



ZHANG MAOMING / X



BUREAU OF SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIAN AFFAIRS / X

**EAST AND WEST:** Chinese Ambassador Zhang Maoming with PM Balendra Shah, and US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Samir Paul Kapur with RSP chair Rabi Lamichhane.

## Love thy neighbours (and America)

Sonia Awale

Just three weeks in, Prime Minister Balendra Shah has already shed two ministers, and is having to contend with the economic fallout of the West Asia war plus the global order it has upended.

The new dispensation in Nepal has aroused interest in New Delhi, Beijing as well as Washington. The ouster of Home Minister Sudan Gurung has foreign policy wonks in those capitals scratching heads.

The US sent Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Samir Paul Kapur to figure out what is happening.

In town at the same time was Cao Jing, Deputy Director General of the Asian Affairs Department of China's Foreign Ministry.

For the Americans, it is mostly about containing China and protecting Tibetan refugees, while pushing its MCC Compact and State Partnership Program (SSP).

Beijing is mindful of the post-Dalai Lama era, and does not want instability in Nepal to encourage Free Tibet activities. And India lately seems more wary of American activity in what it considers its backyard as Prime

Minister Shah prepares for his official visit to India.

The Chinese appear relieved that Sudan Gurung is gone. Only last week, Ambassador Zhang Maoming met Gurung to raise the issue of Tibetan and Taiwanese activities, seeking firm commitment that Nepal would not allow activities hostile to Beijing.

"Geographically we are close to Tibet and not to the Mainland, so China remains suspicious of us, especially after the Free Tibet emerged in the GenZ protests," says geopolitical analyst India Adhikari.

Kapur met government officials in Kathmandu, and raised the issue of Tibetan refugees. In nearly parallel meetings with ministers, Cao Jing warned Nepal not to be so cosy with the Americans.

### TRI-POLAR WORLD ORDER

For Indian academic and Nepal watcher Sukh Deo Muni, all this harks back to American activity in Nepal during the Cold War. He tweeted: 'US senior diplomat Paul Kapur's statement in Kathmandu must be understood carefully in New Delhi. He said the US does not want China or any other country to dominate Nepal.'

'Any other country' could be a pointed reference to India. This means Nepal will have to navigate

more carefully in a tri-polar world order reshaped by the Gulf war.

Nepali journalist based in New Delhi Akanshya Shah agrees that the United States may not be seeing Nepal through the Indian lens anymore, while New Delhi does not want heightened US activity in what it considers its sphere of influence. All this is further complicated by recent frostiness in Washington-New Delhi ties.

Balendra Shah did engineering in Bengaluru, and his religious public posture could help project Nepal's 'soft power' vis-a-vis India.

But he has also been a nationalist on the Limpiyadhura map dispute, and there are other thorny issues like air connectivity, river projects and power exports that need to be ironed out.

In New Delhi, Prime Minister Shah also needs to convince his interlocutors that Nepal's traditional policy of 'equidistance' is not an anti-Indian stance.

Sukh Deo Muni warns that the old Indian diplomatic approach based on religio-cultural stakeholders in Kathmandu may not work anymore.

He wrote: 'Modi government must prepare itself well to deal with new Nepalese leadership

and their empowered support base, which is self-confident, highly nationalist, aspirant and impatient.'

The RSP's 22-page National Commitment document said Nepal should abandon its historical 'buffer state' identity to serve as a 'vibrant bridge' between regional and global powers. Much of this debate is theoretical, and distracts from regional realpolitik.

"Whether we are a buffer state or a vibrant bridge, we have to have good relations with neighbours," explains Akanshya Shah.

For her part, Indra Adhikari thinks Nepal is neither a 'buffer state' nor a 'vibrant bridge'. She says, "We have had zero role in mediating or de-escalating tensions between India and China to call ourselves a buffer state. As a vibrant bridge, we cannot facilitate trade between the two countries."

**Sudan Gurung's coming and going**  
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**When Aura meets Audit**  
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# NEW COLLECTION

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# Silver lining in war clouds

The West Asia conflict can hasten the global green energy transition



**GUEST EDITORIAL**  
Manjeet Dhakal

In 2024, renewables accounted for the largest share of growth in global energy supply. For the first time, solar and wind generation exceeded coal and gas in the European Union. In the United States, solar and wind reached 16%, overtaking coal.

In China, solar and wind generated about 20% of total power. More than 51% of India's total installed electricity capacity comes from non-fossil fuel sources. Together, these shifts point to a system in transition at a time when the world is once again confronting a global energy crisis due to the Hormuz blockade.

But this is not an isolated disruption — it is a structural signal reminding us that fossil fuel dependence is not only environmentally unsustainable, but also economically and geopolitically precarious.

India, Indonesia and Vietnam are scaling up renewables and electric mobility, while exploring storage and grid upgrades. China leads globally in solar and wind expansion, rapidly increasing domestic capacity to lessen exposure to external shocks. Japan and South Korea are investing in hydrogen, offshore wind and next-generation energy systems.

In Europe, the response has been both immediate and strategic. The European Union's REPowerEU plan aims to reduce dependence on imported fossil fuels while accelerating renewables. Germany, Spain,



SUMAN NEPALI

and Denmark are expanding wind and solar at scale, with renewables increasingly outcompeting fossil fuels.

Chile is advancing solar and green hydrogen, Brazil is strengthening its renewable-based power system, and South Africa is opening space for private renewable investment to address power shortages.

Energy security and climate action are no longer competing priorities, they are deeply aligned. Renewable energy offers not just emissions reduction, but independence from volatile global markets.

The current crisis is also reshaping global climate diplomacy. Initiatives such as the Santa Marta Conference, bringing together

countries committed to accelerating the fossil fuel transition, signal growing political momentum and reflect increasing frustration with slow progress and a recognition that incremental change is insufficient.

This aligns with broader developments under the Paris Agreement. The COP30 Presidency in Brazil advanced roadmaps for transitioning away from fossil fuels and scaling up clean energy deployment. It serves as a catalyst to translate global commitments into practical pathways.

## NEPAL'S EXAMPLE

Despite rising global prices, Nepal's overall spending on fuel imports has declined for

the last four consecutive years, driven by the expansion of hydropower, increased electrification, growing adoption of EVs (page 5) and electric cooking, and policy measures aligned with Nepal's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).

Together, these efforts are beginning to reshape the country's energy landscape. The country has been exporting clean hydroelectricity since last year.

Nepal's experience shows that transitions do not always require massive technological breakthroughs. It often begins with incremental changes, better policies, targeted investments and shifts in behaviour. It demonstrates that even in the face of structural challenges, it is possible to reduce fossil fuel dependence while advancing development goals.

Too often, short-term responses to crises, like fuel subsidies or increased fossil fuel production, undermine long-term goals. Rather than increasing dependence on fossil fuel, investments should focus on diversification, efficiency, and clean energy systems. The transition is not a question of feasibility, but of priorities. Choices made today will shape the future.

We can choose to treat this as a temporary disruption, or we can recognise it as an opportunity to expedite the shift to a more sustainable and equitable energy system.

What is needed now is the will to act and invest because every crisis holds the seeds of a new beginning. 🇳🇵

Manjeet Dhakal is the Head of the LDC Support Team at Climate Analytics and Director for Climate Analytics South Asia.

## Trending Online

### Grandfather carried cars, son drives cars, grandson flies planes

by Kunda Dixit  
Hira Bahadur Ghalan carried cars bought by Rana rulers from Bhimphedi to Kathmandu. His son Maila Kaji drove cars for ministers. His grandson Manjil Lama is a pilot. If you missed it in print, story is online at nepalitimes.com

**Most reached and shared on Facebook**

### The long and winding road

by Dan Edwards  
The idea of building a road to connect Nepal with India came up during the last years of the Rana regime. Construction began in 1952 and took five years, and was named Tribhuvan Rajpath. Read the chronology of Nepal's first highway on our website.

**Most popular on X**

### Insured but not covered

by Barune Thapa  
Nepal's National Health Insurance Program launched in 2016 was the most ambitious attempt in the country's history to materialise the constitutional right to health. Eight years later, the program is in crisis. Read about the way forward, and what now on our website.

**Most commented**



### Nepal drone startup takes off

by Vishad Raj Onta  
Drones have gained high profile due to their widespread adoption in war, but a Nepali startup is building precision unmanned aerial vehicles for use in disaster and waste management. Go online to read the story.

**Most visited online page**

## Letters

### HEALTH INSURANCE

Thank you, Barune, for this timely and well-researched article ('Nepalis are insured but not covered', Barune Thapa, #1307). Just last week, while I was in Madhes speaking with Health Insurance Board officials, empaneled hospitals, NHIP beneficiaries, and non-beneficiaries, I heard many of the same concerns reflected in this article. The gaps between being insured and actually being covered are very real and deeply felt at the ground level. At the same time, it is also true that the scheme has provided critical relief to many households and remains an essential pillar of social protection. The challenge now is not whether the program should continue, but how it can be

strengthened, better governed and sustainably financed so that its promise translates into real access and trust for all.

**Rajesh Poudel**

■ This is a comprehensive piece for those who want to get information on Nepal's health insurance program. Great job by Barune Thapa.

**Mukesh Adhikari**

■ The three recommendations suggested in this article could revive Nepal's ailing health insurance while responding to most of the grievances expressed during the recent visit of Health Minister at the Bir Hospital OPD.

**Rita Thapa**

### MORE EVS

The transition to EVs might be feasible, and this might also look great on paper ('Petrol panics to

plug-in promises', Arnav Upadhyay, page 5). But I wonder if any analyst has ever been concerned with the recycling of batteries and battery waste. Nepal is not pro-sustainability or pro-recycling when it comes to technology. My comments will make sense after 5 or 6 years when half the population has EVs, and the concerns and cost about installing of new EV batteries and their recycling comes into play. We need to talk about battery hazards. If you look it up, you will see that China is also facing this issue.

**Sagyan Khadka**

■ I'd love to take more EV taxis next time I visit Kathmandu.

**Trish DeMers**

### TRIBHUVAN RAJPATH

A memorable, insightful review of the 'ByRoad'. Thanks ('The long and winding road to India', Dan

Edwards, #1307).

**Iván G Somlai**

### RSP

Nepal's leaders need to be transparent and stay transparent ('Gold standard', Editorial, #1307). Hardly any country on earth is setting an example worth emulating.

**Tony Jones**

### 3 GENERATIONS

I am glad to read the story of this great family, and proud to be Tamang ('Grandfather carried cars, son drives cars, grandson flies planes', Kunda Dixit, #1307).

**Sur Esh Tamang**

### NEPAL'S DRONES

Lidar drones could be interesting for quick mapping ('Nepal drone startup takes off', Vishad Raj Onta, #1307).

**Thomas-Xavier Christiane**

## Online Package



ROAD OUT OF NEPAL

Until Tribhuvan Rajpath in 1956, Kathmandu was the isolated capital of a country that had no modern surface transport link with the rest of the world. Watch video on our YouTube channel.



TOWERING MONUMENT TO 2015

For many in Nepal, the destruction of Dharara has become a motif of the 2015 disaster. Watch Te Bahal resident Kanchhi Khadgi recall the destruction of Kathmandu's iconic tower. Subscribe for multimedia content.

## 1,000 Words



BUREAU OF SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIAN AFFAIRS

**UNCLE SAMIR:** US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Samir Paul Kapur, toured Boudha this week during his visit to meet Nepal's new leaders.

He posted on X: "Visited the renowned Patan Durbar Square and Boudhanath Stupa representing the Newari and Tibetan cultures, two of Nepal's stunning cultural sites."

The post created a kerfuffle on Nepal's social media because of his reference to Tibet, proving once more how sensitive geopolitics can be in Nepal.

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# Sudan Gurung's coming and going

Scrutiny over his investments made the home minister's exit inevitable

Home Minister Sudan Gurung resigned on Wednesday following intense criticism over his investment in companies linked to controversial tycoons Sulav Agrawal and Deepak Bhatta, both under investigation for money laundering.

'I am resigning from the position of Home Minister effective today to ensure impartial investigation into matters associated with me, and to make sure that there is no conflict of interest,' Gurung wrote on Facebook (pictured, far right), saying that morality and public trust mattered more to him than being in office.

Gurung ended his message to the nation in English as he invoked the security forces, writing: 'For my country and For the respect of our security forces and For the youths of Nepal.'

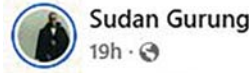
Gurung has become the second member to be ousted from the Cabinet, serving for less than a month, despite the Nepali electorate's hopes that Nepal would finally get a stable government after the RSP's sweeping victory in the March elections.

Prime Minister Balendra Shah had sought clarification from Gurung on Wednesday after new details emerged about his shares in two micro-insurance companies, Star Micro Insurance and Liberty Micro Life, which are said to have been issued their licence by the Nepal Insurance Authority at the behest of Bhatta and Agrawal.

Gurung denied financial misconduct, saying that his investments in the two companies were included in his asset



SUDAN GURUNG / FACEBOOK



Sudan Gurung

19h · 🌐

म, सुदन गुरुङ, मिति २०८२ चैत १३ गतेदेखि गृह मन्त्रीको जिम्मेवारीमा इमानदारीपूर्वक काम गर्दै आएको छु। पछिल्ला दिनहरूमा नागरिक स्तरबाट मेरो शेर लगायतका विषयमा उठेका प्रश्न, टिप्पणी र जनचासोलाई मैले गम्भीर रूपमा लिएको छु।

मेरो लागि पदभन्दा ठूलो कुरा नैतिकता हो, र जनविश्वासभन्दा ठूलो शक्ति कुनै हुँदैन। आज देशमा सुशासन, पारदर्शिता र जवाफदेहिताको माग गर्दै उठिरहेको Gen Z आन्दोलनले पनि यही सन्देश दिएको छ सार्वजनिक जीवन स्वच्छ हुनुपर्छ, नेतृत्व उत्तरदायी हुनुपर्छ। मेरा ४६ जना भाइ बहिनिहरूको रगत र बलिदानी को आडमा बनेको सरकारलाई कसैले प्रश्न गर्छ भने त्यसको जवाफ नैतिकता हो।

त्यसैले, मसँग सम्बन्धित विषयमा निष्पक्ष छानबिन होस् र पदमा रहँदा conflict of interest नदेखियोस र त्यसमा कुनै असर नपरोस् भन्ने उद्देश्यले मैले आजकै मितिदेखि लागू हुने गरी गृह मन्त्री पदबाट राजीनामा दिएको छु।

मैले आफ्नो तर्फबाट नैतिक जिम्मेवारी निर्वाह गरेको छु। अब मेरो अपिल छ, प्रिय सञ्चारकर्मी मित्रहरू, आम नेपाली दाजुभाइ, दिदीबहिनी र युवाहरू, यदि हामी साँच्चै परिवर्तन चाहन्छौं भने सत्य, इमानदारी र आत्मशुद्धिको बाटोमा सबै उभिनेपर्छ। कति मिडियाकर्मी साथी हरू को कहा कहा स्वीट शेर छ बिस्तारै आउला, रामराज्यको चाहना राख्नेहरूले त्याग र नैतिक साहस पनि देखाउन सक्नुपर्छ।

For my country and For the respect of our security forces and For the youths of Nepal.

disclosure and insisting the misunderstanding was a result of how the shares were categorised.

Leaders within the RSP had called for an internal investigation into Gurung as they sought to maintain the party's platform of clean governance and transparency.

Gurung's exit has also drawn attention to a perceived tussle between Prime Minister Shah and the RSP chair Rabi Lamichhane. Gurung was Shah's candidate for home minister, while Lamichhane had pushed for D P Aryal, who had to settle for being House Speaker.

Gurung's position had become increasingly untenable, especially since Labour Minister Dipak Sah had been sacked for a much smaller misdemeanour.

Judging by the comments under Gurung's resignation post, many seem to be firmly on his side,

blaming the mass media and what they call mouthpieces of old parties for driving him out of the Cabinet.

## SUSTAINED SUPPORT

This is a reflection of his meteoric rise and the continued support Gurung has maintained since he stepped into the spotlight as the leader of Nepal's youth movement in the aftermath of the September protest (page 6-7).

While Gurung's continued presence on social media and engagement with Nepalis has helped elevate his public profile, it was mainstream media that exposed his finances early this week and forced Gurung's hand.

Diyopost and Janaastha published documents listing him as a shareholder in the two companies. Himalkhabar, Kantipur, and other media followed up with

their own investigations.

Gurung has made headlines ever since he burst onto the national stage. There were questions over the degree of his involvement in the 9 September unrest, his proximity to generals in the Nepal Army, calls to divulge details behind finances of his Hami Nepal non-profit, and not paying five years of rent for an illegal lakefront property in Pokhara.

There are also claims, which Gurung has denied, about his ties to the Free Tibet movement that has made the Chinese wary (page 1).

As Home Minister, Gurung cultivated an image of a tough but approachable leader, overseeing a series of high-profile arrests of previous political leadership and business figures even as he posted photos of sleeping in a sofa in his office (pictured above, left), and

engaged with the public on the streets and on social media.

RSP Chair Lamichhane seems to have harboured suspicions that PM Shah brought Gurung in as home minister to be a hook if Lamichhane, with his own share of controversies, stepped out of line.

Following Gurung's resignation, the Prime Minister's secretariat has said that the PM would take charge of the portfolio for the time being. But it will be interesting to see if and how fresh negotiations for the Ministry unfold within RSP.

Gurung remains an MP, and the parliamentary committee formed to investigate him might still exonerate him and pave the way for his eventual return to the Cabinet. And with his supporter base largely intact, it remains to be seen how much of an impact this setback will have on his political aspirations. 🇳🇵



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## Himalayan Java, Ncell

Ncell customers can now get discounts at Himalayan Java cafes. Data packs worth Rs499 and up come with a buy-one-get-one free deal on a second drink, and 30% off the third. Ages 25 and under on packs Rs99 and up get 20% off all food and beverages, and all other customers get 10% off.

## Switch to Tiago

Sipradi Trading's new exchange campaign allowed customers to trade in any bike or scooter for a bonus towards a Tata Tiago EV. The campaign also offered a down payment of Rs499,000, attractive old vehicle valuations, cash discounts, free accessories, one-year tax exemption, free lifetime DC fast charging.



## Nepathya in Canada

Nepathya wrapped up its two-week Canada tour with a sold-out concert at the London Music Hall in London, Ontario, drawing an enthusiastic crowd. Attendees traveled from as far as Ottawa, with the audience spanning Nepali diaspora members, Bhutanese-Nepali refugees, and local Canadians. The 14-member team will next tour New Zealand.

## Nabil burn camp

Nabil Bank, in partnership with Provincial Hospital Surkhet and FECT Nepal, organised a three-day burn treatment camp in Surkhet, treating 194 patients. Senior surgeons performed operations on 39 patients, with one complex case referred to Kirtipur Hospital. More camps are planned in Lumbini and Madhes Provinces.



## Aloft + Maatri Nepal

Aloft Kathmandu Thamel donated stationary to the Maatri Nepal Bal Griha Orphanage ahead of the new academic session with 45 children receiving notebooks, pens, pencils, and geometry kits. Hotel associates engaged with the children through informal activities and conversations. GM Vikram Singh emphasized the hotel's belief in education.

## Samsung campaign

Samsung Nepal's new campaign honoring Nepali migrant workers and their families partners with IME Remit, Ncell, Khalti, and Hulas Fin Serve to offer remittance-linked benefits including bonus Ncell data, up to 24-month EMI options, and Khalti cashback on Samsung product purchases.

## Ncell's Pahilo

Ncell's Pahilo SIM offer for students appearing in the SEE provides a prepaid SIM for Rs50. The SIM includes 2GB data, 50 minutes of all-network talktime, and 28-day free access to Mero School (an online learning app). Students also get access to Khalti digital wallet and a 500MB bonus on recharging Rs50 or more.

## Buteaucracy pay

Civil servants will now get paid every two weeks instead of every month to ease financial pressure on public employees. The Financial Controller General Office has already started on setting up the technical and administrative preparation needed to implement the system.

## Corruption complaints

The Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) registered 166,520 corruption complaints over the past five years in Nepal, reflecting a steep rise — from 12,496 complaints in early FY 2021/22 to over 37,000 in FY 2024/25. Despite the surge only 55 individuals were proven guilty out of 4,662 defendants brought before the Special Court.

## Ride-Hailing fares

The Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Transport has drafted Digital Mobility Operation Related Standards 2026, proposing fare ceilings for ride-hailing services. Two-wheelers would be capped at Rs 25/km and four-wheelers at Rs 55/km, with a minimum two-kilometer charge applicable.



## Indians in Pokhara

Indian tourists make up 35% of Pokhara's tourism market — the second-largest visitor segment after domestic travelers who account for 50%. The trend is driven by Pokhara's proximity, accessibility, and cooler climate. Chinese arrivals are below expectations, and geopolitical tensions have reduced European and American tourists.

## Bhaktapur fair

The 10th Bhaktapur Industrial Fair at Sallaghari, held over 12 days during the Nepali New Year, exceeded Rs 8 million in transactions. Organised by Industrial Peace Nepal, the fair attracted over 130,000 visitors and featured 180 stalls of industrial, agricultural, cultural, and tourism products.



## TIA nightly closure

Tribhuvan International Airport will close from 11:45pm to 6:30am until May 18 for upgrading work near the runway. A NOTAM has been issued to formalize the revised operating schedule. Previously, TIA operated until 1:00 am. The closures are expected to affect late-night and early-morning international flight schedules.

## Pending licenses

The Department of Transport Management has urged driving licence applicants to collect their long-pending licenses. The licences previously delayed due to printing issues are now being dispatched to respective transport offices across the country. Applicants who passed their trials or submitted renewal documents can now pick up their new licences.

## Customs enforcement

There is widespread outrage on social media over the APF enforcing the government's decision to tax any item worth more than Rs100 that people bring back from India. Videos of Nepalis being harassed by Nepal's own police have gone viral.

## Doko recycling

Doko Recyclers honored five partner organisations at its 2025 Client Impact Awards, recognising efforts in waste disposal and sustainability. The US Embassy was awarded for 25,390kg of recyclables collected; Hotel Barahi for recycling 16.50 tons and saving 56 trees, and Golden Peak High School for student-led engagement in recycling 2.01 tons.



**EV EVOLUTION:** (clockwise) The Reva two-seater first introduced to Nepal in 2002 by Lotus Energy, was the official car of Norwegian Ambassador Tore Toreng. After Mahindra acquired Reva, it upgraded the model to the e20 in the 2010s. And now there is the futuristic Mahindra BE 6.



Nepal is 100% reliant on imported fuel from India, which in turn relies mostly on imports from the Gulf states. We are directly affected by the escalating conflict and geopolitical tension.

Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) usually publishes a new fuel price every 15 days, for petrol, diesel and kerosene at the beginning, and another at the middle of the English month.

But departing from the 15-day rule, NOC has made large out-of-schedule overnight revisions to the fuel prices in the past month to accommodate global fuel fluctuations.

The two-day weekend may help, but the higher prices have already forced consumers to travel less. There are rumours that if supplies from India are further constrained, the government may implement an even/odd number plate rule.

Driven by relentlessly rising fuel prices, the willingness to transition to electric mobility, whether two-wheelers or four-wheelers, has never been higher. Your columnist has also observed a surge in inquiries from both new and old EV owners, reflecting a clear shift in consumer sentiment, and recently took out the BYD Atto 2 on a test drive (review below).

This growing demand for EVs has its own set of challenges. Global supply chains are already under severe strain, and as demand for electric vehicles accelerates worldwide, production bottlenecks are inevitable.

The question then arises: will Nepal have sufficient EV stock to meet this surge, or will consumers be faced with longer waiting periods and limited choices?

For the time being, Nepalis must look beyond quick fixes and begin actively reducing fuel dependency in more ways. While switching to EVs offers an immediate alternative, it is not a complete solution.

The current oil shock is not just about fuel, but about the future economic model this country will have to adapt to. 🇳🇵

Arnav Upadhyay is a content creator who reviews automobiles and promotes road safety for his Nepali Times column, Drive Line. He is also on Youtube, Tiktok and IG under the handle Casually Annoyed Driver.

# Petrol panic to plug-in promise

## How to use the fuel shortage to accelerate Nepal's EV transition



**DRIVE LINE**  
Arnav Upadhyay

Mahindra acquired Reva and introduced the upgraded e20 which was well-suited for city driving, but alas they are no longer made. Now, Mahindra's latest flagship the BE6 crossover EV is a whole new breed, evolving leaps and bounds with its jet fighter-inspired cockpit design and a boatload of futuristic tech.

But with such an impressive history of EVs in Nepal and the whole range of models to choose from, it seems we are still addicted to fossil fuels. Not everyone has, or wants, to make the transition to battery-powered locomotion just yet.

Even though range anxiety may not be as much of an issue anymore, drivers may not want to wait a whole hour for a fast DC charge to 80% on their EVs, when a quick 5-minute pit stop at a gas station allows them to hit the highway again quickly.

But Nepal was second only to Norway last year in the proportion of new cars being battery-powered. And this has to some extent cushioned us from the full impact of the fallout on fuel prices due to the Strait of Hormuz blockade.

The uptake of EVs in Nepal

was a direct result of tax rebates. As Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle prepares the annual budget, it could be an opportunity to extend tax breaks to public vehicles to further reduce Nepal's petroleum import bill (guest editorial, page 2).

### ENERGY CRISIS

Even if the war ends and the strait is opened to tanker traffic, however, energy experts say it will take months for oil prices to stabilise. This means petrol in Kathmandu will stay at Rs219/l or thereabouts for some time yet. It was only Rs160/l before the war.

EVs in Nepal have come a long way since the micro-segment Reva was first introduced in the early 2000s with 2-seat occupancy and giving no more than 80km of range.



## Versatile e-vehicle



- Healthy amount of features and space on the inside
- Above all, an abundance of ground clearance (200mm) greatly needed for our roads.

The cherry on top was that all this came at a sub Rs5 million price tag. But one nagging question on my mind was: will the Atto 2 drive as well in real life, as it sounded on the BYD website?

Getting in, the almost all-black cabin felt premium. Shifting in my seat and turning on the seat ventilation with a push of the accelerator pedal, I found the vehicle had more pull than anticipated.

The Atto 2 turned out to be a jack of all trades, it had something for everyone. Whether you need to drive from Kathmandu to Nepalganj, rough it to West Rukum, or get stuck in Kathmandu traffic, this was one versatile vehicle.

I got into the BYD Atto 2 knowing that it met almost all the requirements on my checklist:

- Muscular-looking SUV design
- Decent size battery pack (51kWh Blade Battery) that gave over 300km range (345km WLTP claim)
- Powerful enough motor with good acceleration (100kW motor producing 290Nm torque)

# WHEN AURA MEETS AUDIT

'Homie Minister' Sudan Gurung's exit is the first real verdict on what happens when auramaxxing collides with accountability

Nobel Rimal

Sudan Gurung is dancing. It is 2009. An emo fringe is falling over one eye as he spins on a polished floor. His dance shows dedication — moves that take years of bruised elbows to land.

The clip is 16 years old, and had been sitting in the dead archives of YouTube and old Facebook pages, watched by almost nobody. This month it has 1.9 million views.

Gurung became Home Minister on 27 March and resigned on Wednesday, barely a month into office. His pre-political life had been put back into circulation at industrial speed -- the b-boying, the DJ sets, and the YouTube video of him dancing in a music clip.

The youth of Nepal, well-versed in snappy TikTok edits and aura compilations, turned the archive into a meme economy almost overnight. TikTok remixed the footage to trap beats. The comments settled on a nickname that crossed into everyday speech within days: 'Homie Minister'.

As home minister, Gurung was in charge of the Nepal Police, Armed Police Force, Department of Immigration, and the internal security apparatus. Calling him 'homie' collapsed the distance between that office and the Discord server where the movement that brought him to power organised.

What is harder to explain is why the nostalgic clips did the narrative work for Gurung's political standing right up until the moment the paperwork did not. A teenager on a dance floor in a Thamel club functioned as political currency for a powerful home minister, while a share registry was being probed.

Gurung was not doing anything in it that related to home affairs. He was just dancing. The comments compared him to Korean film heroes. A separate 48,000-like edit was captioned 'Our New Home Minister Aura'. The replies were full of people saying they got chills listening to him speak. Even after his resignation, most comments on his Facebook page were supportive, saying he had been punished for pursuing truth and justice (page 4).

Political legitimacy in Nepal has been built out of many things over the last 70 years, but never out of this. The question was always: what happens when the job starts demanding things his style, boldness, and swag cannot provide? Political aura in Nepal used to be a slow harvest, now it isn't.

B P Koirala spent eight years in prison under the Panchayat. He wrote fiction at Sundari Jal. The writing survived, the prison sentences survived, and that experience became the template for what a serious Nepali politician looked like: someone the state had tried to break and failed. Legitimacy was accumulated by having their

lives taken away, and refusing to bend the knee.

The old mechanics of legitimacy produced politicians who could be audited. The record was made of words, dates, votes, and years behind bars. A voter who wanted to know what a leader stood for read his writings. A journalist digging for inconsistency could find it. The system was slow, often corrupt, and frequently boring.

But boring was part of the job description. A minister was supposed to be slightly dull — evidence that he was doing the unglamorous work of reading files and sitting in committee meetings.

Today, boring is a disqualification. The attention economy rewards velocity and visual charge, and a politician who cannot generate either does not exist in the feed, and that means does not exist at all.

The legacy parties are still issuing press statements criticising the new guard in the grammar of paper trails and procedural failure. But the audience has stopped reading, users scroll for their next viral bite.

On his first evening as home minister, Gurung posted a photo of himself sleeping on an office sofa. Caption: creation cannot be greater than the creator, government is not above the people. The image travelled further in 12 hours than any ministerial press release has ever done.

Here was a minister who skipped the motorcade and got straight to work. He announced the names of former ministers and businessmen he intended to arrest on Facebook. The feed was used for state security action.

## INFLUENTIAL INFLUENCER

This is not how the Ministry of Home Affairs has ever operated. It is how a YouTuber releases a series. Sudan Gurung was a political content creator. As home minister, he was an influential influencer kinetically posting visuals.

Much like Prime Minister Balendra Shah's sunglasses, Gurung's aura, authenticity and swag were a brand asset, instantly

recognisable even at thumbnail size. Balen's pre-political rap archive authenticates him the same way Gurung's DJ sets and b-boying clips legitimised him.

The aesthetic is doing the work a manifesto used to do. The work is authenticity, and the strategy is auramaxxing. The emo fringe predates Hami Nepal, the September Uprising, the interim cabinet, and the home ministry.

Whatever Gurung is now, he was already that person before the office existed. This was the real spectacle of the Homie Minister: authenticity. Nepal's youth have grown up watching heavily-polished, talking-point ministers speak in a language aimed at nobody in particular. But that grainy archival clip of the Home Minister from 2009 was honest.

The effect transcended GenZ. On

TikTok, millennials posted their own archive photos from the same period, aligning themselves with Gurung's pre-political aesthetic.

The aura did cross-generational work. It was a shared legibility, spanning at least 15 years of Nepali youth culture, with the home minister standing at its centre.

The traditional politician's entire adult life is a performance of identity. Every photograph is lit for the media, every statement is vetted. The persona is the product, and the product has been in development for 30 years. This makes the old guard legible but suspect in the attention economy.

A generation raised on authenticity-as-currency reads the decades of careful performance as evidence of something to hide. The polish is the problem. The nostalgic

Sudan Gurung party clips inverted this. The polish was absent.

The footage could not be performance aimed at the viewer, because the viewer did not exist in 2009 and neither did the political stakes. The clip was read as real, in a way a press conference can never be.

But Sudan Gurung's job was never to go viral. The Ministry of Home Affairs requires the person running it to file a complete asset declaration, and to avoid holding financial interests in crony entities.

None of that work is content. A correctly filed asset declaration does not get remixed into a trap beat. A functioning immigration database is not a TikTok. The paperwork that constitutes actual governance is structurally boring in exactly the way the old parties are structurally boring, and for the same reason.





ANUP TAMU

It is the slow, procedural, checkable apparatus that the old system was built to produce and that the new system has not yet learned to replace. It is painstaking follow-the-money paper trail investigative journalists in the legacy media who uncovered the evidence.

You cannot auramaxx your way out of a share registry. You cannot post your way past a conflict-of-interest statute. No amount of fire outfits and wild DJ transitions does anything for you when a journalist pulls the initial shareholder list of Star Micro Insurance and finds your name at number 49, with Rs2.5 million in shares alongside investors linked to Deepak Bhatta and Sulav Agrawal — two men currently at the centre of a Rs 3.7 billion money laundering investigation (page 4).

Auramaxxing was engineered for

the mechanics of reaching office. It is the reason Sudan Gurung became home minister and Gagan Thapa did not. The question that had not yet been tested, until this week, was whether the same weapon works when the terrain changes. The terrain does change when you assume power. This week, the answer arrived.

#### TWO CLOCKS

Two clocks had been running, and they did not sync. The first clock was built for auramaxxing. A clip posted at eight in the morning peaked by noon. A sofa photo was remixed before the minister had left the building. The feedback loop is fast and legible, and a politician playing this clock gets real-time data on what to post next. The old guard never learned to read it,

which is a large part of why they lost the election.

The second clock was the one the ministry actually runs on. It measures in quarters, court calendars, and the slow grind of investigation files moving between offices. A share registry takes weeks to pull. A money-laundering case moves at the speed of the prosecutor's office, which is to say, it often does not appear to move at all, until one morning it does. The legacy mass media is fed leaks, and the second clock does not care whether the minister is currently trending.

The two clocks collided this week, and the second clock got there first. Faster than anyone expected. The first clock put Gurung in the Home Ministry in weeks. The second clock put him out of it in less than a month.

On Sunday evening, Diyopost and Janaastha published documents showing Gurung as a founding shareholder in Star Micro Insurance and Liberty Micro Life — companies licensed by the Nepal Insurance Authority in 2022 following what reporting identified as political lobbying by Bhatta and Agrawal. A photograph also surfaced of Hami Nepal, the NGO Gurung chairs, honouring Bhatta as a donor on 21 December 2021.

Gurung's first response was auramaxxed. A Monday Facebook post distinguishing 'rumours' from 'facts', insisting the shares were disclosed within his broader Rs20 million securities portfolio, promising to cooperate with any investigation. "Allegations and truth are not the same thing," he wrote. "Decisions should be based on evidence, not sentiment."

It was a coherent clip, but it did not stop the clock. By Wednesday, Prime Minister Balendra Shah had sought written clarification. Leaders within the RSP itself were calling for his resignation. The opposition Nepali Congress had framed the question as one of democratic transparency.

Gurung resigned, posting his decision to Facebook as he did everything else. Ethics, he wrote, hold more weight than any position. There is no power greater than public trust. He ended in English, invoking 'my country ... the respect of our security forces ... the youths of Nepal'.

Even the exit was content. And this is the asymmetry the office exposed. A politician whose legitimacy is built on fast 30 second videos is structurally exposed to a process that runs slower than the news cycle, because the archive of aesthetic proof was not engineered to answer documentary evidence.

It was engineered to displace the demand for documentary evidence in the first place. When that demand returns, as it always does once a politician takes office, the digital archive keeps performing, but the documents keep getting uncovered. And the two tracks do not communicate.

The old guard knew this clock because they had no other clock to know. What they lost in charisma they gained in durability: a politician built over 20 years of parliamentary record is harder to dislodge with a single document because they have already survived thousands of documents.

The new guard has not been stress-tested against its own paper trail. Sudan Gurung has now been tested, and the test is over, and the template has been written in his exit rather than his survival.

A politician can enter office on the strength of a dance clip, and the same class of evidence — share registries, company filings, founding-shareholder lists at number 49 — that would have ended the career of a politician in a previous era of Nepali politics has ended his. The second clock got there. The feed did not save him.

Or not entirely. Because the resignation itself is now in the feed. The Facebook post. The 46 brothers and sisters. The epic sign-off. Within hours of stepping down, Gurung had already re-enrolled his



exit into the same register that put him in office. The clip of the Home Minister dancing in 2009 is still in circulation. The sofa photo still reads as sincerity. The investigation into the micro-insurance shares will move at the speed of Nepal's prosecutor's office, which is to say, at a speed the feed has long since outrun.

The movement that installed Gurung in the name of ending elite capture has had its answer about whether its own hero is subject to the same audit it demanded of everyone else. He walked — or was walked — before the audit ran its course. The resignation was framed as a moral choice rather than forced exit, and the framing is already

winning. Whether that framing holds is the next test.

Auramaxxing, it turns out, is a weapon that works in one direction only: it got him the job, and when the documents arrived, it did not save him. But it may yet save the person. These are not the same thing.

If the technique is wounded, it is not yet dead. The next Nepali politician with a pre-political archive and a phone is watching how Gurung exits, not just how he entered. And the answer is: you exit the same way you entered: on Facebook. In your own voice. Before anyone else writes the caption.

Whether he comes back is the thing to watch. Whether the technique does is already decided. 🇳🇵



## Events

### Khorlo Exhibition

The Khorlo/Wheel exhibition brings together four Tibetan diaspora artists from India and explores how individual practices engage with questions of selfhood within the complexities of contemporary life.

Until 2 May, Takpa Gallery, Lazimpat



### Bungadyah Sketch

If you are an early rising artist, this Bungadyah sketching event is for you. Gather your supplies and get the creative juices flowing. DM @ usk.kathmandu on Instagram for details.

25 April, 7:00am, Nugah Hiti, Sundhara, Patan

### Zumbathon

Lace up your sneakers and go with friends to Zumbathon and Fitness day this weekend.

25 April, Rs1,500, 10am onwards, Square Hotel, Pulchok



### Dakshinkali Hike

Plan a hike with friends this weekend on the Dakshinkali-Chhaimale route. Around 15-16km, a refreshing outing in the current weather.

25 April, Rs900-1,500, 6:40am, Bhrikutimandap

### Sickle Cell

Catch shows of the social drama Sickle Cell, directed by Sumit Bhandari, at Shilpee Theatre.

26 April-11 May, 5:15pm (except Tuesdays, additional 1pm show on Saturday), Shilpee Theatre, Battisputali



## Music



### Kutumba Night

Watch Nepali folk instrumental band Kutumba perform their greatest hits live at Hard Rock Cafe. 24 April, 7:30pm onwards, Hard Rock Cafe, Sherpa Mall, Darbar Marg

### Music Festival

Catch top artists at the GE Fest musical extravaganza, featuring live performances by Albatross, Swoopna and the Asters, Wangden Sherpa and the Cowboys and others.

25 April, 1pm onwards, Rs1,200, Malla Hotel

### MAESIC Live

MAESICare is set to deliver high-energy music, immersive vibes, and a futuristic atmosphere with their live set this weekend.

25 April, 8pm onwards, Rs1,000-Rs6,000, Club Nova, Thamel

### Shailu Rai & The Grunchiez

Shailu Rai and The Grunchiez, known for their raw energy and stage presence, are set to jam out some rocky rhythms live at Moksh. April 24, Rs 899-Rs2,000, 5pm onwards, Moksh, Jhamsikhel



### Grasslands festival

Grasslands music festival returns to the outdoors for its 10th edition. Get tickets at K Garira.

2 May, Rs799-Rs1,000, Grand Norling's Hotel Resort, Gokarna



## Getaway

### Barahi Jungle Lodge

The first eco-jungle lodge in Chitwan directly overlooks Chitwan National Park. Spa, boutique guest rooms, individual and two-in-one private villas, including a suite with a private swimming pool.

Megauli, Chitwan, 985-1331247



### The Pavilions Himalayas

Luxury boutique eco resort with boutique villas, swimming pool, organic farm, restaurant lounge and bar. For refreshing morning walks, therapeutic and relaxing day-ins, authentic gastronomic experience and quiet nights.

Chisapani, Pokhara, 9856025997



### Hattiban Resort

Hattiban Resort is the perfect place to getaway for the weekend. Grab breakfast from the hotel's buffet, lounge by the sunny courtyard as you gaze up at the mountains, get a massage at the spa and take a tour of nearby Pharping, Champadevi Temple and Khokana Village.

Hattiban, 9801309847

### Lapsi Tree

Escape the noise of the valley and experience a serene, peaceful stay at Lapsi Tree with delicious food, comfortable rooms and mesmerising views.

Danda Gaun Marg, 9761797014

### Godavari Village

Spread over 14 lush green acres, the resort offers mountain views and traditionally-styled cottages and buildings overlooking rice fields.

Godavari (01) 5560675

## Weekend Weather



### Storm Warning

After that hot and dry week, a stormy one is ahead, bringing short heavy showers to the mid-mountains starting this weekend. Heed thunderstorm warnings, especially if trekking. As this NASA FIRMS satellite image from Thursday noon shows, many wildfires in Karnali and Lumbini Provinces are causing hazy skies across Nepal.



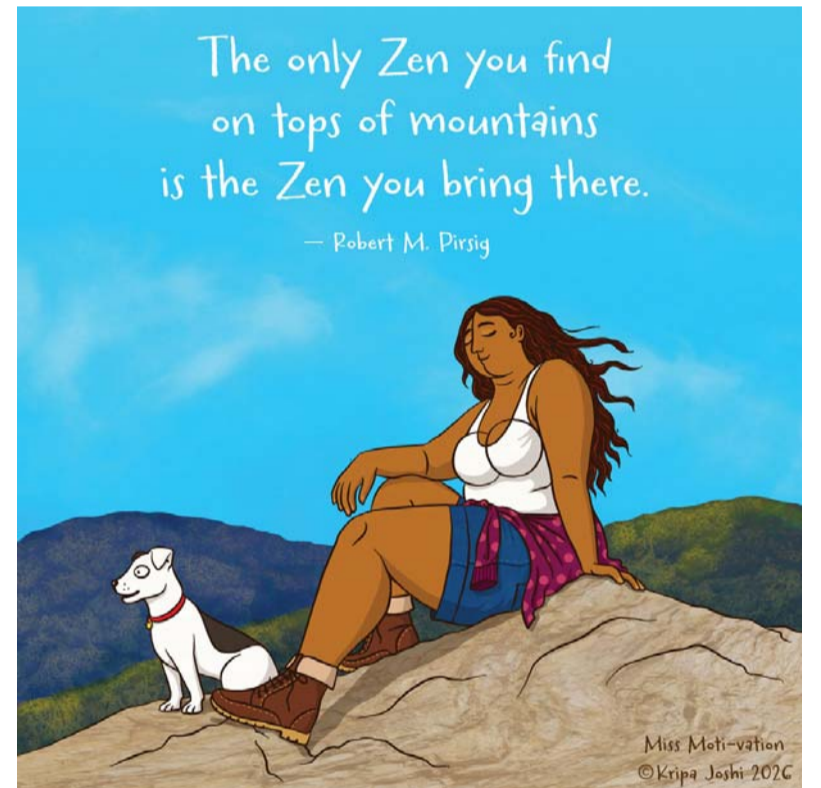
## Our Pick



The 2026 eight-part Irish comedy series How to Get to Heaven from Belfast follows lifelong friends Saoirse, Robyn, and Dara, who travel to the small town of Donegal to pay their respects to an estranged friend after receiving news of their death. Peculiar events at the funeral compel the trio to look into the mysterious circumstances surrounding their friend's death. Determined to get to the bottom of things, they go on an adventure across Ireland. Stars Roisin Gallagher, Sinéad Keenan, and Caoilfhionn Dunne. Watch on Netflix.

## MISS MOTI-VATION

## KRIPA JOSHI



## Dining



### Evoked Café & Bistro

This café and bistro is your doorway into a space that will induce smells, colors, sounds and shapes in your mind's world. Pick your favourite: pita bread, baguette and multigrain bread sandwich all served with homemade fries and salad on side.

Jhamsikhel (01) 5432021

### Bricks Café

A multi cuisine restaurant in the heart of Kathmandu offering flavourful dishes in a pleasant surrounding. Their lasagna is a must-try.

Kupondole (01) 5181156



### Haadi Biryani

Haadi's slow-cooked biryanis are seasoned with a secret spice blend. They come in clay pots for maximum authenticity.

Dilli Bazaar (01) 4438444



### Tip Top

In the mood for Indian? Enjoy sweets, South Indian cuisines and other meals at Tip Top. The Chola Bhatara is a must-try.

New Road (01) 4240470

### Utpala Cafe

Utpala Cafe, a monastery restaurant, is perfect for anyone looking for healthy vegetarian options. With their scrumptious buffet lunch, use of fresh produce and mouth-watering baked goods, this is one of the best eateries in Boudha.

Boudha, 9810700763

## 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 चिठ्ठा 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

# Birth sleeves and synapses

Two artists use drafting films as an interface for temporal, neurological collaboration

**Niranjan Kunwar**

A concept popularised by Richard Morgan in his 2002 cyberpunk novel, *Altered Carbon* — set in a future where consciousness can be transferred between bodies — ‘birth sleeve’ is the body an individual is born with.

Using that ideological framework, Jonathan Armour, currently visiting Kathmandu as a resident artist with Space A, has created a series of artworks.

Transhumanism can be alarming, but I could connect the idea of sleeves to my own ongoing preoccupation with deconditioning as it relates to depth psychology — ‘a therapeutic process of dismantling deeply ingrained, unconscious patterns, limiting beliefs, and automatic behavioural reactions formed by early socialisation, familial upbringing, and cultural conditioning’.

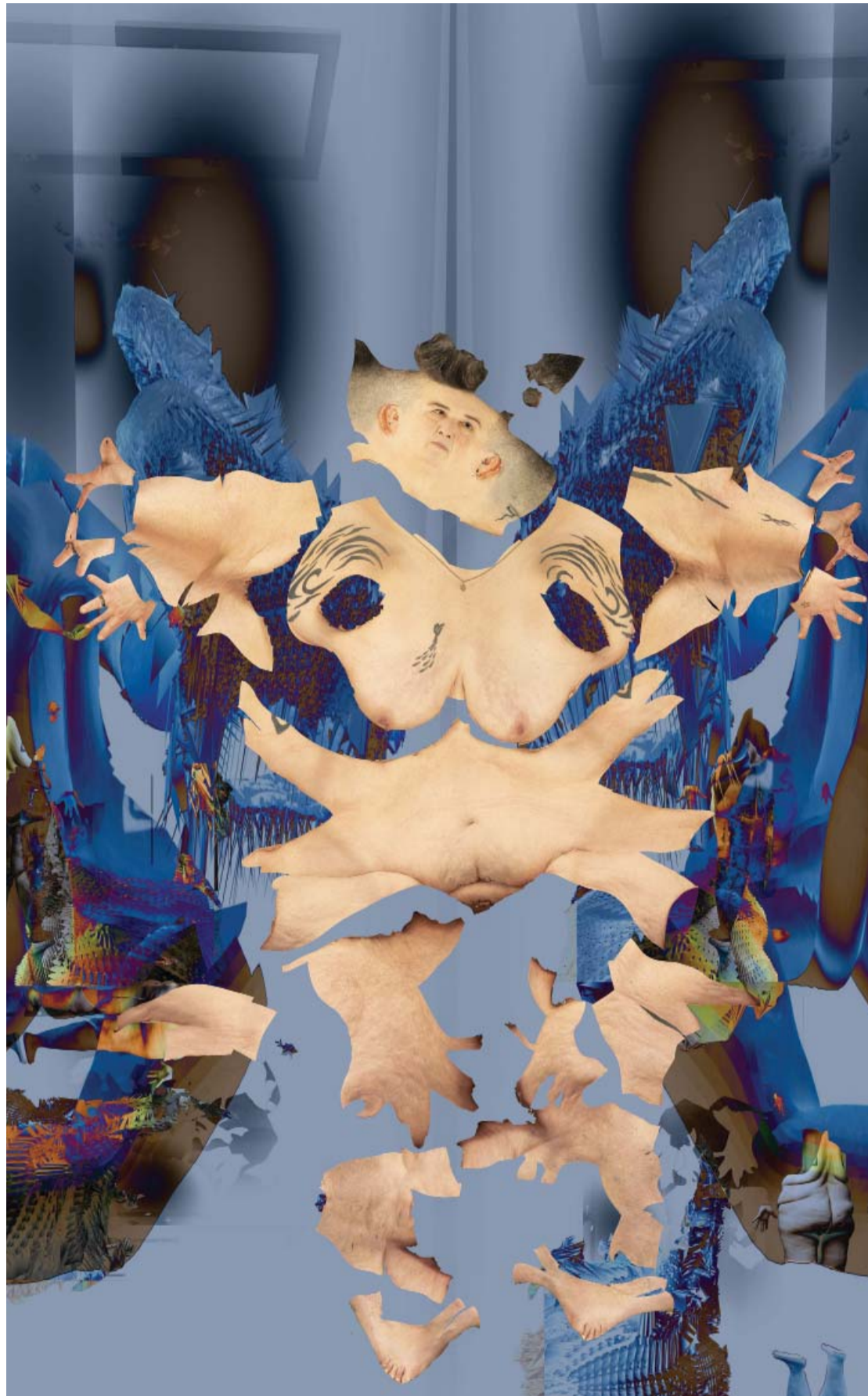
Anyone can benefit from some deconditioning, but queer and/or disabled individuals might find instant resonance with approaches that support transcendence, whether mentally from narrow societal standards or physically from one’s birth sleeve.

Armour uses numerous cameras to scan an individual’s body from multiple angles and creates 3D images on a computer. Guided by conversations with participants, he then opens up the 3D image using software to create flat portraits of their sleeves.

Before coming to Kathmandu, Armour asked to be introduced to any Nepali artist who might also be working with the human body, and he corresponded with Kapil Mani Dixit online for three weeks in order to plan an immersive collaboration during his residency. Dixit is known for pioneering nude figurative art in Nepal, a genre still considered taboo in this country, but he had never collaborated so closely with another artist.

As an art student in Dallas, Dixit was uninspired by the Texan flatness. Used to drawing landscapes, he was at a loss. Then a professor invited him to his first class in life drawing: ‘the practice of drawing the human figure from direct observation of a live model, often nude, to develop skills in anatomy, proportion, and gesture’.

Armour’s exploration is a departure from this more traditional, representational art practice. Perhaps, being queer himself, he is mindful



An example of a body sleeve (Wendyl Harris).

COURTESY OF JONATHAN ARMOUR

of the Gaze Theory and seeking to destabilise power dynamics between subject and object.

On one of their trial studio sessions, Armour and Dixit stood on either side of a semi-transparent drafting film hanging vertically. Using each other’s bodies as surfaces, they used oil pastels to trace, creating impressions rather than clear figures.

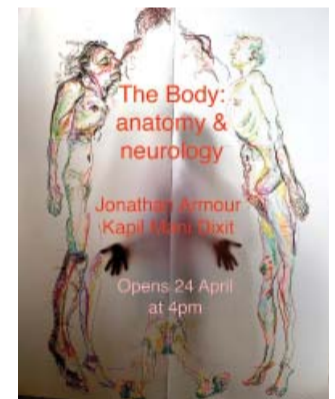
*The Body: Anatomy and Neurology*, featuring output from their collaboration as well as from a workshop with six other Nepali artists, is opening this Friday.

Armour was keen to work with Nepali artists, and he says drafting film, “became the surface on which the collaboration played out. It was the meeting point ... a synaptic metaphor where their neurons connected, communicated and responded to each other”.

“I used to be afraid of colours,” Dixit says, limiting himself to blacks and browns, but he has been expanding his palette while working with Armour.

After his Dallas exposure to life drawing, Dixit began viewing human bodies as landscapes as well. Instead of focusing solely on anatomical representation, Dixit’s recent drawings have been anthropomorphic and even surreal.

One might be doubtful of this whole project, since painting has merged with performance in the social media age. But collaboration is centred in this practice, the marks are witnesses and records of exchanges between artists which were ‘competitive, cooperative and conflicting’.



*The Body: Anatomy and Neurology* by Jonathan Armour, Kapil Mani Dixit  
Opens 24 April, 4PM  
Kathmandu Art Gallery

Experience Luxury

# SILK

Finish

# Rangelands of the Himalayan Range

Valuable documentation of the herders of High Asia who sustain its nature and culture.

Saurav Thapa Shrestha

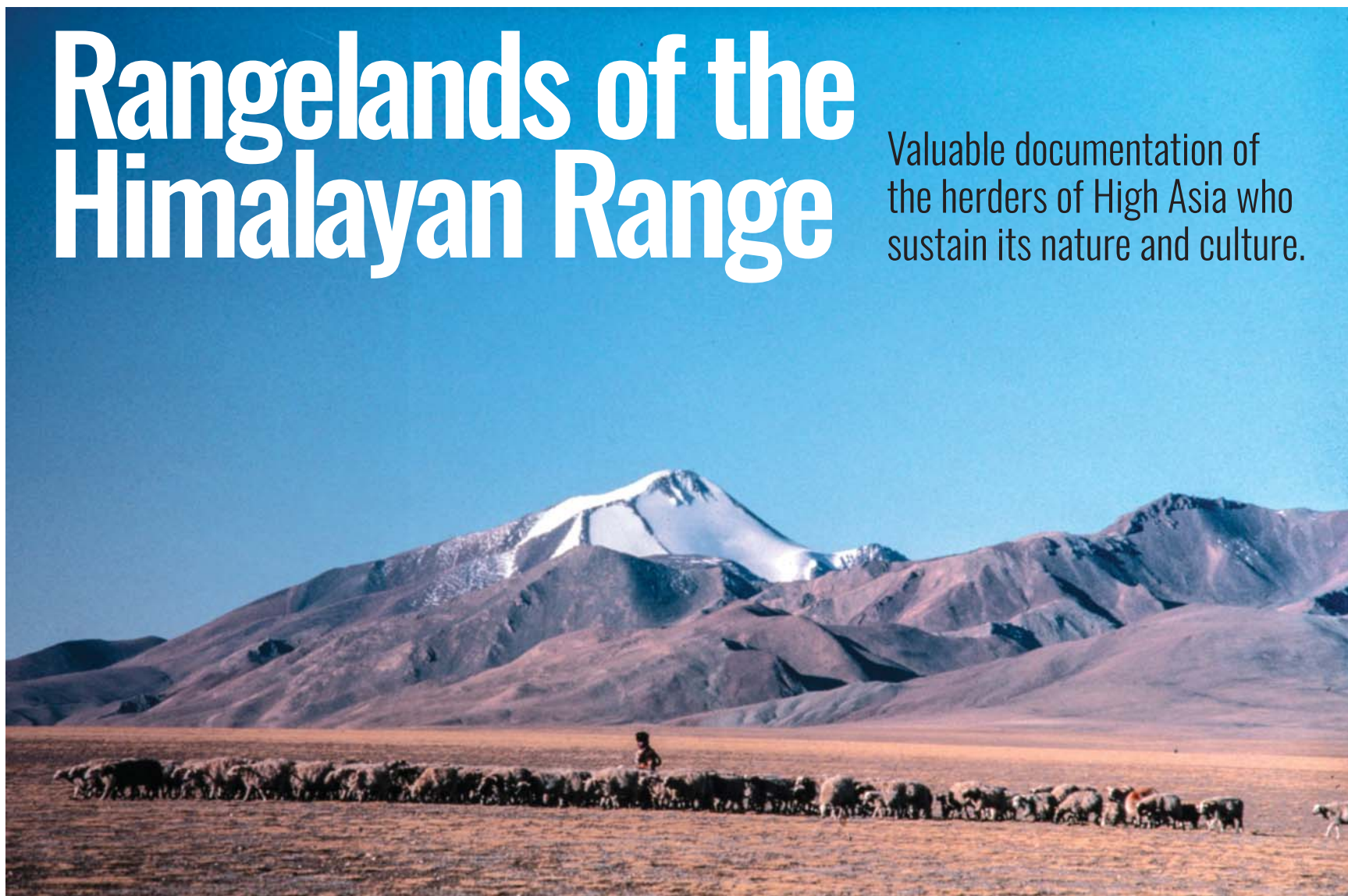
Daniel J Miller arrived in Nepal as a Peace Corps Volunteer in 1974, and spent four years in villages above 3,500m, recording the lives of livestock herders.

His photographs and ethnographic observations offer valuable visual documentation of how the lives of Himalayan humans were (and are) intertwined with their yaks, sheep, goats, and the ecosystems they shared.

Miller later worked for USAID, the Asian Development Bank, World Bank, and the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD). He travelled across Afghanistan, Bhutan, the Tibetan regions of China, Mongolia, Pakistan, and Nepal, documenting the livelihoods of the inhabitants of High Asia.

The Himalaya is not just a high altitude wilderness, it is a living ecosystem that includes grasslands, shrublands, forests, wetlands and a cold desert. These account for 60%, about 2 million sq km, of the region. Miller's work captured the essence of this diverse landscape, its pastoralists and their livestock, and communities whose livelihoods depended on seasonal movement across high passes.

Miller's photographs romanticised the rangelands and the nomadic lives of its



A flock of sheep moves below a cold, open skyline, capturing the scale of trans-Himalayan pastoral life and the constant search for grass, water and seasonal refuge

PHOTOS: DANIEL J MILLER / ICIMOD ARCHIVE

people, while encapsulating their inherent beauty and resilience. He photographed nomad camps and caravans, documenting seasonal landscape use and migration as herders moved up to summer pastures and down in winter.

Miller wrote in his book *Drokpa: Nomads of the Tibetan Plateau and Himalaya*: 'Moving across the grasslands with their animals, their home a tent, nomads evoke freedom.' His images show a world shaped by indigenous

knowledge, vibrant culture, and a harmony between people and their ecosystems.

#### CLIMATE CHANGE

From the Yunnan mountains to Afghanistan, the Himalayan arc supports the livelihoods of 30 million pastoralists, sustaining a rich bio-cultural diversity. Today, this balance is being disrupted on an unprecedented scale by climate and demographic change.

Because crops struggle to

grow in this harsh, high terrain, livestock is what sustains mountain communities. For the Drokpa, Bakarwal, Brokpa and Changpa, livestock is their biggest asset.

The animals can survive temperatures as low as  $-40^{\circ}\text{C}$ . But global warming over the last 25 years has severely impacted the herds, weather systems and ecology of the Himalaya.

Livestock increasingly suffer respiratory problems, loss of appetite and stress, weakening

age-old pastoral systems. Mortality among the animals has increased, forcing herders to seek alternative migration routes and graze animals in unfamiliar and often riskier terrain.

What were once well-established pastoral routes are also being disrupted by border controls, protected areas, highways and hydropower plants. Wildlife populations are declining, and with them, centuries-old knowledge systems.



KUNDA DIXIT

## Nepal's yak

Ken Shimizu

When Nepal decided to mark the annual National Yak Day on 20 April 2025, it celebrated an animal that has been the mainstay of mountain livelihoods for centuries.

The sure-footed yak is more than just an iconic bovine. It is the guardian of the high Himalaya and integral to the identity of pastoralist communities. Yaks provide a lifeline: hauling goods across treacherous trails, providing milk, butter and warm wool for clothing, and producing dung that serves as fertiliser and fuel.

(In English, yak is used to refer to both the male and female, while in Himalayan languages it refers strictly to the male, while females are called dri or nak. A dzo or chauri is a crossbreed between a yak and a domestic cow.)

At above 3000m, where the air is thin and cold, yaks and chauri have made mountain agro-pastoralism coexist. This transhumance herding and livelihood system, practiced by the Sherpa, Tamang, Thakali, Rai, Limbu and other communities, shapes pastoralist identities.

The yak also holds deep cultural ties, often featuring in folklore and festivals. Their presence has led to rich indigenous pastoral knowledge of the alpine ecology, embodying a unique harmony between people and nature.

But despite their value and reverence, the animals and the customary practices around them are in peril. Nepal's yak population has plummeted from around 200,000 in the 1960s to just 53,000 today.

Climate change has led to the degradation



PHOTOS: FAO NEPAL



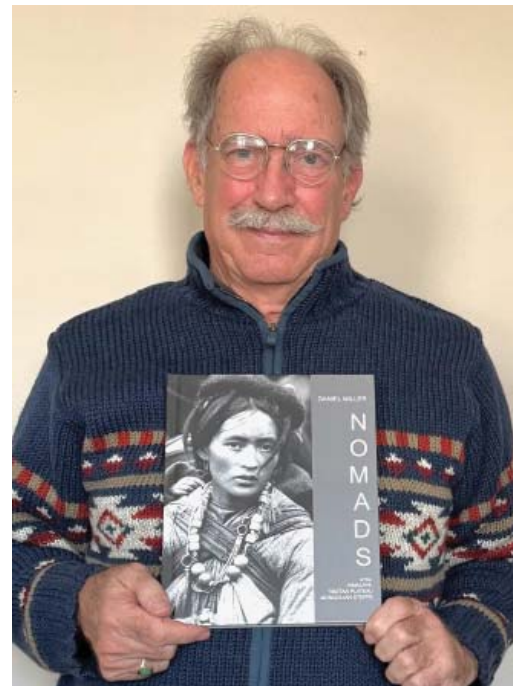
A pastoral camp spreads across the high rangelands, where tents, horses and open pasture show the mobility that has long sustained herding life in High Asia.



Goats and sheep are handled in a dusty enclosure, showing the daily labour, care by pastoralist amidst harsh terrain.



Mounted herders gather on a slope which is green in summer.



Daniel J Miller with his book.

wool into blankets, weaving hand-knotted carpets, crafting garments, and building yak-hair tents are becoming a lost art. In pastoral kitchens, the craft of preserving raw milk by turning it into chhurpi and ghee is declining due to outmigration, water scarcity and warming trends.

**RECOGNISING PASTORALISM**

The future of Himalayan rangelands depends on recognising pastoralism not just as an endangered way of life, but a system that must be valued and sustained. This demands innovative approaches that support the people who continue to serve as the custodians of these fragile landscapes.

The International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP) 2026 unites global institutions and offers opportunities to recognise the value of rangelands and safeguard them before the loss is permanent. 🇨🇳

Saurav Thapa Shrestha is a Communications Associate at the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) in Kathmandu.

The gradual loss of rangelands is threatening ways of life that depend on mobility and the intergenerational transmission of pastoral wisdom.

Miller's work reminds us of

what it was like in the 1970s and how much things are changing today. His photographs show lush pastures and fluid seasonal movement in regions where grasslands are now turning into

desert, springs are going dry, and extreme weather disrupts long-established migration cycles.

Miller's photographs of caravans and herders are an urgent call for action. They remind us

that rangelands are living systems, interlinked with human survival, biodiversity and cultural identity. Often, the burden of these changes falls on women and the elderly. Their traditional skills spinning

# economy

National Yak Day this week celebrated the animal that is a part of Himalayan livelihood



National Yak Day, therefore, marks an important step in Nepal's effort to revitalise the yak economy, focusing national attention on its role in food security, livelihoods, ecology and culture.

The UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in Nepal is also integrating yak development into its agricultural investment programs, market facilitation, and support for high-mountain communities.

Yak herders from 25 districts across five provinces have formed a national federation, uniting to advocate for their needs from grazing rights and market accessibility to better veterinary and extension services.

National Yak Day has evolved into a collective platform to drive policy support and cooperative action to keep yak pastoralism alive.

The conservation of yak populations is important for the rights, mobility, and preservation of highland cultures, but it also presents an economic opportunity. The most effective way to sustain yak herding and retain communities that depend on it is to make it a financially viable livelihood. Through innovation and value addition, it can evolve into a driver of economic growth and resilience for herding communities.

Yak-based products ranging from Himalayan yak cheese in Langtang to chhurpi and yak wool already secure premium value in niche markets. With enhanced processing, improved cold-chain systems, stronger branding, and greater recognition of the collective rights of herding communities, these value chains hold considerable potential to further increase income.

Herder-led homestays and tourism also present promising avenues for diversification.

And while yak herding is inherently dependent on seasonal mobility across highland pastures, access to traditional grazing routes is becoming increasingly constrained, and land tenure arrangements remain insufficiently defined.

The long-term viability of yak herding systems needs to be addressed. If access to rangelands and recognition of transhumance practices are not secured, the foundations of the yak economy will continue to erode.

Revitalising this sector, therefore, requires more value chain investment and private sector coordination; it will also need policy reform and state support.

Highland communities need pastoral grazing rights, and strengthened claims on the lands of which they have long been the custodians. Targeted subsidies, transport support, and tax exemptions for high-altitude enterprises can help offset the structural disadvantages of remoteness.

With investment, Nepal can create green jobs, curb out-migration from mountain areas, and give young people a reason to carry forward a livelihood that is their heritage. The yak is a climate-resilient animal, and its economy could yield high returns across social, economic, and environmental dimensions.

The second annual National Yak Day on 20 April arrived as the world prepares for the UN's International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP) 2026, a global initiative to safeguard pastoralist communities and the fragile rangeland they nurture. By aligning National Yak Day with IYRP themes, Nepal has amplified its message and tapped international partnerships. The shared goal is the economic empowerment of yak-herding families. With secure livelihoods and a voice in policy,

Nepal's mountain pastoralists can continue as stewards of the high mountains, protecting nature as they have for generations.

FAO is leading this momentous effort, calling for stronger support for pastoralists from the Andes to the Himalaya. Nepal's yak herders have been the bedrock of food security, biodiversity conservation, and climate adaptation through their traditional livelihoods.

**ECONOMY, ECOLOGY**

In Nepal, FAO has been working with the government and national partners to co-host a forum to strengthen Nepal's Rangeland Policy, aiming to ensure herders have better access to pastures and support services. FAO Nepal is also engaged in the value chain and digital innovation to support yak pastoralists.

National Yak Day 2026 was an opportunity to promote a development model that builds on, rather than replaces, traditional livelihoods. Supporting yaks and pastoralists is not just about preserving their past, it is a pragmatic approach to supporting climate-resilient mountain livelihoods.

This means recognising pastoral mobility, securing grazing rights, investing in value chains, and ensuring highland communities are not sidelined in national development.

Nepal must act now by enabling policies, targeted investment, and greater recognition, so that yak herding can serve as a foundation for a future where economic opportunity, ecological sustainability, and cultural continuity are mutually strengthened for better livelihoods across Nepal's mountain communities. 🇨🇳

Ken Shimizu has been the FAO Country Representative for Bhutan and Nepal since 2021.

of alpine pastures, increasing temperatures, while prolonged winter droughts and unseasonal snow have reduced nutritious pastures. Traditional grazing areas have shrunk, or been claimed for other uses.

**OUTMIGRATION**

Nepal's highland youth are migrating to cities or abroad, leading to a decline in second-generation pastoralists as well as a loss of traditional knowledge in yak husbandry. Those who remain face rising losses from predators and disease outbreaks, compounded by scarce veterinary services.

At present, fewer than 10,000 households across Nepal still rear yaks, endangering an important cultural heritage.



# Living to tell the tale

On the 11<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 2015 earthquake, Dharara survivor recalls his miraculous rescue

Sudiksha Tuladhar

**K**rishna Bahadur Ramtel (pictured, right) was returning home after visiting a temple when his family insisted on climbing the Dharara viewpoint tower in Kathmandu.

He climbed up the narrow steep stairs with his mother-in-law and sister-in-law. His wife was nine months pregnant and chose to stay behind.

At the top, Ramtel was holding the balcony bars when the tower started swaying at 11:56AM on 25 April 2015. The 62m tall Dharara, built and rebuilt after previous earthquakes, then collapsed into a jumble of bricks and masonry (pictured right, below).

"I heard screams everywhere, I told my mother-in-law and sister-in-law not to panic," recalls Ramtel after regaining consciousness on a pile of rubble (pictured right, far right). Rescuers extricated his legs from under a brick arch and rushed him to the hospital, which was already crowded with patients writhing in pain.

His wife survived, but his in-laws did not. Ramtel was devastated, more so for his wife who was going to be a new mother, but lost two family members. His right leg needed an operation, but he made a complete recovery.



ADITYAKHARE



BIKRAM RAI / NEPALI TIMES ARCHIVE

His child was born soon after, and Ramtel's wife had to take care of her baby as well as her injured husband. But tragically, she lacked the help of her mother and sister. The 7.8M earthquake 11 years

ago this week killed 8,962 people in Central Nepal. Because it was Saturday, Dharara Tower was more crowded than usual, and at least 180 bodies were later retrieved from the ruins.

it is broader than the previous tower and even has a lift that goes up to the viewing deck.

But Ramtel says he is not going anywhere near Dharara. He says, "That place holds memories that I do not want to remember, but I cannot forget either."

Soon after his operation, Ramtel returned to his hometown in Dhading where more members of the extended clan offered support. But now he lives in Kathmandu with his family. His son is now 11 and he recently had another child. "Being alive is a blessing. As long as one is living, there will be struggles, and I am ready to face them all," he tells us.

## NO PREPAREDNESS

While 25 April serves as a reminder of the last major earthquake in Nepal, 16 January is marked annually as Earthquake Safety Day, coinciding with the 8.3M megaquake of 1934.

Seismologists say the 7.8M disaster was not the big earthquake that Kathmandu experiences every 80-100 years, and the Big One is yet to hit. Building standards are still regularly flouted in densely populated parts of Kathmandu, which worries Ramtel.

"The government acts only after the disaster has happened, people and the authorities forget quickly and move on. There is little preparation, and we expect God to save us," says Ramtel, who also survived because of divine intervention. 🇳🇵



Most like Ramtel who miraculously survived were on the balcony, while those climbing or descending the staircase were killed.

Built by Prime Minister Bhimsen Thapa in 1832, there were originally two towers. But one collapsed and other was damaged in the 1834 earthquake and rebuilt. Exactly 100 years later, another earthquake brought it down again. It was again restored only to collapse in 2015.

Only the base of the original tower remains as a memorial inside the Dharara complex, where a reinforced concrete tower now stands. Dubbed 'Seto Tower' by Prime Minister Balendra Shah when he was mayor of Kathmandu,

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