



SANJOG MANANDHAR / KANTIPUR

**SPOT THE MAYOR:**

Nepal's nomenklatura crowds the balcony of Gaddi Baithak on the Indra Jatra chariot procession on 28 September where public disenchantment with the establishment was loudly evident.

## State malfunction

It seems like just yesterday that the momentous story broke. Police started investigating the fake Bhutanese refugee scandal, and Nepalis held their breath. At last it looked like justice would be done.

Police followed the digital trail from middlemen who hoodwinked hundreds of Nepalis to part with millions of rupees. Phone records and text messages led them to the highest people in the land. Former ministers and secretaries were tracked down and arrested.

The story was first broken in a piece commissioned by the Centre for Investigative Journalism Nepal, and written by Devendra Bhattarai for Kantipur daily in June. Despite state malfunction, it finally looked like press freedom, democracy and the rule of law were intact in Nepal after all.

Morale in the police and investigation agencies went up, journalists were encouraged that coverage had impact. After all,

previous police inspectors and even the Commission on Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) had received the complaints about being swindled by fake refugee middlemen and their political patrons, but had filed them away.

But it was all too good to last. SSP Manoj KC and AIG Shyam Gyawali, the two police inspectors leading the team investigating the refugee scam, were transferred.

We have since learnt that the Maoist Home Minister was under pressure to do so from topmost Nepali Congress (NC) leaders and their consorts of whom police had evidence of collusion. Not surprisingly, KC was replaced by Basanta Kunwar, the same police inspector who had earlier buried the complaint.

More scandals then erupted, including those involving the sale of Baluwatar real estate and gold ornaments at Pashupati. In none of these were Maoist

officials involved.

Then, as if on cue, 100kg of gold was found being smuggled from Hong Kong concealed as motorcycle brake pads. Investigations led to senior Maoists and their progeny, and it emerged that the organised criminals has used brake pads and vapes numerous times before.

Now, with all three of Nepal's main parties neck-deep in muck, the scandals cancelled each other out. Backroom deals ensured 'I will not probe your scandal if you don't probe mine'.

Fast forward two months: none of these monsoon scandals have come to anything. Some small fish have been netted, other bigger fish are out on bail, but the cases are not going anywhere. This week, the CIAA made a show of framing a sitting Finance Secretary on an unrelated budget allocation. Its chief is clearly trying to distract us from his earlier cover-up of the Bhutan refugee case.

The media has moved on, social media is captivated by the viral video of the day, and the three main parties are glad Nepalis suffer collective amnesia.

Mainstream politicians are back to impunity as usual, using the Constitution Day pardon list to get President Ram Chandra Poudel to release a notorious gangster serving a 20-year jail term for murder.

They are playing politics with rising ethno-religious tensions in Kosi Province and across the Tarai where social networking sites have been weaponised with Hindutva hate speech. Throughout all this, the prime minister disappeared for nearly three weeks on a round the world photo-op.

It does not look like the gerontocracy of the NC, the Maoists or the UML have seen the writing on the wall. They were up on the balcony of Gaddi Baithak on Indra Jatra on 28 September (pictured) and must have witnessed the frenzied welcome for Mayor Balen Shah. Still stuck in partisan power struggles, they underestimate the anti-establishment public mood.

Independents and alternative parties are riding a populist anti-incumbent wave among Nepali youth. The dinosaurs of Nepali politics are oblivious to the approaching asteroid. 🇳🇵

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# Sikkim’s warning to Nepal

The devastating flood on Wednesday morning in the Indian state of Sikkim is another shocking proof of what can happen if rampant, unplanned and poorly engineered infrastructure are built along Himalayan rivers at risk from climate breakdown and weather extremes.

Heavy rains caused a cloudburst at the tri-junction of India, Nepal and China in the Kangchenjunga region this week. The South Lhonak proglacial lake burst, unleashing a debris flow that destroyed the Chungthang Dam causing a deadly flash flood on the Teesta River in Sikkim, West Bengal and as far downstream as Bangladesh.

Till press time, at least a dozen people are confirmed dead, with scores missing. Other hydropower projects in Sikkim were also damaged, while many bridges and highways were washed away. Indian satellite imagery confirmed that the flood was triggered by

increase due to the expansion of the lake towards steep slopes, which are considered potential starting zones of avalanches.’

Wednesday’s GLOF event washed away the 1,200MW Chungthang Teesta III Project which had a 60m concrete and rockfill dam, tunnel and underground powerhouse built at a cost of \$1.7 billion. Sikkim has invested heavily on hydropower projects, with more than 35 cascade schemes on the Teesta and its tributaries that drain Mt Kangchenjunga, the world’s third highest mountain.

There are no reports of damage to infrastructure on the Nepal side of the Kangchenjunga catchment, where there are numerous hydropower plants in operation and under construction on the Tamor, Arun, Kabele and other rivers. An early monsoon cloudburst in Taplejung in June killed at least 40 people, and damaged several of those hydropower projects.



The Chungthang Dam before and after the 4 October disaster.

a sudden outflow from South Lhonak, which then led to the collapse of the Chungthang Dam, draining its reservoir, and unleashing the combined debris flow.

The 4 October flood on the Teesta proves that there could be much more destructive glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs) in store in future as global warming melts the Himalayan icecap. These mountains are warming 0.7°C faster than the global average, making glaciers recede and shrink, leaving large moraine-dammed lakes.

Hundreds of new proglacial lakes have emerged in the past decades, mostly in eastern Nepal, India, Bhutan and southern Tibet. Glaciologists are tracking at least 40 of them which they say are fragile, either because of water accumulation, from seismic activity, or because of avalanches causing the lakes to overtop their moraine dams. There are so many new lakes that many do not even have names, but numbers.

In an uncannily accurate forecast of Wednesday’s disaster, Indian glaciologist Ashim Sattar had co-authored a paper in the journal ScienceDirect in 2021 titled Future Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF) Hazard of the South Lhonak Lake, Sikkim Himalaya, warning of the danger of avalanches falling into the lake causing it to burst. The team measured the lake volume at 115 million cubic metres.

‘This enormous volume of water in a highly dynamic high-mountain environment makes this lake a priority for GLOF risk management,’ the paper warned. ‘Our results show that the GLOF susceptibility will

**This week’s disaster is proof, if proof is still needed, that infrastructure on Himalayan rivers are in peril from climate breakdown.**

A flood in July 2021 in Nepal similar to this week’s Sikkim disaster damaged a \$800 million project to supply water from the glacier-fed Melamchi River through a 26.5km tunnel to Kathmandu. Although the tunnel was saved, the headworks were destroyed, and the project

is still not back in full operation.

In 2015, a glacial lake burst in Tibet and brought down debris flow that damaged the 44MW Bhote Kosi project in Sindhupalchok district that had just been repaired after the Jure landslide and the 2015 earthquake. In 2022, heavy rains damaged a dozen under construction hydropower projects in central Nepal, causing huge losses.

There are glacial lakes in central and eastern Nepal like Thulagi in Himalchuli, Tso Rolpa in Rolwaling and Imja in the Khumbu that would be just as dangerous as South Lhonak because of hydropower, highways and settlements downstream. In addition, dozens of glacial lakes on the Chinese side in Tibet also drain into tributaries of Nepal’s transboundary rivers and pose great risk.

The water levels of Tso Rolpa and Imja have been lowered by building weirs on the moraine, but such construction is expensive and there are just too many lakes. A new lake that has emerged on Langtang Glacier is being drained to lower its level as well as generate hydropower, the first in Nepal.

As Nepal embarks on generating up to 30,000MW by 2035, the warning from Sikkim is clear: spread the risk and plan for the worst.

## 20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

### Carrying Nepal

The trekking and mountaineering industry has changed in the last 20 years. Climbers are scaling Mt Everest twice in a season. Others are in a race to break the last record to climb all 14 eight thousanders in the shortest time. Sherpas are no more just a support staff, they are now leading their own expedition companies. Trails are being replaced by roads and porters by helicopters.

Here is an excerpt from a report published 20 years ago this week:

The mountain porters of Nepal are the very backbone of Nepal’s trekking and climbing industry. Fifty years ago, Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay’s first ascent of Everest was supported by 350 porters. Ten years later, the 1963 US Everest expedition used more than 900. Every expedition before and since has depended upon the kind labour and



the strong backs of porters to put climbers onto the highest summits in the world. In turn, this industry has arguably put more food in more stomachs than any other that Nepal has ever seen.

Porters are not the specialised high-altitude Sherpas who carry loads to high camps and set the routes for paying climbers. They are poor farmers who flock to popular trekking routes in search of work carrying luggage and supplies for our foreign clients. Although they never travel above base camp, porters carry ghastly loads to altitudes exceeding 5,000m.

Wherever paying clients want to go, their porters follow. Porterage is the only option for employment for many in Nepal’s rural hills. It is a type of work that chases the very roots of what it truly means to work, and what it means to earn one’s living.

**For archived material of Nepali Times of the past 20 years, site search: nepalitimes.com**

## ONLINE PACKAGES



Sumitra Karki wanted to be a nurse while growing up. Instead, she became a farmer-entrepreneur setting up a collective farming group in her village in Galkot and inspiring other women to pursue professional farming. Watch the video and read the story on page 10-11. Subscribe to our YouTube channel for more original multimedia content.



Over 1,200 women in Patan who have learnt to use bicycles in the last two years as part of an initiative by a local women’s social media group which became active during the second Covid-19 lockdown in 2021. They have gained mobility, freedom, economic opportunity and a sense of belonging on a bicycle. Watch the video and read the story on page 6-7.

### ARCHIVING

Thank you Balram Chitrakar for your hard work, passion, and dedication to preserve the historical documents of archival significance (‘Memories of an archivist’, Anita Bhetwal, #1180). Let’s hope that the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and CA pays due attention to preserve these microfilms. Thank you Nepali Times for highlighting his work.

Devendra Pant

### CLIMATE

Scary thought for all the Nepalis living on the rivers below (‘Trekking in the time of climate change’, Achyut Tiwari, #1180).

Roger Ray

### SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS

Text books are rubbish, make them simple (‘Learning rubbish, memorising gibberish’, Yugottam Koirala and Yugeshwor Koirala, #1180).

Gauri Rimal

■ This is so relatable. I even found the same thing repeated up to university which still focus on memorising useless things instead of critical analysis, and developing robust reading habits.

Nabin Pathak

### TIGER HUNTING

The first priority of the national park is biodiversity conservation, not auctioning tigers for trophy hunting (‘Conservation vs Conservatives’, Maheshwor Acharya, #1179).

Krishna Prasad Pandey

■ South Africa allows trophy hunting, so if we allow 2-3 tigers to be killed in a controlled manner what will be the harm? If there are too many male tigers fighting for territory, it may increase conflict with humans. There needs to be research on the carrying capacity of an area for tigers, and if there are too many then let them be hunted. We allow hunting of blue sheep in Dhorpatan, why not for tigers in Bardia or Chitwan?

Digbijaya Pradhan

### FAITH

Secularism also means the state has a responsibility to enable and empower indigenous communities to practice their faiths and beliefs (‘Crimson, saffron and green’, Chandra Kishore, #1181).

Bimal Rawal

## WHAT’S TRENDING



### “Money is not everything”

by Rohit Shrestha  
“I still remember entering the premises of the Department of Geology and Mines in Kathmandu with the hopes of getting a job. But the lethargy and broken furniture there put me off, I did not want to work in such a place.” Visit nepalitimes.com for latest in Nepali Times Disapora Diaries.

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### Crimson, saffron and green

by Chandra Kishore  
An ideological vacuum is turning the Madhes into fertile ground for the religious right. Economic problems, joblessness and disillusionment with politicians is prompting new forces to stoke religious animosity. Join the discussion online.

Most popular on Twitter

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### Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge at 25

by Lisa Choegyal  
Twenty five years ago Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge was inaugurated by Sir Edmund Hillary. Since then, this haven of sustainable hospitality in Nepal has set a benchmark for ecotourism. Read full story online.

Most visited online page

## QUOTE TWEETS

**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
#longread A haven of sustainable hospitality in Nepal sets a benchmark for ecotourism. Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge at 25 | Lisa Choegyal

**Forester@kuenvmgt504**  
whimsical n lyrical writing of lisa that i enjoy so reliably

**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
Is Nepal’s economy on the mend, or on the verge of disaster? Experts cannot seem to make up their minds. Business as unusual | @Raw\_Ku

**Ratna Sansar Shrestha @pakanajole**  
“If it was a real recession, people would stop buying home appliances but here during the NADA auto show this year, there was a record high transaction worth Rs20 billion,” says Khanal. Middle/upper class buying home appliances/cars doesn’t mean that the mass is not suffering

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# IT is it

IT products already make up 20% of Nepal's exports, and has the potential to be even bigger

■ Sahina Shrestha

Netflix's One Piece is arguably one of the most successful live action adaptations, so much so that it was renewed for a second season just two weeks after its release.

While viewers revel in Luffy's quest to find Gold D Roger's treasure and become the Pirate King, they may not know that Nepali animators worked on the visual effects of the film.

Gone are the days when Nepal just exported palm oil, pashmina, carpets or hydropower. With growing IT and its adjacent industries, 20% of Nepal's export last year was in IT services.

A recent report by the Institute for Integrated Development Studies (IIDS) estimated Nepal's IT exports at \$515 million in 2022, making up 1.4% of Nepal's GDP and 5.5% of foreign currency reserves.

"IT and films are two areas that have huge potential in Nepal but have been overlooked by policymakers," says Kiran Bhakta Joshi whose Incessant Rain Animation Studio worked on the live action for Netflix. "The focus is still on hydropower etc, but IT and films have viable potential for Nepal's economic growth."

Joshi worked at Disney for 18 years before establishing Incessant Rain in 2008 in Nepal because he felt there was great scope for digital art and animation by Nepalis in the untapped market. Incessant Rain currently employs 250 people,



NT ARCHIVE

and 98% of customers are from Hollywood including Netflix, Walt Disney Studios, Fox Studios, Universal Network, Paramount, Warner Brothers, Amazon, and others.

"The volume of work is very high, and we have not been able to take it all up because of the lack of skilled people," says Joshi, who was forced to outsource some work to India. Which is why Joshi has started a training academy and an internal team to develop its own software (see page 5).

People in the industry think the actual figure for IT exports could be much higher than the IIDS estimate. Explains Sanjib Rajbhandari of Mercantile Office Systems: "That figure just represents the amount that comes in through official banking channels. There are many companies that are operating under the radar."

Outsourcing IT products to Nepal is not new, but in the recent

decades the scale of operations and the companies involved have increased. With salaries for Indian engineers going up, more and more companies are looking to Nepal.

The growth can also be attributed to the Nepali diaspora which has been setting up firms overseas, and have their operations in Nepal. Those who return after study and work abroad are also involved in IT startups.

"Nepal provides a whole spectrum of services from business process outsourcing to knowledge process outsourcing," says Hempal Shrestha, former chair of the R&D Committee, Federation of Computer Association of Nepal. This means Nepali companies are involved in tech support, customer relations to software development, app maintenance, and database management.

Added up, the IT sector presents employment for talented Nepali IT specialists, and props up the economy.

Sameer Maskey of Fusemachines that works with AI products and as a solutions provider to clients mostly in the US, is confident that his company and Nepal have a bright future in the IT sector.

"With remote work, the IT industry has suddenly become a gateway to transcend geographical constraints," Maskey said in an email interview from New York. "Our own distributed teams from across Nepal, North America and Latin America deliver cutting-edge AI solutions for diverse international tech companies and the path forward seems even more promising."

From Nepal, Fusemachines caters to international customers in healthcare, banking and finance, retail, communication media and technology, human resources, education, aviation, food and beverage, travel and tourism.

Although Nepal still has a long way to go before becoming

a big player in the international IT sector, its skilled workforce, the high quality of service that companies here provide, and the cost effectiveness has helped place the country on the world map.

"People are not going to come to you just because you are cheap," said Vancouver-based Rajbhandari. "You have to build trust and that can only be done with quality and reliability of your work. Cost effectiveness with quality work has helped Nepal gain some traction in international market."

One challenge is to retain the talent pool in the country because many young engineers are leaving.

Sameer Maskey says the way to reverse this trend is to diversify IT courses and training while also applying their learning in quality projects and experiences.

"The IT sector possesses the potential to generate a multitude of high-quality, high paying jobs, spanning roles from software developers and engineers to project managers and analysts," Maskey said. "Doing this enables students to put their focus on acquiring specific IT proficiencies, and discovering their unique niche. They can bring the income back to Nepal, turning home into a source of income and success."

Indeed, IT exports present a chance for Nepal to generate higher revenues from international clients, and diversify from the country's reliance on remittances, and have a multiplier effect on infrastructure and other sectors of the economy.

Unlike hydropower or tourism, IT is not disruptive on the environment and the nature of work being basically borderless means Nepal's IT industry can grow rapidly as long as the government is not too heavy handed, and issues like double taxation are removed.

Says Hempal Shrestha, "The government can help by curating and incubating the IT sector rather than regulating it for the next 5-10 years. This is an industry that has the potential to create jobs for every household in Nepal." 🇳🇵



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## 3.9% growth

The World Bank projects that Nepal's economy will rebound to 3.9% in 2024, and to 5% in 2025, but lists multiple risks including an erratic monsoon which could reduce harvests and a spike in food inflation due to India's export ban. It notes that Nepal has a labour productivity deficit in agriculture, industry, and services. Exports will be dampened.

## Food security

The WFP and USAID will jointly monitor food security, nutrition, and livelihoods in Nepal with a nearly \$500,000 two-year data collection project. The WFP's latest assessment in October 2022 showed the number of Nepalis with inadequate nutrition had risen to 17%.

## Festive with Samsung

Samsung's "Ramailo Dashain Tihar... Mayale Bharau Ghar Pariwar Dasain Tihar" scheme is offering up



to 41% discount on TVs, washing machines and refrigerators. Customers can buy one of the latest brands to get a combo discount on the bundle purchase. They can also buy a Neo QLED TV and get a B450 worth Rs41,690 for free.

## Türkiye-Japan

Turkish Airlines and Japan's Prince Mikasa Foundation are collaborating for cultural heritage preservation and regional exchange. The agreement was signed at the Turkish Embassy in Tokyo with Princess Akiko and Foundation President Sachihito Omura. The carrier will support the



excavations that started in 1986 in Kirsehir Kaman, on the Silk Road. Turkish Airlines board member Fatmanur Altun said: "We are reinforcing our very special friendship with the Japan in this work."

Meanwhile, Turkish Cargo under its 'Mission Rescue' project transported the koala Yani from Hong Kong to the UK. Born in Australia and brought to Hong Kong, Yani was alone after its mates died. Yani was transferred via an Istanbul layover at the Live Animal Terminal.

## Ncell data

Ncell has launched 'Always On Data' pack at Rs100 which comes with 1GB data and has a validity of 28 days. Customers can dial \*17123# to access the service. Ncell has also added Instagram to its nonstop access of YouTube, Facebook, TikTok.



## Healthy living

Everest Bank and Nirvana Physiotherapy & Wellness Center in Lazimpat offer discounts of up to 25% on treatment to customers, card holders, mobile banking users, staff and family members.

## Nepal-Australia

An Australian parliamentary delegation led by Parliament Speaker Milton Dick is on a visit to Nepal until 7 October. This is the first ever delegation will visit Australian-funded development projects.



## BYD battery test

Cimex Inc conducted the Nail Penetration Test in Kathmandu to demonstrate the BYD Blade Battery's safety standard on its electric vehicles. It checks thermal runaway of Li batteries.



## JICA volunteers

Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCVS) are back in Nepal after three years during Covid. Volunteers live with local communities for two years helping in socioeconomic development.

## Kona GL

Lakshmi Intercontinental has launched the new Hyundai Kona GL Electric at a starting price of Rs5.996 million while GL S variant is Rs6.496 million. The Hyundai Kona has a 39.2 kWh lithium-ion polymer battery and a range of 305km. A 100 KW DC can charge the battery to 80% in 54 minutes.



## DishHome superstars

Bhupajit Rai has won Rs100,000 in cash under DishHome's 'Harek hapta superstar seasonkai megastar' Dasain-Tihar festival scheme. Customers can get Rs100,000 in cash through a lucky draw every week on a new connection or recharge



# Opportunities for women animators

■ Sewa Bhattarai

After making his name as an animator providing sequences VFX footage for movies like House of Dragons, Dora, Lion King and many others, Kiran Bhakta Joshi of Incessant Rain is opening the Nepal chapter of Women in Animation (WIA).

Joshi (pictured, right) hopes to help Nepali filmmakers get more exposure and make connections on global platforms through WIA, not just in animation but also live action. Animators, writers, directors, technicians are all represented in the non-profit which provides mentorship and scholarships.

"Most big studios in the US are supporting WIA because gender justice is so important," explained Joshi, who is based in California, and runs the Incessant Rain studio in Kathmandu. "If a film producer needs a female artist or technician, they ask WIA, and being involved would provide good exposure to Nepali filmmakers."

WIA's Nepal chapter is the first in South Asia, and has filmmaker Sampada Malla as president. She told us, "This is the golden age of Nepali cinema. Better Nepali movies are being made and through WIA, more of them may go to international platforms, with possibilities of collaboration."

Deepa Joshi, co-CEO of Incessant Rain, says WIA will engage in advocacy, mentorship,

and education Nepal. She adds, "There is still the perception that cartoons are for children. We want to show that there are great career options for women in animation."

Stories X Women of WIA helps female-led projects prepare their pitch packages and organise sessions attended by Hollywood executives. "Networking can help women filmmakers make the connections required to produce

their films," she adds.

WIA Nepal will provide scholarships to Nepali women eager to get into animation, and eventually expand to training film editors, cinematography, scriptwriting, and production, reaching out beyond Kathmandu.

Says Kiran Joshi: "Ultimately, the success of Nepali films and animation will depend on how inclusive the sector is." 🇳🇵



SEWA BHATTARAI

## Female artists into filmmakers

**Nepali Times: Why are there so few women animators even in your company Incessant Rain?**

**Kiran Bhakta Joshi:** Gender inequality is a global problem, but it is worse in Nepal because of the patriarchy. After marriage, many families expect women to stay home and look after the family, which means that women end up losing their careers on interests.

Up to 20-25% of the staff at Incessant Rain are women, and most of them are in admin. There are even fewer women artists. I was so busy bringing in work and delivering products over the years that I did not even notice this discrepancy. As a man, one often does not even notice these things. But we have recently started a program at Incessant Rain, which has increased the number of women.

**How did this gender justice program come about?**

As the company grew, so did my workload. At one point, I realized that I couldn't lead the company alone. Two and a half years ago, I asked Deepa Chipalu Joshi to join the company and help lead it.

She immediately noticed that there were very few women, and asked me why. As usual, like men do, I said that it is difficult to find qualified women artists in Nepal. Deepa said that was not a good answer, we must try harder. That is when we started thinking seriously about improving the gender balance.

**What kind of steps did you take to increase participation of women?**

Deepa started an outreach program where she goes to different schools and colleges and tells young people about the kind of career they can have in animation and how they can fit in a

company like Incessant Rain.

Also, when someone goes on maternity leave, we want to make sure that they come back, in any capacity. Maybe they can be given a lighter workload or shift them to a department where they need to work only 20 hours a week. And we know it is a temporary problem, once the kid is grown up, they will be back in their full capacity.

Gender justice is not just for women, it also applies to men. We want to afford the same facility to fathers as well. No one should have to lose their job because they had a baby. We are looking at having a daycare center at the office, which will make it easier for new parents to work.

**There are even fewer women in leadership positions.**

It is not enough to hire more women, you are right, they should also be in senior positions. That is why I stepped down from my role as CEO and made her co-CEO. If the leading woman is still reporting to a man, then nothing changes. So now we, as co-CEOs, manage different areas of the company. I look after the creative and technical side while she looks after her areas of expertise like finance, operations, human resources, etc. This has given a strong message to every artist in the company. If we want to make changes, it must start at the top.

**How can WIA help to further this goal?**

In Kathmandu, our academy is fairly reasonably priced. But, that is not the case outside of the Valley, where this opportunity and this amount is out of reach. So, eventually, we want to tap into WIA for funds to provide the opportunities for training and education to women artists outside Kathmandu.

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# LIFE CYCLE



■ Sonia Awale

**Women gain mobility, freedom, economic opportunity and a sense of benign belonging on a bicycle**

Every morning Makhumaya Tamang (pictured, far right), 66, used to pass a group of middle-aged women cycling in Jawalakhel, and gazed longingly at them.

One day, she mustered the courage to ask the women why they were cycling and found out that they were getting bicycling lessons. She signed up without hesitation.

"I had never before touched a bicycle before, and I thought it was too difficult to learn," says Tamang who is originally from Ramechhap.

It took a while for her to learn to balance and pedal, and came close to giving up. Her kurta-suruwal would get snared in the chain,

making her fall. So she started wearing a t-shirt and pants which she had never done before.

Tamang was a street vendor before the pandemic, and her family and especially her son disapproved of not just her new attire, but also the newfound passion for bicycling at her age.

But Tamang did not allow what people said to deter her, and finally after three months she could pedal around the streets with confidence. Now, her son posts videos and photos of her cycling on Facebook, much to her delight.

Tamang is one of the over 1,200 women in Patan who have learnt to use bicycles in the last two years as part of an initiative by a local women's social media group called महिलाको

लागि महिला (Women for Women) which became active during the second Covid-19 lockdown in 2021.

Many of the women were involved in small street side businesses, and lost their income during the pandemic. The group initially tried out meditation and Vipasana, but soon realised that limited mobility was one of the major challenges the women faced.

Taking charge of cycling lessons was Maheshwari Bista, who used to head the women's development wing of Lalitpur Metropolis.

"We used to call women for all kinds of training programs at the municipality but they always came 2-3 hours late," Bista recalls. "When we asked them why, they said they had to wait for a relative to give them a lift."

Bista was convinced that bicycling would be a cost-effective, eco-friendly and empowering initiative for the women.





PHOTOS: GOPEN RAI

In the beginning there were only a few participants. Rabita Shrestha from the municipality joined up just to motivate others even though she was just recovering from Covid-19.

As word spread, more joined the cycling campaign and other municipalities and wards in Kathmandu Valley have also started their own training. The group wants to take this initiative to all 77 districts.

"It has been nearly two years and we have now created this community of bicyclists," says Shrestha. "But more importantly, our modest initiative has made the women independent, they are no longer confined in their homes. They do not have to depend on others to take their produce to market."

Shiban Maharjan, 49, has been making handicraft products, incense, candies, detergents and woollen wear for many years.

But after two years of learning cycling, she is now also doing the deliveries to clients herself and her business has grown.

"I make my own living now I do not have to ask my husband for money," adds Maharjan who learnt to cycle within two days and had bought a bicycle on the third day, surprising everyone in her family. "Through cycling, I have gained new friendships at this point in my life."

Gyani Shova Awale was a sickly child who never ventured out. But learning to cycle has rejuvenated the 48-year-old. "I have been exploring Patan after I learnt cycling, there isn't a neighbourhood I haven't been to," she says. "My health problems have also disappeared."

Cycling lessons have also meant real enthusiasm for the sport for some with many others having participated in friendly rallies as well as competitive tournaments like Kathmandu Kora.

Jamuna Maharjan, also 48, has been to Nepalganj, Pokhara and other major towns to participate in cycling events. A housekeeper at The Inn Patan, she also uses a cycle for her daily commute to and from home.

"Before cycling, we were like a frog in a well, we knew nothing much of the world outside but we are now much more empowered now," she says.

Lalitpur's cycling lessons are continuing and more women are joining in. Part of the training is also safety, since Kathmandu's traffic can be dangerous for bicyclists.

"Teaching cycling is only a part of the activity, we also train them in safety techniques, and we also lobby for a smart city with cycling lanes," says Nistha Shrestha, an award-winning filmmaker, who is also behind the initiative.

She adds: "We were trying to develop skills and entrepreneurship among women. But along the way they also learnt how to cycle, and that has been a bonus." 🇳🇵



# Peddalling as a life lesson

**Self-reflection, patience, determination and optimism, cycling teaches it all**

■ Eliza Sthapit

Cycling brings fond memories. Learning to take that first ride with my mother in the small alley next to home. Re-learning with my husband in the streets of Europe.

Both came as a necessity. The first because I had failed several attempts at balancing, and it was a matter of self-pride. The second because cycling was the primary mode of affordable commute for a student overseas.

I often connect cycling with life, a balance you need to learn, and once learnt can never unlearn. What a beautiful form of experience that already is.

In Kathmandu, I cycle to work each day. Family, friends and acquaintances compliment me for being so conscious of my carbon footprint. But my cycling was due to forced necessity, I just do not

bruises and aches, but that does not deter me. Cycling has become a part of my life.

And there are people who encourage me. One traffic police officer always greeted me at the intersection I crossed every morning during my commute to work. Once a little girl asked me if it was all right for a woman to cycle. I told her I hoped someday she would be a pilot.

One night, the driver of a private car switched on the high beam so I could pedal along the potholed street in torrential rain. Strangers on the sidewalk smiled when they saw me on my bicycle.

However, I am aghast at the utter recklessness and impatience of motorcycle and vehicle drivers on the roads, speeding and overtaking dangerously. On a bicycle one notices such rashness even more.



have the fortitude to drive in the city's chaotic traffic.

I switched to cycling during the 2015 blockade. Between daily chores at the office and home with two little girls, the struggle to join the long queues at the petrol station had tired me out.

One evening, my husband brought home a beautiful bicycle. I was a bit angry about buying such an expensive bike. But eight years on I am so thankful because the bicycle continues to run solid and is my best buddy on the road.

Thin traffic during the blockade gave me confidence, and although hard at first, muscle memory eventually kicked in. When the blockade was lifted after six months and fuel was plentiful again, traffic clogged the streets again.

Honking always troubled me, and I wished I could put a banner with bold letters on my bag: Don't Honk. My wish was answered in 2016 when traffic police declared unnecessary honking a punishable offence.

A lot of people still warn me about the dangers of being on a bicycle on Kathmandu's roads. That is true, they are not the safest place to be. I have had a few scrapes with

Most of Kathmandu is a cycle city. Lalitpur now has bicycle lanes and that has made it easier to negotiate for space with other traffic. Moving slowly at my own pace, I have the opportunity to see and feel the things around me, to savour the beauty (and, yes, also the ugliness and dangers) of my city.

Cycling has become a ritual, and it does not tire me at all. It has given me a perspective on life, on how one needs to keep going no matter how steep the uphill, and keep an eye on the smaller wins every day. It reminds me that I am not in competition with anyone else, and I am only challenging myself to do better each day.

All these years, cycling has given me serenity, peace of mind, and a time for self-reflection. As the cycling culture continues to grow, it is also a reminder to make our roads safer for everyone. Fast or slow, all street users are equal.

Cycling teaches us to be civil and considerate of others. My right to use the road also comes with the responsibility to think for fellow citizens. 🇳🇵

*Eliza Sthapit is the National Director for Habitat for Humanity International Nepal.*

EVENTS



Mohini Waterfall Hike

Be one with the nature and join this waterfall hike with friends and family from Markhu-Mohini Jharana this Saturday. Book by 3pm 6 October. 7 October, 6:45am, Rs800, Bhrikutimandap

Kathmandu Marathon

Keep fit, participate in the 15th Kathmandu marathon. Visit <https://www.kathmandumarathon.com.np/register-now> for registration and other details. 14 October, Dasharat Rangsala Stadium



Domains of Wonder

Explore the rich culture and heritage of Kishangarh through the eyes of talented miniaturists. Immerse yourself in the intricate beauty of small yet captivating artworks to be presented by Studio Kishangarh. 10 October, 11am onwards, Siddhartha Art Gallery

Boudha Farmers’ market

Think global, shop local at the Saturday Boudha Farmers’ market. Buy fresh local harvest, baked goods, meals, and support small businesses. Saturdays, 8am-3pm, Utpala Café, Boudha



Katha Ghera’s play will bring to life Indian actor and film director and playwright Girish Karnad’s Wedding Album, translated by Akanchha Karki to the stage. Till 14 October, Kausi Theatre, Teku

DINING



Mamagoto

Enjoy Maki Rolls, Satays, Dumplings, Ramen and more all with a side of cocktails in this new quirky eatery at this Pan-Asian restaurant that serves a variety of Asian fusion dishes. Panipokhari (01) 4446299

MUSIC

Deep Echoes

Spend a quiet evening with soulful performance from musician and singer Deep Shrestha. 11 October, 7-10PM, Moksh, Jhamsikhel



Tribute to the Beatles

A night of nostalgia at London Pub Kathmandu will see various celebrity guest artists pay homage to the Beatles. 9 October, 8pm onwards, Darbarmarg



Musical Spectacle

Artists and bands Albatross, The Elements, Swoopna Suman and The Asters, Purna Rai, John Chamling Rai, and Satish Ghalan are coming together for a grand musical performance this weekend. 7 October, Bhrikutimandap



Live Music

This Friday Kathmandu band Tumbleweed Inc is performing live Tito’s Pub. Tickets available at Thamel and Jhamsikhel outlets. 6 October, 7pm onwards, Rs500 with drink, 9851275099

Trio no Treble

String trio Trio no Treble from Norway, is touring Nepal with four concerts. The group will also play school concerts, and one concert with musician Rachana Dahal. Until 8 October



Dhokaima Bistro

Looking for a new spacious restaurant with yummy dishes including fresh bakery items, great ambience and a good selection of drinks to choose from? Check out Dhokaima Bistro, the newest Dhokaima outlet. Mandikatar, (01) 5918934

The Diplomat

Experience luxurious culinary delights at The Diplomat’s Indian and Continental restaurants, without compromising on comfort. Hotel Ambassador, Lazimpat (01) 4410432

GETAWAY



Dahlia Boutique Hotel

A luxury hotel at the bank of Phewa Lake with a 180-degree mountain and city view, Dahlia Boutique Hotel is a good end to a memorable trek. Lakeside, Pokhara (061) 466505

Evergreen Eco-Lodge

At Evergreen Eco-Lodge, unwind in one of the rustic wooden tree-house cabins with thatched straw roofs and enjoy the tranquility of the dense surrounding forestry. Sauraha, 9845693879



Dom Himalaya

Dom Himalaya offers a space for visitors to indulge in traditional Nepali cuisine, relax with Tibetan singing bowls and bask in the vibrant chaos of Thamel. Thamel (01) 4263554

Bandipur Kaushi Inn

Bandipur Kaushi Inn is a small, rustic place to stay in the idyllic village of Bandipur, replete with cultural diversity and traditional architecture. Bandipur, Tanahu (065) 520083



Tiger Palace Resort

Considered one of the most dynamic, exciting and luxurious resorts in Nepal, Tiger Palace Resort offers a wide variety of entertainment, eateries and activities from an international Casino to six restaurants that visitors can choose from. Rupandehi, Bhairawa (071) 512000

Casa Mexicana

Take a culinary tour of Mexico with an assortment of tacos, quesadillas and tres leches cakes. From vegetarian to meat, there are options for everyone. Gairidhara and Patan, 9840542082



Bayleaf

Drop by the garden restaurant for Burmese dishes such as Burmese Tofu Thoke, Khao Swe Thoke, Mohinga (fish noodle soup) and other signature pork dishes. Tangel (01) 4437490

WEEKEND WEATHER



FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
27° 15°	27° 14°	27° 15°	26° 14°	26° 13°

End of season

And it’s a wrap. With that last parting shot this week, the 2023 summer monsoon season is officially over. The overall precipitation shortfall was made up for this week which saw up to 220mm of rain in 24 hours in some Tarai areas. Kathmandu Valley got 100% of total rainfall this season after a below-normal July. With westerlies now active, Dasain-like weather will prevail from the weekend, but cloud buildup and scattered thunderstorms with light showers are forecast along the mountains. Max temp will fall to the mid-20s and minimum down to 16 in the city.

OUR PICK

Thirteen-year-old trainee witch Kiki with her talking black cat Jiji leaves home to live on her own in order to become a full-fledged witch. She settles in the port city of Koriko. When she struggles to find a place to live, Osano, the owner of a bakery offers her a delivery gig in exchange for a room above the bakery. Thus begins Kiki’s journey to independence. Initially she struggles to fit into the new community but eventually discovers her place in the world. Kiki’s Delivery Service is a heartwarming, gorgeously rendered Studio Ghibli classic.



MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



गर्मी मौसममा संक्रामक रोगबाट बचाउँ र बचाऔँ

- गर्मी मौसममा मलेरिया, कालाजार, डेंगी, हैजालगायतका विभिन्न संक्रामक रोगहरू फैलिन सक्छन् ।
- संक्रामक रोग फैलाउने झिँगा, लामखुट्टे, भुसुना आदिको नियन्त्रण गरौं ।
- संक्रामक रोगबाट बच्न शुद्ध र उमालेको पानी पिऔं ।
- बासी तथा सडेगलेका खाना नखाऔं ।
- घरभित्र र वरपरको सरसफाइमा ध्यान दिऔं ।



नेपाल सरकार  
विज्ञापन बोर्ड

# How Nepal can finance climate action

Government must prepare to forcefully push the loss and damage agenda at COP28 in Dubai

■ Govind Ghimire

A key component of international climate negotiations is finance for adaptation measures, which Nepal will face difficulties to secure at COP 28 in Dubai in November.

The Conference of the Parties (COP) under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) brings together member nations for coordinated response to climate breakdown.

Although it is a forum for nations to assess and revise climate commitments and foster international cooperation, the summits face political and economic headwinds in securing funding for low-income nations to adapt and pay for loss and damage from the climate emergency.

Earlier COPs have set emission reduction targets, non-binding national commitments as well as the need for support from wealthier countries to deal with impact of weather extremes.

Since industrialised countries are largely responsible for historical emissions, they should provide financial support to developing countries to transition to cleaner fuels. Climate finance can take the form of grants, subsidised loans, technical assistance.

However, these are complex discussions and developing nations including Nepal have expressed concern about promises not kept, inadequacy of pledges, lack of equitable distribution and transparency, as well as redressal for loss and damage.



SHIVA BASKOTA

As far back as 2009, the Copenhagen Climate Conference set a fund-raising target of \$100 billion a year, these pledges remain largely unfulfilled, even as the rise in global average temperatures, the loss of sea ice and wilder weather are being experienced decades earlier than predicted.

Nepal faces many distinct challenges to reduce petroleum use, adapt to climate change and pay for loss and damage. The country's ability to invest in resilient infrastructure is limited. Expanding glacial lakes, melting permafrost, floods, landslides, glacial lake outburst floods like the one that hit Sikkim this week (See Editorial,

page 2) and springs going dry pose risks to lives and livelihoods.

Farmers dependent on rain-fed subsistence agriculture now have to deal with erratic monsoons and irregular rainfall. Changing precipitation patterns and glacier melt make hydropower unreliable, and infrastructure have been damaged and destroyed by freak floods on Himalayan rivers like Melamchi in 2021 (pictured, above).

Although Nepal has expanded forest cover to 45% of its area, doubling it in the past 30 years, we are not yet out of the woods, especially in the Tarai. Poor urban planning, settlements in high-risk areas and low public awareness as

well as political instability leading to governance shortcomings hinder meaningful adaptation measures.

Building on the 2015 Paris Agreement's objectives to keep global warming to 1.5 Celsius by 2050, the COP26 Climate Summit in Glasgow produced the Glasgow Climate Pact. Strengthening of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), an emphasis on adaptation, funding for developing countries, and addressing loss and damage.

In Dubai, Nepal must forcefully back demands for additional climate finance from industrialised nations especially for infrastructure and renewable energy projects. It should also push for a multilateral agreement to implement a loss and damage mechanism because climate-related harm already pose a serious threat.

Placing a price on carbon emissions, carbon taxes, and, other pricing mechanisms are based on the 'polluter pays' principle. Fossil fuel taxes encourage consumers to minimise emission by raising the cost of using them. On the other hand, cap-and-trade systems place a limit on emissions and permit companies to exchange emission allowances, causing emission reductions in the areas where they are most advantageous.

These instruments can work together to constitute a toolset for reducing emissions, along with

financial incentives for renewable energy sources, legislative requirements, carbon offsetting, voluntary carbon markets, etc.

A cross-border carbon credit framework can be a method to jointly tackle emissions between India, China, and Nepal in compliance with the COP resolutions and the principles of climate justice. Nepal has pledged to achieve net-zero emissions by 2045, which puts it ahead of China (2060) and India (2070). Nepal's giant neighbours can be partners in assisting Nepal's transition to clean energy.

In exchange, India and China could receive credits from Nepal's own carbon reduction efforts. This cooperative model would also support technology transfer, capacity building, and even control trans-boundary air pollution. The continued heavy reliance of China and India on coal and other fossil fuels highlights the necessity of such regional cooperation, while upholding climate obligations.

COP28 in Dubai is expected to yield significant financial assistance for developing countries like Nepal which expect to be rewarded for action they have taken on clean energy and expanding forest cover.

As one of the countries most vulnerable to the climate emergency, Nepal should take the lead in global negotiations. After all, melting ice in the Himalaya will not just affect Nepal, but impact more than 1 billion people downstream. 🇳🇵

Govind Ghimire is Deputy CEO of NMB Bank.



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A female collective in a remote village is a powerful model for independence and income

■ **Sahina Shrestha** in Baglung

Collectivisation may have earned a bad reputation because of Stalin's policies in the 1930s that led to widespread famine in the Soviet Union, but in Nepal today it is becoming a way for women farmers to work together to make up for the absence of men.

Sumitra Karki had been observing the worrying trend of young men moving to the cities or abroad, and in the absence of farmhands more terrace fields were fallow. In recent years, even the women had started leaving to take care of their grandchildren in the cities.

Baglung in the lap of Mt Dhaulagiri in central Nepal is the district with one of the highest proportion of out-migration of young men. In the scenic village of Galkot, tucked amidst forested mountains in the back of beyond, women like Karki who stayed behind have taken over farming.

The feminisation of farming in Nepal is an example of necessity being the mother of invention, so that women who barely grew enough to feed their families now make up the shortfall with money sent home by their husbands

abroad.

"Farming was not productive at all," says Karki. "The women had to wait for the menfolk to send home money even to buy and wear bangles. What kind of a life was that?"

But Sumitra Karki had other ideas. During a visit to Palpa, she had seen women engaged collectively in agriculture to grow more food and cash crops by putting fallow fields to good use. On return, she put forth the idea at a mothers' group meeting, but the other women did not quite grasp the concept.

"They had not seen what I had seen. There is a difference between seeing with our own eyes and listening to someone describe it," she explains.

But Karki did not give up, and a few years later the mothers' group applied for a government grant to grow vegetables and onions. The women realised the power of working collectively, where two and two became more than four.

Encouraged, the women formed the Melmilap Ekikrit Krishak Samuha collective farmer's group in 2019 with eleven members and Karki as president. Today, the women of the Dudilabhati settlement of Galkot who were once confined to household chores and dependent on remittances, are growing valuable vegetables, including unseasonal ones in greenhouses.

"It is easier to work in a group," says collective member Nirmala Gurung. "We get to learn from each other and it also makes the work more fun when there are more of us." For Nirmala, there is another reason to be happy: seeing her income rise, her husband has returned from the Gulf.

Nita Gurung is also happy she joined: "The collective farm

Nepal's checklist for improving agricultural production

■ **Bishow Parajuli**

Globally, there has been a massive increase in food crop production mainly due to increased land use and a rapid rise in yield.

Yet, hunger not only persists but is growing. Conflict, climate change and supply chain disruption are causing global food prices to rise, poorer households face unmet dietary needs and nutrition for children.

Decline in household food production means an increasing number of Nepalis have to buy food, and the country's dependence on imports is increasing even though 60-70% of the population is supposed to be engaged in agriculture. Nepal is high in the global hunger index, with 36% of children being stunted.

Farmers are worried about delayed rainfall due to changes in weather patterns and are unable to plant paddy on time. The shortage and high prices of fertiliser and seeds is a recurring issue. Farmers do get a reasonable price for their produce.

Rising food insecurity can be a trigger for instability and conflict. Access to adequate nutrition for all is part of a country's responsibility for wellbeing of its citizens.

At the historic UN General Assembly Summit in 2015, 193 member countries including Nepal agreed to transform the world by meeting 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. One of the goals is to eliminate all forms of hunger.

At the Food Security Summit Plus 2 in Rome, Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal stated: "It is important that we address the bottlenecks in every sector for making a leap towards zero hunger." The PM's statement needs to translate into action with leadership, commitment, and financing.

The government's budget for 2023/24 makes a commitment for a national campaign for self-reliance in agriculture with an increase in food production from 10.7 million tons to 14 million tons and a reduction in imports by 30% by the end of 2024.

This is clearly unrealistic in absence of budget allocation, shortage of agricultural inputs, lack of irrigation and extreme weather.

Nepal's Agricultural Development Strategy (2015 to 2035) focuses on increasing production with modernisation, processing and marketing. It can be a game changer.

# Strength in numbers for f



PHOTOS: GOPEN RAI

has given us a sense of collective security. Sumitra has been a good guide and coordinator."

Besides vegetables, the women also leased 5,000 sq m to grow millet this season, a native crop which is falling out of favour because it is more labour intensive and has been displaced by rice and wheat. But Karki wants to make this a model farm for the revival of the nutritious and climate-hardy indigenous crop. "We want to give priority to what was traditionally

grown here and make an income from that," she says.

Agriculture in Galkot used to be subsistence, with low yield on steep terrace farms, dependence on rain, limited market, risk of natural disasters and wild animal raids. All these factors have been exacerbated by the impact of climate breakdown in the Himalaya.

The first major challenge for the women's collective was Covid. All members of the group tested

positive, the market closed down and lots of vegetables went waste. Not one to give up, Karki took charge as soon as she recovered and started posting photos of vegetables on her Facebook page during the lockdown.

The group no longer sells vegetables through social media posts, but has developed contacts in the municipality to take their produce to market.

Growing up, Karki never thought she would ever be a farmer-

# Food security is national s



The PM's Agriculture Modernisation Program is linked to this strategy and covers a 10-year period ending 2023, but there are implementation challenges along with poor alignment with the move to a federal system.

The climate crisis adds to these threats. Shifts in rainfall patterns are affecting Nepal's food basket in the Tarai. The 2023 monsoon saw extreme weather and a long dry spell. Eight districts in the plains suffered from delayed rain with shortfall in paddy of 15-20%.

Migration has led to a serious shortage in labour and families are leaving a million hectares uncultivated in the mountains.

Besides high costs of agricultural inputs, low productivity in all three major cereal crops like paddy, wheat and maize are of serious concern. Fragmentation in farm size prevents economies of scale in modernisation and corresponding profitability of farming.

Nepal currently produces 10.5 million tons of cereals (5.5 million tons of rice, 2.7 million tons of

maize, 2 million tons of wheat and about 0.3 million tons of other crops such as millet. There is an estimated supply gap of around 2 million tons of paddy for this year.

India is the main source of food imports. In the absence of price stabilisation, when India announces restrictions on global food exports, there is concern about sudden food price rises across Nepal.

Millet is adaptable to harsh climates and grow well in mountain regions under rain-fed conditions, but its cultivation is declining. Since 2023 has been declared as the

# female farmers



entrepreneur. She had wanted to be a staff nurse. But when she was in Grade 9 at the age of 17, she was married. A year later, her oldest son was born. “Although my in-laws and husband were supportive, I couldn’t go back to school because I wanted to bring up my son myself,” says Karki who missed going to school. When her oldest was in Grade 4 and the younger boy was pre-school, she joined private classes and passed the school exam. In those days, her husband Padam tried his hand in farming, running a rice mill, poultry and running a shop. Sumitra was always by his side, learning the ropes. There was just one thing she wanted to change: society knew her as someone’s wife, daughter-in-law,

sister. But she wanted to carve her own identity. “Setting up a collective farming group has given me my own identity,” she says. “Now people know me as Sumitra Karki,” she says with visible pride. The seven women in the group work together in the fields, dividing time between their own plots and the group’s collective farm. The men come in as consultants and help with physical labour when needed. Profits are equally divided between the women, with some amount going into a savings account to buy seeds, or lease more land. Karki is aware that running a successful business needs time, but making an agro-business work takes even more effort because of

prices, weather, and other changing variables. But the women find their strength in numbers, and this cushions them from hurdles along the way. “Women are often left behind in our society. But when we gain financial independence our voices are heard in the family and larger community,” explains Karki. “So my dream is to add more women to the collective and make them financially independent. For farmers like us, there is no better way.”

## M. S. Swaminathan 1925-2023

India once reeled under chronic hunger. The famine of 1943 killed as many as 3.8 million people. But since then, India transformed itself into a big grain exporter. Credit for this goes to agronomist M S Swaminathan who died on 28 September in Chennai aged 98. The Bengal famine pushed young Swaminathan to pursue agricultural science, and after returning to India in 1954 after his studies, he dedicated his life to research into grain production.

Swaminathan was the architect of the Green Revolution and developed several high-yielding varieties of wheat and rice. His collaboration with Norman Borlaug on Mexican dwarf varieties of wheat in particular saved India and Pakistan from famine in the 1960s.

Borlaug went on to win a Nobel Peace Prize, toured India and sent a range of Mexican dwarf varieties of wheat to be bred with Japanese strains. Initial testing found the crop to be high-yield, disease-free and good quality.

Modifications were made in the laboratory to better suit Indian conditions, and when sown in 1968, production per hectare was impressive. By 1971, India was food-sufficient, and a few years later, net exporter of grain.

Next-door Nepal and South Asia also used Swaminathan’s hybrids to increase productivity to varying degrees of success. However, the



seeds required chemical fertiliser and pesticides reducing soil richness. High-yield hybrids also replaced indigenous varieties of grains, many of which have now disappeared. Genetically engineered crops are also often not as adaptable or suitable to the land.

Swaminathan has also been critiqued for prioritising economy over ecology, and how indigenous seeds that could have adapted better to climate change have now been replaced. In later years, Swaminathan himself advocated for sustainable agriculture, imploring the Indian government to use genetically engineered seeds only as a last resort.

Sonia Awale

# security

International Year of Millet, Nepal should promote its cultivation. The UN’s World Food Programme (WFP) in a recent survey found that about 4.26 million Nepalis eat insufficient diets. There are regional disparities in household diets, with lowest levels in Karnali Province (22.5% consuming an inadequate diet), followed by Sudurpaschim (16.9%). Overall, 45.4 % of children between 6 to 23 months of age did not meet the minimum recommended dietary diversity, with the lowest level in Karnali, Sudurpaschim and Lumbini. Given that nearly 70% of households are buying food, continued rise in prices and decrease in income will inevitably lead to an increase in malnutrition. A nationwide program for meals to students up to middle school in all government schools allocates Rs15 per student per day, which is insufficient. Fortunately, some municipalities are now contributing additional funds for school feeding programs, this trend should spread. Encouraging consumption of native crops could lead to resilient farming, regular supplies and better nutrition. Despite the lack of support, there are success stories, mainly due to individual and private sector engagement.

Bishow Parajuli was formerly the UN WFP Representative in India, Yemen and Egypt and UNRC/ UNDP Representative in Myanmar and Zimbabwe.

- CHECKLIST**  
Here is a checklist for the government to make an impact:
- ☑ Introduce and implement budget increase and governance for farming, along with expansion of livestock, poultry, fishery, horticulture, olericulture and medicinal plants.
  - ☑ Adapt and mitigate climate impact with expansion of irrigation, cultivation of indigenous rain-fed crops and diversification of livelihood.
  - ☑ Protect and improve the livelihood of vulnerable communities with safety nets and employment to ensure food security.
  - ☑ Establish a strong governance structure to coordinate implementation, review and monitor progress in program delivery, outcome and impact.
  - ☑ Cultivate fallow land and help small farmers, with support in technical know-how, marketing, with the engagement of the private sector. Increase women’s engagement in the production process.
  - ☑ India and China have extensive experience in transformation of agriculture from food deficit to food surplus. More exchanges, cooperation and partnership with these countries and UN system, in particular the Rome-based agencies WFP, FAO, IFAD and UNDP, are needed.



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# Prajwal Parajuly's Nepalisphere

Sikkimese author weaves stories of identity, culture, and family across the Nepali speaking world and beyond

■ Sajeet M Rajbhandari

The Gurkha's Daughter, Prajwal Parajuly's debut book was birthed out of a lie. Parajuly had just quit his advertising job in New York and moved back home to Sikkim. His family was not happy, and he was met with endless questions about his plans. "To shut them up, I told my parents I was writing a book," recalls Parajuly. He had never really written fiction. Parajuly grew up in a Nepali-speaking joint family of lawyers in Gangtok where books were aplenty. The town itself was a melting pot of cultures. His family was Hindu, he went to a Protestant church next door, and attended a school whose leanings were heavily Buddhist. The maternal side of the family had its roots in Nepal, and Parajuly visited Kathmandu every other year. "This was where you escaped to when you wanted to go to a big city but were too nervous to go to Delhi or Calcutta. At least in Kathmandu you can talk in Nepali," he recalls. The mixed family root influenced his own sense of identity, but as Parajuly grew older he liked that he was a "hodgepodge" of the two countries. This is perhaps a reason why Parajuly's books are so popular in polyglot South Asia. A Nepali-Indian ancestry, childhood in Gangtok are recurrent themes in his stories which deal with the

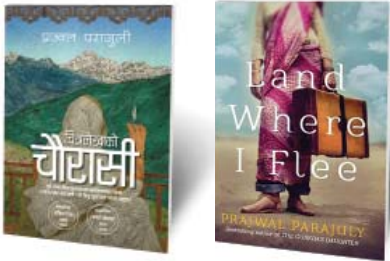


sentiments of a new generation of South Asians, and their struggles with identity and culture. Writing his first book was a struggle. "It felt like I was learning how to write all over again," he remembers, "I didn't even know if

a comma went inside the quotation marks or outside them. But I was 23 or 24, and blissfully unaware about how the publishing world actually functioned. The sole reason I started with short stories was that I naively thought a novel would be

too difficult to write." Parajuly never expected the book to achieve the level of global success that it did. At 27, he became the youngest Indian to sign an international publishing deal when he got a multi-country, two-book deal with London-based Quercus Publishing. In 2012, The Gurkha's Daughter was out in bookstores and almost exactly a year after came his first full novel, Land Where I Flee. Since his last book came out, Parajuly has started teaching creative writing in Colby College in Maine and recently finished a stint as visiting faculty at Sciences Po, Paris. He was also on the jury panel for the Dylan Thomas Prize in 2018, a contest where his own debut book had been shortlisted in 2013. Much like the characters Parajuly writes about, his books have also crossed cultures with translations in various languages. Land Where I Flee was translated into the French, Fuir et revenir. But translation goes beyond converting words from one language to another. Even when Parajuly himself is writing, he is continually thinking of Nepali-Indian dialogue, and making them work in English. Many of the things Parajuly writes about would be alien to his Western audience. The main reason The Gurkha's Daughter is the main story for the book is because the publishers wanted a title that could resonate with readers in both the Subcontinent and the UK. When the book was launched in

North America, the publishers and Parajuly even considered changing the title to The Immigrants, the final story in the book. The translations Parajuly feels most grateful for are the ones closest to home. The Gurkha's Daughter was translated as Gurkha Ki Chhori in 2015, and the Nepali translation by Bibhu Luitel of Land Where I Flee was published last month as Chitraklekha ko Chaurasi. Both translations were published by nepa~laya in Kathmandu. It must feel strange that characters speaking in Nepali were first rendered into English in his stories, and then had to be translated back into Nepali. At the launch of Chitraklekha ko Chaurasi, Parajuly admitted that he always imagined characters in his book conversing in a mixture of Nepali and English. Now that those dialogues are in Nepali, he feels the book has come full circle. A homecoming of sorts. He says, "There was a point where I thought this was the end, perhaps there will only be two books. But I think maybe I have another book or two in me."



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