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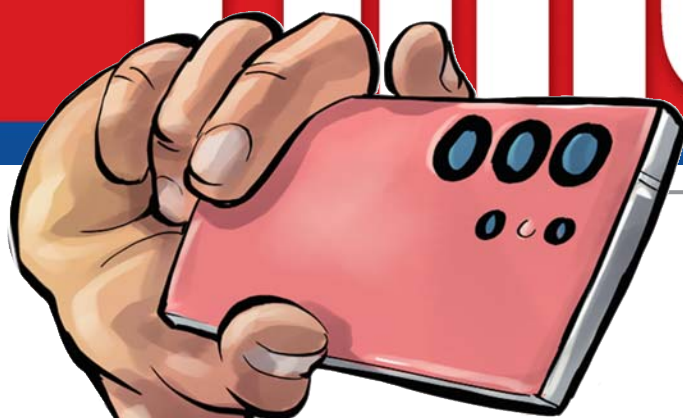
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SELF CONTROL

RSP is off to a spirited start, but must not revert to patronage-driven politics



ANUP TAMU

Shristi Karki

Prime Minister Balendra Shah on Wednesday broke tradition and met with 17 foreign envoys collectively, a move that was a notable departure from how his predecessors operated.

Shah had already set himself apart by talking less, listening more, and delegating to trusted friends. But by meeting all ambassadors at one go in the presence of the Foreign Ministry, he signalled a paradigm shift in how he wants Nepal to be seen: as a country confident about its strategic importance and place in the world.

In just two weeks, the RSP has sprung into action on multiple fronts to implement its ambitious 100-points, 100-days action plan. It has taken short-term measures to mitigate the impact of the Gulf war, as well as medium- and long-term measures to streamline the bureaucracy.

Earlier this week, the government recalled six politically appointed ambassadors. The Kathmandu District Court issued arrest warrants against former prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and his former foreign minister wife Arzu Rana on charges of money laundering and corruption.

Each ministry has been trying to clean up the accumulated rot from the past three decades: regulatory overhaul of microfinance, education, health and service delivery. These actions have made most Nepalis hopeful that the party they installed in power means business.

BACKLASH

But such attempts to overhaul a long-entrenched political culture were bound to face backlash. In their impatience and enthusiasm to get things done, some of Prime Minister Shah's ministers have over-reached.

It was common knowledge that government-paid advertising in the

mainstream press was kickback-driven, but the PMO's directive that official notices be published or broadcast only on state-run media has been denounced — especially as the media industry struggles to stay afloat.

More serious are some recent appointments by ministers of relatives and figures closely associated with the RSP to key positions. This has rankled because this party built its political plank on ending nepotism and graft.

Prime Minister Shah himself has come under scrutiny for appointing a kitchen cabinet full of male buddies from his time as Kathmandu mayor. To douse criticism he brought in as adviser investigative journalist Deepa Dahal, who has exposed corruption in high places of the previous coalitions.

Shah's appointment of another political adviser Asim Shah to the head Constitution Amendment Task Force, is also seen as problematic. He is a former

lawmaker, but does not have a background in constitutional law.

Even more controversial is the Cabinet's decision to appoint RSP Chief Rabi Lamichhane's legal counsel, Narayan Kandel, as Attorney General. Kandel used to be a UK permanent resident, and does not have as much experience practicing law in Nepal. Kandel's appointment drew flak and raised eyebrows even within the RSP, and with the pending legal cases against Lamichhane this

appointment represents a flagrant conflict of interest.

Health Minister Nisha Mehta was also accused of favouritism after reappointing Junu Shrestha, wife of Labour Minister Dipak Kumar Sah, as member of the Health Insurance Board which had earlier suspended her. The Labour Minister's rambling at the Board's meeting on Tuesday has not helped the RSP's image.

It is hard to know what Balendra Shah is thinking, and how Rabi Lamichhane is going to justify some of these moves. After all, making politics, governance, and bureaucracy a meritocracy has been the core tenet of the RSP, and it risks alienating its mainly youth base if these missteps persist.

But at least for now, most RSP supporters seem to be giving the party the benefit of the doubt.



HAPPY 2083 Nepali Times wishes readers, partners and compatriots a New Year filled with joy and serenity. A calendar is included with this print edition.

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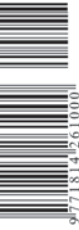
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Tripolar contestation over Nepal

Washington, with New Delhi, can be expected to ensure that Beijing is not a decisive power



GUEST EDITORIAL
Bhaskar Koirala

The Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) that swept Nepal's post-GenZ election has taken office at a fraught period in global geopolitics. The war in West Asia could potentially reshape the world order with far-reaching strategic and economic consequences for Nepal and the region.

The foreign policy of any state is largely dependent on the extant structural features of the international system, and Nepal and its remittance-driven economy faces a challenging geo-strategic environment.

The position of the United States in international affairs is still largely unrivalled, and provides a rather large window into the country. But the impact of greater Chinese power in Nepal is not yet properly understood, while India has always been and will continue to exert regional hegemonic influence.

With 5% of the global population contributing to 20% of the world economy, and flexing 50% of military might, the United States looms large just about everywhere in the world, including Nepal. Its rivalry with an emergent China puts Nepal in strategic proximity.

Whether it is the Millennium Challenge



COLLAGE BY ADITYA KHARE

Corporation (MCC) project or the State Partnership Program (SPP), if President Donald Trump and the State and Defense Departments want it done in Nepal, they will get it done. The more germane question is whether this is beneficial to long term regional peace and stability.

How all this corresponds, or not, to Indian policy towards Kathmandu is the real question that will affect Nepal, given the strained relations between Washington and New Delhi lately.

There should be no confusion that as far as New Delhi is concerned, Nepal is part and parcel of India's grand security structure. It has always been so, going all the way back to the British period under Viceroy George Curzon, and perhaps even earlier.

The Chinese assessment of Nepal is

defined by Beijing's interest to ensure the stability and security of the Tibet Autonomous Region. Any great power wishes to expand its influence beyond its borders and China, after all, now considers itself a global power. It has the engineering and financial capability to project its interest on a neighbouring country like Nepal whose economy is 400 times smaller.

However, expansion of Chinese influence in Nepal becomes a matter of historical significance only because it comes up against what India regards as its sphere of influence. New Delhi's power especially vis-a-vis neighbouring South Asian states is grossly underestimated. India is emerging as the next great power in Asia, and at the current juncture of history, China is unlikely to become an alternative to India in Nepal.

COUNTERWEIGHT

This is also improbable and impractical because of the current power distribution in the international system. The United States is an off-shore power balancer, and is unlikely to countenance projection of Chinese influence into Nepal beyond certain limits.

India is not just a fellow democracy, but also serves as a counterweight to US fears of Chinese dominance of Eurasia. Washington can be expected to exert ever possible influence to ensure that China is not a decisive power in Nepal. It may be the case that Beijing does not wish to enlist itself in such a position either. Such a manoeuvre in the Himalayan frontiers of the Subcontinent could draw the United States still more deeply into Nepal's political tapestry.

The result would be a more combustible Nepal with too many friction points to manage.

Nepal's domestic politics therefore is governed by international developments. How the new government maintains domestic peace and stability will be closely watched.

As the geopolitical thinker Robert Kaplan describes it, conditions are taut like in a musical instrument where too much pressure at one point on the string can disrupt the entire system in ways that are unpredictable.

How that will play out in Nepal will be a function of the intersection of civilian and military leadership within Nepal, and the tripolar contestation of China, India and the United States in the region. 🇳🇵

Bhaskar Koirala is an independent analyst associated with Peking University.

Trending Online



Nepal Himalaya Spring 2026

by Vishad Raj Onta
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. Details at nepalitimes.com

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Michael Thompson, 89

by Dipak Gyawali
Michael Thompson, who died on 18 March was a former Gurkha officer, and thought up the basis of Cultural Theory to explain development paradigms while climbing Mt Everest and Annapurna. Read a tribute to him by his academic colleague.

Most popular on X

Seeds for a greener Kathmandu

by Sudiksha Tuladhar
Lily Leaves is turning the last remaining patches of open space in Kathmandu into compact forests with the 'Miyawaki Method' to nurture local varieties of trees in tiny plots of land. Full story on our website.

Most commented

Fuel price shock hits aviation

As a direct fallout of the Israeli-American war on Iran, Nepal has nearly doubled the price of aviation fuel in a move that is going to impact tourism and the economy during the peak season. Full report online.

Most visited online page

Letters

GREEN SPACES

Well done Lily Leaves, this is lovely ('Planting seeds for a greener Kathmandu', Sudiksha Tuladhar, #1305). This seems to be a very effective way of assisted forest restoration. Dev Mandal of Mithila Wildlife Trust has done wonderful restoration through this method. Kudos to these action orientated conservationists.

Hem Sagar Baral

I have been writing about greening open spaces to the municipality for the last 5 years. But no one even responded. At last, it's good to see the Miyawaki Project happening.

Joels Ktm

I hope they're planting native trees.

Marg Wheeler

How soon will these plants be chopped down?

Margaret Kerr

BAGMATI

There has been a total failure from the beginning to respect Kathmandu's river systems ('A lifeline becomes liability', Roshni Gurung, nepalitimes.com. Now, this has extended to rivers and lakes throughout Nepal. Municipalities and the federal system have failed to stop it. Sewage and garbage management if not tackled will have serious impact on human health, and the environment, as this article notes.

Rajendra N Suwal

Bagmati smells like a toilet half the year, so it's hard to think of it as a lifeline. It's past time to get a sewage management system in place in Kathmandu and other big cities.

Stephanie Suhowsky

The number one need for the valley is a waste water and sewage treatment facility. All household waste and sewage then can be re-directed to the treatment facility. Treated water from the plant flows back into the river, and solid waste can be converted to fertiliser. The remaining inorganic waste is recycled or disposed properly. Instead of MCC, the government should have asked for a treatment facility for Kathmandu Valley.

Havan Sabid

There is work to be done but a clean green Kathmandu is possible. Political will and smart environmental policies will be key.

David Seddon

MUKTIKOT EXODUS

For long our young men have had to leave their villages to travel afar to seek work to support themselves and their families ('Mass migration from Mukti Kot', Sabina

Devkota, nepalitimes.com). Now they are joined by our women, leaving only children and grandparents in their villages. A sad story of separation and longing for togetherness.

AirlineGuy

CRYPTO OPPORTUNITY

I hope the home minister will look into this so that cryptocurrency will be unbanned soon ('Time for Nepal to enter Web3', Vishad Raj Onta, #1304).

Rehan Qureshi

CLIMBING SEASON

The reason some mountains are more popular than others is because they attract selfie climbers ('Nepal Himalaya Spring 2026', Vishad Raj Onta, #1305). Who wants to climb peaks no one has heard of?

Geoff Bartram

Online Package



MASS MIGRATION FROM MUKTIKOT

For decades, nearly every household in Mukti Kot has sent its men to India every winter. What is new is that women are now also going, and for longer periods. Scan to watch.



THE BEEKEEPER OF MUSIKOT

Chuman Gharti Magar taught himself bee-keeping so he would not have to migrate for work. Magar now keeps 150 hives of local honeybees which produce 10 quintal of honey every season. Scan to watch.

1,000 Words



BEING DIPLOMATIC: Prime Minister Balendra Shah broke from tradition by collectively meeting Kathmandu-based diplomats at Singha Darbar on Wednesday. Attending were the ambassadors or chargé d'affaires of India, Pakistan, China, Japan, South Korea, Bangladesh, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Sri Lanka, UK, USA, Switzerland, France, Israel, Germany, Egypt, as well as the UN's Resident Coordinator. Foreign Minister Shishir Khanal and Foreign Secretary Amrit Rai were also present.

Times

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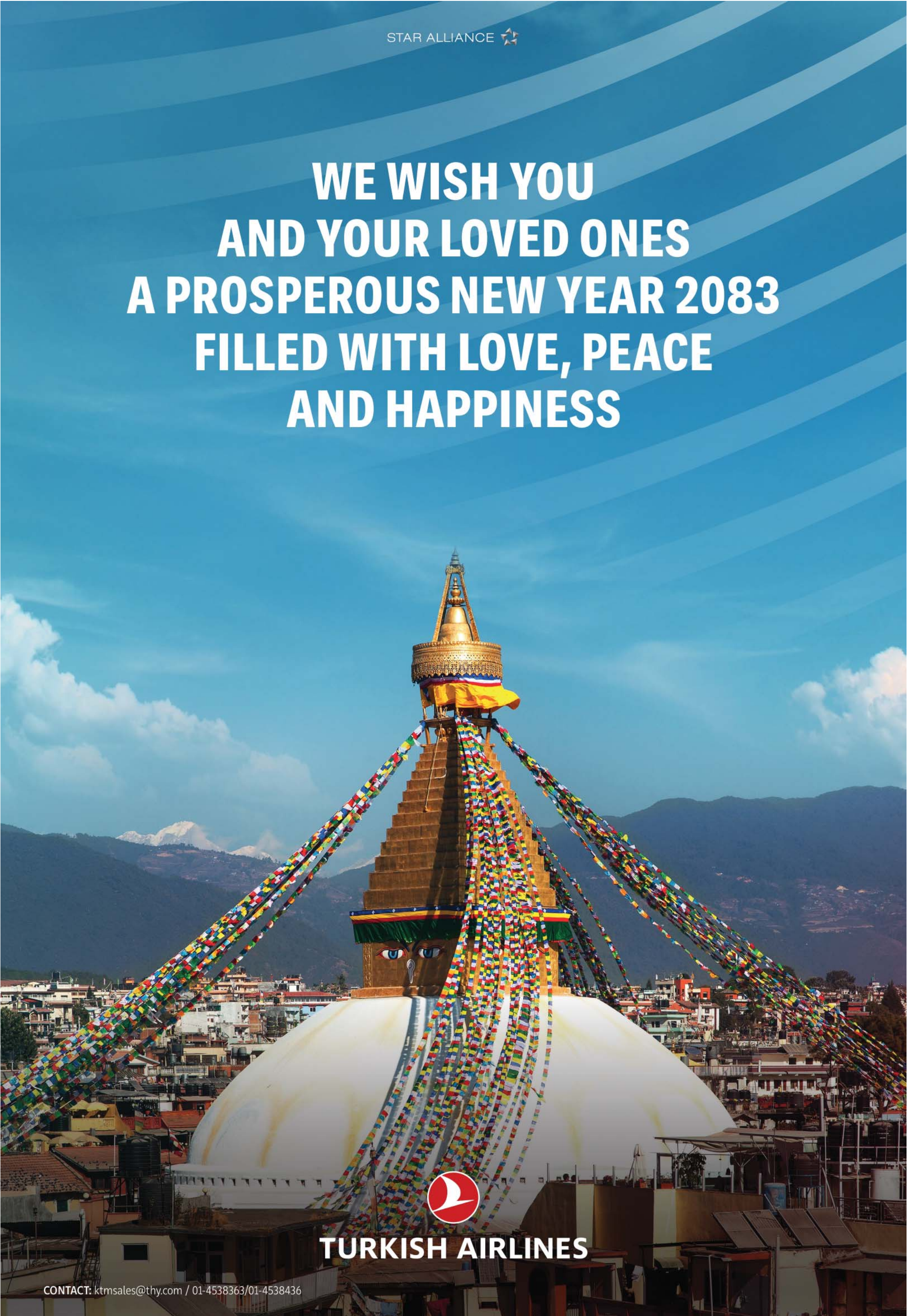
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How to win friends and influence nations

Translation of Bhekh Bahadur Thapa's memoir offers an insider perspective on government and diplomacy

Pratibha Tuladhar

‘One early morning, we heard the ambassador's wife cry out, “Ram, Ram, Ram!” A disaster has befallen Nepal!’ She had heard on the radio that a fire had consumed Singha Darbar.’

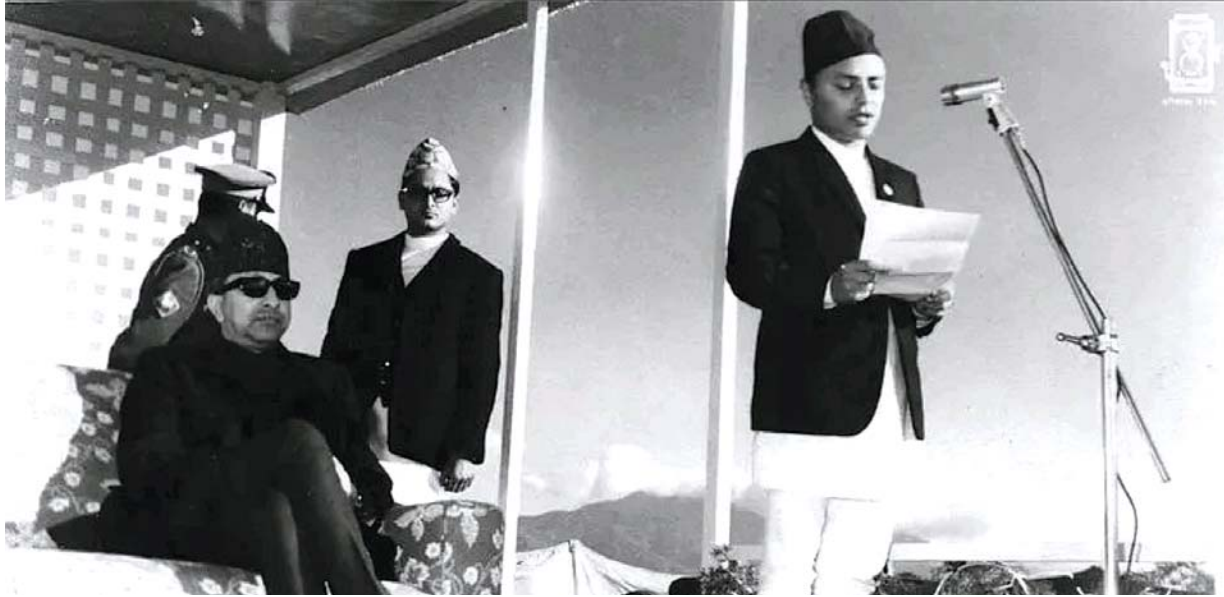
This is not about the arson attack on 9 September 2025, but the one on 8 July, 1973. It started in the South Wing of the then single-largest building in all of Nepal. It took two days to bring the blaze under control.

As Bhekh Bahadur Thapa recalls in the English translation of his memoir *A Life in Public Service: Nepal from Autocracy to Democracy*, he was then on leave from the Nepal government serving with the IDRC in Ottawa.

He had already served as Nepal's Finance Secretary at age 25, went on to be Finance Minister and Governor of Nepal Rastra Bank. He was younger than some of the ministers in Nepal's present RSP government.

Thapa, now 89, was at the launch of the book in February which was attended by former diplomats and bureaucrats. After speeches by panelists, there was a question from the audience about how Thapa had managed to be the diplomat he was, managing Nepal's international relations on the world stage.

Writer and journalist Akhilesh Upadhyay, who was moderating the panel, responded by going into the section of the book where we see Thapa as an ambassador to the US,



playing tennis with White House officials, cultivating a network of contacts to project the identity and welfare of Nepal, and making it possible for a state visit by King Birendra to Ronald Reagan's America.

The book is full of anecdotes that suggest Thapa was a clever and strategic diplomat, always calm and unruffled, easily making friends in high places with his maturity and engaging sense of humour.

Thapa's memoir is heavy on details about Nepal's administrative history during his active years in public service, serving as minister and ambassador under three kings: Mahendra, Birendra and Gyanendra, as well as five PMs.

As a reader, one is struck by the level of detail around the events that unfolded in Nepal over

the years during Thapa's tenure. Was Thapa recording a journal over the years of the events and the conversations that transpired, or were they committed to his phenomenal memory?

Either way, the reader gets a glimpse of Nepal's recent history from the early days of Panchayat to Gyanendra's 2005 coup. The book keeps its focus on the administration and the key figures around it, mostly those in the Panchayat era. Towards the second half of the book, we do start to hear about political parties, but not in great depth.

Throughout, we learn about Thapa's thinking as he navigated the world of diplomacy, and there are tips here for a new generation of Nepali officials and diplomats about the commitment needed to

58 YEARS AGO: King Mahendra listening to Bhekh Bahadur Thapa in 1968 at the inauguration of the National Insurance Company while he was a 30-year-old member secretary of the National Planning Commission.

serve the national interest.

This book adds to tomes that have been written on Nepal's fragile relationship with India. It has insights into the Indo-Nepal trysts with diplomacy and agency. China's role is also recorded, viewed through conversations during a visit to Beijing, before it emerged as a world economic and military power.

The text is immaculate and does not read much like a translation, credit for which clearly goes to the team that put the edition together: translator Prawin Adhikari, Anagha Neelakanthan and Bhekh Thapa's

daughter, Manjushree.

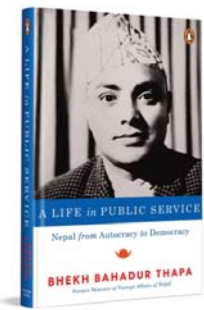
As Nepal enters a new era of governance and diplomacy, *A Life in Public Service: Nepal from Autocracy to Democracy* should be essential reading for students of political science, economics, foreign affairs to gain fresh perspective on the country's trajectory.

There are dozens of forgotten state secrets recorded in the book, but the reader must also remember this is a story told from one person's perspective and there may be others.

So, what really made Thapa the diplomat he was? I met him in 2004 at the Kantipur TV studio when he was serving as king Gyanendra's foreign minister. He was there for a studio interview, and I was just done with my English newscast.

He surprised me at the door: “Pratibha! I've been reading your articles in *The Kathmandu Post*. You must keep writing.”

I thanked him, glad to have been noticed for my work by a stranger. That was perhaps one of the things that set Thapa apart — he excelled at staying close to those in power, while also noticing those who were not. 🇳🇵



A Life in Public Service: Nepal from Autocracy to Democracy by Bhekh Bahadur Thapa
Translated from Nepali by Prawin Adhikari
India Penguin, January 2026
384 pages
Rs1,120

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Stopover in Istanbul

Turkish Airlines' Stopover in Istanbul program allows transit passengers to explore Istanbul with complimentary hotel accommodation. Connecting travellers with a layover of at least 20 hours and up to 7 days are eligible. Economy Class passengers receive



one free night at a 4-star hotel, while Business Class passengers enjoy two nights at a 5-star or boutique hotel on a bed-and-breakfast basis. Flights must be round-trip Turkish Airlines tickets and passengers bear the cost of visa fees and airport-to-hotel transportation.

Rs1.45 trillion

Nepali migrant workers sent home Rs1.45 trillion in the first eight months of the fiscal year—a 37.7% increase compared to the same period last year. February–March alone saw Rs188.64 billion. During the period, 273,536 workers received new labour permits and 251,985 received re-permits.

Galaxy A series

Samsung Nepal has opened pre-orders for the Galaxy A57 5G and A37 5G. Both phones run Samsung's One UI 8.5, featuring AI capabilities like voice transcription, Circle to Search, and photo editing. They feature a 50MP triple-camera system, a Super AMOLED display, and six years of OS and security updates.

Ncell free 100MB

Ncell is offering 100MB of data free daily to all customers through its app. Users can visit the Buy Packs section to activate the offer and join a weekly promo to win data prizes by earning points. Top 10 users win 50GB each week.

Redmi Buds 8

Xiaomi has launched the Redmi Buds 8 Lite in Nepal at Rs4,199. Key features include active noise cancellation using dual-mics and AI, a 12.4mm titanium-diaphragm driver, dual-device connectivity, and 36 hours of battery life. Available in Black and White with a 1-year warranty.

inDrive support

inDrive Nepal announced a Rs2.2 million initiative for driver-partners as rising fuel costs strain driver earnings. Distributed based on activity and performance metrics, the initiative aims to stabilise driver incomes without raising passenger fares. Additional measures include reduced commissions on selected rides.



2-day weekend

The government introduced Saturday–Sunday weekends for all offices and schools to reduce fuel consumption after petrol prices rose by 30% to cross Rs200/l due to the US-Israel war on Iran. Office hours have been extended to 9am–5pm to compensate. Bus fares may increase by 19% after diesel prices have risen by Rs40/l over the past month. Transport operators are pushing for immediate implementation.

Hyundai new year

Hyundai distributor Laxmi Intercontinental launches a New Year campaign offering cash discounts up to Rs175,000 and one year free insurance and tax on selected models. Hyundai assembles Creta and Venue models in Nepal.



North Face reopens

North Face has reopened its Thamel store in Kathmandu as a Performance Pro Store, aiming to integrate outdoor gear, lifestyle apparel, and expedition equipment. The store has a new look, using its familiar black and yellow colours. The brand has operated in Nepal since 2003, and has stores in Thamel, Pokhara, and Namche Bazar.

MG new tech

MG is developing a Hybrid+ system featuring a 70,000 rpm electric turbo with digital damping to reduce vibration. The system includes a 1.83kWh battery and may debut in the MG S9. MG is also introducing its SolidCore battery, made of 95% solid material, offering longer range, faster charging.

Online betting banned

The Nepal Telecommunications Authority, in coordination with ISPs, has shut down over 7,000 betting-related apps and websites following a cabinet decision on governance reforms. Betting can result in 1 year in jail or a Rs10,000 fine.

Nepal approves loan

The cabinet approved \$185M in foreign loans for the Digital Nepal Transformation project, which aims to modernise government services. Of this, \$50 million comes from the World Bank and \$40 million from the ADB to modernise digital government services. An additional \$95 million from the World Bank is for SDG and inclusion projects. There has been criticism in MPs about Nepal's increasing debt burden.

Fuel-to-EV

The cabinet approved drafting a law to allow the conversion of petrol and diesel vehicles to electric despite the lack of a legal framework for this. Unresolved issues include tax treatment, registration, license plates, and vehicle lifespan.

Morbidelli launches

Italian premium motorcycle brand Morbidelli has entered the Nepali market with multiple variants. Prices range from Rs969,900 for the C252V to Rs4,499,900 for the T1002v. A showroom has opened in Naxal. The brand is distributed by Vaidya Organisation, which also sells Toyota vehicles and Ather e-scooters.



NAIMA meets GoN

Nepal Automobile Importers and Manufacturers Association (NAIMA) president Ritu Singh Vaidya led a delegation to meet Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle and Transport Minister Sanil Lamsal. NAIMA urged reducing taxes, clarifying the EV/hybrid policy, improving digital integration, and promoting Make in Nepal assembly.

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KNOW YOUR MINISTERS

Profiles of select cabinet members of the Balendra Shah government

Biraj Bhakta Shrestha

Minister for Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation

The new Minister for Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation holds a bachelor's degree in business administration, and worked in development projects and the hospitality sector before he got involved in social work.

As a RSP candidate from Kathmandu-8, he beat his nearest competitor, cultural activist Suman Sayami of the NCP.

In the aftermath of the 2015 Nepal earthquake, Shrestha, then 24, led a volunteer team that conducted relief operations and health camps in remote areas like Mustang and Bardibas. He founded Force Nepal and led environmental campaigns but gained more popularity through his involvement in heritage conservation and revamping local infrastructure.

As the former Minister of Sports under Pushpa Kamal Dahal government in 2024, Shrestha formalised the inclusion of e-sports, introduced the course of sports science in collaboration with KU, and signed an agreement with Qatar for the development of youth and sports. The Anti-Doping Agency

was made fully functional during his short tenure.

Like other RSP candidates, Shrestha was associated with Bibeksheel Sajha party, had close ties with the late founder Ujjwal Thapa and won a seat in the Bagmati Provincial Assembly in 2017. He later left the party due to a rift with Rabindra Mishra over their opposing views on monarchy. His political career really took off after joining the RSP in 2022.

Although it holds great promise for Nepal's future economic growth, the hydropower sector has been under control of political patronage and cronies. Freeing the sector from their control is not going to be easy. Shrestha will need to also ensure energy diversification as well as manage Indian interests in Nepal's water resources and balance that with Chinese involvement in infrastructure contracts.

Shrestha recently implemented a ban on single-use plastics which demonstrates a practical, hands-on approach to his leadership. But at least three governments in the past implemented a similar ban only to yield to powerful plastic lobbyists. A lot will rest on Shrestha's ability to show short-term results as well as implement policy reforms for the longer term. ■

Pratibha Rawal

Minister of Federal Affairs and General Administration

A former journalist with Republica and a fact-checker, she graduated from the Asian College of Journalism in Chennai. Pratibha Rawal also hosted a popular public service oriented program on Galaxy 4K tv station when Rabi Lamichhane was the Managing Director.

Rawal, 32, a Proportional Representation RSP candidate from Sudurpashchim Province, said she felt journalism was too slow to bring about change and that she was committed to entering politics for policy reform and its implementation. ■

Dipak Kumar Sah

Minister of Labour, Employment, and Social Security

The qualifications of Dipak Kumar Sah has nothing to do with the ministry he has been appointed to. This contrasts with the RSP's campaign slogan of "जान्ने लाई छान्ने" that promised ministers qualified for their posts.

It might have all come down to a political arithmetic to balance a Madhesi minister when Dol Prasad Aryal who was previously Labour Minister from the RSP was rewarded speakership for his seniority.

Sah, 35, contested from Mohattari-2 and scored a resounding victory over Sarat Singh Bhandari, who has been minister 20 times in the past 30 years and was labour minister under the previous UML coalition.

Sah has a PhD in Health Policy Planning and Financing from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. He has a bachelor's degree in optometry and served as president of the Nepalese Association of Optometrists.

Sah is now responsible for the ministry that oversees a sector that

essentially keeps the country afloat. Remittance from Nepali migrants overseas made up 26% of GDP equivalent, surpassing agriculture. In USD, remittance inflows rose by 31.0% to \$10.15 billion this year.

After the RSP's 100-point plan was approved, Minister Sah called for drafting and implementing measures to reform the country's labour sector. Key instructions included replacing the old 'token' system with same-day permit issuance and to develop digital content based on Pre-Departure Orientation Training (PDOT) curriculum.

Sah needs to prioritise the safety of Nepali workers abroad and have rescue plans in place if the West Asia war spirals out of control. His ministry must also push for better destination and well paying high skill jobs for workers overseas through government to government negotiations.

In 2016, Sah was arrested after his consultancy approached a student's mother and demanded Rs200,000 to secure backdoor entry into medical school. He was investigated and acquitted. ■



Nisha Mehta

Minister of Health and Population

Nisha Mehta is a nurse who completed her postgraduate from Gwalior in India specialising in patient care, healthcare management, and public health.

Mehta, 39, was born in Sunsari, and after her studies worked as a clinical nurse at B P Koirala Institute of Health Sciences in Dharan for three years. She then joined Birat Teaching Hospital in Biratnagar where she served as both a nurse and an associate professor.

She has been a general member of the RSP since its formation, and was

in the PR list in the last election also, but did not make the cut.

At an World Health Day event this week, Mehta stressed the concept of One Health, and how the health of nature and animals must be ensured for the health of the people.

Mehta's main challenge will be to improve access and affordability of medical care for all Nepalis, and reduce out of pocket expenses. Many Nepali households become indebted or fall below the poverty line when a family member falls sick. Private hospitals are too expensive, and government hospitals generally have poor service. Universal health insurance would help solve this, but

past efforts have floundered. Yet, her party's 100-point roadmap has no mention of health insurance.

Meanwhile, one of the first decisions taken by the RSP last week was to instruct all hospitals to set aside 10% of their capacity to provide free healthcare to patients who cannot pay.

Mehta's decision this week to reinstate Junu Shrestha, the wife of Labour Minister Dipak Kumar Sah, in the Health Insurance Board from which she was removed, has raised questions about the RSP's commitment to accountability. Sah was already under scrutiny for alleged medical exam fraud. ■

Bikram Timilsina

Minister of Communications and Information Technology

Bikram Timilsina defeated Nepali Congress (NC) stalwart Prakash Sharan Mahat in his home turf of Nuwakot-1, after getting into politics only two years ago.

As Minister of Communications and Information Technology, he will oversee traditional and digital media, telecommunication infrastructure, cybersecurity, regulating social media, and ensure that the push for digital governance is carried out successfully. Fifteen of the 100 points of the RSP's Good Governance Blueprint are about implementing digital governance.

Timilsina holds a Master of International Studies from the University of Queensland, and a PhD in Politics, Geopolitics, and International Relations from Griffith University in Australia.

He served as a producer and presenter at Radio Sagarmatha, Nepal's first FM radio station. He was editorial adviser for the portal SouthAsia.com.au while in Australia. In academia and research, Timilsina has served as

lecturer in the Governance and Anti-Corruption Studies program at Tribhuvan University, and founded the Asian Institute for Advanced Research.

Timilsina, for all his expertise, does not have a technical background. He has a steep learning curve. Regrettably, an inside source says that Timilsina's team so far has no tech experts, but it does have 'swakiyas' who were with him during the election. The source adds that these loyalists see qualified candidates as threats, and are gatekeeping positions.

Timilsina and the other ministers must be more ruthless in choosing by merit if this cabinet has any hope of a different result to all the duds before it. His current attitude is discouraging young talent, who were initially enthusiastic about the change.

There are also rumors that the responsibilities of the ministry will be split such that Balen oversees the technology side of it. It will still be massively difficult to deliver, but at least Balen has that engineering degree he can dust off. It would also allow Timilsina to focus more on the comms - his forte. ■

Sobita Gautam

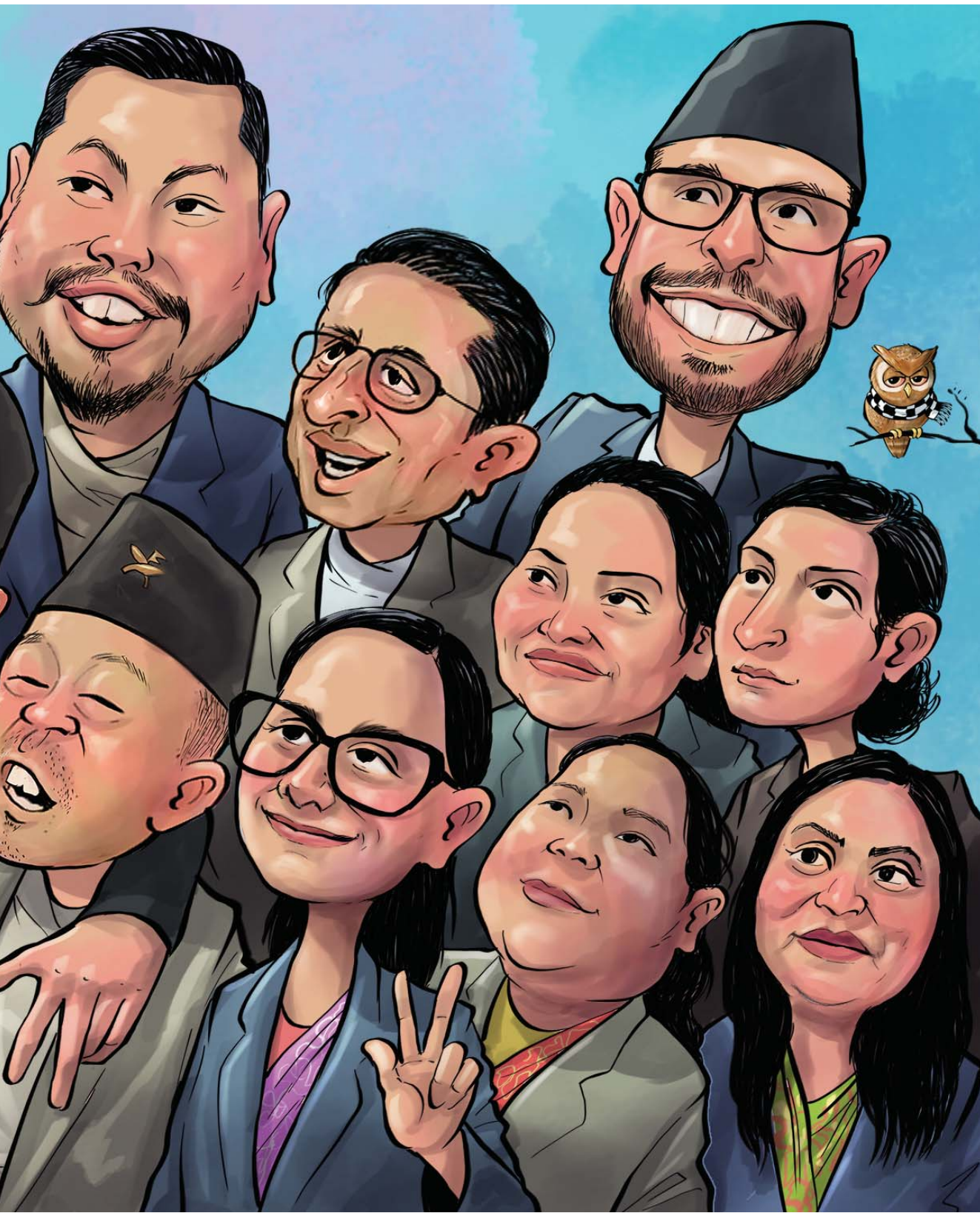
Minister of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs

One of the most anticipated outcomes in the 5 March election after the Balendra Shah vs K P Oli contest in Jhapa-5 was Chitwan-3 where Sobita Gautam was up against former mayor and daughter of Pushpa Kamal Dahal, Renu Dahal.

The RSP candidate who was also the youngest directly elected lawmaker in Nepal's federal parliament in 2022 from Kathmandu-2 won comfortably with 59,277 votes over Dahal's 20,615 despite the latter's achievements in improving the urban management of Bharatpur.

A trained lawyer, 30-year-old Gautam specialises in constitutional and administrative law. She is currently pursuing a LLM in international law and has an undergraduate degree in Development Studies from Kathmandu University.

She is a founding central committee member of the RSP. Before joining politics, Gautam hosted the health awareness television show Swasthya Sarokar on Nepal Television for over four years. ■



ANUP TAMU

Shisir Khanal
Minister of Foreign Affairs

Shisir Khanal returned to Nepal after completing grad school in the USA and founded Teach for Nepal in 2012 that mobilised young graduates to ensure education for all, and improve quality of instruction in public schools in five districts. In 2026, Khanal was appointed Foreign Minister, and at 47, he is one of the older Cabinet members. He has a Bachelor's degree in International Political Economy and Diplomacy from the University of Bridgeport and a Master's degree in Public Policy from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Khanal entered active politics in 2022 by joining the RSP, and contested and won the election from Kathmandu-6. In January 2023, Khanal served a 19-day stint as the Minister for Education in the Pushpa Kamal Dahal government. In 2026, Khanal contested the election once again from Kathmandu-6 and was re-elected. In the lead-up to the election, he led efforts from within the RSP to bring Balendra Shah under the RSP banner alongside Rabi Lamichhane. In an interview during his 2026 campaign, Khanal noted that Nepal's diplomacy is still dependent on 19th and 20th century frameworks, and pointed out the Foreign Ministry's low institutional

capacity. Nepal needs to reimagine its place in a multilateral world, he added, to reflect the rapidly changing geopolitical context. For the RSP, the diplomatic reboot involves 'development diplomacy' to steer the country away from traditional aid towards economic partnerships and foreign investments without any strings attached. As the Minister, his experience as a public education reformist will help select priorities for foreign partnerships. With the West Asia war, there are more urgent things on his plate. Khanal has said that there is no immediate pressure on Nepalis to return home, but has sent relief flights to Dammam and Dubai. 🇳🇵

Sasmit Pokharel
Minister of Education, Science and Technology, Minister of Youth and Sports

One of the youngest MPs at 29, Sasmit Pokharel as a close colleague of Prime Minister Balendra Shah has been given the responsibility of not just Minister of Education, Science and Technology, but also Minister of Youth and Sports, as well as being the government spokesperson. Earlier, he worked with Shah for three years when he was Kathmandu mayor as Associate Expert in the City Planning Commission, and as an Adviser on Education and Urban Planning. He holds a BBM-LL.B from Kathmandu University School of Law and is currently pursuing a Master's degree on governance and anti-corruption policies. He was only 18 when he joined the Bibeksheel Sajha Party inspired by its founder Ujjwal Thapa. After Bibeksheel fell apart, he contested the 2022 provincial elections as an independent, but lost. In the 2026 election, Pokharel contested from Kathmandu-5 and defeated three heavyweight politicians: NC's Pradip Paudel, Ishwar Pokhrel of the UML, and RPP Chair Kamal Thapa. Immediately after taking office, Pokharel banned bridge entrance preparation courses for students applying to +2 or A levels following their SEE exams, saying they were too commercial. After an outcry, the decision appears to have been rescinded, and again reapplied although there is confusion about the status. As minister, Pokharel wants to crack down on student and teacher unions affiliated to political parties, although this does not sit well with those in favour of freedom of organisation. He also wants education curricula and management to be decentralised, and address delayed exam results and disrupted classes. 🇳🇵

Sita Badi
Minister for Women, Children and Senior Citizens

Sita Badi is the first person from Sher Dalit community to become a minister. A native resident of Birendranagar in Surkhet, she has spent a lifetime in social work and activism, becoming a strong voice for marginalised groups. As a Dalit, Badi faced difficulties completing her studies due to societal ostracisation. She spent her childhood as a labourer with her parents hauling sand for construction contractors along the Bheri River. Badi moved to Kathmandu at age 12, and with the support of a local organisation completed her bachelor's degree in social work and eventually a master's in political science. She has since been working through her own activist group Sundar Sahaj Nepal. She has also set up the Badi Sustain Company to work towards improving the livelihoods of people from her community. She launched a small enterprise in Chunikhel in Kathmandu, where women sell handicrafts, allowing many women facing exclusion gain financial independence. Despite laws, higher literacy and empowerment, the Badi community continues to suffer from stigma and exclusion. There are challenges including protection and social safety net for children and the elderly, shelters for the vulnerable. It was Sita Badi's interest in activism and commitment to improve status of the marginalised that led the RSP to pick her as a proportional representation candidate in last month's election. Badi's ministership is not just a symbolic gesture of tokenism, it is recognition of her past commitment and work on behalf of Nepalis who are excluded from the mainstream where decision-making is dominated by men from powerful caste groups. 🇳🇵

Geeta Chaudhary
Minister of Agriculture, Livestock, Forests and Environment

A self-made social justice activist and lawyer, 33-year-old Geeta Chaudhary, who has struggled for the rights of her Tharu community, knows what exclusion means. Sudurpaschim suffers from neglect due to its geography, and the Tharu community has historically been ostracised and exploited by settlers from the mountains. Chaudhary is now in a position to make a difference on behalf of all Nepalis in the periphery. Chaudhary herself had to struggle against economic hardship,

and fight discrimination both for her ethnicity and for being a woman in the legal profession. Formerly a UML activist, she has defended Dalits, Tharu and other communities in cases involving property, discrimination and domestic violence. She faces immediate challenge due to the West Asia war, which is driving up inflation, cost of fertiliser and fuel, hitting poorest farmers hardest. In the longer term, Nepal's farms and forests are at risk from climate breakdown. 🇳🇵

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Events



Acting / filmmaking course

Kantipur Film Academy is starting a six-month professional acting and filmmaking diploma course for aspiring actors, writers, filmmakers, cinematographers, editors, and film students.

Apply by 10 April, Gairidhara (01) 5245011

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



Hike for Nepal

Be one with the nature this weekend, go for Kalache -Kafal Danda day hike. A 16-17km medium-hard hike might just be what you need to rejuvenate yourself.

11 April, Rs900-1,500, 6:40am, Bhirkutimandap, 9843171275

Mother Mine

Nepal launch of Sheeba Shah's fourth novel, Mother Mine will open with introductory remarks from writer and academician, Prof. Arun Gupto. This will be followed by a conversation between Shah and podcaster, Alfa M. Shakya, book-signing and refreshments.

11 April, 3pm, Manny's Eatery & Bar, Jwalakhel



Poker Run

All the thrillseekers out there, the 16th edition of Poker Run Nepal to Pokhara coincides with the new Nepali year. Register on Poker Run Nepal's website.

13-15 April, pokerrunnepal@gmail.com / info@pokerrunnepal.com

Tattoo Convention

The 13th International Nepal Tattoo Convention is starting this week at Heritage Garden in Sanepa. Best artists from around the globe will be participating. Don't forget to check it out. Get tickets at Khalti.

10-12 April, 11am onwards, Rs500



Music

New Year

Bring your family, friends, raise your glasses, and celebrate the beginning of a New Year with performances from Ojash and Daiharu.

13 April, 7pm onwards, London Pub Kathmandu, Darbar Marg (01) 5320256

Bisho Dong and Lhaso

Ring in the New Year with electrifying live performances by Bishwo Dong and Lhaso, as they bring you great music, lively vibes, and a festive atmosphere.

13 April, 10pm onwards, Rs1,000, VIP Club and Lounge, Thamel



Echoes of Eternity

Join legendary singer Deepak Kharel for a soulful live orchestra performance featuring his timeless classics and unforgettable melodies.

10 April, 5pm onwards, Rs1,000-5,000, Nepal Pragya Pratisthan, Kamladi, 9841509445

New Year's Eve

The Shadows Nepal, Kumar Sagar and the Khwopa and John and the Locals are set to ignite the night with their signature performances.

13 April, 4pm onwards, Rs2,000-10,000, Malla Hotel, Kathmandu



Kandara Live

Join fellow music lovers for an unforgettable evening filled with nostalgia, rhythm, and powerful performances as Nepal rock band Kandara takes to the stage.

10 April, 8pm onwards, Rs1,000-6,000, Club Nova, Thamel



Getaway



Grand Norling Hotel

Enjoy a calm and relaxing stay at the hotel which provides a spacious bedroom with adjoining bathroom, a large balcony with sights of the golf course, monkeys and deer herds, and not to forget, the garden.

Gokarna, 9801121560

Balthali Village Resort

A simple and cosy retreat just beyond Kathmandu Valley, Balthali Village Resort is ideal for anyone seeking to getaway but not too far away from the city.

Panauti, Kavre, 9851087772



Dahlia Boutique Hotel

A luxury hotel at the bank of Phewa Lake with 180 degree mountain and city view: a good end to a memorable trek.

Lakeside, Pokhara (061) 456505

Heranya Yala

Get a genuine feel of authentic Newari heritage by living right in the middle of Maha Boudha and the Hiranya monastery. The hotel provides a complete tour package to immerse in the rich cultural heritage of Patan.

Gujibahal, Patan 9841259445

The Last Resort

Bungy jump, Tandem swing, or white water rafting--take an adventurous trip to Bhot Koshi River near the Tibetan border.

Bhotekoshi, 9801258675



Dining

Tamarind

If you want to explore authentic Thai flavours, try the Sea Bass Fillet, Pad Thai Kai and Pad Thai Koong, or explore their fresh seafood selections at Tamarind.

Jhamsikhel (01) 5422626

Mamagoto Nepal

Mamagoto is a fun Pan-Asian restaurant that serves a variety of Asian fusion dishes. Enjoy maki rolls, Satays, dumplings, ramen and more all with a side of cocktails in this new quirky eatery.

Panipokhari, 9802320960



New Year 2083

Welcome this Nepali New Year with a buffet dinner at Aloft Kathmandu Thamel. Expect a lavish spread, welcome drink, and live music. Early reservations are recommended.

13 April, 6:30pm-10:30pm, 3,500 net per person, 9801976054

Anatolia

Anatolia's Indian and Turkish dishes are packed with spices and an unforgettable assortment of flavours. From the Mutton Kofta Curry to the Baklava, the dishes will keep one wanting more. All the food is halal.

Chhetrapati (01) 5358757



Erma Restaurant

Erma Restaurant offers an upscale fine dining experience with chef-curated continental dishes. With a farm to table approach and an assortment of wines, Erma turns every meal into an experience.

Bansbari, 9803867240

Weekend Weather



Drier and Hotter

It has been an unusually wet spring so far. This has reduced the incidence of wildfires, although some forests are burning in the central foothills. The weather is expected to clear up starting this weekend, but there may be afternoon convection systems along the mountains. The maximum temperature in Kathmandu will stay below normal, warming up only next week. High passes remain under thick snow.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
22° 11°	24° 11°	25° 12°	25° 13°	27° 13°



Our Pick

Phil Lord and Christopher Miller's 2026 science fiction film Project Hail Mary, based on the 2021 novel by Andy Weir, follows American middle-school science teacher and former molecular biologist Ryland Grace, who finds himself the sole survivor onboard a spacecraft when he wakes from an induced coma. As he gradually regains his memory, he must figure out how a mysterious substance is causing the sun to dim, and use his expertise to prevent humanity from extinction. The film has been especially timely in light of NASA's Artemis II moon exploration mission this week. Stars Ryan Gosling, Sandra Hüller, James Ortiz, and Lionel Boyce.

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 नपरों ।
- 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

Mainstreaming abstract art

Twenty-six Nepali modern artists come together for a one-of-a-kind exhibition at Taragaon Next

Sudiksha Tuladhar

Once a quiet niche in Nepal's art world, abstract works are gathering a certain following. Art aficionados and collectors have embraced the freedom this art form provides, making the canvas a compelling, unfiltered space for expression and raw energy.

Nepal's transition into modernism and abstract art began in the mid-1900s as the country opened to the world. The pioneer was Lain Singh Bangdel who was exposed to the modern European school while studying in Paris in the 1950s. It was Bangdel who infused abstract styles to modern Nepali art and inspired generations of new talent.

Fast forward 65 years. For the first time, 26 abstract Nepali artists are coming together for an extravaganza at Taragaon Next titled Forms of Abstraction. The exhibition brings the works of Kiran Manandhar, Sangee Shrestha, Sushma Rajbhandari, Bidhata KC, NB Gurung, Jeevan Rajopadhyay, Laya Mainali, Nabendra Limbu, among others as they explore motion, emotion, nature, architecture and geometry, while always melding culture and heritage into modern visual themes.

"Unlike purely formalist approaches, abstraction often emerges from cultural memory, spiritual philosophy, and lived environments," explains Roshan Mishra, curator and director at Taragaon Next. "Even in its most



non-representational forms, Nepali abstraction retains a connection to tradition by transforming rather than abandoning earlier ways of seeing and making."

Supported by the Saraf Foundation for Himalayan Traditions and Culture, the exhibition foregrounds abstraction not as a departure, but as a continuum, an evolving language shaped through time, practice, and context. The artworks presented include mixed media, acrylic on

canvases, and water colour on paper.

Jeevan Rajopadhyay has been working with abstract art for 20 years, and his work is distinguished by the vibrant use of colour and fluid forms, often evoking a sense of movement and harmony for viewers. "Abstract art exists beyond what is seen by human eyes to evoke feelings and emotions," says Rajopadhyay.

Nabendra Limbu's Samaahit highlights years of deep exploration



into abstraction, displaying an emotional interplay of colour and form. "I explore rhythm, repetition, and space, where colour and form engage in an emotional dialogue, unfolding contemplation, movement, and what exists beyond perception," he explains.

But because abstract art resonates at an emotional rather than rational level, the paintings cannot be explained in words. Artists use expressionism precisely because its message exists in a different dimension from language.

Laya Mainali has been painting in the abstract for 40 years and has two works titled Antaskaran and Creation on display, both of which come with distinct colour palettes and shapes. He says: "Abstract art is

an expression, a mixture of colours and a medium through which feelings can be poured out."

Kiran Manandhar's Mero Man Ka Kura appeals to the eye, as darker shades dominate the foreground fading away to lighter tones. Manandhar has made a name for himself as an artist of repute, and says abstract art is actually more real for him.

"The communication through the combination of colours, textures and forms stimulate emotion and evoke memories and moods, and that's what gives me the energy to return again and again to this art form," he adds.

Sushma Rajbhandari's work also blends tradition and modernity while Sacred Landscape by Binod Pradhan, Snowy Granulation by NB Gurung and Antardwandwa by Sangee Shrestha add heft to the exhibition.

Forms of Abstraction can be viewed as individual works, or seen as a collective creativity in Nepali modern art. Every artwork on display spread across multiple galleries tells different stories, each speaking differently to different audiences.

Roshan Mishra hopes the exhibition will make abstracts more accessible: "There is minimal discussion around abstract art in Nepal. Paradoxically, the more people do not understand the paintings, the more successful the exhibition will be." 🇳🇵

Forms of Abstraction
Taragaon Next, Boudha
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10am-5:30pm

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From Mahottari to Malaysia

Two friends from the Musahar community share their experiences growing up and migrating together



DIASPORA
DIARIES 90

This is the 90th episode of *Diaspora Diaries*, a *Nepali Times* series in collaboration with Migration Lab providing a platform to share experiences of living, working and studying abroad.

The Musahar community lives in the Nepal Tarai and India, they have been historically excluded and are at the bottom of the economic and caste ladder. Many families still work as sharecroppers for landlords, but overseas migration is changing their lives as this conversation between Abhinash Sada and Lalit Majhi shows. Both were home for a vacation from work in Malaysia which coincided with the election. They are hopeful that the new RSP government will improve things.

Abhinash: I was born into such poverty that we worried about the next meal. My family used to work near the river, mining sand and gravel. They were paid in rice. Sometimes we children went to the field to help with work, not for money but for the roti we got for lunch. I was eight when I was sent to school, and I still remember the first day.



Lalit: We were classmates. Abhinash already knew how to recite the Nepali alphabet, but did not know how to read the letters. Meanwhile, I knew how to write क ख ग but did not know what those letters stood for. I just liked using a stick to scribble the alphabets in the sand while tending to the water buffalos. We finally learnt the alphabets properly in school. We used to skip school a lot but became interested after they offered sports like volleyball, and

they also let us use a computer once every week. We started focusing on our studies, and Abinash used to stay at my house so we could start studying together at 4AM because the teacher said our minds were freshest in the morning.

Abhinash: I used to sleep over at Lalit's house so we could get up and study together early in the morning before school. We enjoyed studying so much we even asked the teacher for more homework.

Sometimes, we used to skip class to do some work to earn some money so we could afford stationery or uniforms. Lalit ranked better than me in class.

Lalit: My best memories of childhood was us swimming in the river after the rains when water levels were high. My mother thought we would get sick, but we did not listen. When we finally came home in the evenings, she would be fuming. My father worked

in Punjab as a contractor and took fellow villagers there to work.

Abhinash: My father went to Saudi Arabia to support the family. When he came home for a break, he enrolled me in a private school so my English would improve and private schools were also stricter. I was in Grade 5 in the government school, but the private school put me in kindergarten. It felt strange because everyone else was much younger. After three years, I rejoined Grade 6 in the government school but Lalit had already moved on to Grade 8. We no longer studied together.

Lalit: I did not pass my SLC. Instead of retaking the exam, I went to Chennai and got a dishwashing job although I was promised waiter. I came back after a month and started getting my paperwork done for Qatar. I borrowed Rs100,000 from a villager at 36% interest. Even so, in three years there I helped my family repay loans and bail out my eldest brother who had been cheated in Malaysia. All my savings in Qatar and what my middle brother earned in Malaysia went to rescue our oldest brother.

Abhinash: We Musahars can work hard. Our forebears worked from childhood tilling the fields of land owners whose children went to school. Saying no was not an option. Our fathers' generation prioritised education because they did not want us to be trapped in servitude. I studied until Grade 12 but failed

The great equaliser

Making meaningful migration accessible to all



Labour Mobility
Upasana Khadka

Pappu Mahara's campaign for RSP began in Malaysia as he came to Nepal with a suitcase plastered with PM Balendra Shah's photo (pictured, right).

Last week, after what he considers a "job well done" he was flying back to Malaysia with a suitcase without the election poster but with high hopes for his, and Nepal's, future.

On Thursday, the day of his flight, the first session of Parliament was underway. Addressing the House, RSP Chair Rabi Lamichhane made an apology to Nepal's Dalit community.

Pappu was traveling to Malaysia with Lalit and Abhinash (see adjoining article) and all three are members of the Dalit community working in a factory to provide for families back home. Migration is an equaliser: it connects talent which is universal with opportunities that are not. It allows people a fresh start no matter their circumstances.

However, this equaliser itself is not equally accessible. Access to migration requires money, networks and information – all of which are unevenly distributed.

Among the three, Abhinash was part of an initiative by Migration Lab and the group International Manpower Recruitment targeted at the Musahar community to make meaningful migration accessible to all. He did not pay a single penny. He got exactly the job he had been promised.

Abhinash and other Dalit youth may still have migrated despite not having money, but they would have had to borrow to pay hefty recruitment fees to fraudulent agents.



As they prepared to fly back to Malaysia after a 45 day break, the three workers were examples of how targeted labour mobility can be designed to ensure migration benefits the poorest. One answer is scale: reaching more marginalised communities with ethical recruitment pathways. The other is to link them to countries offering higher salaries and better protections for workers.

Abhinash and others would have typically gone to India, a low-cost, low-risk and low-return destination, but they went to Malaysia where returns are significantly higher. But returns are relative: a Nepali in a Malaysian factory earns a basic salary of \$422. The same factory job in Korea would pay \$1,500 per month. But barriers to entry are higher for countries like Korea. Workers have to learn the language and pass a test.

In interactions with youth from the Musahar community, I have often asked them why they do not opt for Korea. Abhinash, Lalit or others could easily pass the Korean

language test if they put their minds to it.

There is lack of information (even misinformation) about migrating to places like Korea. Village-based agents will not share information about the Korean labour market because it is a government-to-government initiative where brokers have no role at all.

While not a representative sample, many youth I spoke with do not know such details: how to apply, what the benefits are and how much it can cost. Abhinash thought that it costs upto Rs800,000 to migrate to Korea, which is not true. Actually, a Korea placement costs just Rs70,000 which can easily be recuperated in less than a month.

There is also a network barrier. Musahar youth I spoke with did not know a single person who had migrated to Korea or Japan. Not knowing anyone who has attempted to go to Korea or Japan makes it daunting and out of reach. Word of mouth is one of the most important sources of job information for workers. It takes just one cohort to change perceptions of the unknown, we have learnt.

Lalit is setting up a WhatsApp group with peers from his village who also wanted to get jobs without recruitment fees. "My friend is very smart and educated, but has never worked in his life," he says. It was an honest referral, but not a blind one.

When we create labour mobility initiatives, a part of the wider goal is also to enable such knock-on effects like building networks, role models, mentors, and reliable sources of information. Only then can we eliminate fraudulent actors.

The government's apology to the Dalit community for historic discrimination has to be followed through with concrete action. This means creating job opportunities, including for foreign employment that are transformational.

This is in line with RSP's own manifesto. Goal number 80 states: 'Families from Dalit and marginalised communities who wish to go abroad for employment will be provided

with concessional loans through banks based on recommendations or guarantees from local authorities.'

This commitment can be realised in many innovative ways so people from marginalised communities have access to the most rewarding, safe and transformational ones.

Unlike India, Malaysia and the Gulf, access to high-return markets like Korea and Japan has a more rigorous preparatory and selection stage. What barriers, for example, do youth from underserved communities like the Musahar face in accessing language preparation classes? Are there gaps in finances, social networks or reliable information that can be addressed? Can they access high-quality instruction?

Not all migration is the same. Some return worse off than when they left, others are engaged in "survival migration". Some come back having built assets or to build thriving businesses. A successful returnee contributing to Nepal is inevitably a function of their migration experience: how much they earned, saved, learned, and were protected.

The earlier we become intentional through better program design, training partnerships, recruitment practices, and employer selection, the more likely it is to create positive and lasting change for migrants and their families. That we have an action oriented, proactive government gives us hope.

We met Abhinash when he had doubts about whether he could actually migrate without paying fees. Now, back home for a break, he encouraged others to migrate ethically directly through recruiters. He has bought land, and now plans to build a house on it within the next two years.

A youth from the Musahar community or someone from Bajura should have the information and resources to migrate for rewarding overseas jobs if they wish to do so and to break out of the broker-trap that puts them in vulnerable positions. The new government should undertake measures to ensure that this great equaliser is also equally accessible to all. 🇳🇵

Upasana Khadka heads Migration Lab, a social enterprise aimed at making migration outcomes better for workers and their families. Labour Mobility is a regular column in *Nepali Times*.

my exam. I worked in a sweet factory in Bangalore to support my parents. I returned after a year, and did odd jobs in a brick factory and sometimes as a day labourer with my father. I did not go abroad because I did not have money and people were not willing to lend to us. It was only when I got a free recruitment job in Malaysia that I decided to migrate.

Lalit: I came back from Qatar, got married and remigrated to Malaysia with Abinash. It has been 2.5 years and we work in the same factory and share a dorm room just as we did as kids. With the money we earned, we have bought land back in our village. We are returning to Malaysia after our vacation here. My wife put mehendi in my palms, and told me that I should remember her whenever I see it. I also gave her a silver chain I was wearing as memento. My wife said the mehendi will last about a month and will fade away, that is the most difficult part of being overseas — but after a few weeks the working life takes over and we get occupied with duty.

Abhinash: The election coincided with my vacation and I voted for the RSP in both ballots. They have already started building a road in our area, so there is hope. People in other parties were angry, but I told them my one vote would not have made a difference, they would have still lost. You can feel new energy in the village now, maybe things will change. We Musahars have always been discriminated against, even though our situation has improved. At least we do not have to worry about food anymore. It is not just my father who is the breadwinner. Now, I am also earning to support the family.

Lalit: The whole point about migrating is to take care of my parents and make sure they are happy. They are my role models,

and struggled all their lives for us. They invested in our studies so we would not have to live through what they did. They are happy that we are earning and supporting them. We bought land with the money saved in Malaysia. Now, as we go back, the next goal is to build a house. Then we will think about our future. When Abhinash and I were children, we thought we would be दुलो मान्छे one day. I looked up to my teacher and wanted to be like him. But now that I am grown up, I do not have anyone I look up to. I just make my goals and achieve them.

Abhinash: We have our whole lives ahead of us, and it is our turn to support our parents. What is the point of anything if our family is not happy? I do not want my parents to have to depend on others for money. We Musahars have been historically mistreated. We are known to be too trusting, and we do as we are told. We grew up believing that we were underdogs because of our caste. People still treat us as untouchable, although less than before. We were invited to parties but made to sit separately; at friends' houses, we were asked to remain outside. We accepted all this because that is way it always was. Even when it made us feel bad. My younger brother stopped going to parties altogether because he did not like that discriminatory treatment. The new generation is not like that thankfully.

Lalit: I once ran away from a feast because the Musahar invitees had to eat last. High caste or low caste, we all have the same red blood. The young ones thankfully are not like that. We were invited to a wedding recently during this vacation from Malaysia, and all of us young boys sat and ate together. But if the elders had been around they would have asked Abhinash and me to sit separately from the others.

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