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## RSP dos and don'ts

### Shristi Karki

Barely a month after the March election, newly elected lawmakers convened for the first session of Parliament on Thursday (pictured above).

But the RSP had already hit the ground running in its first week in office. Prime Minister Balendra Shah and his trusted Home Minister Sudan Gurung conducted a slew of high profile arrests.

The former prime minister, home minister and Kathmandu CDO, among others, were detained in connection with the 8 September massacre outside Parliament.

The Cabinet unveiled its 100-point roadmap outlining sweeping institutional, economic and social reforms to ensure better service delivery, and setting deadlines for itself for the first 100 days in office.

Key priorities include strengthening digital governance, removing redundancy across the civil service, investigating assets of high-ranking political and government figures, depoliticising the bureaucracy and universities, as well as broader legal and constitutional reforms.

"The move to hold former leaders accountable sends a

powerful signal that impunity is no longer politically untouchable," says Pukar Malla of Governance Lab at Daayitwa Abhiyan. "On the reform agenda, the direction is right but the timeline is too compressed, 100 days is not enough to transform the system. It is only enough to establish the discipline of transformation."

The RSP's decisions have mostly been greeted with enthusiasm by the electorate. Nepalis are for the first time in decades genuinely hopeful about the country's leadership.

"The enthusiasm is real because the pain is real. But people are not just asking for symptoms to be treated. They want the patterns underneath the symptoms to change," says Malla. "That is where the leadership journey becomes much harder, because structural change is slower, more conflictual, and far less theatrical than headline decisions."

The RSP's prompt proactiveness signals a can-do approach designed to placate voters impatient to see immediate change, and also to warn influential figures. The message is also to the bureaucracy to pull its weight, and clean up its act.

But in public discourse, there is also a sense that anyone critical of the government's decisions can be targeted and trolled. Enthusiasm

about the new government seems to outweigh critical and nuanced reasoning about whether 'Balendra Sarkar' can achieve targets it has given itself within the self-imposed timeframe.

Any concerns about the RSP's perceived high-handedness or criticism of state overreach tends to be dismissed, branded as noisemaking by mouthpieces of old parties. Critics say the arrest of Oli, Lekhak others did not follow due process, and displays the very partisanship and vendetta tactics of the legacy parties that the RSP vowed to dismantle.

"The detentions and the plans this government has made for the next 100 days might be necessary, but they seem to be optimised for public spectacle rather than being deliberative steps for sustained reforms," says researcher Dovan Rai of Body and Data.

"K P Oli failed because he put himself above the system, and it seems as though that power has just transferred from one personality to another. What we need is strong institutions, not strongmen that play the role of hero or villain."

The RSP's strategy to overhaul the state apparatus is high-stakes, aspirational and unquantifiable.

The new leaders and the public must recognise Nepal's problems cannot be solved in 100 days.

The near two-thirds dominance in Parliament offers the RSP a chance to show results, but it is also an unforgiving majority. Failure is not an option.

The NC and the UML are licking their wounds, and again proved their obsolescence this week by trying to rehabilitate and reinstate old leaders. The UML is on warpath, and missed another opportunity to turn a new leaf by rejecting 36-year-old Suhang Nembang as parliamentary party leader.

People who did not vote for RSP must give the party a chance to deliver on promises. But the party's most effective opposition may have to be its own voters, who must play the check and balance role by insisting on results, and preventing fawning support for populist leaders resulting in authoritarian creep.

"The public now plays a critical role in holding the leadership accountable, it must go beyond small wins," says Dovan Rai. "Support must not come from opportunism, and criticism must not be based on prejudice."

**A dead tree tests Nepal's bureaucracy**  
GUEST EDITORIAL  
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# A dead tree tests Nepal's bureaucracy

Can the new government get the bureaucracy to be less bureaucratic?



**GUEST EDITORIAL**  
Ramesh Bhushal

**N**ext to my home in Bhainsepati stood a dead Uttis tree. A nearby water tank built a year earlier had killed its roots.

If the tree collapsed, people living nearby and those queuing up to fetch water at the tap would be hurt. With the storm season approaching, the risk was obvious. The tree could also fall on my own house, so I volunteered to find a way to remove it.

Little did I know how difficult it would be. A forest officer acquaintance told me there is a special procedure for cutting risky trees. I contacted the Lalitpur District Forest Office (DFO). He said a technical report from a field officer was needed, and passed on her number. When I called, she asked for the location, photos, and a video. I sent them all.

The ward office also suggested I use the Metropolitan City's mobile app, Lalitpur Alert, to report the problem. I uploaded photos, and submitted the complaint. This seemed to be very easy and efficient.

Indeed, the next day the municipality called me back and I explained the situation. They said they could not act without permission from the DFO. I asked why the app existed if the city could not act on such complaints. The officer said he did not know. My happiness was short-lived.

A couple of days later, the app notified me that my problem had been solved, and the



RAMESH BHUSHAL

complaint was removed. But the dead tree still stood there defiantly.

A week later, two forest technicians arrived to inspect the tree. They asked if I had a measuring tape. "You are the technicians," I told them. "You came to inspect the tree, and you came without a measuring tape?"

I rummaged at home and found a tape measure. They got the diameter and said they would prepare a technical report, but I would have to obtain a recommendation letter from

the ward office and submit it to the DFO. "This tree is dead," I told them. "It is on public land. You have seen it with your own eyes. You know it's dangerous, so write a report and arrange for it to be cut. Why do I have to run from office to office to apply for recommendation letters?" Their answer was simple, yet expected: "Those are the rules."

They left, and I gave up. Two technicians spent half a day visiting the site. The metropolis runs a complaint system with a mobile app funded with public money. The ward office has staff to solve problems. Yet none of these institutions took the responsibility to remove a dangerous tree.

Then, one bright December morning, a few neighbourhood boys were swinging their axes on the trunk. They had no proper equipment, no safety gear, and no professional experience. I gave them some money and so did a neighbour. It took an hour or so for the tree to come crashing down safely. We had paid to have the tree cut illegally, and the matter ended there.

Multiple government offices, technicians, procedures, and mobile apps could not remove a dangerous tree, and we had to break the law to cut it. The tree is gone now, but the real problem remains: an inefficient bureaucracy.

It is perhaps emblematic that Tree is also the electoral symbol of the Nepali Congress (NC), the grand old party of democracy which was decimated by the RSP in last month's election. On Monday in a meeting with MPs in Singha Darbar, Prime Minister Balendra

Shah blamed the UML and NC for politicising the bureaucracy and making it ineffective.

## A DEEP REFORM

Later, I posted on Facebook that we must demand a deep reform of the state bureaucracy. The first responses came from two senior government officials. They told me privately that they agreed 200% but could not say so publicly.

It is quite normal for a Nepali to get the run around in government offices, it is almost a given to be asked for a bribe. As an environmental reporter and citizen, I have numerous such examples.

It is not just one sector that has been suffering. It is everywhere, and this is just an example of how complicated our bureaucracy is. As a 40 something person, I remember the 1990 pro-democracy movement, the Maoist insurgency. Many promises made then by the politicians were broken.

We fought for rights, we fought for regime change. The country has changed political systems several times, from monarchy to multiparty democracy and finally a republic.

Yet one thing that remains largely untouched or reformed is our inefficient and corrupt bureaucracy. The new government, to be led by the youngest prime minister in our history, must start this reform if it wants to deliver. Otherwise, we may have to keep changing governments every few years, and still find ourselves unable to legally cut down even one dead tree. 🇳🇵

Ramesh Bhushal is an award-winning environmental journalist and author of 2024 travelogue *Chhalbato*.

## Trending Online



### Nepal swears in Cabinet

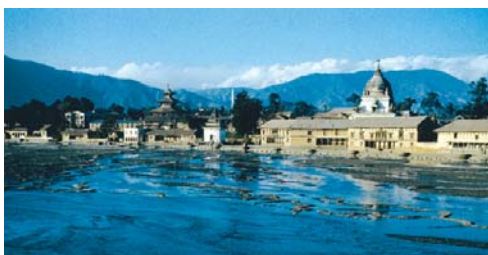
by Shristi Karki  
Nepal's newly-appointed Prime Minister Balendra Shah and his Council of Ministers took the oath of office in Kathmandu last week. They now have their work cut out for them. Read roundup at nepalitimes.com

**f** Most reached and shared on Facebook

### A dead tree tests the bureaucracy

by Ramesh Bhushal  
Environmental reporter Ramesh Bhushal recounts how multiple government offices and procedures could not remove a dangerous tree in his neighbourhood. Can the new government get the bureaucracy to be less bureaucratic? Read the Guest Editorial (above).

**x** Most popular on X



### A lifeline becomes liability

by Roshni Gurung  
The death of Bagmati River is a systemic collapse of ecological integrity, socio-economic stability and cultural heritage, affecting its downstream users as well. Read the article on our website.

**”** Most commented

### Time to enter Web3

by Vishad Raj Onta  
As a new forward-looking government of technocrats assumes control, Nepal should identify talent which exists, and adopt technologies such as cryptocurrencies and blockchain, regulate them effectively and reap the benefit. Go online for details.

**🔍** Most visited online page

## Letters

### REVIVING BAGMATI

Saving Bagmati may need a national, governmental approach from vision and planning to implementation ('A lifeline becomes liability', Roshni Gurung, nepalitimes.com). Civic outcry could set such a process in motion but action by individual civilians might have chaotic and random results. The public and government must collaborate and start the process.

**Renate Schwarz**

■ Fifty years ago, oxidation ponds were created to utilise slurry, treat wastewater, and release clean water in Bagmati. Our entities could not maintain the pumps and caused sewage to enter into villages near Chovar. A year ago, the same type of

infrastructure has been made east of Vishnumati.

**Rajendra N Suwal**

■ Bagmati's fate is the result of unplanned urbanisation and a lack of civic sense.

**Kirat Rai Manuraj**

■ Preserving Bagmati is the responsibility of all people. If it is a holy site, then it will be a spiritual entity that unifies us.

**Andreas Jarkowski**

■ The Bagmati will start smiling again if we relieve the pressure on land and the capital.

**Deepak Shrestha**

■ Grateful to the author Roshni Gurung for her powerful words on the Bagmati River. She reminds us that rivers are lifelines, not just resources, and their decline is a collective loss.

**Sujan Nepali**

## Online Package



### LEARNING SPACES

Patan Museum is more than just the most popular of Kathmandu's destinations for visitors, it also provides a striking experience of exploration and learning. Watch the video.



### WEAVING NEW LIFE

Pabi Sara and Chandra Bahadur's New Sangharsha Dhaka Udhog is one of the 32 small-scale dhaka businesses in Palpa. Subscribe to our YouTube channel for more multimedia content.

### NEW PM

Don't you think Balen's reticence is a breath of fresh air compared to the flippancy of a loquacious Oli? ('Ball in Balen's court', Shristi Karki #1304)

**Ajay Pradhan**

■ I am interested in only what Balen does and how he delivers in development in a just way, no talk please from any Nepali politician ever.

**Forester**



### Ball in Balen's court

### NEPAL BUREAUCRACY

The source of our real problem is the corrupt, antiquated, inefficient and anti-Nepal bureaucracy ('A dead tree tests Nepal's bureaucracy', Ramesh Bhushal, Guest Editorial, Page 2).

**Airline Guy**

### NATURE CONSERVATION

This study on fragmented forests has interesting findings that should not be ignored for the sake of our biological diversity' (Protecting nature outside national parks', Page 10-11).

**Hum Bahadur Gurung**

### MICHAEL THOMPSON

A moving tribute and illuminating back story of a quietly influential intellectual ('Michael Thompson, 89', Dipak Gyawali, nepalitimes).

**David Seddon**

## 1,000 Words



MADHAV DHITAL / FACEBOOK

### PEDAL POWER:

Member of Parliament from Sindhuli, Ashish Gajurel of the RSP, who is a public transport expert and former head of Nepal Intermodal Transport Development Board (NITDB), bicycled from Bhaktapur for the first session of the House on Thursday. Gajurel is a strong proponent of a reliable public transport system.



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# Fuel price shock hits aviation

West Asia war fallout impacts tourism and economy during peak travel season

As a direct fallout of the Israel-American war on Iran, Nepal on Monday nearly doubled the price of aviation fuel in a move that is going to impact during the spring peak tourism season.

The steep price hike of jet fuel appears to have been made to cushion the impact on the general public because the price of petrol, diesel and cooking gas were not hiked this time.

Aviation turbine fuel (ATF) will now cost \$1,785 per kilo litre, up from \$966. The cost of ATF in Kathmandu was already one of the highest among Asian airports, and this price hike will affect mostly long-haul flights to Istanbul, Seoul and Narita for airlines that need to refuel in Kathmandu.

Domestic airlines, which paid Rs127 per litre, will now have to pay Rs251. "We have no recourse but to pass this on to passengers as a fuel surcharge," said one executive of a domestic airline.

As it is, Nepal Oil Corporation levied a hefty tax on petrol and ATF in order to subsidise diesel and cooking gas. Many analysts were expecting a fuel price hike, but the near-doubling of the price of ATF means the new Nepal government is trying to protect ordinary citizens from raising the price of diesel and LPG.

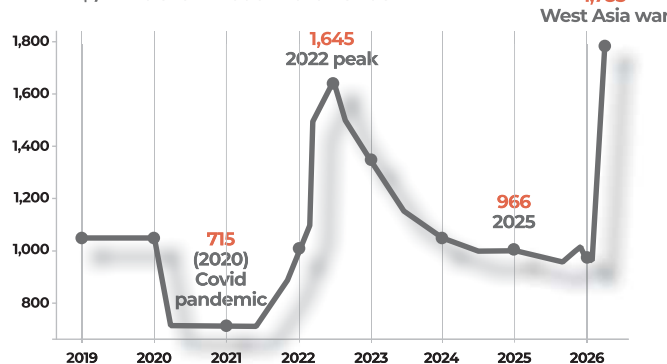
Aviation fuel in Nepal is trucked in on tankers from Indian refineries and its price is highest in Kathmandu, and less in Bhairawa and Pokhara — transportation



NEPAL OIL COOPERATION

## Sky high prices

\$ / kL litre for Aviation Turbine Fuel



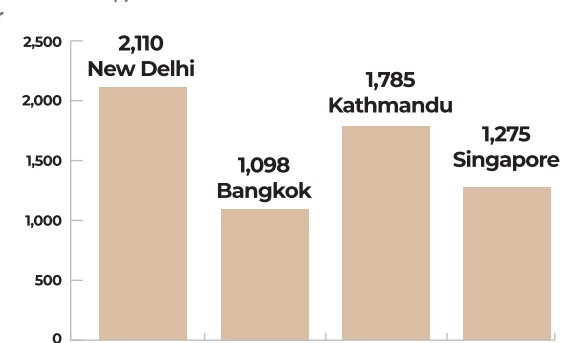
costs being higher depending on distance. But even in Bhairawa, ATF prices have doubled to \$1,796 per kL for international airlines.

Most airlines flying Kathmandu from nearer airports in India, the Gulf and Southeast Asia will be less impacted because they can fly in

on full tanks and need minimum refuelling in Kathmandu. But carriers like Turkish Airlines, Cathay Pacific, Korean Air, and Nepal Airlines which fly wide body aircraft on long-distance routes will be hit hardest. However, ATF costs have also been raised in

## Aviation Fuel Costs

\$ / kL



regional airports like Hong Kong, India and Singapore. Korean Air is adopting emergency measures to reduce costs to make up for rising fuel prices. South Korea gets nearly all its fuel from the Gulf, and the blocking of the Strait of Hormuz has been especially damaging for

the country.

Fuel makes up more than a third of the operating cost of airlines, and even a small increase in ATF prices can make a big difference. Crude oil prices have increased 50% since the West Asia war began on 28 February, and global ATF prices have doubled.

## DOUBLE SHOCK

Airlines in Asia, including Nepal, face a double shock. The first is the higher fuel cost, and the second is that fewer people are travelling. Nepal's tourism arrivals fell by half in March compared to February. India has added up to 20% fuel surcharge on domestic flights, and has reduced flights by 12%.

Chinese airlines have also been affected, with China Eastern preparing for significant impact of the Gulf war. It has added fuel surcharges to new tickets, as have Cathay Pacific, Thai International and Air Asia. Vietnam has drastically cut the number of domestic flights, and the Philippines will ration ATF.

Australia imports 90% of its ATF mainly from China which has stopped export to ensure domestic supply to its own airlines. Carriers like Qantas have curtailed flights, changing aircraft type on long-haul routes, and a fuel surcharge of up to 20% have been added to tickets.

Most Asian airlines are adding fuel charges only to new tickets, and the increase will not affect the price of pre-sold tickets issued for April and May. 🇳🇵

## NMB BANK एनएमबि बैंक

### Swarnim Wagle



Incoming Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle has hit the ground running by cancelling 15 laws as his first act in office, deeming them obstacles to economic growth. The laws concerned those fostering black market, private forest nationalisation, foreign investment restrictions, export smuggling, and revenue leakage. These reforms aim

to reduce bureaucratic hurdles and make the sector friendly to the private sector.

Nepal's private sector has responded positively to the government's 100-point Good Governance Blueprint, especially the energy export strategy, the commitment to fight corruption, and the repealing of outdated laws. The Blueprint also aims to integrate AI into the country's economy. Key initiatives include digitising budget, tax, customs, and treasury systems; a faceless tax audit, and linking taxpayer PAN numbers to NID cards.

The government also ordered the immediate shutdown of all online betting apps and websites on Tuesday as part of its 100-point good governance reform program. The MoCIT issued a directive to the NTA, which has instructed all ISPs to block the sites.



### Turkish to Timișoara

Turkish Airlines has added flights to Timișoara, its fourth destination in Romania. There will be five flights every week, and the airlines is offering special fares starting from \$169 for the Istanbul-Timișoara-Istanbul route.



### BYD at WADA

BYD distributor Cimex participated in the WADA Auto Show in Pokhara, held 25-29 March showcasing its Atto 1, 2, and 3 electric SUV models. Bookings made at the show came with perks such as a 10-year/200,000 km battery and motor warranty, free accessories, and a home charger.



### Suarpana Shahi

Aloft Kathmandu Thamel's Marketing Manager Suarpana Shahi was awarded Select Property Marketing Leader of the Year at Marriott International's ELITE Awards 2025. Since joining in April 2023, Shahi who has over 12 years of experience in hospitality and brand development, has led integrated marketing and public relations strategies aligned with Marriott's global standards while ensuring strong local market relevance.

Her contributions span strategic brand positioning, innovative guest engagement initiatives, key outlet relaunches, and performance-driven digital campaigns, all of which have supported sustained business growth.

### Kumari Mastercard

Kumari Bank announced its first Mastercard debit card, which will be accepted at all Mastercard ATMs and point-of-sale terminals in Nepal, India, and Bhutan and supports secure online and international transactions.



### IME AI Hackathon

Global IME Bank is organising the second edition of its AI/ML Hackathon, 29-31 May. Participants will work on projects like autonomous credit and lending, agentic fraud detection, multilingual voice banking. The best projects will receive cash prizes and the chance to collaborate with the bank.



### Samsung Smart Ghar

Samsung Nepal's Smart Ghar New Year campaign from 1-14 April offers discounts on TVs, washing machines, and refrigerators. Select TV buyers will receive one year of NETTV. The appliances can also be bought on a 24-month payment plan.



### IME + Tilganga

Global IME Bank and Tilganga Eye Institute agreed to provide free cataract surgery for senior citizens and disadvantaged patients, also promises free eye screenings and prescription glasses for students in need across Nepal.

### Govt to govt

The Prime Minister's office in a statement on Thursday said that henceforth government advertisements, notices and announcements will only go to state-run media like Gorkhapatra, The Rising Nepal, Radio Nepal and Nepal tv. The notice also says payment for the placements must be made directly without going through ad agencies. The government used to pay for public service announcements in private media where there were said to be irregularities.

### Foreign aid report

Nepal received US \$1.6 billion in development assistance last fiscal year, a 15.5% increase. However, the share of aid in the budget dropped to 14.5%, the lowest in a decade, due to increased domestic revenue use. The World Bank was the largest donor with \$541 million.

### Ather Rizta S

Vaidya Energy launched the Ather Rizta S e-scooter across Nepal on 27 March. Priced at Rs295,000, the Rizta offers 123km range, 4.3kW peak power, and a top speed of 80 km/h. The first 150 customers will receive Rs20,000 off.



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# NEPAL HIMALAYA SPRING 2026

This year's mountaineering season promises to be the busiest (and most crowded) yet

Vishad Raj Onta

It is only April, and Himalayan expeditions are already making rotations to acclimatise on Annapurna and Dhaulagiri, and will soon be making summit pushes.

On Mt Everest, Icefall Doctors are fixing ropes and ladders into the Western Cwm as international climbers arrive at Base Camp.

Spring 2026 is going to be the busiest and most crowded so far in the Nepal Himalaya. The main reason is that China has closed expeditions from the north side for eight-thousanders Everest and Cho Oyu, and also Xixapangma.

The closure is informal, from what one can make out. The Chinese have not put out any official statement, but there are no permits either. The reason seemingly was the 'Rising Dragon' firework display last September by pyrotechnic artist Cai Guo-Qiang near Xigatse.

Working with outdoor wear company Arc'teryx, Guo-Qiang set off an impressive sequence of orange and white fireworks that wound up a mountain. The spectacular display was criticised for damaging the fragile ecology of the Tibetan Plateau. But this cannot be the only reason the north side is closed.

Experienced Everest blogger Alan Arnette anticipates that about 125 climbers will shift to the Nepal side of the mountains, and expects there to be up to 900 summits this spring — up from the highest spring number so far of 876 climbers on top in 2019.

The early Base Camp arrivals are having problems with their first rotations because of heavy snow this season. Unlike previous springs, this year has seen back-to-back blizzards at high altitudes since February. The increased snow load on the slopes have increased avalanche danger right across the mountains.

There has been an increase in numbers on Everest despite the West Asia war, flight disruptions, LPG shortage and new regulations. The permit fee has gone up for the first time since 2015 from \$11,000 to \$15,000 this year.

The Tourism Bill passed by Nepal's Upper House last year would have required climbers to have first summited a 7,000m peak in Nepal before attempting Everest. However, the Department of Tourism has confirmed that there are no new experience requirements this season. Some want this rule changed to include 7,000m peaks anywhere in the world.

That could be one reason people are rushing to climb Everest before the Nepal government changes its mind and enforces the new regulations on prior experience on Everest. "It's probably going to encourage a lot of people that simply are not ready to go," reckons Alan Arnette. "Once again, we may see a lot of inexperienced people on the mountain trying to get in before the rule comes into place, if it does."

Arnette has always been sceptical of Everest regulations, and points out many instances where rules have been announced but not implemented over the ten years that he has been tracking them. For example, a helicopter ban to Everest Base Camp was announced last year, but rescinded. A rule requiring climbers to bring down waste was never seriously enforced.

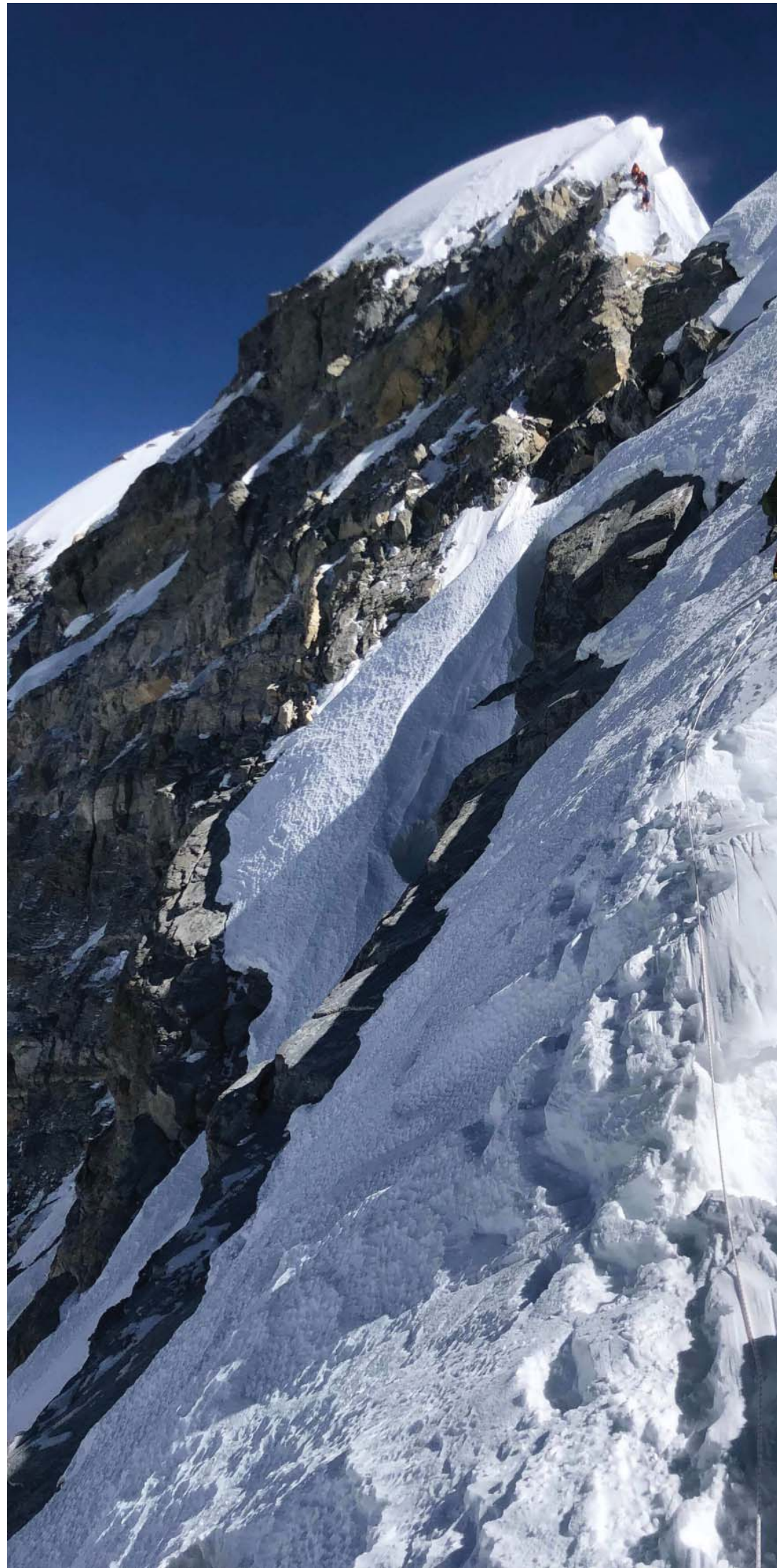
Since there is so much money involved for the government and for the operators, any rule that would reduce revenue is never fully implemented. This year there is another 'High-Altitude Trash Quota' rule requiring climbers and guides operating above Camp 2 to collect and bring down at least 2kg of waste from the higher camps.

The Nepal government has tried to diversify peaks on offer by reducing the royalty on climbs, but the draw of Everest, Annapurna and other eight-thousanders seems to be too great. Even when the permit fees for some remote peaks like Kangri Shar, Himlung and Api, were reduced to \$400, there are few takers.

## TIME LAPSE

Clients and expedition operators have been trying to shorten the time needed to complete an Everest expedition from the city of origin to the top and back. Since Nepal has no rules about spending a certain number of days in acclimatisation, this has allowed some expedition organisers to use new technology.

Austrian operator Lukas Furtenbach last May led a group of four British ex-military clients to the summit within a week of leaving London. This climb was scrutinised because the group had practiced breathing xenon gas, a substance that increases the count of red blood cells and is banned in competitive sports. The climbers had also trained for months at home



# Mountaineer-turned Cultural T

Dipak Gyawali

Michael Thompson, who died on 18 March after suffering a stroke a few weeks earlier, was a former Gurkha officer, mountaineer, and an academic who worked on Cultural Theory. He himself had asked to be taken off medical support after doctors said they could do no more.

Together with his PhD adviser, the late Mary Douglas and fellow PhD student Steve Rayner of Oxford's Institute for Science, Innovation and Society, Mike chose to generalise from years of anthropological work to filter out common traits of human behaviour across time and space, and then to apply that to modern society and its conflicts.

Cultural Theory has also been used to explain water and energy conflicts in Nepal and California, seat belt and pension fund battles in Europe, the underlying social dynamics of kibbutz in Israel, and what Mike liked to call "argumentative technology assessment".

Unlike other 'descriptive' social sciences, Cultural Theory is 'interpretive' in its orientation, which makes many rather uneasy with its 'uncomfortable knowledge'. A classic example is the massive almost six-year exercise that resulted in the multi-country, multi-author 4-volume study Human Choice and Climate Change led by Steve Rayner and Elizabeth Malone for the US Department of Energy and the Pacific North-West Lab.

It was, and perhaps still is, the first time that the social sciences looked seriously into climate change. Mike liked to say that his own work on Cultural Theory was initially conceptualised while he was in Nepal climbing mountains.

He was part of the British expeditions on Annapurna's South Face in 1970 and Everest Southwest Face in 1975. "To my surprise, mountaineering and applied systems analysis came together quite effectively," he once said.

In line with Cultural Theory, which examines and explains everyday life, Mike's sociology of mountaineering expeditions was published in Diadem Books' Mirrors in the Cliffs in 1983 as a hilarious but astute piece titled Sahibs and Shepas.





KARMA TENZING

in hypoxic tents, and used supplemental oxygen during the actual climb.

The success of that expedition prompted an investigation by Nepal's Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Civil Aviation, but there was nothing it could do because the team had taken the xenon in Germany two weeks before their trip. But even if they had administered the gas in Nepal, it would technically not be illegal.

Furtenbach is firmly in favour of speed, and of using the gas. "The only reason why we are working with xenon is to make climbing safer, to protect climbers from high altitude sickness," he says, arguing that the less time climbers spend on the mountains, the less their exposure is to disasters, sickness, and they also generate less trash.

His firm, Furtenbach Adventure, offers a three-week Everest South Flash expedition, at a cost of €100,000, using custom oxygen systems. Other expeditions take up to two months.

A young American duo of Ryan Mitchell and Justin Sockett got to Everest Base Camp five days ago. They are preparing for an oxygen-free summit attempt.

Being around these mountains for one



DAMIEN FRANCOIS

day has already brought me so much joy. Every time I come back to the Khumbu I feel more familiar and connected,' posted Mitchell. He and Sockett have since summited Lobuche East (6,119m) as they continue to acclimatise and wait for the Khumbu Icefall route to be fixed.

There are other sans-O<sub>2</sub> trips planned this climbing season in Nepal. Norwegian Kristin Harila, the fastest in the world to climb all 14 8,000ers (in 92 days), is attempting the Nuptse, Lhotse, and Everest three-peak climb without supplemental oxygen.

American Tyler Andrews and Ecuadorian Karl Egloff are continuing their race to break records in Everest. While Andrews is attempting the Fastest Known Time from Base Camp to the top without oxygen, Egloff is taking it a step further and going for a round trip: from Base Camp to the summit and back in record time.

Both Egloff and Andrews had attempted these climbs in 2025 spring, but abandoned around 7,000m due to bad weather.

Kami Rita Sherpa wants to extend his all-time record of total Everest summits to 32, while Kenton Cool from England is chasing 20, a non-Nepali record.

The first summits of the season will be in late April, or early May depending on weather. Besides Everest, there are a lot of interesting climbs on lesser known peaks.

The Japanese trio of Masayuki Takenaka, Tatsuro Sugimoto, and Ryota Nomura, for example, are attempting the unclimbed Jarkya Himal (6,473m) near Manaslu. 🇯🇵

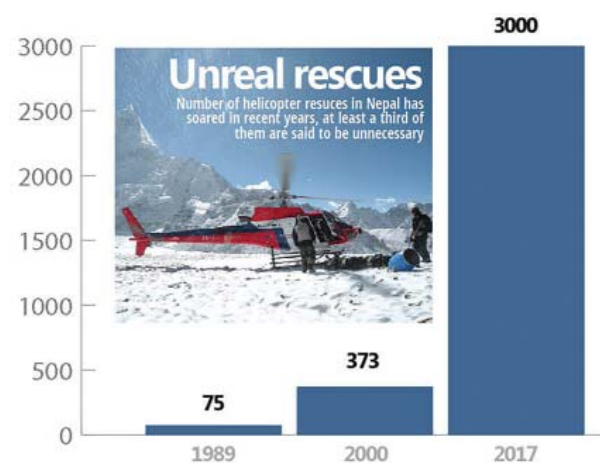
## FAKE RESCUES

This year's spring climbing season has coincided with Nepal's new government taking action against alleged perpetrators in fake rescues and insurance fraud.

The Central Investigation Bureau (CIB) has already arrested more than a dozen trekking agency executives, hospital managers and helicopter company executives for medevac insurance fraud. Climbers are known to fabricate medical emergencies, get flown down from as high as Camp II on Everest, and then submit false insurance claims.

Sometimes one flight is made to look like many using fake invoices. Trekking companies are also involved in fake rescues of hikers who just get tired of walking.

Too many fake claims could lead to insurer's losing confidence in the industry, and increased premiums, leading to delayed responses in real accidents.



As a result of the scandal, there is now more scrutiny from the government about rescues. Already, helicopter operators have to wait for permission before carrying out rescues while their application is vetted.

The worry is that this could cause unnecessary delays when time is of the essence in mountain rescue. Already, medevacs are delayed because of the bureaucracy needing permits to fly to sensitive regions bordering China. Last year, a climber died on Himlung because helicopter rescue took too long while operators ran from door to door in Kathmandu to obtain necessary permits.

## Mingma David Sherpa, MP

Meet Mingma David Sherpa, Nepal's first mountaineer to be nominated to Parliament. Sherpa is a self-made professional climber from Rolwaling, who rose up from an expedition porter to a record-breaking mountaineer and expedition organiser. As an insider, he is now in a position to streamline laws related to Nepal's trekking and mountaineering sector.

He is co-owner of EliteExped with Nims Purja, and in 2021 the two were part of a team of Nepali climbers to be the first to make it to the top of K2 in winter, the second highest mountain in the world in Pakistan.

Mingma David was also on Purja's Project Possible to climb all the 14 eight-thousanders in six months, shattering the previous record of seven years. He was featured in Purja's documentary 14 Peaks: Nothing is Impossible.



At age 30 he became the youngest climber to reach the top of all 14 eight-thousanders for which he was awarded the Piolet d'Or.

Mingma David has taken part in dozens of successful rescues of fellow climber, including the highest ever long-line rescue on Dhaulagiri and saving the life of fellow-climber from 8,600m on Everest.



## April Fool

The Austrian expedition outfitting company Furtenbach Adventures spoofed the anticipated crowds on an April First post on social media this week, showing 'a fully galvanized, weather-resistant steel staircase, complete with a sturdy handrail' to make the Hillary Step bottleneck on Mt Everest less dangerous.

# Theorist, Michael Thompson, 89

### HIMALAYAN DEVELOPMENT

I first met Mike in April 1986 at the now famous Mohonk Mountain Conference in upstate New York, the conference with most of the world's eminent mountain experts which resulted in a major scientific paradigm shift – the debunking of the Theory of Himalayan Degradation. It resulted in the book *Uncertainty on a Himalayan Scale* (with Warburton and Hatley), which was republished in 2007 by Himal book with a long updating foreword by Mike and me.

We continued on to Battelle Pacific Northwest National Lab in Washington state that resulted in the monumental 4-volume *Human Choice and Climate Change*, and involved work with Oxford's James Martin Institute for Science and Civilization, King's College London, LOS Center in Bergen, places in Germany and very much at the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA/Laxenburg) since the early 1990s.

Between mountaineering and Cultural Theory, Mike worked as a builder, and

he single-handedly retrofitted his London home, which he later sold to buy a much bigger and better house in Bath with money to spare as retirement fund.

The idea of what was good versus bad development in the Himalaya from a perspective was further developed as an IIASA/Oxford Science and Society research resulting in our 2017 book *Aid, Technology and Development: the Lessons from Nepal*.

While he was in Nepal for that research, we did manage to get him to deliver a Social Science Baha lecture on the book's essence, *Cultural Theory and Clumsiness: Some Lessons from Nepal*.

Sometimes our collective writings came from discussions in the strangest of ways and places. After a long meeting at the IIASA schloss, we ended up at a pub for beer, and the discussions were around what it would take for a city to be a force for good and not a bad one for the environment.

If such a city could be designed, one could plonk it on the middle of a degraded landscape, which theoretically should then heal itself. Someone less inebriated

obviously took notes and circulated it, which eventually resulted in the Engineering Sustainability paper *On Governance for Re-engineering City Infrastructure*.

Its earlier efforts were explored in our work on transboundary risk management in the Himalaya at Bergen's LOS Center and also dealt with in a chapter in EARTHSCAN's IIASA publication *Transboundary Risk Management* edited by Joanne and others.

It argued that risk is socially constructed in four distinctly varied ways, where facts and values are entangled, leading to competing technological preferences. Our other on-going effort was, given that IIASA was founded during the Cold War as a place for scientists of the Euro-American West and the Communist East to work together to build confidence for peace.

We believed that was where the great challenges of tomorrow- development debates as well as environmental concerns (including climate change) would play out. Towards that end, he was working with a range of Global South scholars.

Mike retained interest in Nepal's developments up to his very end, even when on hospital bed, asking his daughter to find out from me what was going on with Nepal's March elections that saw a seismic upheaval which decimated all the old political parties.

When Ursula described the gist to him, I am sure he was inwardly pleased that it vindicated Cultural Theory as Political Science's contention that moral high ground activist egalitarianism not given proper place at the policy table can strike back at insensitive bureaucratic hierarchism and market individualism's crony capitalism with swift and lethal vengeance.

Michael Thompson's physical presence will be greatly missed, but his impact on interpretive social science – and its extremely relevant application to Nepal's and other LDC's developmental conflicts – will live on. 🇳🇵

Dipak Gyawali is an energy economist and academic with the Nepal Academy of Science and Technology (NAST). He is a former minister of water resources.



## Events



### NIFF 2026

The 9th edition of Nepal International Film Festival (NIFF) explores the power of film to inspire, inform, and entertain. It will feature 88 films from 40 countries. **2-6 April, QFX Civil Mall and QFX Chhaya Center 9801131383**

### Women's trade expo

FWEAN's 9th International Women's Trade Expo 2026 brings together 50,000 visitors to explore a diverse marketplace. It features more than 130 stalls from across Nepal and South Asia. **3-5 April, Heritage Garden, Sanepa**



### Biska Jatra

Celebrated for nine days and eight nights, Biska begins with the pulling of the three-storied chariot of Bhaila Kha: from Taumadhi. **11 April onwards, Bhaktapur Durbar Square, Madhyapur Thimi**

### Kakani-Jhor hike

Join Duluwa's women-led hike from along the Kakani-Jhor trail this weekend. Fee includes transportation, permits, and breakfast. **4 April, Rs1500**



### Beer Fest

Go with friends to check out the brews at Kymapa's 5th Beer Fest. The event will feature a live performance from What The Funk. **4 April, Kyampa: The Social Hub, Sanepa**

### Antardrishti

A contemplative solo exhibition of works by Sangee Shrestha, exploring inner vision through paint and ceramic. Read review on page 9. **Until 11 April, 11am-8pm, The Kala Salon, Chhaya Center, Thamel**



### Farmers' Market

Browse through seasonal produce, handcrafted treasures, and unique artisanal goods and experience the best of local goods at Le Sherpa Farmers' Market. **Saturdays, Le Sherpa, Maharajganj**



## Music

### Balaju street festival

Kuma Sagar & The Khopa, Anuprasth, and other musical artists join this cultural event featuring great food and beverages. **4 April, Tarkeswor**

### Prashant Ghale

Enjoy live tunes from Prashant Ghale at Hard Rock Café's Live Acoustic Night. **4 April, Hard Rock Café, Darbar Marg, 9801986771**



### KJC Summer Camp

A 10-day camp for kids with music, art, and adventure, from ice-breakers and balloon games to painting, dance, and a talent show. Call to register. **Until 13 April, Fee: Rs12,000, Chabahil, 9704543010**

### Technotics Vol. V

XO Club transforms into the epicenter of techno energy with hypnotic beats, high-voltage drops, and immersive soundscapes curated for true electronic music lovers. Featuring DJs SuperTrip, Den, Techno Kali, Bisharad, Azen, and Iraz. **4 April, XO Club, Thamel**



### NMC Gig

Celebrate with music students from Nepal Music Centre as they take the stage for an afternoon of music, energy, and expression. **Pingalsthan (01) 4565463**



## Getaway



### The Dwarika's

A heritage oasis celebrated for its serene courtyards and cultural elements, Dwarika's offers warm hospitality and special multi-course Nepali feasts, all without having to leave the city. **Battisputali (01) 4579488**

### Methlang Villa

Methlang is the best pick for anyone seeking modern comfort just minutes from Lakeside. The villa offers a tranquil retreat with private infinity pools and breathtaking views of the Annapurna ranges. **Pokhara, 9846082437**



### Riverside Springs Resort

Set beside the peaceful Trishuli River, Riverside features cosy twin-bed cabins, a welcoming restaurant with views of a swimming pool, and access to a sandy river beach. **Kurintar, 9801801336**

### Prakriti Resort

Wake up to Himalayan dawns over terraced organic farmlands at Prakriti Resort and Organic Farm, where one can unwind in hands-on experiences from herbal garden tours and cooking classes to campfires and stargazing. **Haibung, 9851041448**

### Hotel Bhrikuti Tara

Bhrikuti Tara is an ideal getaway for travelers seeking a comfortable retreat near Boudha. The hotel's Rooftop Oasis Restaurant is a must-try that features British, French, Indian, and Nepalese cuisine. **Boudhadwar Marg, 9862167002**



## Dining

### Bourbon @ WXYZ

Savor the rich, smooth taste of Woodford Reserve with our exclusive cocktail selection and indulge in handcrafted bourbon delights at Aloft's WXYZ Bar throughout this month. **Throughout April, Rs1,400, Aloft Kathmandu Thamel, 9801976073**

### Bajeko Sekuwa

This timeless Nepali food chain offers authentic flavours with a menu featuring smoky grilled meats, like varieties of sekuwa, timmur chicken, as well as hearty thali sets. **Baluwatar (01) 4547052**



### The Workshop Eatery

The Workshop Eatery is the go-to fast-casual spot for American classics. Try their Nashville Hot Chicken Burger, or go for their signature donuts and creamy milkshakes. They have great burgers too. **Bakhundole, 9860431504**

### Sanchyan Ramen

Get yourself a hearty bowl of Tonkotsu ramen simmered in a rich and creamy broth and at Sanchyan Ramen, and explore other options. **Darbar Marg, 9805674887**



### Pasa Deli

Pasa Deli is the go-to place for a wholesome breakfast. Try their One Pan Grill with eggs, bacon, hash browns, and toast, or go for the sweet and creamy French toast. **Boudha, 9863029295**

## Weekend Weather

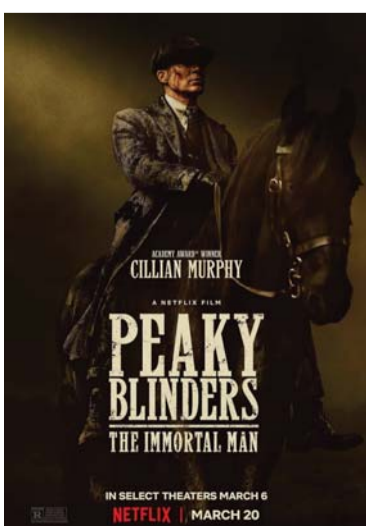


### Hot and Humid

It has been a wet spring so far, and this trend is expected to continue for at least another week. Despite this, the temperature in Kathmandu will peak at 28°C on Friday before another storm system arrives from the west on Sunday. Expect sharp showers with hail and high winds toward the afternoon and into early next week. High passes on the trekking routes are all snowbound, and more blizzards are on the way. Take care.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
28° 14°	29° 16°	27° 15°	24° 12°	23° 11°

## Our Pick



The continuation of the widely acclaimed series directed by Tom Harper and written by Steven Knight follows Tommy Shelby after he returns to Birmingham in the thick of World War II having previously retreated from public life following the death of his brother Arthur and daughter Ruby. Soon, Tommy becomes involved in secret wartime missions, facing new threats even as he is haunted by his loved ones and associates—both dead and alive. The ensemble cast includes Cillian Murphy, Sophie Rundle, Ned Dennehy, Stephen Graham, Rebecca Ferguson, Tim Roth, and Barry Keoghan. Available on Netflix.

## सामाजिक सञ्जाल प्रयोगमा सचेतता अपनाऔं

- सामाजिक सञ्जालमा अपरिचित व्यक्तिको साथी बन्ने अनुरोधलाई विश्वस्त भएर मात्र प्रतिक्रिया जनाऔं ।
- अपरिचित व्यक्तिलाई जथाभावी साथी बन्न अनुरोध नपठाऔं ।
- सामाजिक सञ्जाल तथा अन्य विद्युतीय माध्यमबाट चिड्डा पुरस्कार जस्ता आर्थिक प्रलोभनका प्रस्तावको भरमा नपरौं ।
- आफूले प्रवाह गरेका सन्देश वा सूचनाबाट समाजमा पर्नसक्ने नकारात्मक प्रभावको ख्याल गरौं ।
- आफ्नो सन्देशले कुनै व्यक्ति वा अन्य कुनै समुदायको आत्मसम्मानमा चोट नपुऱ्याऔं ।



नेपाल सरकार  
विज्ञापन बोर्ड

# Artist explores her inner self

A journey to peace, spirituality and impermanence in this solo exhibition

Sudiksha Tuladhar

Emotions are an indispensable part of being human, but in the world of social media networks and the virtual world of augmented reality and AI, people are more connected digitally than they are in their real lives.

This creates an emotional distance. The exhibition Antardrishti (Inner Vision) at The Kalā Salon at the Chhaya Centre in Thamel attempts to bridge that widening gap. It encourages visitors to pause, reflect and better understand themselves and their identity.

Sangee Shrestha (pictured, right) draws viewers into her own creative world of drawings and paintings on canvases with ample use of red, black, blue, white, grey and green. Each of them features an open or closed eye, signifying the real world and not the make believe one on an Android phone.

“One eye is closed so as to push away negative thoughts and bad omens. The other eye is open and drawn wide so as to keep our vision wide and be vigilant,” explains Shrestha, who has been creating powerful work since 1993 that has won multiple awards.

Geometric figures are an important aspect of her work, and Shrestha uses them to draw various parts of the human anatomy and adorns them. Hand gestures hold special significance and meaning in art which has such a spiritual aura



that even viewing them feels like an act of devotion.

Shrestha refrains from giving a title or a name to her works, and explains: “I deliberately put up my works without titles so that viewers can interpret my creations in their own ways.”

Antardrishti is a labour of love that took two years. The show also includes ceramic masks and pots. Shrestha feels that working with clay is therapeutic not just for the artist but for the viewers too. Each figurine radiates positivity while

also offering us a glimpse of the mind that guided the fingers that shaped these forms.

Curator Sophia L Pande says as much: “For this exhibition, Sangee Shrestha set herself a challenge to create multiple sets of art that complement each other in theme and vision.”

One of the highlights of the exhibition is a 100m long drawing of Egyptian gods and figures from mythical folklore that Shrestha made during one of her visits to Egypt. “What I found interesting



is that the Egyptian gods and their stories are also similar to those of our own gods and goddesses,” says Shrestha.

### LIKE A PHOENIX

The death of her mother three years ago changed the trajectory and content of her work, transforming the way she looked at the world and its transience. She was not confident about her own creative process anymore and started a journey to find her own identity and started pouring her thoughts into canvases.

While many of her works during this phase featured red, black and other dark colours, one was that of white butterflies flying out from a box, symbolising freedom and inner peace. And somehow they all force us to contemplate impermanence.

The focal point of the exhibition is a series of devi goddesses as four

separate artworks in a composite in grey, black and a dash of yellow. The use of dull colours signifies the clouds of thoughts, Shrestha says.

The painting also includes three stages of a flower in a single branch: the bud, a half-open blossom and a flower with fully unfurled petals. “They depict different stages of human life -- childhood, youth and old age,” explains Shrestha.

Also on exhibit are artworks using metal, made through etching which reflect spirituality and religion. Climate change is another theme depicted through the melting of the Himalaya. Shrestha tells us: “I wanted my creations to be seen as more than just aesthetically pleasing. But to impart the message to make the best of what we have as we live our lives.”

Antardrishti  
by Sangee Shrestha  
The Kalā Salon,  
Chhaya Center, Thamel  
Until 11 April  
11 am-5pm

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# Planting seeds for a greener

The last remaining patches of open space in Kathmandu are turned into compact forests

Sudiksha Tuladhar

Nepal is known internationally for its successful community forestry programme, and the country has doubled its forest cover to over 45% in the last 25 years.

But the opposite is true for densely populated urban centres like Kathmandu Valley which have turned into concrete jungles, with no remaining open spaces. Air pollution is increasing to hazardous levels, and the urban heat bubble means the temperature in the city is 2°C-3°C higher than in the outskirts.

But there is a solution with a proven track record from similar densely populated cities in Japan — the 'Miyawaki Method' of growing local varieties of trees in any small patch of land in the city and turning them into compact forests.

Named after Japanese botanist Akira Miyawaki in the early 1970s, carefully selected native trees and plants grow in tiny plots of land, or even in household backyards. They regenerate degraded urban soil, and help restore some greenery and biodiversity back to sterile city centres.

The group Lily Leaves has planted Miyawaki forests in six sites across Kathmandu, and is on a mission to green all the river corridors in the Valley. So far, it has planted more than 17,000 trees belonging to nearly 40 species



in patches of land along the Bishnumati and Swayambhu, and is eyeing the UN Park area along the Bagmati.

"It is extremely important to connect with nature and greenery in cities," says Lily Katuwal of Lily Leaves. "Besides restoring nature,

these forests also clean air pollution and reduce summer temperatures."

Unlike traditional reforestation where trees of the same species are planted in bulk at a distance of 3-4m, Miyawaki prioritises native varieties best suited to Kathmandu Valley's microclimate. The saplings

are packed densely together, spaced only 60cm apart. After they start growing, native grass and undergrowth also thrive.

The most recent plantation was along the banks of the Bagmati in Sanepa where, in addition to camphor and jacaranda which

are grown in the area, native species such as kabro (*Ficus lacor*), kanike (*Forget-me-not*), parijat (*Night-flowering Jasmine* or *Coral Jasmine*), champ (*Plumeria*), harro (*Ink Nut*) and barro (*Bahera*) were planted.

A new site in Kirtipur is being

# Protecting nature outside

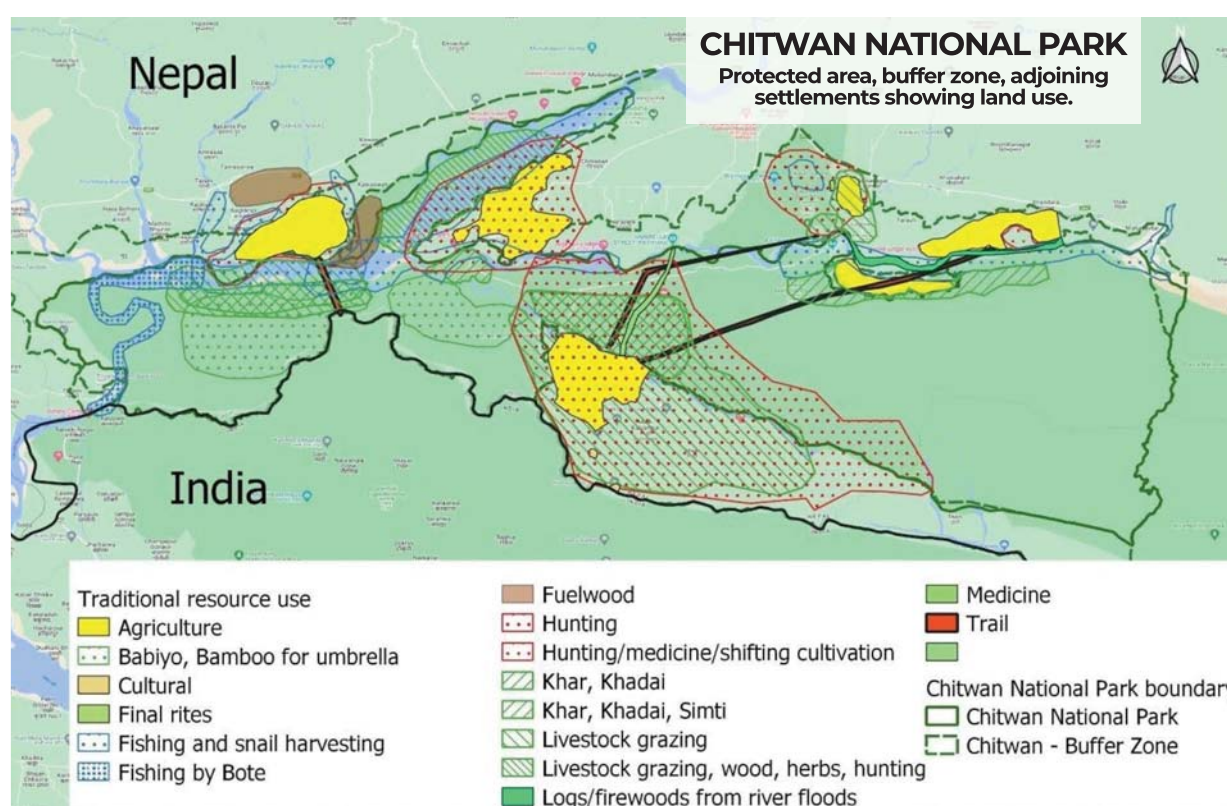
Nepal's fragmented forests can also see biodiversity gain from nearby sanctuaries: study

In findings that have implications for Nepal's protected areas, a new study has found that improving the landscape surrounding forest remnants can increase their ability to retain bird species — even in small or isolated forests.

For decades, traditional ecological theory has treated isolated and fragmented habitats as 'forest islands', predicting species' survival through area size and isolation. But these models have long overlooked the nature of the matrix of farmland, vegetation, or open areas surrounding these habitat remnants.

Such isolated natural habitats can be found in Nepal's buffer zones and the fringes of community forests. The study shows that such landscapes are critical, as species must move through, use, or avoid them when navigating between forested areas.

The research published on



Monday in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS) provides strong evidence that the quality and structure of

the matrix play a crucial role in biodiversity survival.

The study was led by scientists from the Instituto Federal de

Educação, Ciência e Tecnologia Farroupilha in Brazil, Slippery Rock University in the US, and University of East Anglia (UEA)

in the UK. It shows that even modest increases in nearby tree cover can substantially boost the number of bird species that survive in forest remnants.

"This study clearly shows how high-quality surrounding landscapes increase species retention within forest remnants," said Prof Carlos Peres of UEA's School of Environmental Sciences. "Conservation gains from investing in a more hospitable matrix in agricultural and urban areas are far greater than previously realised."

The study revealed that small forest patches retained significantly more bird species when surrounded by at least some tree cover rather than open water. Landscapes with greater surrounding tree cover supported richer bird communities overall.

Lead author Anderson Bueno from the Instituto Federal de Educação, Ciência e Tecnologia Farroupilha, said: "Habitat remnant size is not the whole story. Two forest remnants of the same size can support very different numbers of bird species - those surrounded by

# Kathmandu



PHOTOS: LILY LEAVES

readied for the next plantation. Miyawaki has been carried out elsewhere in various parts of Nepal, primarily in Dhanusha which has seen forest regrowth that has brought back insect, bird, reptile and amphibian life.

## EMPOWERING WOMEN

Lily Leaves employs just 17 women, six of whom have hearing disabilities. Many have been neglected or abandoned by their in-laws for various reasons. They have a livelihood and learn new skills so they can also find jobs elsewhere. “We trained them in plantation

and other skills including tailoring, as well as jewelry, bag and reusable pad making,” says Katuwal. “They are now experts in planting trees.”

Lily Leaves gets support from Pipal Tree International in the UK and Nepal, and hopes that the idea of compact urban forest spreads. This is especially important in areas like Taudaha, which is an important stopover for migratory birds. Once noted for its aquatic and avian biodiversity, Taudaha has become lined with concrete and has turned into a loud picnic spot.

Urban expansion has encroached upon what used to

be the floodplain of the Dhobi Khola, Bishnumati, Bagmati and Manohara rivers. The open spaces along the river corridors are being turned into green belts haphazardly.

For many wards, the concept of green space is to have cement pavements and ornamental hard-to-maintain potted plants instead of allowing urban forests to grow back naturally.

“Apartment buildings and housing colonies that are being constructed can include green spaces that can increase the real estate and rent value of property,” Katuwal says. “Engineers designing the buildings can suggest such changes so that we remain connected with nature.”

Although Lily Leaves needs to have permission from local ward and municipal councils before implementing any program, it continues to face challenges in ensuring smooth coordination.

In one such plantation along the Bishnumati River corridor, for example, a heavy earthmover uprooted young trees that were just beginning to thrive. Despite this setback, Katuwal’s team returned to replant them.

The land mafia often covets the last remaining open spaces in Kathmandu, deploying local strongmen to try to take them over. They tear down fences, uproot saplings and loot tools. There is a lack of awareness about the importance of greening the city.

But now that the former mayor of Kathmandu Balendra Shah is prime minister, national awareness could translate into more urban forests not just in Kathmandu but also in overcrowded urban centres across Nepal.

Says Lily Katuwal: “We just plant the seed in people’s minds. Once people in the neighbourhood see that restoring nature lifts their quality of life and increases land prices, there is support. That is when the power of a good example spreads, and communities build on the idea.”

# national parks



UMANG JUNG THAPA

where farms and urban buildup coexist.

## APT LANDUSE

Chase Mendenhall of Slippery Rock University hoped the study will support more effective land-use policy and encourage governments and landowners to invest in wildlife-friendly farming practices that support both biodiversity and agricultural productivity.

The findings highlight that, while protecting remaining

forests is essential, restoring and improving the landscapes around them is also important. Planting native trees, restoring degraded vegetation, and creating wildlife-friendly agricultural land can dramatically reduce local extinction risks.

Human-modified landscapes now cover more than half of Earth’s land surface, increasing the significance of this study.

farmland with nearby trees may host more than twice as many species as isolated remnants within reservoirs.”

Indeed, the study showed that even small amounts of tree cover within just 300m of a forest remnant had a strong positive effect on species survival. Although the study was not done in Nepal, it has implications for buffer zones surrounding Tarai national parks

The research team included 58 scientists from 19 countries to analyse results from 50 landscape-scale bird surveys across tropical and subtropical regions in the Americas, Africa, and Asia where natural landscapes have been heavily fragmented.

The unique design of the study compared two types of forest remnants: forest islands created by hydroelectric reservoirs, which represent the most extreme habitat fragmentation on Earth, and forest fragments embedded within terrestrial landscapes, often surrounded by agricultural land.

By comparing these contrasting systems, the researchers could quantify how much a more benign, tree-rich matrix can buffer species against local extinctions. More than 1,000 forest remnants were studied and almost 2,000 bird species were recorded, including critically endangered species.

The report in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences is titled ‘High-quality surrounding landscapes mitigate avian extirpations from forest remnants’.

# No forests, no economies

Zhimin Wu

Money may not grow on trees, but much of our prosperity does.

Forests quietly support trillions of dollars in economic activity, millions of jobs, and essentials like the food we eat, the air we breathe, and the climate we depend on. In reality, the global economy cannot function without healthy forests.

Forests are far more than timber. They stabilise soil and regulate water vital for agrifood systems and industrial productivity, supply energy and a wealth of forest products, and create space for recreation and ecotourism.

The formal forest sector alone contributes an estimated \$1.52 trillion annually to the global economy, while more than half of the world’s gross domestic product – some \$44 trillion – relies on nature, including forests.

For more than 2 billion people, wood fuel is essential for cooking and heating, and hundreds of millions of people depend directly on forests for their livelihoods. Beyond wood, forests provide food, medicines, resins, fibers, animal feed and ornamental plants that support around 5.8 billion people worldwide. These non-wood forest products are worth at least \$9.41 billion annually and could grow much further.

of industrial roundwood, more than the 4 billion cubic metres currently being produced each year.

As it is, forests are already under pressure. They are home to up to 80% of biodiversity on land, yet they continue to be cleared for other economic uses, even if deforestation and forest degradation are slowing around the world. As climate change intensifies, the global economy of the future must look different: more sustainable, more circular, and more closely linked with nature. To get there, we need to bring protection and production together rather than treating them as opposites.

The UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is working to promote the concrete steps needed to realise this vision of healthy forests that support livelihoods and deliver ecosystem services, including through sustainable products.

First of all, meeting rising demand does not have to mean taking more from nature than it can regenerate. Using wood more efficiently, smarter recycling and reusing wood products can reduce pressure on forests.

Long-lasting uses, such as timber buildings, store carbon for decades, “stretching” each harvested log further. Sustainable forest management is vital to ensure that harvesting of timber and non-wood forest products stays within ecological limits and that forest ecosystems remain



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By storing carbon, forests help protect economies from climate impacts that can cost billions. In Brazil, for example, converting tropical forests to farmland has reduced evapotranspiration – the movement of water from land to the atmosphere – by 30%, raising local temperatures and putting rainfed agriculture at risk. Without forests, global food production simply cannot sustain.

## BIOECONOMY

Forests are also part of the natural solution as the world starts to transition towards a bioeconomy based on climate-friendly alternatives from more emission-intensive materials such as steel, concrete and plastic. As populations grow, renewable, sustainable wood used in construction for housing can become a cornerstone of a low-carbon economy, while innovative products such as wood-based textiles, food packaging and even transparent ‘glass’ are already a reality.

This will mean increased demand for forest products which is already at record levels. For example, by 2050, the world may need 1 billion cubic metres

healthy. International trade can also help balance global supply and demand, allowing regions with abundant forest resources to support those with fewer. But trade must be anchored in strong sustainability standards and governance to prevent deforestation and overharvesting of non-wood forest products and to ensure local communities benefit.

Incentive schemes and innovative financing can also help by rewarding those who protect forests and manage them responsibly, from smallholders to larger producers. The growing bioeconomy, built on renewable materials like wood and bamboo, is ready to be scaled up and offers a promising path forward – as long as it remains firmly grounded in sustainable forestry. To that end, safeguards, clear rules and good governance are essential.

Without forests, there are no economies. The decisions made now will determine whether we can protect forests and, at the same time, build strong, resilient economies for generations to come.

Zhimin Wu is Assistant Director-General and Director of the Forestry Division, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.



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B.S.

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@  
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13<sup>th</sup> April 2026 6:30 PM - 10:30 PM

**Rs. 3500 net**

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