music every day at the oldest live music venue in town. Call ahead to find out who is performing.

Reggae Bar Thamel, Thamel, 9846195216

Charity concert

Book tickets now for the 'Music to heal and help' charity concert featuring The Axe Band, Mukti & the Revival, Cobweb, Anuprasta, Dong and more.

20 May, 12pm onwards, Rs2,000-2,500, Calm, Tangalwood, Naxal

**Ranzen**

Enjoy a night market at The Yellow House with food, drinks, vendors and a fun DJ session from Ranzen.

20 May, 4-9pm, The Yellow House Milap Marg

**Music Room**

Sign up to learn western and eastern music from the best instructors in town at the Music Room.

9818856982

Reggae festival

Gear up for the raw and authentic beats of reggae with Cultivation, Riddim Sons, Emcee Kush and more.

27 May, 2pm onwards, Tangal wood (01) 4443904

**Utpala Cafe**

A monastery restaurant perfect with the best healthy vegetarian options. Also check out their scrumptious buffet lunch and mouth-watering baked goods.

Boudha, 9801052333

Honacha

Serving authentic Newa food since 1934, Honacha will hve your taste buds tingling while keeping your spirit high.

Mangal Bazar

GETAWAY

Bandipur Safari Lodge

Bandipur is more than just its rich cultural heritage. Go beyond the temples and explore the jungles of the town with the Bandipur Safari Lodge.

Bandipur, 9449597880, 08229-233001

**Lake View Resort**

The resort's private huts, featuring hand crafted wooden furniture, local stone exterior and a private veranda, offer a great weekend escape.

Lake Side, Pokhara (061) 461477/463854

**Mystic Mountain**

Situated amid the forest of Nagarkot, the resort features ultra modern designs to provide world-class comfort.

Nagarkot, (01) 6200646

Hotel Heritage Bhaktapur

A Newa boutique hotel that incorporates the rich art and architecture of the ancient city of Bhaktapur.

Suryabinayak, Bhaktapur, (01) 6611628

**Jagatpur Lodge**

Jagatpur Lodge's private tents will take one to the heart of the grassland in the comfort of luxury amenities.

Jagatpur, Chitwan (01) 4221711

Pawan Sweets

For amazing dosas, naan, juju dhau and sweets. It will leave you wanting for more.

Baneshwar, Kathmandu, 9813538897

**Momotarou Restaurant**

Enjoy a scrumptious Japanese meal. Don't miss out on the soft tofu, pork cutlets and don varieties.

Sanepa Chok, Lalitpur (01) 5537385

WEEKEND WEATHER



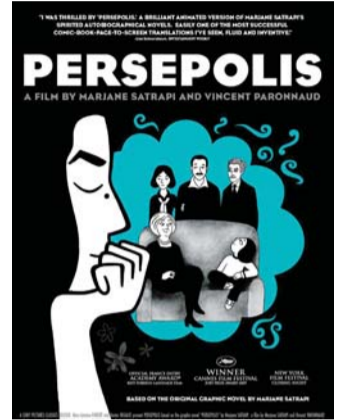
FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
27° 14°	27° 14°	27° 15°	28° 16°	27° 16°

Pre-monsoon storms

We are now going into the pre-monsoon storm season in which updrafts along the mountains riding westerlies bring regular afternoon, evening and night-time showers. This will bring down the maximum temperature to the high 20s, while showers accompanied by thunder will likely be a regular occurrence during the weekend and beyond. The long-term forecast shows a normal monsoon in most parts of Nepal, with deficient rains in the west. Skies are still hazy despite rains, due to wildfires in western Nepal and duststorms in India.

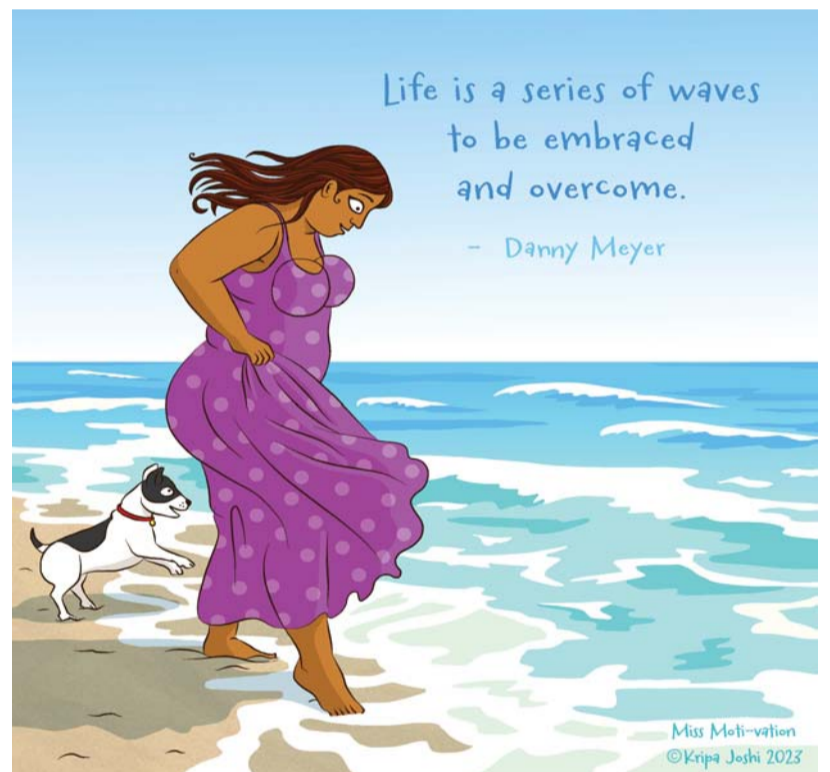
OUR PICK

From building a new life abroad and challenging gender norms to rebelling against tyrannical regimes, Persepolis (2007) follows the coming-of-age story of Marjane 'Marji' Satrapi in 1970s Iran. The animated autobiography follows the protagonist's rebellious and humorous teenage years where her childlike wonder and fascination for the world do not align with the values of an Islamic fundamentalist government in Iran and her time in Vienna where she is sent for higher studies. From navigating life and survival abroad, handling tricky relationships, and exploring questions of identity, Marje's journey takes her back to her home where the world she once knew is no longer the same.



MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



आगलागी हुन नदिन चनाखो बनौं

- खाना पकाइसकेपछि आगो, ग्याँस चुलो, स्तोभ वा हिटर निभाऔं ।
- सिलिन्डरको रेगुलेटर, पाइप वा चुलोबाट ग्याँस लिक भए/ नभएको यकिन गरौं ।
- ग्याँसको गन्ध आए बेवास्ता नगरौं ।
- सलाई, लाइटर बालबालिकाले भेट्टाउने ठाउँमा नराखौं ।
- दाउरा बालेर खाना पकाइसकेपछि पानी छ्यापेर आगो निभाऔं ।
- चुरोट, तमाखु, चिलिम, सुल्पा नखाऔं । खाएमा आगो राम्ररी निभाऔं ।
- बिजुलीका तार, प्लग, स्वीच वा वायरिड ठीक अवस्थामा भए/ नभएको जाँच गरौं ।
- घरबस्ती नजिकै पोखरी, ट्याङ्की वा अरु कुनै तरिकाले पानीको जोहो गरिराखौं ।

आगलागीजन्य विपद्बाट बच्न चनाखो बनौं ।



नेपाल सरकार
विज्ञापन बोर्ड

Australian gallery returns stolen strut to Nepal

A 13th-century wooden strut stolen from a Patan temple finally comes home from Australia after almost 50 years

■ Ashish Dhakal

Near Pimbahal Pokhari in Patan is a vast courtyard lined with historic Newa houses. At the centre is the two-tiered pagoda of Ratneswar Mahadev.

The original carvings on the windows, doors, cornices date back at least to the 14th century. However, radio-carbon analysis of a sample taken from the western doorframe of the temple suggests a date somewhere between 1020 and 1210 CE, making the 8m-tall temple one of the oldest tiered structures in Kathmandu Valley.

Sixteen beautifully carved wooden struts support the temple roofs, and most of these were stolen in the 1970s, along with the other wooden carvings of the temple.

By the 1980s, the temple had further deteriorated, the roof had collapsed and all but two of the temple's original primary struts had been stolen. Those only survived because one was buried in debris inside and another was taken by a sympathetic neighbour for safekeeping, and both are currently on display at the Patan Museum.

One of the stolen struts was finally returned to Patan this week from Australia's Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW) where it was located in 2001, almost 50 years after it was stolen. The strut will be housed in Patan Museum for now.

AGNSW Director Michael Brand formally handed over the strut to Heramba Raj Rajopadhyay, the head priest of the Ratneswar Temple.



Patan's Ratneswar Mahadev temple from where the now returned wooden strut was stolen nearly 50 years ago.

SUMAN NEPALI

In attendance were Australia's Assistant Foreign Minister Tim Watts and Mayor of Lalitpur Metropolitan City Chiri Babu Maharjan.

Watts said at the ceremony: "In 1975, thieves took it, illegally removed it. A collector acquired it, treasured it. When he died, he donated it. It sat in an Australian art gallery, which exhibited it, honoured it. People came to see it, were moved by its elegance and craft. But it didn't belong there either – that wasn't its home."

Thousands of stone, metal and

wooden heritage have been stolen from the Kathmandu Valley since the 1970s and, as with many of these artefacts, how this particular strut was smuggled out of the country remains a mystery.

What is known is that in the intervening years, the strut changed hands until it reached Alex Biancardi, an Australian-British collector of Asian art. Coming from an old family from Alexandria in Egypt, Biancardi arrived in Australia in 1947 after a stint in the air force, where he became a textile trader.

He returned to France but would frequently revisit Australia. He died in November 1998, bequeathing much of his collections to the AGNSW, including the Ratneswar strut in 2000.

Within a year scholar Mary Slusser informed the gallery that she had taken photographs of the struts before they were stolen. The gallery began its own research to find out more about where it came from, but because of the turmoil in Nepal after the royal massacre could not return it.

Brand first visited Nepal with his brother in 1973 when he was only 15 and met architectural conservator John Sanday who was then leading restoration work on the Hanuman Dhoka. "Nepal changed my life, and ultimately led to me studying the art of South Asia before becoming a curator, and then an art museum director," he said.

Brand would then later join the J Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles in 2005 as its director. In 2010, the Getty was under extreme pressure from the Italian and Greek governments to return Etruscan antiquities. Getty eventually returned 45 artefacts to Italy.

Back in Nepal, restoration of the temple began in earnest in 1992 by the KVPT and World Monuments Fund (WMF). Replicas of the stolen struts were designed based on Slusser's photographs and the caretaker's memories by Indra Kaji Shilpakar in 1998. But immediately after the first restoration, one of the strut reproductions and the toran were stolen, with the most recent theft 10 years ago.

The discussions between the gallery and Nepal government were once again hampered by the 2015 earthquake. But the strut was formally deaccessioned by the gallery in 2022, and the governor of New South Wales signed off on the return. Two other struts from the Ratneswar Temple have since been located by Lost Arts of Nepal: one in the collection of Chino Roncoroni, and other with Theresa McCullough in London. 🇳🇵

Go online for longer version of this article with more pictures, and an interview with Tim Watts.

TATA MOTORS
Connecting Aspirations

TATA

INTRODUCING
NEXON EV MAX
MOVES YOU TO THE MAX

INTRODUCTORY PRICE
NPR 46.49 LAKH*



go.ev

POWERED BY

ZIPTRON
Advanced Electric Drive Experience

RANGE MAX

453 km* DRIVING RANGE

40.5 kWh BATTERY PACK

MULTI-MODE REGEN

GETS CHARGED IN 56 MINS*

PERFORMANCE MAX

100 kW ELECTRIC MOTOR POWER

0-100 km/h IN < 9* SECONDS

250 Nm INSTANT TORQUE

MULTI DRIVE MODES

SAFETY MAX

ADVANCED ESP* WITH I-VBAC

ALL FOUR DISC BRAKES

ELECTRONIC PARKING BRAKE WITH AUTOHOLD

IP67 RATED BATTERY AND MOTOR

LUXURY MAX

ELECTRIC SUNROOF

JEWEL CONTROL KNOB

AIR PURIFIER WITH AQI DISPLAY

LEATHERETTE VENTILATED SEATS

SIPRADI TRADING PVT. LTD.,

An ISO 9001:2015 and ISO 45001:2018 Certified Company

Toll Free No.: 16600155777, 9801575777

For inquiry, give us a call at 9801013449

For online booking



SIPRADI

More pre-monsoon forest fires

Government inaction, legal ambiguity, climate change and disregard for traditional knowledge increase wildfire risk

■ **Raju Jhallu Prasad and Sujan Khanal**

Four people from Arghakhanchi and one from Dailekh died last week from injuries sustained while trying to put out wildfires fanned by high winds near their communities. Ten more people were injured in a forest blaze in Dailekh's Aathbis Municipality.

NASA satellite data shows that there were wildfires in 1,196 locations in the last five months, out of which 808 of the fires were under the Division Forest Office, while 388 were in national parks. Of the 808 fires within the purview of the district forest office, most occurred within the Lamjung Division Forest Office.

Meanwhile, forests in the Chitwan National Park and the buffer zone have recorded 100 fires: the most out of any protected area. Bagmati Province, with 278 fires, had the highest number of wildfires. More than 80% of wildfires in Nepal occur during the dry season between February to May, reaching its peak in mid-April. According to the Department of Forestry and Land Conservation, wildfires burn 200,000 hectares of forest area in Nepal each year, causing an estimated loss of more than Rs2 billion annually.

According to the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority (NDRRMA), 769 people have died and 2,568 have been injured in 18,791 wildfires in Nepal from 2013 to 2023, and the financial loss has been worth more than Rs22 billion.

One reason there are more fires is because there are just more forests. Nepal's forest cover doubled in the past 30 years, and since they are strictly protected there is a lot of dry flammable material in the undergrowth.

Anil Pokharel, executive head of NDRRMA, says that wildfires have increased tenfold in the last decade and that there have been five times as many wildfires this year than there were last year mainly because

of a prolonged winter drought. "We did not expect that there would be such a large number of forest fires this year," adds Pokharel. "It has been horrific."

Deputy Secretary and wildfire expert Sundar Sharma says that inadequate record-keeping measures mean the actual numbers of wildfires are higher than official figures. The lack of detailed study of wildfires has also meant that there has been no preparation and preparedness plan, and by the time work starts, it is too late.

Rameshwar Marhatta, joint secretary at the NDRRMA, says that even as fires rage across the country, the authorities have not been able to do much more than provide first response. "Right now, we have just been delivering firefighting equipment from district to district, and as such we have not been able to properly study the wildfires," he adds. "This is because we lack manpower, and Sundar Sharma is the only wildfire expert we currently have on the team."

According to the report, Amplified Drought Trend in Nepal Increases the Potential for Himalayan Wild Fire by Binod Pokharel, associate professor at Tribhuvan University's Central Department of Water and Meteorology, wildfires in Nepal will increase by 12% by 2030, 30% by 2050, and 50% by the end of this century as the climate crisis intensifies along the Himalaya.

It's getting hot out here

Most of the wildfires are human induced. Early summer is the peak season when herders and farmers set fire to crop residue or pastures to make green shoots grow when the rains come. But with long winter droughts, the slopes are tinder dry and the fires spread out of control when they are fanned by up-valley winds.

Strict rules to protect national parks and community forests also means there is a lot of dry biomass in the jungle floor, which makes it easy for forest to spread -- especially where highways pass



AMIT MACHAMASI / NT ARCHIVE

through nature reserves like Bardia, Chitwan, or Parsa.

"In the past, forest fires used to be naturally occurring, but at present, they happen increasingly due to human factors, either unintentional or deliberate," says forester Bhola Bhattarai, "People have been known to set fire to the forests to hide evidence of theft of flora and fauna, smuggling, and even to plant new plants."

Research conducted by Monash University in Australia found that climate change directly contributes to increasing wildfires globally. An article published in the New England Journal of Medicine noted that climate change helps fuel oxygen and fire sources.

Climate change has also brought about changes in rainfall patterns, leading to more frequent and prolonged droughts across the world. A 2021 report published in German Watch had Nepal as the ninth most vulnerable country in

the world to the effects of climate change. But lifestyle changes have contributed just as significantly to increasing wildfires, says Nurendra Aryal, chief conservation officer of the Api-Nampa Conservation Area. Mass migration from villages to cities and outside Nepal has meant that forest management has fallen behind, undermining traditional practices that helped in preventing forest fires.

Indeed, across Nepal's villages, the practice of collecting and managing dry leaves, twigs and branches, and firewood that litter the forest floors and barren farmlands which catch fire quickly during the dry season have been all but abandoned. Managing dry leaves and twigs has become a major challenge. Cattle-rearing has stopped, and consequently, the number of people dependent on the forest for their livelihood has decreased.

"Our traditional practice

of collecting forest and farm debris and utilising them must be encouraged," says Aryal. "The leaves, for instance, can be collected and turned into charcoal and then sold."

An apathetic government

Nepal's Ministry of Forests introduced the Forest Fire Management Strategy in 2010, but the implementation has been lax. A budget of Rs13 billion has been assigned to the Ministry of Forests this fiscal year. Of this, only Rs22 million has been set aside for wildfire management. Meanwhile, Rs1.6 billion has been allocated for the NDRRMA, out of which Rs5 million has already been spent on wildfire control so far.

The government sends about Rs500,000 annually to each forest office for wildfire control. A part of it is used to purchase firefighting equipment including fireproof jackets, helmets, gloves, backpacks

Thunderstruck in Nepal

Climate change and increased human activity make lightning strikes even more deadly

■ **Shristi Karki**

Three people who had gone yarsagumba picking in Darchula were struck by lightning on Saturday evening. The injured were airlifted to hospital by the Army.

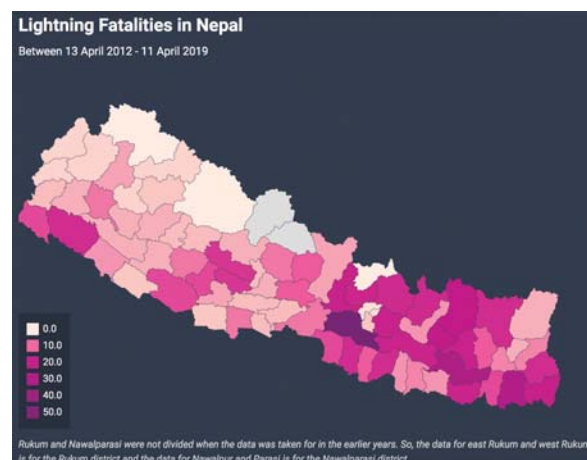
On Monday, a family of four was injured when lightning struck them as they slept in their home in Dailekh.

Lightning mostly occurs high above the earth's surface and is harmless, but cloud-to-ground strikes—which make for around 10% of all lightning—can be lethal.

According to the National Disaster Risk Reduction Management Authority (NDRRMA), there have been 45 lightning strikes just in the last 30 days which killed five and injured 42, and also killing 142 livestock.

Lightning strikes are more frequent during the current pre-monsoon season in Nepal and also spark forest fires. Nine people have died from lightning strikes in 2023, four in March, three in April, and so far two in May. 80 people have been injured.

"Lightning strikes are becoming more frequent and violent," says climate expert Ngamindra Dahal, adding that there are more casualties because of greater human mobility.



In the last 10 years, lightning accounted for the third-highest number of deaths due to disasters with 905 fatalities, ranking after the 2015 earthquakes and landslides. And yet, there is little awareness or preparedness.

Now, studies have linked the increase in intensity and frequency of thunderstorms to climate change induced convection systems.

"These changes in climate and weather dynamics make a case for the change in

frequency and intensity of lightning strikes being climate change-driven," adds Dahal.

Nepal's mountains have always been vulnerable to cloudbursts and lightning strikes, with districts like Makwanpur and Tanahu being the most vulnerable.

But lightning is a natural disaster that can be prevented in cost-effective manner, at least its impacts, says Dahal. It can be as simple as local governments marking off areas with frequent cloudbursts and putting

out information about when the public needs to avoid the areas.

Another option is to set up public shelters made up of lightning arresters, especially near picnic zones, or areas where farmers take their livestock to graze.

For its part, the NDRRMA on its website allows people to parse which lightning strikes are dangerous by counting from 1 to 30. If thunder sounds within 30 seconds of a lightning flash, seek shelter immediately for at least half

an hour as those are closer to the ground, and thus more dangerous.

"Our research has so far mostly been limited to keeping records of death and injuries, and not so much looking into evolving climate and weather dynamics or the increasing intensity and coverage of lightning strikes," says Dahal. "But we can give early warning based on Doppler radar mapping for location of possible lightning storms." 🇳🇵

and the like, while some of it goes towards conducting awareness programmes.

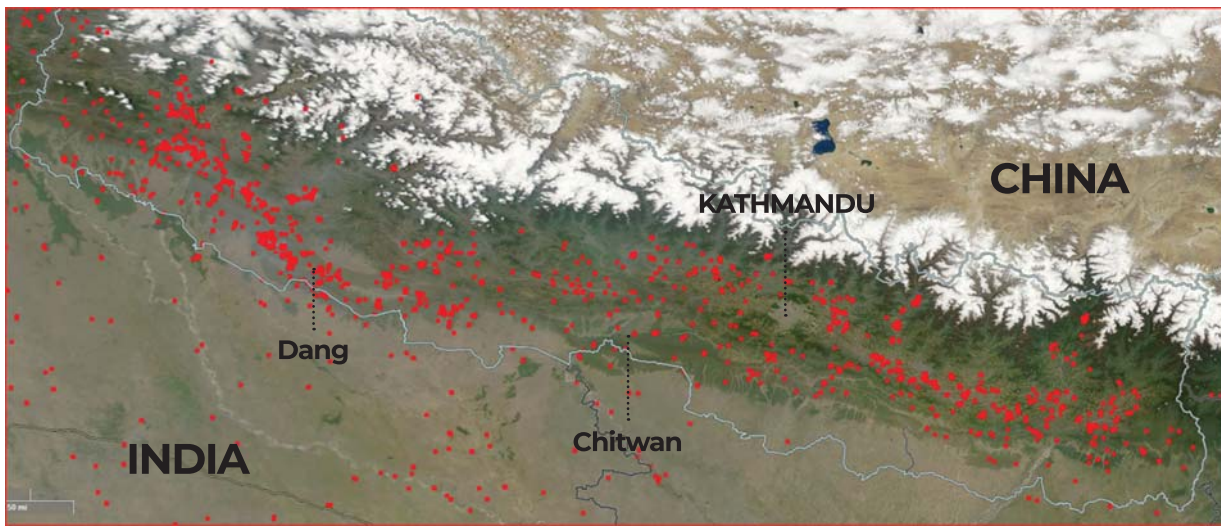
"Aside from budget gaps, Nepal's forest offices lack up-to-date resources as well as qualified personnel to fight wildfires," says wildfire expert Sundar Sharma. "We cannot partake in effective and result-oriented work as long as we do not have an integrated management system and a responsible institution."

Nepal Police, Nepal Army and the Armed Police Force have been coordinating with forest research and training centres under the Ministry of Forest to control wildfires. But the efforts will be successful only if there is sufficient budget, necessary equipment and skilled human resource, says Rajendra Khadka of the Armed Police Force.

Meanwhile, the government has been trying to control fires with water bombing helicopters, which is not very effective. "Rather than have manpower and up-to-date equipment, the government has been conducting unnecessary stunts by using helicopters to fight wildfires, which is expensive, cumbersome, and impossible to send to every single affected area," says Lokraj Nepal of the Chitwan Forest Division.

Those who set forest fires are punishable under The Forests Act, 2019 and can be imprisoned for three years, pay a fine of Rs60,000, or both. However, authorities have no information about how many offenders have been prosecuted so far. Four people have been arrested for their alleged involvement in deadly Arghakhanchi fires.

In 2020 the government rendered its Scientific Forest Management Guideline, 2014 null and void, effectively banning the collection, transportation and felling of wood. Consumers now have no incentive to protect



Infrared hotspots detected by the NASA FIRMS Satellite over Nepal on 12 May at noon.

NASA FIRMS

the forests and this has led to an indifference towards wildfire control and increased forest fires, say experts.

However, Sadhu Ram Chaulagain, president of the Hetaunda chapter of the Federation of Community Forestry Users Nepal, refutes such claims. He says: "The truth is that the drought during last year's winter and the increasing wildfires have stretched out local manpower thin. Otherwise, our community has a deep connection to the forest."

Pravin Bidari, chief of the Forest Division Office, Bardia says that more than half of the 281 community forest users in his division have been actively fighting wildfires, a sentiment which is echoed by Bharti Pathak, president of the Federation of Community Forestry Users Nepal.

"It's not like anyone can sleep in peace while fires rage around their house. But one is not able to do much without technology or adequate manpower," she says, adding that if the government were to provide advanced equipment to more than 22,000 community

forests across the country to facilitate wildfire control, locals would not have to show up at the scene dressed inadequately—armed simply with buckets and sticks.

"Local and provincial governments have shown no desire to coordinate with us," Pathak continues. "After the fire is over, they will send someone over to hold a wildfire-related awareness program, and consider their job done."

Nepal lacks a clear policy on wildfire control, and as such, there has long been confusion over authority and jurisdiction in all three tiers of the government. Home Ministry spokesperson Jitendra Basnet argues that the NDRRMA carries more responsibility over fire control than the ministries.

Meanwhile, Devesh Mani Tripathi of the Department of Forests and Soil Conservation, which is under the Ministry of Forests and Environment, says that since the provincial government has the authority to manage national forests, wildfire control should also fall under its purview.

"A large amount of money has

been sent to the provinces for fire control, so it is them who have a major role to play," says Tripathi. Bagmati province has had a forest department since 2018, while the Madhes province has recently begun smart patrolling in forests. But much as the provinces have made efforts, Tripathi says, a lack of budget and an abundance of legal hurdles have caused problems.

But the real issue lies with the fact that the government is yet to take wildfire control seriously, says Sundar Sharma: "So far, we haven't had an accountable authority to oversee wildfire control. Our forests will continue to burn and Nepalis will continue to suffer as long as we do not have an institutional body to address the disaster."

Increasing wildfires also threaten Nepal's diverse ecosystems, putting biodiversity at risk. Alternatively, when fires raze the habitats of animals, it has led to an increase in human-animal conflicts.

But while western Tarai is most impacted by wildfires, Nepal's

low-risk Himalayan region has not been spared. Much of yarsagumba, cypress trees, birch trees and other vegetation have been lost to increasing fires in the Himalaya where it takes up to 15 years for a plant to grow by one metre.

"There is such diversity of species in the Himalaya even within relatively small areas that it is impossible to undo the damage caused by wildfires," says Narayan Ghimire, an associate professor at the Department of Botany at Tribhuvan University. "We risk losing it all if something is not done."

In the Manaslu Conservation Area, 200 hectares of land have been subject to wildfires caused by yarsagumba hunters and cattle herders who believe that setting fire to the land will cause the grass to grow. Manaslu Conservation Area chief Pashupati Adhikari notes that situations like this are the result of an inactive nature conservation fund.

Annapurna Conservation Area has also seen an increase in wildfire this year, affecting the habitats of musk deer, snow leopards, and the Himalayan blue sheep. "Large animals may be able to escape wildfires, but animals with young babies and birds that have just laid eggs will not abandon their offspring and will perish, as will small reptiles, insects, and ants," explains ACAP head Lokendra Adhikari.

In the Tarai, construction of fire lines, early warning systems, and fire control patrol dispatched to 67 locations within the protected area have helped greatly in controlling wildfires, says Chitwan National Park chief Jil Bahadur Pun.

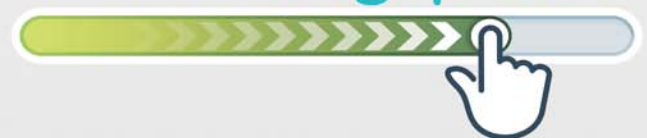
Says Pun: "Having fire lines has meant that the wildfires do not spread from one location to another, which is why there has not been a big threat to the biodiversity in Chitwan National Park so far." ❑



"Want to create your plan based on your needs?"

Get your My Plan today with customization to make it truly your own.

Ncell my plan



Activate on Ncell App now!



or visit your nearest Ncell Center

For more information

9007



Finding a niche in Nepal

A Nepali migrant returnee has set up a successful business back home and has some tips for others like him



DIASPORA
DIARIES 32

■ Babare Bahadur Bomjan

This is the 32nd instalment of *Diaspora Diaries*, a regular series in *Nepali Times* with stories of Nepalis living and working abroad.

I have worked overseas for nearly two decades, hopping around the Gulf countries from Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar to Kuwait. I even landed up in Seychelles. I came to Nepal twice but left again for better earnings overseas.

After my SLC, I started working as a waiter for a salary of Rs450. I was also a sportsman, and worked as a wushu trainer. When a friend who had returned from Singapore came to visit me, he inspired me to go abroad for a secure future. Until then, I had not considered moving overseas. I handed him my freshly minted passport and he applied on my behalf.

Before I knew it, we were both headed to Saudi Arabia to work as trolley boys in 1996.

My starting overseas earnings was just Rs13,000. By the time I returned in 2011 from Dubai, I was



Babare Bahadur Bomjan in the UAE in 2010.

earning up to Rs400,000 a month in a managerial position.

But after all that time being away, I no longer had a reason to linger around overseas. My family was settled, and I was financially stable. It was time to go home.

After returning, I worked in a café for some time but I wanted to start something on my own. Having grown up working in the hospitality line, starting a restaurant seemed like a natural next step. Momos were the obvious choice, but I knew I had to do it differently to stand out.

My research showed that extremely spicy Korean ramen noodles were very popular among young Nepalis. This was the niche

I could fill in the momo market where customers could adjust their spice levels.

I chose a name that would stick: 'Akbare Jhol Momo'. We sourced akbare chilis directly from farmers to keep costs low so it would be affordable for common people. Rent is high in Nepal but during the pandemic lockdown, I lucked out even though it was a risky move given the uncertainty.

It has now been three years, and we are doing well with three outlets in Kathmandu. The restaurants are always busy with people enjoying the hit that the hot chili gives them, without causing a dent in their pockets. My hunch about the demand for spicy momos in Nepal



One of the outlets of Akbare Jhol Momo in Kathmandu.

was fortunately right.

Everyone wants to go abroad these days. There are Nepalis who earn over Rs1 million there and those who earn only Rs30,000. The struggle is much harder if we go overseas without any real experience and skills, which later also impedes our ability to climb the career ladder.

We now have good hospitality management schools in Nepal where people can get degrees in the field. With the right education and experience, more Nepalis will make it to leadership positions not just as chefs, but also in front of house positions.

I returned to Nepal despite a handsome salary. Being home

brings a sense of comfort and satisfaction that I cherish. I am around family, provide youth with jobs, am connected with my community and get to follow my passion. The overseas journey had been full of missed moments and sacrifices. Right after my marriage in 2002, I had just spent 19 days with my wife before returning to Dubai. When I met my eldest daughter for the first time, she was already three months. These were at a time when phone calls were still expensive.

The trepidation of leaving cushy jobs to try something back home is understandable. I have talented friends who have worked overseas as chefs who returned to Nepal, failed with their ventures and were compelled to remigrate.

I myself had started a restaurant in 2004 that did not work out. I had an investment plan, but not a plan to draw customers nor an understanding of the Nepal market to make informed decisions about potential locations, target populations, lowest cost sourcing strategies and what we could bring to the market that is refreshing and new.

Money by itself is not enough. Customers won't come automatically no matter how much you invest. The invitation needs to reach target customers in a way that appeals to them. In fact, I advise people to start small and build gradually, instead of gambling away all their hard-earned money. 🇳🇵

Translated from a conversation with the author.

FORTUNER

IT'S NO FUN WITHOUT KICKING UP SOME DUST




TOYOTA

Move your world

