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REBUILDING NEW NEPAL

Sonia Awale

Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle presented the principles and priorities of the upcoming budget in Parliament last week to unanimous endorsement. The focus was on good governance, digital service delivery, connectivity and human capital development, and economic reform.

But as much as Wagle wants to present a transformative budget, he must factor in the impact of the West Asia war, Nepal's LDC graduation deferral, and meddling from the PMO.

His RSP manifesto set a target of 7% annual growth (from the present 4%), to raise per capita income to \$3,000 (from \$1,660 now) and expand the economy to \$100 billion over the next five years (from

\$46 billion today). But the World Bank and others project a more modest 5.5% growth, and the goals for per capita income look unrealistic.

"The government has focused on transparency and the rule of law, and while those are important, increasing the capacity of the private sector is crucial," explains Posh Raj Pandey of the South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE). "Our targets for the digital economy are too ambitious, there are still 20% of people below the poverty line, and the new government hasn't really taken climate mitigation and adaptation into account."

MIC DEFERRAL

Concerned over stagnant growth in recent years, the government is preparing to ask the UN to defer graduation to middle-income status (MIC) once again, this time by three years. Nepal was first eligible for graduation in 2015 after meeting thresholds for the Human Assets Index (HAI) and the Economic and

Environmental Vulnerability Index (EVI) but not the Gross National Income (GNI) per capita criterion (page 4). The government chose to postpone the graduation following the earthquake that year.

Economist Pushkar Bajracharya recalls, "I was the one who proposed graduation from the LDC by 2030. There was a new Constitution and government in place, a lot of hope but we made a mess of it all, misutilised resources. We must graduate in time but Nepal will lose concessional loans and other facilities."

Nepal also stands to lose preferential access to global markets and relaxed international trade rules upon graduation. The graduation will mean less climate funding and negatively impact exports from small enterprises to the European market.

However, the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and the IMF which together provide 70% of concessional loans to Nepal do not consider LDC status but per capita income.

Biswash Gauchan at the Institute for Integrated Development Studies (IIDS) said this week that deferral will further increase Nepal's dependence on foreign aid at a time when international development funds are being diverted to defence.

"Remittance is the largest single contributor to poverty reduction in Nepal but it is now time to think

beyond remittance. What we need is capital, which, together with FDI and technology will lead to development," Gauchan said.

He noted since the investment climate is not conducive, Nepal must tap into diaspora capital to fast-track growth by wooing well-off overseas Nepalis by meeting their demand for dual citizenship.

Posh Raj Pandey agrees that attracting foreign investment in the current environment will be near impossible: "We have a historically lowest interest rate and highest liquidity which means the private sector has no confidence. If a Nepali who understands the country hesitates to invest here, why would foreigners?"

Finance Minister Wagle says he is committed to economic reform aimed at restoring private sector confidence and creating an investment-friendly environment. But

his own government is working at cross-purposes by arresting prominent CEOs and captains of industry. Not only will there be less investment, but the arrests are leading to capital flight.

Says Pushkar Bajracharya: "The investment climate hasn't improved at all, there is still much suspicion and looming uncertainties which are not good management and governance, prerequisites for business." 🇳🇵

Nepal's National Debate Championship
EDITORIAL
PAGE 2



CARPET BOMBED: The settlement along the Bagmati Corridor that was demolished this month symbolises the challenge of replacing destruction with development.

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Nepal's National Debate Championship

Resolved: Two months on, the government of Prime Minister Balendra Shah is doing a good job.

Editorial

Kunda Dixit

There is a National Debate Championship going on in Nepal. The resolution: is Prime Minister Balendra Shah's government doing a good job or not? Nearly two months after assuming office, supporters think he is off to a flying start, and others that he has an authoritarian streak.

For the sake of this country's stability, this debate needs a rapid resolution. Toxic trolling has polarised the polity and society to the point of paralysis. Healthy debate is impossible.

What does the pro-prime minister team support, and what do his critics oppose:

Affirmative Team: In favour of the resolution.

Nepalis fed up with the last decades of mismanagement, partisanship and corruption voted en masse for the RSP mainly because Balendra Shah was its prime ministerial candidate. We had endured serial prime ministers who headed rotational coalitions and ran the country to the ground till the breaking point on 8-9 September.

The March election turned this anger into votes. Nepalis felt that change, any change, was better than the status quo. Even though at least 5 million young Nepalis abroad could not exercise their franchise, they swayed the ballot.

As prime minister Balendra Shah hit the



ground running. He arrested his predecessor, sacked two tainted ministers, removed 1,500 party-appointed officials, abolished unions in education, got himself a chief justice, sent bulldozers to raze squatter settlements to the ground.

Balenistas cheered the prime minister on. If he had waited for Parliament to debate bills ad nauseam, it would have taken months. The only way to deal with the real estate mafia and their political protectors was to physically remove them.

So what if he did not meet Donald Trump's emissary and envoys from China and India? He is demonstrating that Nepal is no longer a buffer state and not kowtowing to bullies anymore.

Balendra Shah is a man of few words. He walks the talk. His predecessor K P Oli

talked a lot and was too clever by half, and no one could understand what Sher Bahadur Deuba was saying. Action speaks louder than words.

By posting a photo of himself nibbling yak cheese from the DDC, the prime minister was promoting a state-owned corporation that was not able to pay dairy farmers because of

politicisation, mismanagement and corruption.

Prime Minister Balendra Shah was elected to shake things up, and he is doing just that. His choice of wardrobe, shades, shoes shows he is disruptor-in-chief out to set off a seismic rupture in Nepal's socio-political landscape.

Negative Team: Against the motion.

Balendra Shah still thinks he is rapper Balen. He got away with misogynistic lyrics and being radically anti-establishment, but he is the establishment now. He is not just the Mayor of Kathmandu, he heads the government of Nepal. By bulldozing riverside settlements he is making the landless homeless. He is continuing what he started out as mayor to evict shantytown dwellers, chasing down and beating street side vendors. The prime minister's actions do indeed

speak louder than his words. Such anti-poor atrocities are an antithesis to the very songs he rapped about. If the land mafia was involved, he should have gone after them — not the poor families eking out a living on the edge of society.

He removed party-affiliated officials, only to replace them with untested cronies, exactly the behaviour the RSP said it would eradicate. He suspended Parliament to ram through ordinances just so he could get his man in as chief justice. He has never addressed the House, and haughtily walks out while the president is reading his government's address.

Avoiding foreign emissaries is not nationalism, it is destructive arrogance that the poorest country in Asia cannot ill afford. He shows disrespect for national institutions by wearing sports shoes to Parliament and hiding unsmilingly behind shades. Posting social media memes with yak cheese is cute and may have got millions of likes, but does not solve the structural problems of the DDC and other corrupt corporations.

Judges in a debating championship would adjudicate the two teams on: a) the strength of their arguments, b) its delivery and persuasiveness, c) engagement with opponents in the rebuttal round. It will be up to us citizens who will have to judge.

Mass media and social media amplify the gulf between the two sides and feed the beast through partisan content and clickbait. In the national interest, the old and new have to shed their egos and agree to disagree. Otherwise there will be no winner in this debate. 🇳🇵

Trending Online



Kathmandu and Myagdi divorces

by Mohan Mainali
Changing societal mores, demographic shifts, long separation due to overseas migration, and increase in literacy rates have led to rising divorce rates in Nepal. Details of the investigation at nepalitimes.com

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Life amidst the ruins

by Aditya Khare
Two weeks since the shantytown along the banks of the Bagmati in Kathmandu was razed, residents are still picking up what is left of their homes. Follow us for the latest developments.

Most popular on X

Yes, Prime Minister?

by Shristi Karki
PM Balendra Shah's absence from Parliament last week made it clear that sooner or later, he will have to explain his disdain for the democratic process, his own party, and the outside world. Read the report on the website.

Most commented



Never black or white

Editorial
Each new episode of Nepali politics polarises society. The PM's supporters think he can do no wrong, while his critics pick apart every detail, diluting genuine criticism of more serious breaches of democratic principles. Read the editorial online.

Most visited online page

Letters

BALEN GOVERNANCE

RSP knows and probably doesn't care about PM Shah's governance style ('Yes, Prime Minister?', Shristi Karki, #1311). It's not in his party leaders' benefit to object now. Rabi will wait until Balen looks bad enough so that his reentry as a PM candidate will look natural. If Balen was smart he wouldn't let that happen by being the best version he can be now.

Prerana Poudel Chaulagain

Many institutions and people in power are openly compromised and rotten to the core, and history will be kinder to PM Balen for his courage to hold a mirror to their faces. I bet not even one opposition MP would have had any questions regarding the budget even if the PM were to be present, and that's a pity.

No Harm Done

We won't support or oppose this government for the next 3 years. We'll just wait and watch, then we'll speak louder against or supporting them.

Seller Bahadur

What do you think would have happened if the Prime Minister had been present in Parliament? Would the opposition have stayed focused on discussing national policy, or would the debate have shifted toward criticising Balen instead? In many ways, the Prime Minister seems to have caught them off guard. It was already clear that the opposition was prepared to create noise and oppose almost anything the government introduced. By the time the opposition fully debates those ordinances and decisions, some of them may already have begun to show results.

George Jung Katwal

The pattern embedded within your news reporting is as transparent as a polished mirror, reflecting to the public that you harbour little interest in witnessing competent governance or the progressive advancement of our nation. Your narrative machinery appears perpetually engineered to vilify and disparage every initiative undertaken by the new government, regardless of merit, substance, or national significance.

Prabhakar Lamichhane

DIVORCE RATES

Women in Kathmandu have more freedom to leave unhappy marriages unlike regressive communities in Madesh and Sudurpaschim ('Why do Kathmandu and Myagdi have the highest divorce rates?', Mohan Mainali, #1311). That's not to say that Kathmandu is modern. It is relatively orthodox, hypocritical and unsafe for women as well.

Bhavita Karma Bhumo

This story shows just the numbers. It would have been really interesting to see the reasons for divorce in Nepal. Factors like behaviour of in-laws or getting too involved in your sons' and daughters' lives are one of the main reasons for divorces in India. I'm sure there is some similarity in Nepal as well.

Shruti Kansakar

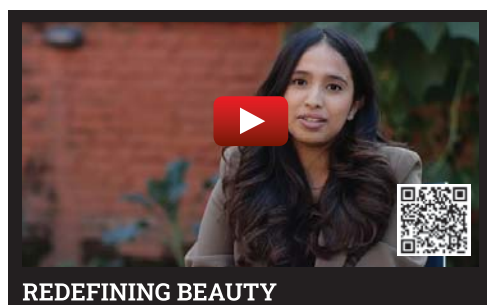
One cannot expect all relations on this planet to last forever. Dysfunctional relations, domestic violence and all kind of relation related problems are everywhere. So divorces in a society is normal. The cultural norm has been so strong against divorces in Nepal that a wife had to stay even in cases of domestic violence. Now more people understand they don't have to stay in a dysfunctional marriage.

Anneli Wester

Online Package



Yak cheese is in the news lately. But in the high pastures of Langtang, Gyalbu Lama rebuilt his cheese plant after it was reduced to rubble in the 2015 earthquake only to face new challenges. Watch video on our YouTube channel.



Even with the beauty industry in decline during Covid, Arushree Sharma Khatiwada and Megha Agarwal set up a skincare brand suited for Nepalis. Subscribe for multimedia content.

1,000 Words



SOCIAL MEDIA

MAN IN BLACK: Line up of the men who rule at the swearing in of the new Chief Justice on Tuesday. From left to right: National Assembly Chair Narayan Prasad Dahal, Chief Justice Manoj Kumar Sharma, Vice President Ram Sahaya Prasad Yadav, President Ram Chandra Paudel, Prime Minister Balendra Shah and House Speaker Dol Prasad Aryal.

Times

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Rethinking Nepal's graduation to middle income

Green growth and care work can create jobs and attract Nepali migrants back



COMMENT
Bina Pradhan

Nepal's graduation from Least Developed Country (LDC) status has been repeatedly deferred, and this time it may be postponed till 2029.

The country had already exceeded the Human Asset Index and Economic Vulnerability Index thresholds in 2015, 2018, and 2021 – evidence of sustained socioeconomic progress through time. Postponement will not alter GDP or per capita income.

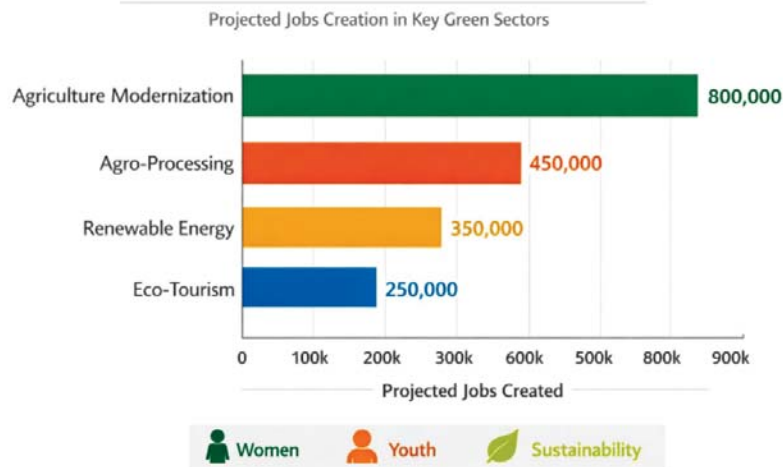
What matters is that Nepal's progress has been people driven: households, own-account production, and women's care work strategies sustained resilience through crisis after crisis. Analysis of the Labour Force Survey shows these invisible sectors already contribute over 40% of GDP and sustain nearly 59% of livelihoods.

Recognising and formalising them in mainstream planning would transform the growth narrative far more than waiting for statistical improvements that are unlikely to materialise within the given time frame.

Nepal's socioeconomic progress was achieved despite weak GDP growth, averaging 4% over the past decades and dropping to 1.8% in 2023. Growth is projected to slow down to 2.3% in FY26 from 4.6% in FY25. It is the households that absorbed shocks from successive crises in the past.

- During the conflict, families - often led by women - negotiated survival and

Employment Potential in Green Growth Sectors



education with Maoist insurgents/political actors.

- After the earthquake, communities rebuilt livelihoods through flexible labour and diversified farming, often avoiding government reconstruction support because of stringent conditions attached to receiving such support.
- During the 2015 border blockade, informal trade and subsistence farming sustained food security.
- In the pandemic, migration and remittances stabilised incomes and balanced trade – households sought outside jobs while the state failed to create employment opportunities at home.

Despite sluggish formal growth, poverty rates declined, health and nutrition outcomes improved, and education expanded. The Human Asset Index continued to rise even after the 2015 earthquake, when growth fell close to zero.

These gains underscore that household resilience and care work services – not market expansion – were decisive in Nepal's graduation. To ignore this sector,

which sustains nearly 59% of livelihoods, is a gross oversight.

The Finance Ministry's recent White Paper sets an ambitious target of 7% growth through market liberalisation, private sector expansion, infrastructure investment, and digital adoption. While these priorities are not without merit, they give privilege the formal market sector and ignore the informal household and the care sector that enabled graduation.

Postponement risks entrenching this blindness. Feminist economic critique insists that GDP could be increased by at least 40% annually by recognising and formalising own-account work and care services without subsidised loans or trade preferences.

The White Paper's silence on this contribution is a fundamental weakness in understanding people, and their reality of how the graduation was made possible. This omission connects to a wider debate on GDP as a sufficient measure of development and wellbeing.

The paper's narrow focus on market expansion also overlooks the potential of advancing green growth. Modernising agriculture and allied sectors could

generate employment, enhance sustainability, and strengthen resilience. Agroprocessing, renewable energy, and ecotourism offer opportunities for rural employment and women's enterprises.

GREEN GROWTH, GENDER

The proposed Kosi Pride project illustrates how green growth can be linked to gender equality. By investing in sustainable river basin management, agroprocessing, and ecotourism in the Kosi region, the project could create employment opportunities for rural women and youth, strengthen local enterprises, and integrate care sector considerations into development planning.

The employment potential in agriculture modernisation (≈800,000 jobs), agroprocessing (≈450,000), renewable energy (≈350,000), and ecotourism (≈250,000) demonstrates how green growth can generate millions of jobs. Integrating women and youth into these sectors would not only expand livelihoods, but also attract migrants back home, easing dependence on remittances and stabilising local economies.

By embedding feminist priorities, Nepal can transform green growth into a pathway for resilience, gender equality, and inclusive prosperity as well as achieve the income criteria.

Investing in green growth would not only create jobs but also align with global sustainability commitments. It would absorb youth and women into productive sectors, reduce migration pressures, and strengthen local economies.

A feminist economic reframing of Nepal's graduation calls for:

- Recognition of households as economic units: Integrate own-account production and care

services into GDP and policy frameworks.

- Reject deferment as a solution: Graduation has already been achieved; postponement distracts from structural reforms.
- Green growth strategy: Modernise agriculture and allied sectors, invest in renewable energy, and promote ecotourism with gender equality at the centre.
- Inclusive digital governance: Ensure rural women and youth access eservices and link digital transformation to enterprise support.
- Enterprise development: Provide credit, training, and market access for women's SMEs, protecting small producers in trade agreements.
- Employment creation: Expand vocational training and rural industries, recognising care work as a sector that sustains labor supply.

Nepal's graduation should be celebrated as the achievement of households, unpaid women's labour, and care strategies. Repeated deferments will not raise GDP or per capita income. Nepal's economy is people-driven. Despite poor formal performance, failing governance, corruption, and repeated crises, households and care work carried the country across the graduation thresholds.

Green growth could create millions of jobs at home – enough to bring Nepali migrants back and make graduation truly inclusive."

Speaking at a Social Progress conference, Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle had said: "Social progress can be pursued even in the absence of high GDP. That is the story of Nepal." 🇳🇵

Bina Pradhan is a feminist economist and independent researcher. She is the founder and Board Director of the BEES (Business, Enterprise and Employment Services) Network for Women in South Asia.

BRIEFS

Squatter grants

Squatter families displaced from Kathmandu will receive a one-time resettlement package of Rs25,000, and monthly housing support of Rs15,000 for families of up to five members for three months. Elderly and disabled individuals will be placed in holding centres with school and health services.



DDC and PM

A social media post by Prime Minister Balendra Shah featuring Nepali yak cheese sparked support and debate over the DDC, which collects over 60 million litres of milk annually from 200,000 farmers across 45 districts and records Rs3.5 billion in annual transactions. However, some Rs650 million in farmer payments remain pending, largely due to seasonal oversupply. Private dairy companies have eroded DDC's market share.

Beautify Bharatpur

Bharatpur has launched a campaign to remove overhead electrical and communication cables to improve safety and beautification of the city. Internet companies have begun removing their own cables, supported by municipal police teams.

Nepalgrid grid

Nepal Electricity Authority's Nepalgrid Distribution Centre has upgraded ahead of high-demand summer months, improving voltage stability and reducing overload. Old and thin transmission lines have been replaced, and new transformers installed while anti-theft monitoring has been improved. Officials report reduced load shedding and voltage complaints.

Traffic fines

Kathmandu Valley Traffic Police booked 2,029 motorists for various violations, collecting Rs 417,000 in fines on 17 May. Infractions included 59 cases of drunk driving, 119 of illegal ride-sharing, 132 signal violations, and 208 speeding offenses. Additional fines were issued for lane indiscipline, honking, parking on sidewalks, and driving on one-way roads.



Annapurna trail

Local communities in the Annapurna region collected 32,650 kg of waste from trekking trails in the first nine months of this year, already exceeding last year's total of 31,000 kg. ACAP coordinates collection across 11 centres. Most of the waste is glass, plastic or metal which is transported to Pokhara for recycling.



Army WWF

WWF Nepal honoured the Nepal Army at its 33rd anniversary event, recognising 50 years of contribution to nature conservation. The Army currently protects 12 national parks, one wildlife reserve, and one hunting reserve, with over 1,000 personnel mobilised. Conservation efforts have helped Nepal's tiger and rhino populations rebound.

Sugar stock

The Ministry of Industry says Nepal has enough sugar to meet demand for the next eight months amidst India's ban on exports until September citing low sugarcane harvests. Nepal's sugar production has fallen to 120,000 tons against the demand of 270,000 tons. The ministry is urging against panic buying and price manipulation.

North Face run

The North Face is hosting Mountain Quest in Nepal to celebrate International Everest Day 2026, culminating at Gokarna Forest Resort on 29 May. Highlights include a 7.5km night trail run over forest trails, with \$5 donated to Everest conservation for each completed run.

NAIMA EV standards

Automobile importer group NAIMA has called for clear, standardised procedures for testing and certifying electric vehicle motor capacity, noting that the same vehicle model may carry different specs across markets. A certification process would help avoid market confusion and protect investor and consumer confidence in EVs.

Yoga Municipality

Changunarayan is set to become Nepal's first Yoga Municipality with daily yoga science camps to be held at 5AM at the NEA Training Center in Kharipati. Yoga camps will operate in every ward and school, yoga parks will be established, and yoga will be incorporated into the school curriculum.



Aloft rescues

Aloft Kathmandu Thamel partnered with Shree's Animal Rescue to provide food and medicine to over 500 rescued and street dogs. The hotel's culinary team prepared meals of meat and rice while first-aid, bulk food and bedding were donated.

BC position paper

The British Council launched a position paper stressing on teacher training, appropriate materials, and supportive assessments. Where English is used for instruction, students should also be supported through their mother tongue, it states.

A budget for structural transformation

Nepal's economy needs to be jump started to attract investment and create jobs



COMMENT

Siddhant Raj Pandey

There is an old English adage, 'If you find yourself in a hole, stop digging.' For decades the politicians in Nepal continued to dig deep with impunity, it took the GenZ generation movement to attempt to bury that hole.

Not that similar tipping points in Nepal's political history had never happened. This time, it was the total capitulation to the movement and the speed of change that surprised many. Citizenship at times requires courage. It took a generation of youngsters to show us what we had neglected. The government of Prime Minister Balendra Shah is in a hurry to fill that deep hole. In less than two months of formation there have been many trail-blazing decisions, some less contentious than others.

Tackling corruption seems to be the agenda, and rightly so. The message is that this government has zero tolerance for it. But in a hurry to make changes, sometimes the tendency is to throw the baby out with the bath water. This can, in the long run, impede progress.

The mandate to make change is the people's expectation, however painful in the interim. The focus now should be to jump start the economy.



SUMAN NEPALI

The courage of transformation now needs to be mirrored on the economic front and that is expected from the upcoming budget to be delivered by astute Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle.

Nepal's economic model is fragile in the extreme. It exports migrant workers, and depends on remittances that lacks the capacity to absorb a rapidly growing labour force. The need is to address immediate economic issues, like employment. After that, planning long term for structural

transformation is necessary.

The annual policy and programs attempts to address some of these concerns.

POINTERS FOR BUDGET

Consumers are buying fewer goods and services, causing businesses to fold. Banks are bloated with excess liquidity because fewer people and businesses are taking loans. They are putting this extra cash in non-banking assets. The expectation is that the budget will address these concerns and assuage the economy.

The budget should, to begin with, address the various anomalies in the taxation system. Nepal attracts the least amount of foreign direct investments in South Asia (only 0.2% of GDP). Issues such as double taxation, a flat VAT rate, excise duty and high tax bracket among others should be revisited.

If we are to reach carbon net zero by 2045, we need to start providing incentives to renewable energy technologies. Alternative energy, besides hydro, cannot commercially compete with

fossil fuel. Therefore, a method of viability gap funding in the interim to finance the long term should be availed. Investments in Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), the most neglected sector, can catalyse the nation's development by creating jobs. Risk capital for this should be availed and scaled up from the present debt financing they receive from banks to Private Equity (PE) or Venture Capital (PE/VC).

Development finance institutions funded by PE have the wherewithal to intervene with MSMEs and assist in access to finance in the form of risk capital, improving production and productivity, and providing knowledge in protecting physical assets and resource efficiency.

With climate change as a potent threat, Nepal's MSMEs need all the assistance to manoeuvre through it. Adaptive resilience financing with social and governance components needs to be introduced.

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in primary agriculture for SMEs should be allowed by amending the Foreign and Technology Transfer Act. The 23% of GDP is in that sector and FDI is barred from it.

For Nepal to grow it will need FDI. To attract FDI there needs to be a stable government along with stable policies and most importantly, rule of law.

Today, Nepal seems to have the political will and social consensus to make that change. Onwards and upwards, we hope. 🇳🇵

Siddhant Pandey is CEO of Business Oxygen, an international private equity fund.


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Junko Tabei comes back to life on screen

The first woman to climb Mt Everest returns in a biopic at the Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival

Miki Upreti

Junko Tabei (1939-2016) is remembered not only as the first woman to summit Mt Everest in 1975, but also as an irreplaceable lifelong friend of Nepal.

It was 1975, the International Women's Year. And 2026 is the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Nepal. The timing could not be better for the special screening on 30 May at the Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival (KIMFF) of the Junko Tabei biopic, *Climbing for Life*.

As a Japanese citizen who has lived in Nepal for 36 years, and a member of the same mountaineering club as Junko, I am among the generations she inspired.

Junko received worldwide acclaim after her epic climb, and even while suffering from terminal illness in her later years, refused to limit her activities. She was loved by her family, continued to climb, and encouraged young people traumatised by the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami to join her in climbing Mount Fuji.

Legendary Japanese actress Sayuri Yoshinaga plays Junko in the film. Her journey in the film industry mirrors that of Junko, who also reached the top. Non plays Junko in her younger days, and has been active across a wide range of genres. I was surprised to see



© "CLIMBING FOR LIFE" FILM PARTNER

how accurately the young actress portrayed Junko's casual gestures.

Director Junji Sakamoto (pictured, right) has made numerous Japanese cinematic masterpieces since 1989, winning major awards like Japanese Academy's Best Director Award. He says the aim of the film was to be enjoyable even for people who are not devoted to the mountains.

REAL TO REEL

Unlike the commercialisation of Himalayan climbing today, the film captures the spirit of adventure from the early years of expeditions. Everything has been recreated -- the

climbing gear kept in the Junko household, shirts and boots worn by young Junko and her future husband, as well as their family car.

The film is authentic about the details of the Tabei family that I knew. The clothing and equipment look as if they were the originals. There may be some who think that Junko is a bit idealised in the movie. That would be natural since this is not a documentary but a feature film — but the move accurately brings the real to reel.

Junko Tabei loved Nepal and its people. Even in her later years, she kept returning to trek, sometimes with her husband, Masanobu,



and other times with her son and daughter. Though they showed little interest in the outdoors as children, they later became her greatest supporters.

In 2015, on the 40th anniversary of her ascent of Mount Everest, Nepal was struck by an earthquake which killed nearly 9,000 people nationwide. Additionally, an avalanche triggered by the earthquake caused numerous casualties at Everest Base Camp. After the chaos settled, Junko and her family marked her own anniversary of the climb at an event in Kathmandu. Their goal was to contribute to Nepal's economic recovery by hosting the big get-together and spending money there. At the same time, she sought to strengthen the emotional resilience of her friends in Nepal.

This act of compassion towards Nepal reflected Junko's own empathy since her own hometown was also devastated by an earthquake and tsunami just four years previously.

That 2015 event in Kathmandu was the last time I saw Junko. She passed away the following year. She did not let on at all that her illness was so advanced. Even now, I want to tell her, "Junko, show a little more weakness to others. I depended on you until the very end, but I was never able to return you the favour that made me a resident of Nepal."

Bringing the Junko film to KIMFF began as a casual conversation with its director Ramyata Limbu. We shared the same vague hope of screening the film in Kathmandu. We appreciate the support of many people, including the Tabei family, Embassy of Japan in Nepal, Kino Films, Tabei Junko Foundation, and Setsuko Kitamura (Junko's closest friend and my mentor).

This film might not have been produced if Junko was alive today. The production could therefore be a message from her soul. The screening will be a meaningful opportunity for us to see Junko's story unfold on the big screen and reflect on my memories of her.

Miki Upreti is a Japanese writer, former mountaineer, trail runner, and development worker who has lived in Nepal since 1990. She launched this film screening project in collaboration with KIMFF.

Climbing for Life
Directed by Junji Sakamoto
130 mins | Japan | 2025
30 May, 3pm

GLOBAL STORIES, LOCAL VOICES AT KIMFF 2026

The 23rd edition of the Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival (KIMFF) is set to celebrate global and Nepali cinema from 27-31 May with more than 50 films from 29 countries. With its theme Global Stories, Local Voices, this year's

Momo and misogyny

The ideal shape of dumplings is a metaphor for the pressure on women to shape up

Sangya Lamsal

Think of a South Asian household made up entirely of women. Does that paint a perfectly ordinary picture, or does it make you pause for a second too long?

The possible discomfort in imagining this comes from the absence of a man, and in societies like ours, a home without a 'head' man or a male 'provider' still triggers suspicion, judgement, or unsolicited sympathy.

Societies are getting progressive but patriarchy is far too deeply woven into our social fabric. Schools here still instinctively ask for the father's name when it comes to guardianship, and institutions still treat fathers as a default point of legitimacy. The script is similar when a family has just daughters or if they are the only daughter.

"What about a son?" they say. "Now you'll have to become the son of the house." This is followed by dramatic sighs from distant relatives. A daughter is a daughter; she does not need to be a son. She is the daughter of the house. That should be enough.

Tribeny Rai's (pictured) feature *Shape of Momo* lays bare this emotional weight carried by countless women, weaving together themes of patriarchy, gendered expectations, women's agency, and the complexities of familial relationships that feel harshly familiar.

At the heart of the film is a household of intergenerational women in rural Sikkim, navigating constant scrutiny simply because there is no man in the family. The tension sharpens with the return of Bishnu (the



youngest daughter) from Delhi, whose refusal to conform unsettles not only the rigid expectations of a village society, but also the deeply internalised traditions that the older women in her own family have learned to settle within.

Bishnu challenges the idea that women must endure, adjust, and remain silent in a male-dominated society, and her rebellion becomes a disruption of the 'normal'. Through each generation, the film paints different shades of womanhood: a grandmother spending her final years waiting for a son to come around, a mother burdened with holding the family together while still having to depend on men, an elder sister who has surrendered her dreams and identity to an unhappy marriage, and

the youngest who is desperately trying to break free from the cycle.

Even Bishnu's female cat, Azadi, is not spared from the weight of these prejudices, dismissed as a burden for having a large litter. Ironically, her name itself hints at the freedom and social shackles that linger in the narrative.

WOMEN CAN BE ANYTHING

The subtle yet strong symbols of how deeply misogyny is embedded into everyday life are ever-present in the film, but none stand out quite like momos. The dumplings here represent the language of intimacy, shared laughter, bonding among the women in the family, folded and cooked together with care. But, the women in the family are expected



to master the perfect half-moon fold while Bishnu's momos are not shapely enough. Bishnu argues that momos are meant to be eaten, and it does not matter if they are pretty or not.

This seemingly harmless culinary expectation mirrors the demand for women to be polished, obedient, and 'shaped' to fit society's approval. In contrast, Bishnu's momos become acts of resistance. A reminder that women, like momos, are not meant to be standardised. Women can be messy, loud, imperfect, dominant — and still whole.

Shape of Momo is Tribeny Rai's debut feature, a slow-paced, visually rich coming-of-age film set in the Himalaya, using natural blue and green landscapes to reflect the quiet struggles of women in the region. The film has gained international recognition and awards, its message universally resonant.

The film is set for a theatrical release in India and Nepal on 29 May.

Shape of Momo
Directed by Tribeny Rai
114 min | India | 2026
28 May, 1pm

Peaks that overshadow people

Documentary uses a 50 year old film on Nepal's Rolwaling to think of the next 50 years

Honor Dodd

Summits represent the pinnacle of Nepal's tourism industry. Expeditions make headlines, whether they succeed or fail.

Climbers endure hardship to conquer the highest peaks, capture hard-won photos, and earn entrance to an exclusive club.

So, it is refreshing and exciting to find a constellation of new tourism stars twinkling in The Anti Expedition, a documentary by director Elena Jean at KIMFF 2026.

This short documentary is shot on location in Rowaling Valley to ponder the future of Nepal's adventure tourism sector.

The story begins in 1971, with a film called Ferden Til Tseringma, when a trio of Norwegian climbers cross the Himalaya but refuse to climb the peaks. They seek joy in the journey and demonstrate restraint and respect by not trammeling on Nepal's most sacred, forbidden peaks like Mt Tseringma, also known as Gauri Shankar.

That idea grips Bob Henderson, a Canadian outdoor educator. He brings a trio to Nepal 50 years after the Norwegians to find the people whose traditional resilience, hospitality, and deeply held beliefs so inspired those summit refusers a half-century ago.

On arrival, they find that only 65 people remain in a once bustling



village of Beding, below sacred Mt Tseringma.

Henderson screens the 1971 film in Beding, causing great delight as youthful selves and family members appear. This scene raises an interesting question: if The Anti Expedition is screened 50 years from now, would there be any people left in Beding, or would most have migrated to the city or abroad?

TRANSFORMING WORLD

Then and now are juxtaposed through intercuts of fascinating archival and contemporary footage.

The west face of Mt Tseringma, once covered in a thick icecap, now rises into the sky jagged and bare due to global warming. The people who live in her shadow tell us why this is happening, through an unforgettable tale of a transforming world.

Henderson asks, "What do stories mean when they're not being told?" If media highlights successful climbs, it takes away attention from the places at the base of the mountains. Tourists are pulled by tales of celebrity mountaineers and famous peaks and not local people and their cultures.

Modern connectivity has already cut what used to be an eight day Rolwaling trek to three days.

Roads now bypass many villages once only accessible on foot. Still, village life has an allure for tourists, even as inhabitants empty into cities. By refusing to centre all meaning on the 'conquest' of peaks, the film takes viewers through celebrations with a joyful guide, a Rinpoche, and his people.

Nepal's mountains are more than their peaks, these are landscapes alive with life and



stories. Chasing records and new extreme climbs makes headlines that eclipse the real Nepal.

The Anti Expedition is an exciting invitation for viewers to consider a different next 50 years.

In this version, top billing goes to stories and traditional ecological knowledge that undergird life in Nepal's remote villages. We encounter a vast unknown terrain filled with human activity, sustainable lifeways, animals, waterfalls, and land brimming with meaning. The villages resound with calls to hospitality, dance, song, and blessings amid personal discovery.

We are invited to envision policies that support this potential, so these lifeways are not lost.

Hopefully the room in Beding will not be empty in the year 2056. 🇳🇵

The Anti Expedition
Directed by Elena Jean
40 min | Canada / Nepal | 2025
29 May, 6:30pm

line-up will explore climate justice, migration, identity, and the resilience of remote communities.

The festival will kick off with the Nepal Premiere of Indian director Tribeny Rai's award-winning film Shape of Momo (review below, left).

KIMFF this year will also

celebrate 70 years of bilateral relations between Nepal and Switzerland with the Alpine Alliances: New Wave of Nepali Cinema panel featuring Nepali filmmakers at Swiss film lab and festivals. The festival will also mark 70 years of Nepal and Japan's diplomatic

relationship with a screening of Sakamoto Junji's feature film Climbing for Life (review above, left), which tells the story of Junko Tabei.

The festival will feature a panel discussion What's In a Story – Cinema and Censorship, as well as the second edition of Kathmandu

DocLab, an incubator designed to foster South Asian talent.

"We hope the line-up of films and events will entertain audiences and engage them in critical conversations in and around issues that affect the Nepali public," says festival director Ramyata Limbu. 🇳🇵

kimff

See the schedule at
<https://kimff.org/kimff-2026-schedule/>

Being human in a land of machines

Documentary explores Korea's work ethic with lived realities of Nepali workers

Shristi Karki

Nepal's history of rural-to-urban as well as international migration has been reflected in its music and poetry ever since Nepalis began to migrate, in dohori duets to folk music, the ballads of the Gandarva and songs of longing for home.

Nepalis have written poetry about the pain of separation, the struggle to assimilate in a new world, about Lahure soldiers fighting and dying in faraway lands, and workers toiling in मुरलान of British India.

Perhaps all Nepalis have the heart of poets. Or perhaps the desire to translate homesickness into art is universal.

In South Korea, Sunil Dipta, Dilip Bantawa, and Jiwan Khatri carry the tradition of Nepali migrants turning their lived realities to verse. Their poems, along with those of other Nepalis who are currently working or who have since returned from South Korea, was published as an anthology titled Yo Machineko Sahar Ho.

The anthology inspired director Kim Ok-young (pictured, far right) to film the 2025 documentary In the land of Machines, which tells the stories Nepali workers in South Korea and is being screened at KIMFF 2026.

Viewers are confronted with the stark contrast between the aesthetic, technological wonderland often reflected in popular media, and the realities that workers face every day.

Sunil works at a mushroom substrate factory, and is covered in dust from head to toe from mixing and packaging organic matter. During breaks, he carefully takes out his tightly plastic-wrapped phone from his



pocket to call his wife back home and his toddler daughter, whom he has never met.

When Dilip calls home, his daughter excitedly asks him if he knows BTS. Away from the glitter of cities where K-pop artists smile from digital billboards, Dilip looks after cattle in rural South Korea, and has become attached to the cows in his charge.

Jiwan is the senior-most Nepali worker at a sheet metal factory, but he has not forgotten his broadcaster roots in Nepal— he still reports on the Nepali diaspora in Korea, sending it back home.

SOLIDARITY THROUGH POETRY

Thousands of kilometres from home, Nepalis have found companionship, common ground, and solidarity through poetry, and meet when

they can in person or over video.

The stories of their lives in Korea serve as backdrops for their poems that document their experiences. Some of the most poignant ones are those about the initial indignity of trading diplomas earned in Nepal for farm animals, about lives now held within battered suitcases and tiny rooms, about the cruelty shown to foreigners by their employers.

The poems are interpreted in English and Korean on screen, but some of the impact and nuance of the words are lost in translation.

The documentary is also interspersed with Jiwan's reporting of Nepalis who have died while working in Korea: from accidents, by suicide, in their sleep.

Their experiences spotlight how South Korea's rapid post-war economic



development combined with the nation's particular hierarchal socio-culture has manifested into a work ethic defined by impassive, unyielding, relentless efficiency.

"Most Koreans think of foreigners like machines. They think we don't feel pain when they hit us. They don't see our spirits aching and crying," says a Nepali worker as a group of them meet at a restaurant.

But through their despair, the men attempt to rationalise the reality of the land they have come to depend upon.

"Without treating people like machines, they wouldn't have developed this far," one Nepali worker says matter-of-factly. "Although machines cause us pain, they also give us opportunities."

Which is why Jiwan, Dilip, Sunil, and their friends will show up for work another day, cogs in South Korea's economic engine. And in their small apartments, empty pages await, offering respite. 🇳🇵

In the Land of Machines
Directed by Kim Ok-young
92 min | South Korea / Nepal | 2025
28 May, 4pm



Events



KIMFF 2026

The 23rd edition of the Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival (KIMFF) will feature 50 films from across 29 countries. Reviews of select films on page 6-7. See the schedule at <https://kimff.org/kimff-2026-schedule/>
27-31 May, QFX Chhaya Center, Thamel

Achheta

The dramatic play Achheta written and directed by Govinda Sunar explores caste discrimination and societal neglect in Karnali. Catch a show.
Till June 8, 5:15pm, Shilpee Theatre, Battisputali

Craft and Connect

Learn the art of jewelry designing with Mohita Bhimseria, and connect with like-minded creatives.
May 23, 2pm-5pm, Rs3,500, La Terrasse, Maharajgunj



Doodling at Taragaon

Grab some chalk and let imagination run free on the pavements of Taragaon next. Doodling at Taragaon is open to people of all ages. Entry fees apply.
24 May, Taragaon Next, Boudha



Jitpur Shantidham Hike

Join Hike for Nepal's scenic 16km Jitpur-Shantidham hike this weekend.
23 May, 6:45am, Rs1,000-1,500, Brikuti Mandap, Kathmandu

Bird Watching

Be part of Bird Conservation Nepal's bird-watching day trip to Sundarikal this Saturday.
23 May, 7:30am, Sundarikal, Shivapuri Nagarjun National Park, 9849327473



Labim Bazar

Shop for fresh and baked goodies, agro products, thrift items, handicrafts and support local businesses.
Saturdays, 10am-4pm, Labim Mall, Pulchok



Music

Bob Dylan's Day

Join Phospenes and Kta Haru as they pay tribute to Bob Dylan and celebrate his 69-year old music career to amark the anniversary of his birth..
22 May, Rs400, Eden, Sanepa, Lalitpur

Electric Jatra

Take some friends and immerse in techno beats at this Friday-night rave. Featuring DJ DIBS, A.c.m.d, DJ Phuchhey and Niuzina.
22 May, 10pm onwards, The Bar Room, Thamel



Rock n Roll

Rock and roll with alternative/indie rock band Chumbak this Friday evening at Moksh.
22 May, 8pm, Rs500-750, Moksh, Jhamsikhel

Darbar Marg Street Fest

This edition of Darbar Marg street festival features eight bands and over 150 musicians, along with more than 70 stalls. Enjoy the day out with good food and great music.
23 May, 11am onwards, Darbar Marg, Kathmandu



The Last Ride

The Last Ride Band will be performing live at Hard Rock Cafe. Grab a drink and enjoy the music with loved ones.
23 May, Hard Rock Cafe, Darbar Marg



Getaway



Dhulikhel Lodge Resort

The lodge is nestled amidst the beautiful terraced hills of Dhulikhel. It has a rooftop as well as the Stupa Restaurant, where Nepali, Continental, Chinese and Indian food are served. Services offered include spa, excursion and lounge and bar.
Dhulikhel (11) 490114 / 9801002120

The Famous Farm

This three-storey boutique hotel west of Kathmandu is Nuwakot's best kept secret, rich in culture and history.
Kuwapani, Nuwakot, 9808882270

Hotel Barahi

Enjoy a great view of Phewa lake from rooms at Hotel Barahi. Don't miss the scrumptious pastries from the German Bakery on the hotel premises.
Lakeside, Pokhara (061) 460617



Hotel Country Villa

From the top of the Nagarkot hill, the hotel provides spectacular views of greenery, sunrise and sunset, and showcases the Himalaya on clear days. A natural and relaxing retreat for those wishing to escape the pandemonium of the city.
Nagarkot (01) 6680127/28

Park Village Resort

Park Village offers yoga, detox, and ayurveda treatment in a quiet corner of Kathmandu. Enjoy the services of Himalayan wellness centre- a one-stop centre to relax the mind and body.
Budhanilkanttha (01) 4370286



Dining

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

Fire and Ice

One of the first pizzerias in Kathmandu, Fire and Ice offers genuine Napolitana pizza and dozens of variants to choose from. Try the paesane, a combination of mozzarella, spinach, courgette and bacon.
Thamel (01) 4250210



Le Trio

The vintage-esque posters that line the walls and rustic wooden tables all give the impression that one has stepped into a 1960s Parisian café but the menu is very much local in taste. Try the Grilled Chicken Cheese Burger and the Jhol momo.
Jhamsikhel (01) 5521674

International Food Festival

Experience a wide range of global cuisines, all under a single roof. Enjoy delicious food accompanied by live performances.
23 May, 9:30am onwards, Rs150, Everest Hotel, Baneswor



Canova Cafe Coffee

This casual cafe not only serves good coffee but also a surprisingly light and flavourful masala dosa.
Maitidevi, 9801023759

Weekend Weather



FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
28° 18°	29° 18°	28° 17°	28° 17°	27° 18°

El Nino Effect

This may already be early signs of the warm Pacific Current which this year threatens to be the warmest ever. Scientists have forecast a late monsoon and deficient rainfall in South Asia. May continues to be wet despite this usually being the dry season. More unseasonal rain forecast for the weekend and beyond with the combined effect of westerlies plus convective storms.

Our Pick



Nepali filmmaker Abinash Bikram Shah's 2026 film *Elephants in the Fog* is set in a small Nepali village within a forest inhabited by wild elephants, and follows Pirati, the matriarch of the village's transgender community, who dreams of escaping with the man she loves. But when one of her daughters vanishes one day, she is torn between choosing to leave and the responsibility towards her child and her people. The film, which marks Shah's directorial debut, premiered at the 2026 Cannes Film Festival, and is nominated for its Caméra d'Or and the Queer Palm awards. Stars Pushpa Thing Lama, Deepika Yadav, Jasmine Bishwokarma, Aliz Ghimire and Dura Sanjay Kumar Gupta.

सामाजिक सञ्जाल प्रयोगमा सचेतता अपनाऔं

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



नेपाल सरकार
विज्ञापन बोर्ड

Rush hour traffic at 8,848m

Could extending the spring mountaineering season reduce record crowds on Mt Everest?

Vishad Raj Onta

As a record number of climbers head up Mt Everest this week, there have been calls in some quarters for Nepal to change strict cutoff date of 31 May for the spring climbing season.

The rules were made when long march-ins from the foothills were inconvenient when the monsoon set in. But with climate breakdown making monsoons more erratic, and better access to the base of mountains, it is not as compelling to set a date for the end of the spring climbing season.

The industry would also generate more revenue if mountaineering was open all year around instead of seemingly arbitrary closure dates in the spring and sometimes in the fall. There is proof that off-season summits are possible, if not on Everest right away, then at least on other lesser peaks.

Ultimately, the weather windows are rooted in nature. The monsoon is when the jet stream moves north to the Tibetan Plateau, allowing in moisture-laden winds in from the Bay of Bengal. Although there is more snow on mountains, there is almost no wind higher up from mid-June to end-September.

It may be time for the Nepal government and mountaineering industry to re-evaluate strict season demarcations — if only to reduce the spring rush on the world’s highest mountains.

Thursday and Friday could see some of the highest single-day summits since the previous record of 354 on 23 May, 2019.

After a record late start due to an ominous serac which slowed down rope-fixing on the Khumbu Ice Fall, climbers on Mt Everest are seizing narrow weather windows.

“Climbers were summiting in great numbers from 3AM in the morning to 2PM,” mountaineer Khim Lal Gautam told us on the phone from Base Camp “Due to the high numbers, there were some rescues and some developed snow blindness.”

Given to the volume of climbers and the rarity of friendly weather on the mountain, Everest has



QUEUING UP: Climbers line up on the fixed rope near the Geneva Spur on the way to Camp IV of Mt Everest this week.

PUERNIMA SHRESTHA



KAMI RITA SHERPA / FACEBOOK

Everest accounts for 85% of that. Of the 1,134 permits issued, the Chinese topped the list.

“Right now most expedition companies are dealing with crowd control, managing summits,” says Ben Ayers of Outside magazine. “Despite the delay at the start of the season, the vibe is pretty good. There is nothing that scary. While there were some drama and hiccups with the heavy lift drones and exiting the icefall, people are still getting what they came for, which is Everest summits and the

companies are delivering on it.”

This season also saw climbers attempt some unique feats. One of them is Bartek Ziemski, 31, from Poland, who summited Lhotse without bottled oxygen, ropes, or Sherpa support, then skied down to Base Camp, stopping at each camp only to retrieve his tent and gear.

Ziemski said that he just changed into his skis and headed

down from the summit, since he doesn’t enjoy lingering. Caught in a whiteout storm during the descent at the icefall, he waited 45 minutes and decided to resume. “I had skied there a few times already, so I knew my ski line and its location very well,” he said.

A week later, Ziemski repeated the feat — this time on Everest. His own forecasting told him that winds would be lowest at 2AM on 17 May. Weather had been rough a day ago, so other climbers held back, which gave Ziemski a relatively crowd-free climb up Everest.

After breaking briefly at Camp 4, Ziemski summited around 1PM. He skied down to Camp 4, packed up, and skied non-stop to Camp 1.

Earlier in the season, while the serac had delayed climbing, Ziemski helped a group of five Sherpas from different expeditions fix ladders and ropes to Camp 1.

As has been the norm, drones were used to send ropes to set up from above the ice fall to the summit. Helicopters also took ropes to Camp 1 as Sherpas rushed to fix ropes to the summit in time for the climbers, trying to catch up on a two-week delay.

However, there is pressure on the government to allow climbers in future to fly to Camp 1 by

helicopter, avoiding the precarious Khumbu Ice Fall, getting more dangerous by the season due to rising temperatures.

Meanwhile, Tenzing David Sherpa became one of just a handful people in the world to complete a rare Triple Crown achievement by summiting Everest, Lhotse (8,516m) and Nuptse (7,861m), all in the same season.

Other notable feats include Kami Rita Sherpa’s 32nd summit (pictured below), breaking his own record, and Lhakpa ‘Mountain Queen’ Sherpa’s 11th, a record for women. “There were so many people at Everest this year. Some people were incredibly skilled and others were very new to mountaineering,” said Kami Rita, who noted that the summit had now turned into “the face of a cobra” due to overhanging ice.

Bianca Adler, 18, became the youngest Australian to get to the top of Everest as her family watched from Base Camp, while 75-year-old Viorel ‘Wally’ Stirbu, a Romanian refugee then Chicago firefighter also reached the highest point in each of the seven continents.

OTHER MOUNTAINS

The Japanese trio of Masayuki Takenaka, Tatsuro Sugimoto, and Ryota Nomura did the first ascent of Jarkya Himal’s main peak (6,473m), near Manaslu, on 11 May.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian Alexandr Moroz and Russian Mark Ablovacky took on Manaslu, climbing without bottled oxygen, no guides, no fixed ropes, and even no base camp.

As a short weather window opened up, the two decided to scrap plans for an acclimatisation rotation, instead going for the summit. Ablovacky turned back at a point, while Moroz forged on, resting in the open at 7,450m, often climbing on large stretches of bare ice, before reaching the summit alone at 8AM on 28 April.

While Everest gets a climber gridlock, Manaslu, despite also being an 8,000er, only got two permits for the spring. Smart marketing and good logistics will get more commercial climbers to take a liking to Manaslu and other 8,000ers.

And extending the spring season could be a way of reducing rush hour traffic on the mountain. 🇨🇳

Experience Luxury

SILK Finish

Global energy crisis hits Nepali

But this could be the perfect opportunity to revive the country's successful biogas program

Saurav Dhakal

The price of cooking gas that Nepal imports from the Gulf countries via India has hit a record high, while the nation falters on its plans to install large-scale biogas plants.

Liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) prices have risen from Rs1,910 for a 14.2kg cylinder before the West Asia War to Rs2,010 today. The only reason it has not doubled like the price of petrol and aviation turbine fuel is government subsidy.

The spread of LPG even to the remotest areas has reduced pressure on forests for fuel, and improved pollution levels inside homes, but it comes at increased cost of imports. Nearly a quarter of Nepal's total import bill is for refined petroleum products from India, and the cost of LPG has risen most sharply in the past decade (chart).

Now, a study by Kathmandu University (KU) Renewable and Sustainable Energy Laboratory (RSEL) has found why Nepal's primary alternative — household and large-scale commercial biogas —



KUNDA DIXIT

Simply organic

Four farms in Dhulikhel redefine agriculture to lure Nepali youth back to the land

Alexandra Coltman
in Kavre

Just outside the Kathmandu Valley, past Dhulikhel, four farms are redefining agriculture. At a time of severe fertiliser crisis and resulting increase in the price of chemicals, the farms show that organic methods can be both practical and economical.

HASERA Permaculture Learning Center, Everything Organic, Okharbot Organic Farming, and Green Intelligence follow a system called permaculture that works in tandem with natural processes rather than relying on machinery or synthetic materials.

Rooted in reciprocity with our planet, permaculture encourages a model of farming that is not only sustainable but organic, benefiting both consumers and the land.

The four farms are vying to join the global lighthouse network which brings together 'exemplary farms and foodscapes from around the world that have found radical solutions to current sustainability challenges'.

Each farm not only practices permaculture but also creates individual models to connect agriculture with education and tourism.



HASERA Permaculture Learning Center

HASERA, established in 1992, not only runs a successful farm with a large variety of crops but also educates people in permaculture practices. The team has trained more than 26,000 farmers, the majority of whom are Nepali, across 23 districts.

Additionally, it has supported nearly 60 communities in obtaining Participatory Guarantee System Certification, which is Nepal's national standard for organic farming.

Says the general manager Bibek Dhital, "When local farmers see our model they realise that it makes sense and that this is something they can do."

These educational courses range anywhere from a few days to several weeks, hosting young students, tourism groups, and local farmers looking to learn more about organic farming.

They teach practices found at all four of the farms in this network including cross-cropping, natural alternatives to pesticides, and zero-waste practices of composting and recycling water.

These approaches are all designed to be not only completely self-sustaining but also affordable and accessible to all farmers.

Hasera has a guesthouse that can accommodate up to 25 guests.



Everything Organic

Founded in 2010 by American couple Judith and Jim Chase and now operated by Eco Himal, Everything Organic also combines agriculture, tourism, and education. It grows over 100 kinds of crops organically.

Everything Organic is also open to teaching bio-intensive farming methods. It employs locals and receives visitors from all over the world who learn about methods in deep digging,

water management, and recycling. It has trained over 210 farmers and given free courses to Peace Corps volunteers.

Rather than separating training from crop production, Everything Organic teaches through direct participation in the daily operations of their farm. It supplies produce to several organic markets in the city, demonstrating how permaculture oriented farming practices can generate income.

kitchens

is failing to deliver on its promise. A successful campaign in the 1980s spread household biogas to 400,000 homes, reducing firewood consumption, improving infant and maternal health and providing fertiliser for farms. But a recent survey found that only half the plants are still operational due to outmigration, a decrease in livestock and the spread of LPG.

WHITE ELEPHANTS

The KU research published in the *Journal of Cleaner Production* is about large scale biogas generation from urban waste, and warns that 18 such plants across Nepal risk becoming 'expensive monuments of planning failure'. With operational plants currently running at less than 30% of their designed capacity, the study highlights a critical gap between ambitious energy plans and ground-level implementation.

The survey showed that six commercial plants from Jhapa in the east to Kailali in the west were designed to be the backbone of Nepal's energy independence.

However, RSEL's audit shows that even the first plants are producing less gas than targeted not for technical reasons but because of bad management of feedstock and insufficient marketing of the methane gas produced.

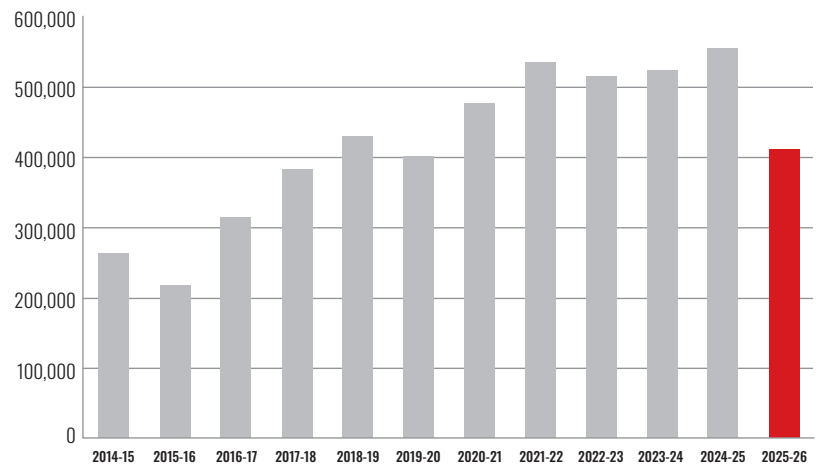
This raises fears that 12 more projects currently under construction may become white elephants too. The report says that Nepal's energy security is held hostage to cross-border supply chains and its large scale



commercial biogas plants are operating at less than a third of their capacity, becoming 'stranded assets' when they are needed most. As of April 2026, Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) is facing monthly losses of billions of rupees even with LPG cylinders now priced at Rs 2,010 and domestic fuel prices reaching historic peaks. The current supply disruption has led to panic buying and a shortage of nearly 30,000

cylinders daily. "Nepal cannot afford to keep importing energy while sitting on enormous untapped potential of organic waste," says Sunil Prasad Lohani, lead author of the study. "Large-scale biogas isn't just an environmental choice anymore. It is a survival strategy for our national economy. But right now, the gap between our high-flying designs and ground reality is a systemic failure."

Nepal LPG Imports-Annual Trend (Metric Tons)



The RSEL study provides the first rigorous empirical assessment of a flagship 4,000 cubic metre biogas facility. Despite World Bank financing and 40% government subsidies, the results are troubling. The plant produces only 700 cubic metres of biogas daily, against a design target of 2,500. This means the projected annual revenue of Rs102.9 million is just Rs18.6 million.

The effluent spent slurry from biogas plants makes organic fertiliser. This fertiliser would be a valuable alternative at a time when Nepal faces a critical shortage of chemical fertilisers due to the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz.

But the bio-fertiliser digestate output from the plants is at a mere 10% of its projected capacity. This raises serious concerns about the credibility of the projects' feasibility study and business plan, pointing to a systemic failure in planning.

The study identifies that the failure is not in the technology, but in the infrastructure of the market. There are currently no formal supply contracts for

feedstock of organic waste to fill the digester with, and no government-supported transport to move organic waste from cities and farms to the plants.

Mismanagement of feedstock and insufficient marketing of the methane gas produced often means that large-scale biogas plants like become ineffective.

Furthermore, despite the current fertiliser crisis—where urea prices jumped by \$100 per tonne in a single week—there are no awareness campaigns and pragmatic pathways to help Nepali farmers transition to the nutrient-rich organic slurry produced by these biogas plants.

KU researchers warn that Nepal is on track to build 12 more 'monuments of inefficiency' unless the government integrates biogas logistics into broader waste management and energy frameworks.

'Building the plant is only half the job,' the report concludes. 'The other 50% is building the market where we are failing currently, leaving our energy security in a state of high-priced dependency.' 🇳🇵



Okharbot Organic Farm

Okharbot Organic Farm, the largest of the four, spans three hectares with over 150 varieties of crops. It was founded by Dutch native John Hummel and places permaculture practices into a more holistic model.

Not only does it grow sustainably with a circular ecology zero-waste system, but it also harnesses solar energy, and produces dairy items. All of the buildings are eco-friendly. The luxury lodging is built from rammed earth and salvaged materials.

Hummel also works with Kathmandu University, bringing students from Nepal and the

Netherlands to teach the APPA method (Appreciative Participatory Planning and Action framework), encouraging a focus on community based sustainable tourism. He hosts groups of students and tourists for short term visits, farm to table meals, or longer term stay.

"There is so much opportunity for agriculture and tourism to impact and engage with communities and surrounding landscapes to promote sustainable development," says Hummel, who is on a mission to show young people that there is a future in agriculture in Nepal.



Green Intelligence

Green Intelligence is the newest farm in this lighthouse network, staking roots in Nepal in 2022. Founded and directed by Dutch man Matthijs van Rijn, it focuses on agroforestry and practices carbon trading on an international stage.

Green Intelligence works with 150 local farmers who each have a minimum of 0.1 hectares. It brings them to a training farm past Dhulikhel free of cost to teach how to organically plant and grow fruit trees and other cash crops.

When the crops are harvested, Green Organic sells part of them in local organic spaces and the rest to buyers in the Netherlands, in the form of ground ginger or cardamom.

Eight percent of these profits go directly back to the farmers.

Trees are tagged with QR codes for easy tracking and the amount of carbon it has absorbed, resulting in a future carbon reward for farmers. Its goal is to use organic practices to benefit farmers who reduce their carbon footprint.

Lead farmer Bijay Gautam is a young man from Dhulikhel who spent several years abroad. He returned to Nepal to build a future in agriculture.

He says, "Our goal is to use organic practices to benefit farmers who reduce their carbon footprint and in turn uplift the community economically."

A SHARED MODEL

Beyond their commitment to organic farming and permaculture, the farms exemplify how agriculture can be linked to other sectors.

Farming today is not just limited to modern machinery and chemicals. All four farms are nearly completely self-sustaining. By combining local knowledge, training, and diverse streams of income, they have proven that working with nature does not require sacrificing economic opportunity. The work is especially important to promote farming at a time of youth outmigration.

Says Dhital: "We are not alone in this journey towards organic farming. There are enough people in Nepal who believe in this." 🇳🇵



Naturally, from the top of the world

Belgium's first organic-certified skincare brand sources its ingredients from the Nepal Himalaya

Sonia Awale

When Walter De Boeck was trekking in Nepal with his daughter Anke (pictured), they were overawed by the sheer diversity of rare plants with remarkable medicinal and cosmetic properties. An idea took root.

Anke, a lawyer, had always wanted to leave the corporate world and strike off on her own with her friend Isabel, whose sensitive skin made her an expert in natural skincare.

For his part, Walter has over 30 years of experience in botanical extracts, as well as an extensive network in Nepal from the time he first visited in the 1980s. So, why not a skincare company that develops all natural and organic products from the Himalaya?

After much behind the scenes work that involved sourcing raw ingredients from Nepal, getting an extract and analysing it in a lab in Europe, integrating it into products and quality control, CÎME (pronounced 'sim' and means 'peak' in French) was launched in 2012.

"The idea was to use the Himalayan plants, local knowledge and work together with partners in Nepal to combine it with modern, cutting-edge science in Europe to create organically certified products," explains Anke.

But organic products were not as popular back then, not even in Europe, so Anke and Isabel had to do significant groundwork to take CÎME from the lab to the



CÎME

market. Finally, CÎME became the first organically certified skincare company in Belgium.

It uses a range of medicinal and aromatic plants, but one of the key ingredients is the Himalayan edelweiss which grows above 3,000m, and has an inbuilt mechanism to adapt to harsh conditions at that altitude. "It is full of antioxidants and has skin rejuvenating properties. When we analysed the extracts, we found it to be much more potent than its European variety," says Walter.

THE NEPAL OF IT ALL
CÎME has also faced its share of bureaucratic hassles in Nepal and difficulties in registering a cultivation plot — so it has to

contend with a collection permit. The Department of Plant Resources publishes a list of herbs that can be cultivated for export purposes. If not on the list, the plant has to be collected in the wild.

Cultivation permits are tangled in bureaucratic red tape and bribes that take months for importers to receive their product, says Walter whose company uses soap nuts to make value-added products by making an extract in Nepal.

Most shampoo and soaps contain petroleum-based sulfates, cleaning

agents that remove oil and dirt but also strip hair and skin of their natural protective layer. Soap nut is a natural alternative which does the job harmlessly.



CÎME with local partner Satya International and the Dutch brand Seepje have planted nearly 5,500 soap nut trees across 11 sites in the Karnali province. Every year between October to February, villagers collect ripe soap nuts, separate the shells to dry and process them into concentrated powder to be exported to Belgium.

Villagers involved in the process, most of them

women, are guaranteed a fair wage, adding to their regular income. Because a part of the production process takes place in Nepal and the extract is more compact to transport than the shells, the company is also reducing its ecological footprint.

The company also makes essential oil out of wintergreen that grows all over Nepal, and have several small distilleries in Dolpo to process the aromatic shrub.

CÎME also supports local schools in Humla from where the dhatelo shrub is sourced. The plant is rich in omega fatty acid and locally used as cooking oil, it also has cosmetic uses as a moisturiser and to repair damaged hair.

"After fashion, the beauty industry is one of the most polluting in the world, because of microplastics, hormone disruptors, and we wanted to change it all," says Anke.

That is how the Honestly Aging line came about, which uses the butter tree (chiuri) from Nepal. CÎME champions its mantra that commits to 'caring, not correcting'. "We don't call our products anti-aging, we help women age gracefully by supporting their skin in the best way possible."

The first year of its launch, CÎME had a turnover of €100,000, and is now a €1.4 million business.

Says Walter, "Big brands put a lot of emphasis on marketing and that's a big part of the expense. We rather put those resources into ingredients."

A limited stock of CÎME Skincare products can be found in Nepal at Himalayan Biotrade shop in Darbar Marg. 🇳🇵

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