



@INDIAINNEPAL

## Walking together

Nepal's Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal's 4-day official visit to India this week is being keenly watched in Kathmandu and these borderlands of the Tarai.



**BORDERLINES**  
Chandra Kishore

Relations between the two asymmetric South Asian neighbours today are neither 'chilly' nor 'warm', and are a lot more cordial after the departure of UML Prime Minister KP Oli in 2022.

The visit is happening as Dahal tries to keep his 9-party coalition intact, even if it meant getting a presidential pardon for Resham Chaudhary. The RSP left the coalition, and the RPP is trying to revive the Hindu monarchy.

Stung by the BJP's defeat in Karnataka, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is building up for elections next year with an aggressive Hindu-right agenda. Nepal could fit into

that game plan, and Hindutva wind is blowing across the open border.

Dahal got flak for cancelling what was to be his first visit to China in March to attend the Boao Forum in Hainan. But he is trying to balance things by meeting a Chinese Communist Party official from Yunnan just before flying to Delhi, and sending off a Maoist Centre delegation to China on tour.

Dahal needs to balance his need to extract concessions from Modi on river projects, air routes, infrastructure assistance, while at the same time not be seen in Nepal as kowtowing too much. Till press time Thursday, it remained to be seen if he has appeased India, or if the visit will be just cosmetic.

The chronic problem in India-Nepal relations has been a mutual trust deficit. What does Nepal expect from India, and what does India want to do in Nepal? Bilateral relations should not depend on which leader is in power in New Delhi or Kathmandu, it needs continuity so citizens of both countries benefit.

In 2014, India had changed its

approach to Nepal by appearing magnanimous during Modi's first visit. But that goodwill collapsed with the blockade and bilateral relations chilled as non-political actors started directing policy.

Leaders in Nepal, too, tend to oscillate between sanctifying India or vilifying it. This might serve their immediate political interests, but does long-term harm to mutual ties. Leaders are also fickle and erratic in their stance: during the conflict Dahal threatened to wage a 'tunnel war' against India.

The visit comes amidst heightened geopolitical tension in the region. An enemy of an enemy is a friend for America, and India's international stature has risen with its buoyant economy. Nepal may be forced to choose sides, and will need to deploy all its diplomatic skills to maintain equilibrium.

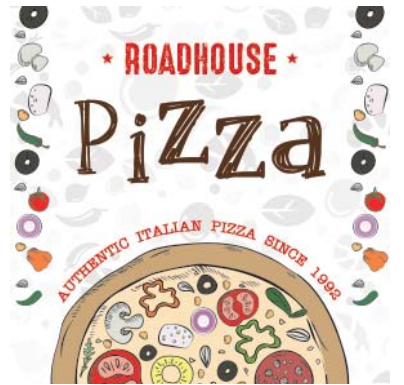
India's rulers may also need to ponder why traditional close ties with Nepal are frayed. New Delhi strategists appear sanguine that whatever the noise on social media, its tactics in Nepal are working.

Nowhere is the people-to-people

relations between India and Nepal felt as keenly as here in the Tarai. The open border, cultural and family links and trade bind the two countries together. Even so, there is a feeling that India is unfeeling. The flood season is looming again, and there are new embankments on the other side. These floods will get worse if quarrying the Chure for export resumes, affecting not just the Tarai but also Bihar.

Nepal-India relations have always been defined by how well or badly governments in their capitals get along. The media tends to amplify nationalism on both sides. Geography, history, culture, trade, politics, religion have kept links across the border stable all these years, but Nepalis in the Tarai are wondering why New Delhi hobnobs so much with movers and shakers in Kathmandu.

Bilateral relations must not be limited to periodic summits, we need to see improvement in the lives of half of Nepal's population that lives in the borderlands through better connectivity and environmental safeguards.



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## Political environment

The health of Nepalis is being seriously affected by air pollution, contaminated water, plastic garbage and the impact of the climate crisis on weather, water supply and agriculture.

These are a result of neglect by the state, which means we have it in our power to remedy them. All it needs is political will.

The new budget presented to Parliament on Monday, however, was one step forward two steps back. It increased the tax on electric SUVs, and increased it for battery-powered public utility vans and smaller e-cars -- which goes against the government's stated decarbonisation targets.

The budget reiterated the commitment to promote paper and cloth bags and replace plastic. That is timely because #BeatPlasticPollution is also the theme of World Environment Day on 5 June.

This is not the first time a government has banned plastic bags. In 2011, it announced a complete ban on the production, import, sale, distribution, and use of plastic bags thinner than 20 microns. But political lobbying by plastic pellet importers was too strong to enforce it.

So, the government later made a symbolic gesture of prohibiting plastic bags within Singha Darbar. That could not even be implemented within the central government secretariat in Kathmandu.

Since plastics are so convenient to use, an immediate and outright ban will not work. But there is nothing stopping us from recycling, reducing and removing them.

Kathmandu Mayor Balendra Shah's electoral platform included solving the capital's garbage problem by making citizens segregate trash at source. More than a year later, there has been no move to sort trash.

Seventy percent of Kathmandu's waste is biodegradable, and can be turned into compost. The rest is mostly plastic, paper, metal and glass which are already collected by informal waste workers for recycling.

Also on World Environment Day, let us commit to protecting the Chure Hills where indiscriminate mining and quarrying by corrupt contractors will inundate the Tarai

and the plains of Bihar (see page 1).

Extracting sand from the beds of seasonal Chure rivers have worsened floods downstream, lowered the water table, affecting farms and livelihoods in the Tarai and in Bihar.

How ironic that the Finance Minister's budget allocated Rs1.05 billion for the President Chure Conservation Project when the coalition government is planning to allow contractors to mine boulders and sand.

Nepal is now all set to have year-round electricity surplus with an estimated 4,500MW of peak power generation by 2024. But we are not allowed to export more than 420MW to India, which is just as well because Nepal should actually be using renewable energy to reduce fossil fuel imports for transport, industry and household cooking.

But Nepal is going in the opposite direction to increase fossil fuel imports by signing off on the construction of two additional Indian petroleum pipeline projects during Prime Minister Dahal's visit to India this week.

Reducing diesel, petrol and LPG import is a win-win-win because it would not just cut the trade deficit, but improve public health, and use surplus power that would go waste.

Successive governments have tried to enforce green stickers for vehicles that pass emission tests. But these stickers can be bought off the counter. How come the anti-drink and drive campaign with breathalyzer tests has succeeded and reduced road accidents by 80%, while testing the exhaust pipes of vehicles has failed so miserably?

And let's not blame everything on climate change. Increasing global average temperature is not responsible for the garbage problem. Chure exploitation is pure greed, and corruption in high places. Increasing the tax on public electric transport is stupidity.

We know about Nepal's environment crises, we know the solutions, we need the will to implement them. Accountable government, a clear strategy on interventions and a functioning democracy gives us the power to deliver solutions.

Nepal's environmental crises are a direct result of democratic decay.

## 20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

### 1 June 2001

It has been 22 years since the royal massacre that decimated king Birendra's immediate family. His brother Gyanendra ascended the throne and within seven years Nepal had abolished the monarchy and turned into a federal republic. Such was the love for king Birendra that many Nepalis believe the monarchy would have survived if he was still alive.

True decentralisation and devolution of power is still a mirage in Nepal, top leaders in the main political parties are unwilling as ever to let go of power. This has made it easy for anti-federalism sentiments to grow. In fact, the royal-right RPP is trying to bring Gyanendra back as a king for the third time.

Excerpts from page 1 report 20 years ago this week on issue #147 30 May – 5 June 2003 on the second anniversary of the massacre:

A tragedy on such a scale will leave scars on the national psyche that will never completely heal. All we can do is try to deal with the legacy, learn its lessons. The single most significant consequence of June First was that King



Gyanendra became king.

Last year, in a candid television interview, the king told Durga Nath Sharma: "I am not like my brother, I can't sit idly by while the country sinks deeper into crisis." He appointed a cabinet of trusted political figures and technocrats, then got Col Narayan Singh Pun to forge a ceasefire with the Maoists.

The five parliamentary parties first went into a deep sulk, but managed to launch a united street agitation. In reality, they felt left out of the peace process, and had dark misgivings about the country being dragged back to pre-1990 days. It is a measure of how low the stock of the political parties has fallen that there hasn't been a groundswell of public support for the anti-royal agitation. But surveys (Nepali Times, #140) have shown that the people overwhelmingly reject a return to absolute monarchy as well.

From archive material of Nepali Times of the past 20 years, site search: [www.nepalitimes.com](http://www.nepalitimes.com)

## ONLINE PACKAGES



Join us on a trip to Langtang to get up close of the Hungung Microhydro Project, the first scheme to lower the water level of a glacial lake formed by global warming, and at the same time generate electricity for a tourism-dependent valley. Subscribe to the Nepali Times YouTube channel for exclusive videos.



Some 15 million people worldwide are at risk from flooding caused by glacial lakes. There are 3,252 glacier lakes in Nepal, many of them potentially dangerous. Tso Rolpa has grown seven times since 1957, if it bursts it could affect up to 650,000 people downstream. Watch video about this scenic but dangerous lake. See page 6-7 for coverage of increased risk of glacier lake outburst floods in Nepal.

### NEPAL-INDIA TIES

The article highlights the complexities and challenges in Nepal-India relations, emphasising the need for trust, continuity, and mutual benefit between the two countries ('Nepal PM to India to reboot ties', Chandra Kishore). It correctly points out that the state of relations should not be determined solely by the leaders in power but should consider the interests and well-being of the citizens of both nations. The author rightly criticises the media's role in undermining the friendship between the people and governments of India and Nepal. India's unfeeling attitude towards Nepal, particularly in relation to floods and border security issues needs better communication, cooperation, and understanding between the two countries, especially in addressing the grievances of the people living in the border regions.

Rak Hee

### #EVEREST70

We commemorate the extraordinary accomplishment of Tenzing Norgay and Sir Edmund Hillary exactly 70 years ago, when they became the first people to stand atop the world's highest mountain. We recommend reading Lisa Choegyal's article ('Everest 70 years on', #1163) on their lives and legacy in Nepali Times.

### Royal Norwegian Embassy

■ Nepal and UK are two very intertwined countries. Trust prevails.

Alan Roadnight

■ As always, Lisa Choegyal's words of heart-warming experiences is brilliant. Palms joined for sharing this.

Jo Sanders

### HITI

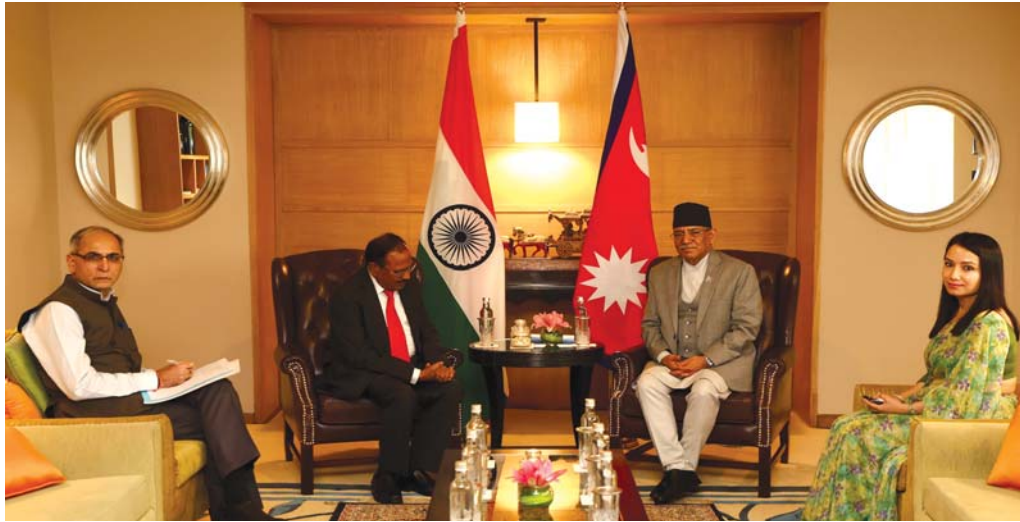
It is good the Valley's governments have included local heritage, language and culture in the school curriculum ('Water for the ages', Anita Bhetwal, #1161). This will help to spread greater appreciation of these achievements.

Kamal Ratna Tuladhar

■ A key challenge is that all surface water is presently polluted, unfit for consumption and basic use, flowing out of the Valley. Plus all pokharis have been converted to ceremonial confined unmanaged algae-infested concrete tanks not even suitable for groundwater recharge. Let us wake up to the bigger picture. And climate change is the dengue threat.

Garry De La Pomerai

## 1,000 WORDS



PRADEEP RAJ ONTA/ RSS

**DAUGHTER ALSO RISES:** Indian Foreign Secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra and Indian National Security Adviser Ajit Doval with visiting Nepali Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal and his daughter Ganga Dahal in New Delhi on Wednesday 31 May.



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## WHAT'S TRENDING



### First Native American on world's tallest peak

by Naresh Newar

Jacob Weasel, MD, of the Cheyenne River Sioux tribe combines medicine with mountaineering to empower indigenous communities. Watch videos from the summit as Weasel scales Mt Everest this season on nepalitimes.com



Most reached and shared on Facebook

### Tax system widens rich-poor gap

by Ramesh Kumar

The rich-poor gap in Nepal is state-sponsored violence, and is detrimental to stability and prosperity. This is made worse by a skewed tax system in which the poor are taxed disproportionate to their income. Visit the Nepali Times website for details.



Most popular on Twitter

### Everest 70 years on

by Lisa Choegyal

If you take a look around the cast of characters who define Nepal in the international arena, none loom so large in popular imagination as Tenzing Norgay and Edmund Hillary. Don't miss this anniversary longread chronicling the lives and legacy of the legendary climbers. Join the online discussion.



Most commented



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## QUOTE TWEETS



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Why is Resham Chaudhary's release from prison, where he was serving a life sentence after being convicted of masterminding the killing of policemen in Tikapur, significant for Nepali politics?



कमल गाहा मगर @kamalKThapa

I don't know how good or bad this decision is but it can definitely impact the country if more ethnic related planned bloodbath take place in #Nepal in future.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Since Nepal has existed as a nation state, one thing has remained constant: the privileged and new-rich remain in power, while the poor are as neglected. The gap has got wider because the political-economy is rigged in favour of an entrenched ruling class.



pigreen1 @pigreen1

Class divisions in Nepal are closely related to divisions of caste so that high caste Hindus are disproportionately represented in the corridors of power as well as among the wealthy



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# Global heating and Gulf migrant workers

Migrant workers in the desert need safety measures against heat stress this summer

Migrant workers in the Gulf lack health and safety protection from the region's extreme summertime heat and humidity now made worse by the climate crisis.

Extreme heat exposure can cause rash, cramps, heat exhaustion, or heat stroke, which can be fatal or have lifelong consequences.

Heat stress is also suspected to be one of the reasons behind what is now termed as 'sudden death syndrome'. Outdoor migrant workers mostly from South Asia engaged in construction and agriculture are disproportionately affected.

"Despite substantial scientific evidence on the devastating health impact of exposure to extreme heat, Gulf states' protection failures are causing millions of migrant workers to face grave risks, including death," says Michael Page, deputy Middle East director at Human Rights Watch (HRW).

He adds: "Gulf states should prioritise creating a comprehensive strategy to address occupational heat stress, and international organizations that claim to champion international labour rights should speak out about the issue."

Between 2021 and 2023, Human Rights Watch interviewed 90 migrant workers from Bangladesh, India, Kenya, and Nepal about heat and health safety issues in Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Researchers found that workers were unable to sufficiently recuperate from the heat, in part due to a lack of sufficient rest areas, air-conditioned accommodations and water.



S. IRFAN AHMED/IPS

Workers were not always allowed to set a safe pace either. These conditions cumulatively often lead to serious consequences, including heat-related deaths.

The average daytime temperatures in the Gulf during summer months often exceed 40°C with temperatures sometimes climbing to 55°C at over 80% humidity. All Gulf states apply a summer midday work ban that prohibits employers from continuing outdoor work during pre-defined times and months.

Qatar's 2021 legislation goes further, at least on paper, as it prohibits any outdoor work when the Wet Bulb Globe Temperature (WBGT) rises beyond 32.1°C.

Wet bulb temperature, the threshold temperature for what a healthy person can endure for several hours, is estimated to be around 30°C and 31°C in warm humid environments.

While enforcement gaps remain, the 2021 Qatari legislation is a positive foundation because the wet-bulb temperature is a more accurate tool for monitoring heat stress risks, states HRW.

Other Gulf countries should adopt similar legislation because midday work bans have failed to protect workers.

"At work [in Qatar], we had to pour out sweat from our shoes," says one former construction worker. "Our socks and t-shirts would become so soaked that we had to wring them out multiple times a day."

Multiple studies focusing on heat exposure risks in Gulf states found a strong correlation between heat stress and deaths due to cardiovascular problems and indicated that extremely hot days are associated with higher mortality risk, with migrant workers disproportionately exposed.

A study in Kuwait has found a substantial increase in the risk of occupational injuries associated with extremely hot temperatures despite the midday work ban.

Another study found that the highest heat intensity for workers in Saudi Arabia was from 9AM to noon, while the ban is in effect between noon and 3PM.

Says a UAE returnee: "While the company never tried to make us work during the summer afternoons, people would still fall ill or faint earlier in the mornings, between 10AM and 12 noon."

Adds another: "[Even] excluding these three hours... the air is as hot as fire."

Climate change has further exacerbated the problem. According to the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the Gulf's 'extreme wet-bulb temperatures are expected to approach, and possibly exceed, the

physiological threshold for human adaptability (35°C).'

Governments have also failed to enforce the inadequate heat protections they have in place. Many workers said their companies violated the rules partially or fully.

"Sometimes the employer made us continue the work [during summer ban hours] secretly. In such cases, we used to deploy some workers to guard if someone from the government or inspection department came," says another UAE returnee.

Ironically, Gulf countries where migrant workers are exposed to heat stress are the world's biggest exporters of fossil fuels and are major contributors to climate change. The hotter it gets the more air conditioners are used, and these are powered by fossil-fueled thermal power plants.

"One day I fainted at work," a worker in Saudi Arabia said. "Colleagues took me to the resting room ... and poured water on my head. Within minutes I was conscious. I rested for a while and started working again because my colleagues told me this is very common."

And yet, workers continue working because the alternative is no income. Self-pacing and maintaining work-rest schedules are useful heat mitigation strategies but it is nearly impossible under abusive supervisors or in time-bound employment projects.

Meanwhile, deaths not attributed to work-related causes, which exclude adverse health outcomes attributed to heat exposure, are not eligible for compensation under labour laws in the Gulf, and life insurance seldom covers deaths described as 'acute heart failure due to natural death.'

Says Michael Page: "To knowingly put migrant workers in harm's way without substantial protections from heat is inhumane, and Gulf states need to act with urgency ahead of the scorching summer to address these problems." 🇸🇦



**NMB BANK**  
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## Budget 2023/24

Finance Minister Prakash Sharan Mahat presented the new budget in Parliament this week of Rs1,751 trillion. Targeted economic growth rate is 6% whereas expected revenue is only Rs1,248 trillion. Each MP will be getting Rs50 million as pork barrel fund. Agriculture was allocated Rs58.98 billion, Rs30 billion of which will be used to import chemical fertilisers. Health received Rs83.99 billion with Rs8 billion for local-level hospitals, Rs1.28 billion for free medicine and Rs460 million each for infectious disease control. Education got Rs197.29 billion including Rs8.45 billion for the school day meal program and Rs3.02 billion for scholarships. Contrary to Nepal's own climate target, electric public transport has a hefty tax, smaller battery cars have higher tax than SUVs.

## Strongest airline brands

Turkish Airlines climbed several places to land 8th in an international ranking of strongest airline brands by Brand Finance. The carrier was 31st in 2022. Says Ahmet Bolat,



chairman of Turkish Airlines: "With the responsibility of being our country's national flag carrier and the power of being the airline that flies to more countries than any other airline in the world, we will continue to carry our brand to many more successes."



## Ncell Biratnagar concert

Ncell hosted a musical concert in Hatkhola, Biratnagar with performances by Deepak Bajracharya, Rhythm Band, Laure, The Elements, Sunil Pandit and more. Shiva Pariyar, Keki Adhikari and Asmita Adhikari also performed. Ncell also hosted the Durbar Marg Street festival earlier this year.



## Samsung Innovation

Samsung Innovation Campus completed a coding and programming course for students at Pulchok Campus Institute of Engineering this week. They will next be trained in artificial intelligence. The program aims to provide tech skills including Internet of Things (IoT), Big Data, Coding, and Programming.



## Loconav for XPRES-T

Customers can now track their XPRES-T electric sedan at their convenience with Sipradi's Loconav app. Operators will be able to easily see where their vehicle is, how far it has traveled and how fast the driver has driven it through the new app. Tata Motor's XPRES-T has been plying on the streets of Kathmandu for a month.

## Women empowerment

The UN Women and National Women Commission have signed a five year agreement to protect and promote the rights of women and marginalised groups in Nepal. The areas covered in the agreement include policy dialogues,



monitoring of relevant laws, and developing information, communications and education materials on gender equality and women's empowerment.

## Nepal footwear

Nepal footwear production community organised its first Lalitpur Footwear business expo this week and it was inaugurated by Lalitpur mayor Chiribabu Maharjan.



## Yamaha scooter

Yamaha launched Nepal's first hybrid scooter RayZR 125 this week. The scooter has a smart motor generator, 125 cc engine and four trims – standard, deluxe, premium and premium plus. The model has a starting price of Rs279,900 and can be ordered at Yamaha centres across the country.

## Zeeho launch

CF motors has launched Zeeho AE8 electric scooter in Nepal with a starting price of Rs490,000. The scooter comes in black and white colours, has a range of 120-140 km and 12.5 kW power. The battery takes four hours to charge.



# Mountain to desert to ocean

Nepali overseas worker rises up the ranks from cleaner to manager on a cruise ship



**DIASPORA  
DIARIES 33**

■ **Kamal Subedi**

*This is the 33<sup>rd</sup> instalment of Diaspora Diaries, a regular series in Nepali Times with stories of Nepalis living and working abroad.*

I still remember the first day I landed in the UAE in 2009. Dubai airport was sparkling clean, spotless. Outside, there was a fancy air-conditioned van with a smartly uniformed driver waiting to pick us up.

As he cruised through the wide and clean roads effortlessly, I thought to myself that the driver looked more like a pilot. But reality soon hit. It was past 3AM, and the scene outside started looking dirtier and dimmer as we drove further away from the airport. We had reached our labour camp and were dropped off in a dingy part of the city.

This was our reality, not the glamour and the glitter of the first impression. At 18, I, too, had come to work in the country as a cleaner to add to the sparkle.

Despite the disparity that quickly became evident, I found a sense of warmth in the way the Nepalis at the camp welcomed us. There were no cups, I cannot recall why. But the dais cut water bottles in half, and used the lower half to serve us tea with bread.

They went out of their way to feed us after our long journey as they told us about our new home. I will never forget their 4AM hospitality.

As I was brushing my teeth after waking up, uncertain about what awaited me, I heard someone shout out my name. It turns out two of my school friends were already working in the same company for two years. What were the odds, I thought.

I had finished Grade 12 and landed in Dubai to work so as to better my life. I used to get jealous of the village boys who came home from bidesh every two years or so for a month to relax and splurge money. It was one of those acquaintances on vacation who had advised me to make my passport.

Like other Nepali youth, this was my foreign dream. My father was getting old so I had to assume responsibility of a provider.

My induction training in Dubai, even for a cleaning job, was three weeks long. I had not thought of cleaning as a professional job, but here, it was being taught like it was a science. We were not going to mindlessly scrub floors, we were required to have a deeper understanding of the chemicals and cleaning tools.

I learnt a lot and as I scored over 80% in my assessment exam, I got placed in hotels. Those who scored lower had to work in office buildings and malls.

At the hotel the manager had been secretly watching my work. He was obviously impressed because when a supervisor left he offered me the job. At just 20, I was unsure if I was up for the task as I would have to manage people significantly older than me. But I took a chance and was promoted from cleaner to



supervisor.

Over the next nine years in the UAE, I worked in about six hotels. I could not stay put in the same place for long because once the work would start getting repetitive, I wanted to move on to better things. From a normal hotel to a five star and subsequently to a luxury five star.

I was also getting a degree in tourism on the side at an Indian-affiliated open university in Dubai. I did not manage to attend all classes because of my hectic work schedule, but I knew I needed the credentials for my future so somehow I managed to complete it.

My last employer in Dubai was Fairmont. Working at a five-star hotel has its perks. It is more professional, the staff is more competent. The managers had significantly better skills and experience that made you want to emulate them.

There were also a lot of training opportunities. Lessons from books like Emotional Intelligence and Who Moved My Cheese? were taught in ways that injected Fairmont's values in our blood. I enjoyed my work and even got the 2018 Manager of the Year award, something I had never even dreamt would happen.

At a get-together at a colleague's home, I saw a wall that was full of pictures from all over the world. I asked my friend's husband what countries he had been to. He laughed and said, "Perhaps it would be easier if you asked me what countries I have not been to." Indeed, as a flight crew, he had traveled the world.

That was a turning point in my life. I had been stuck in one country for nine years, when there was a whole wide world out there. I made it a point to look for jobs that would allow me the same kind of mobility so I could broaden my horizon.

Within a month, I identified a recruitment drive in Dubai for a cruise ship and passed the interview. I was to work on an Italian cruise ship as Assistant Chief Housekeeper. I remember the mixture of excitement and nervousness I felt when I first saw the ship at the dock: it had over 1,250 guest cabins and 800 crew cabins.

It was so gigantic that when

I tried to take pictures, the ship would not fit on my screen. My colleagues laughed at me saying it was a relatively small ship by industry standards and that they had worked in much bigger ones.

Life onboard is busy. Most of our guests are older people from all



over the world who have the time and the money to travel around. As we hustle around the clock, it is easy to forget that we are in the middle of the ocean because the vessel is a world of its own.

It does not matter where we are, really. Whether in the middle of the desert or ocean, we are working day and night to make money and provide for our families. Regardless of land or water, our lives revolve around that one day every month when we get our salary notification in our cell phone, this is what all this hustle is about. Everything else is secondary.

I have now sailed to over 45 countries across the world in 17 months. It is like reading the review of a 300-page book: you just get a little taste of what those countries have to offer. At every port stop,

we get to see the few main tourist spots, visit a couple of malls and have a meal before we hop back on to continue our journey. I make it a point to get good Indian or Nepali food, something I miss on board.

But now that I am married, I am restless again. I am not as excited about traveling and meeting new people as I have been. My longing for home, to be with family, is growing stronger by the day.

I can feel my priorities shifting, and it is just a matter of time before I act on it. 🇳🇵

*Translated from a conversation with the author. Diaspora Diaries is a regular column in Nepali Times providing a platform for Nepalis to share their experiences of living, working, studying abroad. Authentic and original entries can be sent to editors@nepalitimes.com with 'Diaspora Diaries' in the subject line.*

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# For destruction, ice is also great and will suffice

Increased risk of glacial lake outburst floods threatens lives and mega projects in the Himalaya

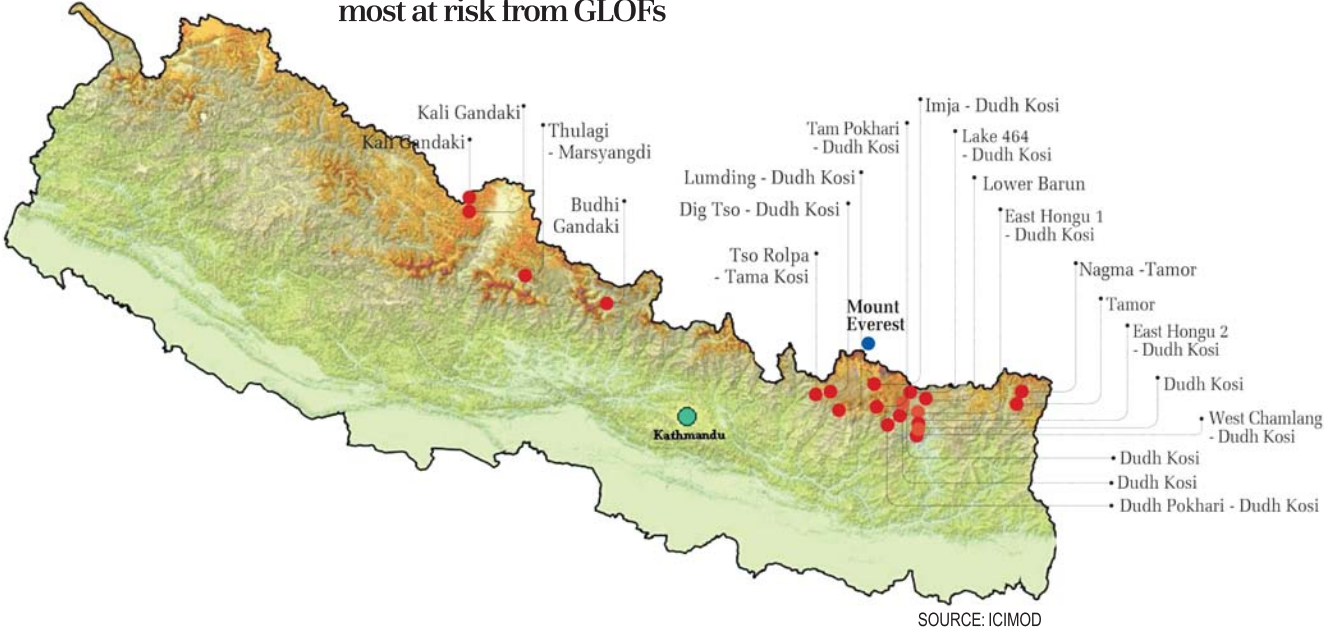
■ Sonia Awale

Some 15 million people worldwide are at risk from flooding caused by glacial lakes, half of them in India, China, Pakistan and Peru, according to the latest study published in the journal Nature Communications. As the most densely populated mountain country in the world, Nepal is at higher risk. Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs) in the Nepal Himalaya can be even more catastrophic for towns along valley floors as well as downstream infrastructure. What happened in Melamchi in July 2021 is a sign of things to come. Nepal’s largest infrastructure project to supply water to Kathmandu was nearly destroyed by a massive debris flow after a cloudburst upstream in the Langtang National Park. “What make GLOFs worse in Nepal is that they are often combined with the monsoon,” explains watershed expert Madhukar Upadhyay. “Every year we have seasonal floods. When a

Imja was a debris covered glacier on trekking maps even 25 years ago, but is now a 2km long lake. Tso Rolpa glacial lake (see overleaf) at 4,580m in the Rolwaling Valley has grown seven times in size in the past 60 years. “There is a lot of evidence that the number of glacier lakes in Nepal and worldwide is increasing,” says Miriam Jackson, glaciologist with the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD). “The size of existing lakes is also increasing. For example, the area of glacier lakes increased by 12% in the Kosi basin and 8% in the Gandaki basin.” The water level in Imja has been lowered by 3.4m and by 3m in Tso Rolpa at a cost of \$7.2 million and \$9 million respectively. Scientists now say the water level in Tso Rolpa needs to go down by another 20m to reduce risk of bursting. There are other potentially dangerous lakes like Thulagi below Himalchuli, and new lakes are emerging on both sides of the Himalaya in China and Nepal that have not even been mapped. Nepal’s glaciers are shrinking three times faster than in 1998 and

permafrost melting that is making the mountains and moraines much more prone to erosion. Permafrost is a thick subsurface layer of frozen soil that is generally not visible and thus harder to identify. Besides Melamchi, thawing permafrost is thought to have been partly responsible for the Chamoli disaster in the Indian Himalaya in 2021. “Generally, moraines have an ice core, which is one reason why moraine-dammed lakes are so dangerous. The ice could be hundreds or even thousands of years old and melt very slowly but the moraine is constantly settling,” explains Jackson. “Thawing permafrost makes mountains unstable, thus causing rockfalls. If there is a landslide into a glacier lake, then that could trigger a flood.” GLOFs also have a transboundary dimension since so many of Nepal’s rivers and their tributaries originate in glaciers in Tibet. Of the 47 high-risk glacial lakes in Nepal, 20 of them start in Tibet (see map, below). Mitigating measures such as artificially lowering the water level are expensive which makes cross-

The Top 20 most at risk from GLOFs



weakened moraine is breached, more water is added to already swollen rivers. Making matters worse is high-intensity rainfall in higher altitudes as we saw in Manang in 2022.” Scientists say that the permafrost binding loose moraine material is also melting, and without the cementing action of the ice the moraine walls can collapse easily in heavy precipitation. Rain falling where there used to be snow is making matters worse. The Himalaya is melting faster than the global average, and even in the best-case scenario, the mountains will lose more than one-third of their ice by 2100. A paper published in the journal Climate and Atmospheric Science last year revealed that the rate of ice loss on the South Col of Mt Everest is shocking: what took 2,000 years to accumulate is melting in a mere 25 years. There are 3,252 glacial lakes in Nepal, including the Khumbu Glacier where Base Camp is now 50km lower than when Hillary and Tenzing climbed Everest seventy years ago.

Jackson says that the possibility of flooding, whether from glacial lakes or other sources, is taken into account when building close to the rivers. When Nepal’s only reservoir project on the Kulekhani was commissioned in 1982, engineers had designed it to function for 100 years. But a cloudburst in the catchment area in 1993 deposited so much debris into the lake that its lifespan was reduced by 30 years. “Melamchi and Kulekhani are proof that the entire Himalayan region including Nepal are not suited for mega projects. Our focus and investment should instead be on multiple small-scale projects spread out across the country,” says watershed expert Madhukar Upadhyay. As for infrastructure already under construction, there are several mitigating measures that can be deployed, such as early warning and real-time information systems in the catchment area, not only about rainfall but GLOFs and landslide blocked rivers. Experts say Nepal and the countries in the Himalaya should not overlook the phenomenon of

border early warning of GLOFs so crucial. ICIMOD has launched the Kosi Initiative with a transboundary working group collaborating with the Chengdu-based Institute of Mountain Hazards and Environment (IMHE) and others. It has also done computer modelling of flood hazard and an assessment called WeACT that integrates local knowledge with science to improve community preparedness. But GLOF risk can be reduced if vulnerable communities are aware of the danger, are given decision-making powers and have the resources to be prepared, as has been seen in Chunkung in Khumbu and Langtang, where villagers are adapting to climate change by building embankments on their own, and avoiding construction along river banks. Says Madhukar Upadhyay: “We need to strengthen our local science to better understand the geology and glaciology, make local communities and the national government aware of the dangers and take the risk into account in building settlements, hydropower plants, bridges and roads.”

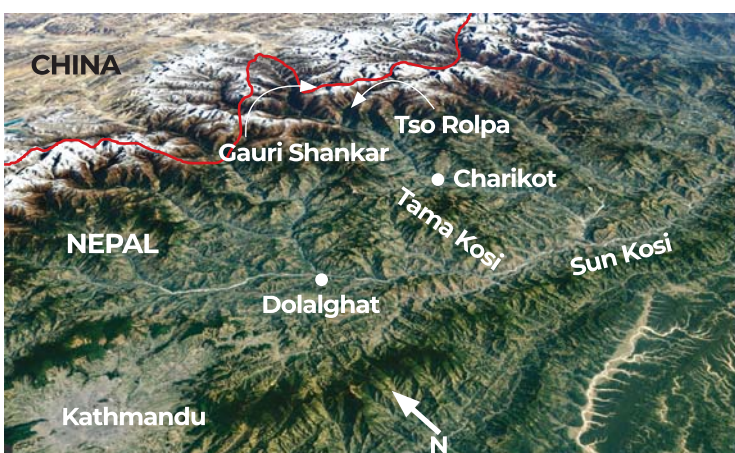






# STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN

A trek to hauntingly beautiful Tso Rolpa is not just invigorating but also a stark reminder of the climate crisis



■ Text and photos  
**Sumin Bajracharya**  
in Rolwaling

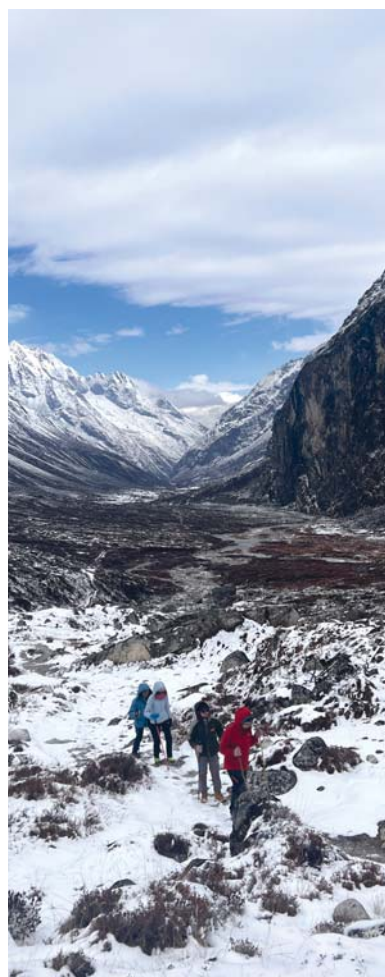
**W**e all have that inner Tintin beckoning us to break out of our everyday routine. Our group of young architects was overwhelmed with the choice of ecologically diverse trails in Nepal.

We finally decided on Tso Rolpa in the upper Rolwaling at 4,550m, one of Nepal's biggest and most dangerous glacial lakes. The trek was not just invigorating but also a stark reminder of how the climate crisis is melting the Himalayan mountains.

The trip started in Kathmandu on a hired Tata Sumo that promptly broke down in Kavre. Onward to Singati where the jeep had a flat tyre. Adventure in Nepal begins even before you start walking.

We finally entered the Gauri Shankar Conservation Area in Chetchet (1,410m) from where the trail leads to Simigaon (2,000m). The Swiss helped make steps to make the difficult parts easier to walk, and added conspicuous signage so people do not get lost.

The Rolwaling is a beyul, a valley of spiritual significance



for the local Tamang and Sherpa communities. The sky turned from blue to violet, and Gaurai Shankar, known locally as Chomo Tseringma, made a brief appearance before hiding behind its south shoulder. The storm hit on the final stretch to Simigaon at nightfall.

The next day's walk was to Thangding (3,330m) along millet terraces below towering cliffs, and crossing frothing rivers over log bridges. A lunch stop in Surmucho (2,480m) meant lying on the grass to watch fast-moving clouds shroud surrounding mountains. The rain overtook us and turned into snow as we negotiated the last steep bit.

New morning, the trail to Na village (4,180m) was covered in fresh snow. The river turned aquamarine as we approached and clambered up the terminal moraine of the Tso Rolpa glacier.

Nothing prepares you for the first glimpse of the lake after cresting the moraine wall. A deep serenity envelopes its icy beauty, but also a sense of dread about what all this melted ice means. ❄️

 [nepalitimes.com](https://nepalitimes.com)

More photos online.



E-VENTS



Muttha tour

Enjoy a free tour of the Muttha hydroponics farm and enjoy sales on salad greens on the occasion of Environment Day. 5 June, 12-4pm, Thecho, Lalitpur, 9849668375

Sustainable Mela

Celebrate World Environment Day and World Bicycle Day together at the Greenway Sustainable Mela. Check out various stalls. 3 June, 9am-3pm, Utpala Café, Boudha



Doko E-waste

Mark Environment Day by learning more about electronic waste generated in households and how to manage it at Doko's E-Waste event. Also showcase self-owned eco-friendly, sustainable products. 4 June, Nepal Academy of Science and Technology, Khumaltar

Red Peter

Head over and watch the play Red Peter, based on Franz Kafka's novel A Report to an Academy. Starring Kundoon Shakya and directed by Sabine Lehmann. 15-18, 22-25 June, 7:15pm onwards, Rs300-1000 (01) 5371545



Bird Count

Participate in the Neighbourhood Bird Count and take the opportunity to contribute to bird conservation. Count common birds using the Chhimeki Chara app by downloading it from Google Play Store. Until 8 June

DINING



Casa Mexicana

For the best Mexican in town, head to Casa Mexicana. It serves vegetarian and meat options of tacos and quesadillas, and the sweetest tres leches for dessert. The service is as good as the food. 12pm-8pm (Except Monday), Gairidhara, 9840542082

MUSIC

Samir Shrestha

Samir Shrestha will perform with his band The Crescent this weekend in Pokhara. 3 June, 8pm onwards, Catwalk, Pokhara



Mukut

Check out Nepali rock band Mukut which is reuniting after 7 years for a live show. Call for more details. 3 June, 3pm onwards, Shades, Baluwatar, 9841739063/9867868322



Sujita Dongol

Join a night out with loved ones and catch a live performance from Sujita Dangol. The show will be accompanied by food and drinks. 2 June, 6:30pm onwards, Hotel Shambala, Bansbari, 9801204879



John Chamling Rai

Don't miss out on John Chamling Rai and the Daju Vai Band, who will be joined by opening acts from Captain Sandesh and the Aarakshan band. 2 June, 7pm onwards, Senate Club, JP Road

Musical fusion

Gear up for an Indo-Nepali musical evening with Aditya Agrawal and Swoopna Suman. Get the best of Bollywood and Nepali music. 2 June, 8pm onwards, Privé Nepal, Soaltee Kathmandu



Blenders

This milkshake bar offers the yummiest flavours in its cute reusable glass bottles and make one want more during the hot summer days. 9:30am-9:30pm, City Centre, Kamal Pokhari, 9808080808

Lhakpa's Chulo

Lhakpa's Chulo offers a variety of Continental and Nepali cuisine. Pick any dish from the Swiss Rösti to the spinach and cheese momo. Jhamsikhel (01) 5542986

GETAWAY



Hotel Annapurna View

Located at an altitude of 1600m, the hotel offers the picturesque scene of the snowy Annapurna mountain range and Phewa Lake and has great accommodations. Sarangkot, Pokhara (061) 506000

Pataleban Vineyard Resort

Pataleban Resort, surrounded by green hills and a sprawling vineyard, is the perfect getaway. Take a hike in the hills and try the wine made from the vineyards. Chisapani (01) 4316377



Kasara Resort

Kasara offers a luxurious, comfortable stay in the natural setting in the heart of Chitwan National Park. Guests can engage in activities including cycling and wildlife viewing. Pathani, Chitwan National Park (01) 5909980

Grand Norling Hotel

Retreat to the quiet, serene environment of the Grand Norling Hotel, which offers sights of Mt Gauri Shankar and a lush golf course. Gokarna (01) 4910193



Hotel Heritage Bhaktapur

Immerse in the Newa-style boutique hotel surrounded by the rich art and architecture of Bhaktapur. The hotel also offers great Newa food for guests. Suryabinayak, Bhaktapur (01) 6611628

La Dolce Vita

The only Italian restaurant in Thamel since 1986, La Dolce Vita serves pizza, steak, pasta and other mouth-watering Italian food. Thamel (01) 4700612



Sam's One Tree Cafe

Sam's One Tree Cafe has mouthwatering appetizers, a perfect atmosphere and a big, shady tree like the name suggests. The sizzlers there are a must-have. 12pm-9:30pm, Darbar Marg (01) 4222636

WEEKEND WEATHER



FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
31° 17°	31° 17°	31° 17°	31° 17°	31° 18°

High and dry

The El Niño effect this year is very pronounced with sea surface temperatures breaking all records due to climate change. For us this may mean a disrupted monsoon. While we had above normal rain for May, June looks set to be drier than usual with the southwest monsoon stuck for the past two weeks in the Bay of Bengal. It is moving again, and the normal ETA in Kathmandu of 15 June may be pushed back by at least 10 days. Expect hot and dry conditions in the Valley for at least the next week. Isolated thunderstorms in the west.

OUR PICK

While we wait for Dune 2 to open in theatres in November, let us revisit the first part released in 2021 and headlined by Timothée Chalamet. Denis Villeneuve's Dune follows Duke Leto Atreides, ruler of the planet Caladan, who is assigned as the fief holder of a harsh desert planet Arrakis, embroiling the noble family in a war for control over the galaxy's most valuable asset. Meanwhile, Paul, heir of the House Atreides, a brilliant and gifted young man born into a great destiny beyond his understanding, is troubled by visions of a dark future.



MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



आगलागी हुन नदिन चनाखो बनौं

- खाना पकाइसकेपछि आगो, ग्याँस चुलो, स्टोभ 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 अरू कुनै तरिकाले पानीको जोहो गरिराखौं ।

आगलागीजन्य विपद्बाट बच्न चनाखो बनौं ।



नेपाल सरकार  
विज्ञापन बोर्ड





# IN HIGH PLACES

Comparing the impact of climate breakdown in the Alps and the Himalaya



## Kunda Dixit in Berne

An exhibit at the Swiss Alpine Museum here last month was a stark reminder of how fast the mountains are changing due to climate breakdown.

In the Après-Lift exhibition, author Daniel Anker documented the disappearance of Europe's once-popular skiing culture, with the sport moving higher up the mountains due to global warming.

The Tête de Ran skilift built in 1942 shut down in 2010, another one in Aargau was dismantled because of the lack of snow. The Col de Montvoie skilift was shut because making artificial snow became too costly.

For many Swiss like avid climber and skier Fritz Indermühle, this has made it harder to enjoy a favourite past-time. He says, "I remember Silberhorn used to be completely white, now it is an unrecognisable black rock."

Many in Nepal who have also seen the ice disappear on Himalayan peaks will find this familiar. Mt Machapuchre was a rocky black pyramid this winter, even though it is nearly 7,000m high.

Indeed, across the Alps and the Himalaya, the climate crisis is no longer an apocalyptic theme in a science fiction novel. It is happening within a generation in front of the eyes of people living in the foothills of both mountain ranges.

"In both the Alps and the Himalaya, climate change is having a devastating effect," says Pema Gyamtsho, Director General of the International Centre for Integrated



Mountains Development (ICIMOD) who is a former politician from Bhutan and did his PhD at the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule (ETH) in Zürich.

He adds, "Alpine glaciers are melting as fast as in the Himalaya, snowfall patterns are erratic, and transboundary issues in Europe have become more important because of the socio-economic impact of melting ice."

ICIMOD and the Alpine Convention are now sharing their cryosphere research and pushing the mountain agenda at climate summits, including COP28 in Dubai in November.

Scientists from the Glacier Monitoring Switzerland (GLAMOS) have found that the Alps have lost 30-50% of their ice mass in the last decade. Even more melting is expected this year because of

forecast heat waves in Europe.

Compared to the Himalaya, Alpine glaciers appear to be in even more trouble because of reduced winter snow accumulation, record summer heat, and deposition of wind-blown sand from the Sahara.

Matthias Huss of GLAMOS has taken to social media to urge global action to limit greenhouse gas emissions, and shows through dramatic graphics that it is still not too late to act.

He writes: "If we manage to limit global warming to 1.5°C or 2°C, we can still save about a third of the volume of Alpine glaciers."

It is easier to see the change in the Alps compared to the Himalaya since the first daguerreotype of Matterhorn was made in 1849, whereas the first photographs of the north slope of Mt Everest were only taken in 1921. The photographs of

**MELTDOWN:** Schreckhorn (4,078m) in 1978 and in 2015 (top).

The Grosse Aletschgletscher in 1978 and in 2019 (above).

The author with backdrop of Eiger (3,967m) in 1978, and the same mountain in the same season in 2020.

the Alps are shocking before-after images of receding snowlines and shrinking glaciers. In the Alps, one of the most vivid examples of glacial retreat is found in the Great Aletsch Glacier which used to be 14km long and 800m thick, once storing 20% of all the ice in the Alps.

The Great Aletsch is visibly shorter and thinner today compared to photographs taken by the author in 1979. Alpine glaciers are not just melting, scientists say, the thaw is accelerating. Some of them have lost up to three times more ice mass just in 2022 than in the last ten years.

Just as there are now occasional melt pools at the South Col of Mt Everest, and a river runs through the Khumbu Glacier at Base Camp, in Switzerland icefalls have turned into waterfalls in just three decades.

Scientists say that at present rates of ice loss in the Alps, Jungfrauoch on the saddle between the four-thousanders Jungfrau and Mönch will have no snow left by the end of the century.

The Alps are older, they are more stable geologically, but since they are at a higher latitude the snowline is at 2,700m, compared to 5,000-6,000 in the Himalaya.

But just as European countries downstream depend on water that originate from Alpine glaciers, nearly 2 billion people in Asia rely

on the water towers of the Himalaya and Hindu Kush feeding rivers.

As glaciers thaw in the Alps, they are exposing human remains entombed in ice. Items from an Air India Boeing 707 that crashed into Mont Blanc on approach to Geneva in 1966 have emerged in Chamonix, including newspapers, an Indian diplomatic pouch, and jewelry.

Computer modelling at the ETH Zurich and the University of Freiburg by Matthias Huss and his team have shown that even if greenhouse emissions are capped at 1.5°C the terminus of the Great Aletsch Glacier will still lose half its volume and recede 10km from where it is now during this century. But if the global average temperature continues to rise, the glacier will be replaced by a large lake.

Because of its location amidst some of the richest countries in the world, governments here are better placed to cope with an Alpine meltdown than countries bordering the Himalaya. The impact on skiing will be an inconvenience.

Even so, a fall in water levels of the Rhine and other rivers can have serious economic consequences.

Says ICIMOD's Pema Gyamtsho: "Alpine ecosystems are relatively well managed as compared to the Himalayan ones. We in the Himalaya are still a long way from reaching that level of development." 🇳🇵



# DALIT LIVES MUST MATTER



AMIT MACHAMASI/NT ARCHIVE

■ Shristi Karki

Three years after the Rukum killings, caste-based violence is still a daily occurrence in Nepal

- In July 2016, 18-year-old Ajit Mijar and Kalpana Parajuli got married in a Kavre village. Parajuli's family opposed the inter-caste marriage and forced the two to annul the union. Five days later, Mijar's body was found buried on the banks of the Trisuli in Dhading district.

Mijar's death was ruled a suicide, but his family has refused to perform his last rites, insisting that he was murdered for daring to marry a 'high' caste woman. His body has remained at the TU Teaching Hospital morgue for the past seven years.

- In May 2020, the body of a 12-year-old Dalit girl was found hanging from a tree in the Rupandehi's Devdaha village. She had been raped

and murdered after being forcibly married to her rapist, an 'upper' caste man, the day before she was killed.

- On the same day in May 2020, Nabaraj BK and his friends Ganesh Budha Magar, Tikaram Nepali, Lokendra Sunar, Govinda Shahi, and Sanju BK were lynched and their bodies dumped into the Bheri River in Soti village of Rukum West. They were killed because villagers discovered Nabaraj was

going to elope with a teenage girl from a 'higher' Thakuri caste.

- In May 2022, Sundar Harijan, a 20-year-old Dalit inmate at Rolpa jail who was serving a life sentence on behalf of another prisoner died under suspicious circumstances. An investigation pointed to police corruption, but the probe yielded no further results.
- In March this year, a restaurant owner in Gorkha beat 36-year-

## Cast light on discrimination

**Suraj Yengde**, PhD, is a leading Dalit scholar and author of the book *Caste Matters*. He is a research associate with the Department of African and African American Studies at Harvard University and was recently named Senior Fellow at the Kennedy School. Yengde is in Nepal to work on his new book, and look at the status of Nepal's Dalit community. Excerpts of a conversation with Nepali Times this week:



**Nepali Times:** You have spent some time in Nepal researching your new book. What are the impressions you have gathered about exclusion and caste issues here compared to India?  
**Suraj Yengde:** I'm slightly hesitant to respond to this, simply because I have to see more of Nepal. I spent some time in Lumbini, but couldn't really meet people from the Dalit community there. I was, however, able to meet the Gandharva people, and was so profoundly impressed with the men and women, especially of the younger generation. They were engaged in community farming using commune models similar to Dr Ambedkar's ideals. And since community farming is something that

is very close to me— it provided me insight into community life in Nepal.  
But this is just a take from interacting with a limited number of people, especially given that the Nepali Dalit community is so vibrant. And I will be very sincere in saying that I may not be able to do everything right because I'm not an expert on Nepal. That is why I have been relying on two things: firstly, my primary respondents who are prominently from various Dalits communities as well as experts, and secondly, recorded textual evidence that civil society has preserved. So, I think this question might merit a more elaborate response when my next book comes out.

**It seems casteism transcends borders and is entrenched even among the Indian and Nepali diaspora. Why is it that education does not seem to make a big enough dent against caste discrimination?**  
Caste is basically a reproduction of the identity of a community and the resources available to it, but the normalisation of this reality is worrisome. Because Nepal is still a young country with a profoundly invested Constitution, and as such, the nation needs to be shaped with appropriate ethical standards.  
What is needed first is a respectful sharing of this nation's wealth with all of its people. Moreover, caste unfortunately has an intricate attachment to religion. So one might be confined to the caste system without even realising it. Another reality is that the caste system is upheld when people are confined within their own caste groups because that means that they are part of a network that everyone within that caste group benefits from.  
As far as the diaspora goes, we need to question if the people who go beyond India and Nepal leave their roots behind during the

process of assimilating to the West. And by that I mean not just their caste roots, or even national roots, but the ways of their ancestry.  
So what one might think of an innocent incident or interaction or even celebration can be in fact deeply caste-based in nature, and there needs to be an acknowledgement that whatever pride one has for such interactions or events comes with certain caste attachments.  
The question, therefore, is: are we taking active steps towards annihilating caste altogether? But at the same time, annihilating the caste structure does not necessarily mean you are dismantling all of your personal beliefs.  
**How do we ensure that the message of equality, representation and resistance goes to the grassroots in countries like Nepal and India, places where people are more likely to be victims of caste violence and discrimination?**  
Yes, oftentimes, the message we are trying to get across do not reach the people that they are meant for. Two things are needed to ensure that it does, and the first is the media to let the world know what is happening. We also need to figure out how to democratise information. It is also how we construct the narrative because high-flying jargon-filled academic ideas and talks and events will not go beyond a handful of people. So we need to tailor messages according to the intended receiver.  
Once people have access to sufficient information, they will have formed opinions and then comes the role of mass movements. And so it ultimately comes down to how we decentralise information and diversify the audience.





**CAST ASIDE:** Nabaraj BK (far left, above) and five of his friends who were killed on 23 May 2020 in Rukum West because he was eloping with a 'higher' caste teenager.

A rally in Chaujhari of Rukum West demanding justice for the six slain men (left).

A rally in Kathmandu in 2022 demanding action on the killings (far left).

his friends in Rukum West three years ago catapulted caste-based violence to the forefront of national and political discourse in a way other atrocities against Nepal's Dalit community had not in recent years.

But when it came to justice, all that public outrage did not seem to matter. Attempts to sweep the murders under the rug began right from the top. Home Minister Janardan Sharma from the Maoist party that once waged war for Dalit rights, claimed the deaths of the young men was not caste-related, and they had all jumped into the Bheri River.

Sharma's remarks were seen as an attempt to cover up the involvement of Soti ward chair and fellow Maoist Dambar Bahadur Malla, who had been arrested for involvement in the murders. Three years later, justice continues to elude the families of Nabaraj BK and his friends. The final hearing of the case is scheduled for 13 June.

Article 40 of Nepal's Constitution guarantees the rights of Dalits to political competition

and representation, as well as basic services like education and health, but Dalit representation in politics and in the workforce is tokenism at best.

Nepal's 2021 Census results did not include information about the country's ethnic, linguistic, and religious demographics. But the 2011 census showed that Dalits made up 13.6% of Nepal's population (researchers say the figure could be as high as 20%) but they hold only 0.7% of senior civil service jobs. Brahmins, on the other hand, are 12.2% of the population but have 72% of senior government jobs.

"The demand for Dalits is for an equal share in the nation's wealth until they are equally represented at decision-making levels," said Suraj Yengde, PhD, one of India's leading Dalit scholars and author of Caste Matters who is in Nepal to research a new book.

"Until the nation's wealth is equally distributed to us, there cannot really be a truly democratic society. Minority communities cannot control the majority resources," said Yengde, who is a research associate with the Department of African and African American Studies at Harvard University and was recently named a Senior Fellow at the Kennedy School.

"Caste is normalised in Nepal, India, and the rest of South Asia through the practice of retaining the hegemony of the historical oppressor castes who then control the resources of the state and then become the final adjudicator of the matters concerning the nation," he added during the talk (see interview below).

During local elections in May 2022, three mayors, eight deputy mayors, 143 ward chairs, and

878 ward members were elected from the Dalit community — each less than 3% of the total elected members from each category in 2017. In federal polls, there were only 16 Dalit MPs out of 275, the lowest proportion since Constituent Assembly elections in 2008. And only one of those 16 Dalit MPs was directly elected and the rest were nominated through the proportional representation system.

Meanwhile, three Dalit leaders were elected to the Provincial Assembly directly, while 28 were elected through the PR system. The number of elected leaders from the Dalit community for both the federal parliament and provincial assembly is less than during the 2017 election.

The Dalit Lives Matter movement gained traction in Nepal following the Rukum killings. But even as the discourse surrounding discrimination and violence against the Dalits continues, some activists want to move beyond the narrative of just being portrayed as victims of the caste hierarchy and take into account their stories of resistance to historical oppression.

But information about equality and representation, insight from scholars and activists, are not accessible to Dalit and non-Dalit communities in rural and remote Nepal — even though people there are more likely to be victims of caste-based discrimination and violence.

It is now up to the civil society to figure out how to ensure that the message of equality, representation and resistance gets to the grassroots, said Yengde: "Dalit lives matter because our stories and our individuality matter. It is because dignity, respect, compassion, humanity, resistance, honour, and justice matters." 🇳🇵



BIGNEWSKHABAR

old Phulmaya Pariyar to death, because her 7-year-old daughter drank a beverage without permission. The issue was settled after the hotelier, Durga Ale, provided Pariyar's family with financial compensation.

- Last month, a 22-year-old Dalit man was injured in Simraungad when a priest poured hot rice starch over him for entering the temple.

These are just a selection of acts of violence against Nepal's Dalit community that made it to the news. There are many more cases that are never reported, and the lifelong oppression that Dalits

face every day all over Nepal is not news.

"Sadly, political turbulence, civil governance, impunity, and lack of accountability to our people have undermined the Dalit achievements, moments and people's aspirations," said Pradip Pariyar, founder of the Dalit Lives Matter Global Alliance during a talk last week.

He added: "The role of social justice seems murky, foggy and lost. Nepali society is becoming more regressive in comparison to other countries. It seems like Dalits belong to the country, but not to the state."

The murders of Nabaraj BK and



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# Cycling to COP28

Bhutanese filmmaker-environmentalist will ride from Thimphu to Dubai to raise alarm about the climate crisis

■ Shristi Karki

When 14-year-old Jamyang Jamtsho Wangchuk knocked on the door of a stranger to ask if they had a copy of the 1995 comedy Ace Ventura: When Nature Calls, he had no idea the person on the other side would make him a film star.

That was in 1996, and the Bhutanese teenager was in Hong Kong on vacation. Little did he know that the person on whose door he knocked was a casting agent. The rest is geography.

Within months, Wangchuk and his younger brother were on set shooting Jean-Jacques Annaud's 1997 film Seven Years in Tibet, starring Brad Pitt. Chaperoned by their mother, both boys played the Dalai Lama in the movie.

"I was honoured to get the chance," says Wangchuk, now 41. That chance meeting eventually got Wangchuk into filmmaking in the US.

In 2020 during the pandemic Wangchuk was cooped up in a studio apartment in New York. The isolation, and a bout of Covid infection, made him reevaluate his career and place in life. He decided to cycle from Thimphu to COP28 in Dubai to draw attention to the climate crisis and how it was affecting Himalayan people.

"I feel fortunate to be able to



**BRAD AND ME:** Jamyang Jamtsho Wangchuk with Brad Pitt on the set of 1997 film Seven Years in Tibet when he was just 14.

Wangchuk last month with a bottle of Himalayan water from Bhutan's Thorthomi glacial lake that he will take by bicycle to the COP28 Climate Summit in Dubai in November.

combine my love for films with my passion for sports and travel, all the while championing the environment," says Wangchuk, who spent his early years trekking through forests in Bhutan's Pema Gatsel district with his father.

In 2022, Wangchuk biked for a week, nine hours every day to reach Bhutan's Thorthomi glacial lake, where the water level has



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to be drained to prevent it from bursting. He filled a bottle of water from the lake, and on 2 May began the first phase of his journey from Thimphu to India.

Supported by the Kathmandu-based research institute, ICIMOD, he cycled across eastern Nepal,

reaching Everest Base Camp 20 days later. There he met up with 22-time Everest summiteer Lhakpa Nuru, who had collected ice from the South Col for his mission.

The ice joined the water collected from the glacial lake in Bhutan on the journey to Dubai.

The bike journey so far has been a 'warm up' in more ways than one. Last month several Asian cities recorded all-time high temperatures. The heat of the plains made Wangchuk dizzy, forcing him to make several unplanned stops.

"We learned the hard way that riding in the heat and pollution can be detrimental to health," he notes. To avoid this, he starts out early, and takes a break during the intense mid-day heat.



Wangchuk will soon begin the second phase of his journey cycling across India and Pakistan. He has not yet figured out how to cross the Arabian Sea to Oman.

"There will be more extreme heat to justify why I'm riding to COP28 to take the messages of Himalayan communities being unfairly impacted by climate change," he says.

Climate summits like the one in Dubai are notorious for being talkfests, and the 2023 event is being held in UAE, a country that is a major exporter of fossil fuel.

Says Wangchuk: "COPs have failed to set a concrete and time-bound target to phase out all fossil fuels and meet the zero-emission vehicle sales targets. But this should not deter us from pressuring world leaders and corporations to be accountable." 🇳🇵

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