



RANJAN KUMAR DAHAL

The Balen Doctrine

Shristi Karki

This photograph of Chinese and Indian registered vehicles alongside a Nepali motorcyclist this week on a bumpy stretch of the highway named after Nepal's founding king Prithvi Narayan Shah is symbolic of the state of the country's foreign policy.

In a significant departure from his famous unwillingness to greet international envoys, Prime Minister Balendra Shah on Tuesday met collectively with a delegation of ambassadors and diplomats from

the EU and other countries.

Given his reclusiveness, the guests were made to feel honoured and lucky. He had earlier refused to meet US president's special emissary in charge of South and Central Asia Sergio Gor, as well as Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and British Minister for the Indo-Pacific Seema Malhotra.

While some diplomats privately said they were underwhelmed by the meeting during which the prime minister spoke for four minutes, the optics was meant for the domestic gallery where it was played like the international community was paying homage to

Nepal's enigmatic leader.

Speaking with the press on Tuesday following their meeting, the ambassadors said they were all "very honoured to be granted an audience" with the prime minister.

Swedish Ambassador Jan Thesleff was diplomatic: "We had a two-hour session, one of the first such meetings with foreign diplomats, which was interesting. For us, representing the EU altogether, the meeting was a vote of confidence in the relationship, which we want to build on."

But other sources present told

us the prime minister did not use the chance to lay out Nepal's new foreign policy strategy. The government has said Nepal does not want to be treated just as a buffer state anymore, and wants to carve out a new identity as a vibrant, forward-looking nation.

The PM's insistence on only meeting one-on-one with foreign leaders of similar rank has played well with domestic supporters, but alienated many in the international community who say such aloof protocol is counterproductive for one of Asia's poorest nations.

BIG BROTHERS

Some foreign partners with little geostrategic interest in Nepal say the prime minister's base may admire him for not kowtowing like his predecessors, but they worry it is not going down well in Washington, New Delhi and Beijing. "There is no changing the fact that we are a small state that needs foreign investment and support," says Vijay Kant Karna of the Center for Social Innovation and Foreign Policy (CESIF). "So, when the PM backs out of meeting foreign envoys, it is Nepal's loss, not the US, China, or India's."

Although they did not voice it publicly, some EU diplomats saw a contradiction between the prime minister's assertion that he was working for the welfare of the "common people", and his actions including mass evictions of urban poor and the Rs100 tax threshold at the Indian border.

In the run-up to the March polls, the RSP campaigned on implementing 'development diplomacy' to steer the country toward economic partnerships with India, China, and other countries through no-strings-attached aid and more foreign investment.

But it will be difficult to achieve this and the ambitious targets of 7% annual growth and a \$100 billion economy, without continued diplomatic engagement especially as Nepal wants to defer LDC graduation by three years.

Most diplomats Nepali Times spoke to wanted to give the RSP government a chance to prove itself with transformative change through new policies and a budget to back it. But they say the signs so far are not good: for example, the arrest of corporate heads while at the same time trying to attract investment.

"I could see that the prime minister and his cabinet are very adamant in reaching their goals," said Dutch ambassador Marisa Gerards. "We are all waiting for the budget because that will give us a lot more information on actually how he will reach these goals."

Photo-op
diplomacy
PAGE 4

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Spring is no longer spring

Rethinking water, weather and development in Nepal to respond to climate breakdown



GUEST COMMENT

Ngamindra Dahal

For the past two months, many parts of Nepal recorded rainfall nearly every day. Monthly precipitation in April was three times average.

Although there is the seasonal heatwave in the Tarai, the mountains have remained unusually cool and wet. This pattern appears likely to continue until the monsoon fully sets in. What may feel like a pleasant break from heat and dust for many, is actually a reminder that Nepal's seasonal rhythms are changing in ways we are only beginning to understand.

There have been visible benefits. Forest fires are not as bad. Pre-monsoon showers have helped clear dust and pollution from the air. Springs in the mid-hills are flowing again. Higher elevations have received fresh snowfall, offering temporary relief to fragile mountain ecosystems.

Yet the same rains have also exposed vulnerabilities. Farmers who prepared for a drier spring have suffered crop losses from excess moisture and disrupted planting schedules. Construction projects have slowed as roads became difficult to access and transport systems unreliable. Along the BP Highway, repeated landslides and flooding have already caused disruption.

Nepal's pre-monsoon season is becoming



AMIT MACHAMASI / NT ARCHIVE

increasingly unpredictable. For generations, people planned farming, water use and infrastructure around relatively stable seasonal expectations. Climate change is not only increasing temperatures, it is also reshaping the timing, intensity and behaviour of rainfall.

EARLY WARNING

This demands a different way of thinking about water, weather and development. First, Nepal urgently needs stronger localised weather information and early warning systems. Farmers can no longer rely only on traditional calendars when deciding what to plant or when to harvest. Construction companies, transport operators and local governments also need timely forecasts to reduce losses and improve planning.

Springs have either dried up or declined in nearly three-quarters of surveyed areas in Nepal. Road construction, changing land use, erratic rainfall and other human pressures have all contributed. Protecting these sources requires sustained investment in watershed conservation, recharge ponds, soil moisture retention and community-led spring management.

Second, Nepal must stop treating water as an isolated sector. Every road, every town expansion, every agricultural investment and every business activity affects water systems in one way or another — either by altering recharge areas, increasing extraction or polluting sources.

Public investment therefore needs to place water security at the centre of planning, regardless of sector. Too often, development programmes operate in silos: one office builds roads, another manages irrigation, another handles drinking water, while none adequately protect the catchments and recharge zones that sustain all three. The result is fragmented development and growing water stress. Integrated planning is no longer optional. It is essential.

Third, Nepal must rethink its growing dependence on aquifers. In the Tarai, groundwater extraction for irrigation has

expanded rapidly as surface water systems become less reliable. Pumping water creates deeper long-term risks if recharge systems are neglected. The irony is that Nepal receives enormous volumes of rainfall every year, yet much of it is lost quickly through runoff, erosion and poorly planned landscapes.

Reviving ponds, protecting livestock watering holes, conserving open land and reducing concretisation are critical climate adaptation measures. Rainwater harvesting and groundwater recharge must become part of mainstream development practice.

I am writing this from the hills of Sindhuli, where I have been travelling with the Muhan Mission — a collaboration among Nepali and Australian researchers, local governments, and communities working to revive drying spring sources.

Sindhuli's lessons are relevant far beyond one district. This year's unusual pre-monsoon rains reflects a broader transition towards more uncertain and uneven climate behaviour — where benefits and disasters can arrive together. Nepal cannot prevent these global climatic shifts alone. But it can prepare.

That preparation begins with treating springs, watersheds and local water systems as the foundation of national resilience.

The future of agriculture, energy, public health, infrastructure and local livelihoods all depend on how seriously Nepal's new government and others to follow respond to these early warning signs from a changing climate. 🇳🇵

Ngamindra Dahal is a hydrometeorologist with the Nepal Water Conservation Foundation.

Trending Online



Simply organic

by Alexandra Coltman
Four farms in Kavre are redefining agriculture at a time of severe fertiliser crisis and resulting increase in the price of chemicals, and show that organic methods can be both practical and economical. Read the story at nepalitimes.com

f Most reached and shared on Facebook

Junko Tabei comes back to life

by Miki Upreti
Junko Tabei's biopic Climbing for Life captures the spirit of the 1975 Japanese Women's Everest Expedition, which has now been overshadowed by the commercialisation of the mountaineering. Read the review on our website.

X Most popular on X

Nepali Army's viral vibe video

by Nobel Rimal
Nepali Army's new recruitment video Ranger is more than a institutional rap experiment. It shows that the military understands the current internet: before young people believe an institution, they have to feel that it has a place in their world. Read analysis on page 6-7.

66 Most commented



Rush hour traffic at 8,848m

by Vishad Raj Onta
A record number of climbers on Mt Everest last week, have intensified calls in some quarters for Nepal to change strict cutoff date of 31 May for the spring climbing season. Go online to read the story.

🔥 Most visited online page

Letters

INDIA DIGITAL REVOLT

The difference between organic digital discontent/outrage and manufactured cognitive distortion is just a few lines of code that runs the algorithm ('Cockroach digital revolt in India', Binod Dhungel, page 6-7). With zero oversight or audit of the western digital giants' algorithm - we must question the rise of CJP. Perception manipulation is not an esoteric notion - it is a time-tested playbook.

Zakir Kibria

NEPALI ARMY

An employment rate of more than 20% and a constantly dumbscrolling population makes anything viral ('Nepal Army's viral vibe video', Nobel Rimal, page 6-7), but the ground reality and priorities must be made clear. Our defence sector

requires vast reforms. The armed forces is the heart of our country.

Vabissa B Magar

■ It is a recruitment video. Many armies around the world have them to attract young recruits.

Ar Sb Bikram

■ Why waste money on extra foot soldiers when Nepal will never be at war?

Ankush Sharma

EVEREST TRAFFIC

Nepal must control access to Everest and encourage diversification of peaks to summit ('Rush hour traffic at 8,848m', Vishad Raj Onta, #1312)

David Seddon

BIOGAS

Electricity is more reasonable than biogas. Invest in the grid and hydropower ('Global

energy crisis hits Nepal's kitchens', Saurav Dhakal, #1312). Also, one should use solar for lights and have two separate wiring in the house, since running an induction stove on solar is still impossible.

Dmitry Schiptsov

ACCIDENTS

For safe vehicular travel, the government, with the support of all stakeholders, must address these issues: high speed, overtaking in an improper place, bad condition of roads and vehicles, rough driving, single driver for driving long distances, and driving under the influence ('Another bus plunges off the road', Arnav Upadhyay, #1311).

Naba Raj Tiwari

■ Road accidents have become the most serious yet least prioritised problem. Traffic rules, safer roads, drivers' responsibility -- these could save many lives.

Sushil Rijal

■ Unless bus company owners start to feel the consequences of their actions (poor management of vehicles, lose hiring standards, etc) nothing will change, especially since most of the time the drivers end up dead.

Michelle Bostick

■ Stricter traffic rules, driver training, proper roads, drivers with civics and common sense, respect for other drivers will go towards improving road safety.

Chandana Gurung Bhandari

■ Learning to drive safely also helps. Judging by the behaviour of many young drivers, it seems as if they think they are in a 'Formula One' race.

Bishwa Limbu

■ Recklessness, carelessness, and fatalism are the real causes.

Jan Petersen

Online Package



BISHNU'S FARM

Bishnu Pandey wanted to go abroad just like other men from his neighbourhood. He then had a change of heart, and imported Boer goats to start his own business. Watch video on our YouTube channel.



CYCLE OF LIFE

Over 1,200 women in Patan have learnt cycling as part of an lokak women's initiative that became active during the Covid-19 lockdown in 2021. Subscribe for multimedia content.

1,000 Words



SOCIAL MEDIA

AUGUST HOUSE: The new Parliament building is nearing completion and expected to fully open in August. Speaker D P Aryal and Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle inspected the hall, but the design was criticised for not reflecting Nepali culture, and some said the blue represented the RSP's party colour.

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ALL PHOTOS: PMO

PHOTO-OP DIPLOMACY

Nepal seeks to establish a firmer spot on the world stage

Sudiksha Tuladhar

From the founding of the Nepali state by Prithvi Narayan Shah till recently, Nepal's foreign policy has been guided by the doctrine of equidistance between its two giant neighbours.

It has been a difficult balancing act, but Prime Minister Balendra Shah's standoffish diplomacy may be having the unintended consequence of pushing New Delhi and Beijing to share a common concern about Nepal's new government.

The ruling RSP has said it does not want Nepal to be treated as a buffer state anymore, but it was this status that gave the country a degree of geopolitical stability over the past decades. India and China may be rivals, but they have enough

on their plates, and do not want any unpredictable surprises along their Himalayan borderlands.

Beijing's interest in Nepal mainly concerns the activities of Free Tibet activists, especially in a future post-Dalai Lama scenario. It accepts that Nepal is in India's sphere of influence, but does not want the Americans and Europeans to be too active here. New Delhi on the other hand would like to see a pliant government in Kathmandu that understands its concerns on security and river sharing.

When India welcomed the new government and invited Prime Minister Shah for his first foreign visit, it was seen as a chance for New Delhi to reboot relations, and understand him better. But not only has Shah refused to give the time of day to Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, he has irritated Delhi by reviving the

Limpjadhura claim and taxing Nepalis along the border.

The nationalism card plays well in Nepal, so the prime minister is branding himself as someone who can stand up to the neighbours and global powers. Says Akhilesh Upadhyay at the Institute for Integrated Development Studies (IIDS): "Designated ministers have been meeting with foreign delegates even if the Prime Minister isn't. We must welcome this new way of governance."

He adds, "Previous governments issued statements on the Lipulekh dispute through the press, the current leadership has used the Foreign Ministry to commit to resolving territorial disputes through diplomatic channels, which is a positive move."

But other experts question how Nepal's leadership expects to settle this territorial dispute through diplomatic channels when

the prime minister is personally unwilling to engage in any diplomacy with India at all. It looks like his reclusiveness has begun to rattle members of his own RSP party.

RIFTS WITHIN

While RSP Chair Rabi Lamichhane, Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle and Foreign Minister Shishir Khanal have not voiced their concerns publicly, they are said to be increasingly frustrated with the PMO's interference in the running of the party and their ministries.

The only RSP member not mincing his words is MP Amresh Kumar Singh, who came out swinging this week against what he said was the prime minister's authoritarian tendencies and disregard for democratic norms. With his past proximity to the Indian leadership, Singh's words may reflect some of New Delhi's

frustration as well.

China has been wary of the involvement of what it sees as the involvement of the Free-Tibet activists in the September protests, and suspicions of former Home Minister Sudan Gurung's ties to them. The kerfuffle this week about a leaked audio allegedly of a Chinese attempt to bribe Kishor Shrestha of Jana Aastha weekly for exposes on Gurung and businessmen appears to have been a sloppy attempt to drag China into the fray.

In a rare statement, Chinese Ambassador Zhang Maoming rejected the allegations: "We strongly condemn such acts of deliberate denigration of China ... China has always been adhering to the principle of non-interference in other countries' internal affairs, has been consistently and firmly supporting Nepal's efforts in safeguarding its national independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity... Let reason and wisdom put an end to rumors."

Meanwhile, the US seems to be seeking another attempt at diplomatic engagement with Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy Sara B Rogers arriving for a three day visit to Nepal on 30 May. It remains to be seen if the PM will be willing to meet Rogers.

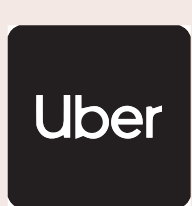
RSP party chair Rabi Lamichhane is set to visit India next month, where he is expected to meet with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Although not officially announced, some view it as a chance for the RSP and the BJP to size each other up on a party-to-party level.

Experts warn that the head of government's continued refusal to participate in diplomatic processes could harm Nepal's international standing, ultimately impacting development partnerships and aid, as well as FDI.

"Nepal's international standing has always been a sore spot for our leadership and has bred a feeling of inferiority in political leaders, we are seeing the same thing happen now with the prime minister," says political analyst Indra Adhikari. "But it is in the national interest for the PM to meet foreign delegates regardless of their rank – we are not in the position to be selective." 🇳🇵

BRIEFS

Uber in Kathmandu



Uber is set to officially launch in Kathmandu on 1 June, with both bike and car options available. Some 1,000 drivers have already registered via Uber's driver app. The entry of the international ride hailing app adds to inDrive and Pathao in Nepal.



Umbrella Green Tax

The Finance Ministry is consolidating environmental and infrastructure fees into a single green tax in the budget on Friday. Currently, the separate charges include a Rs 1.50/l pollution fee on fuel, Re 1/l green tax, road construction duties of 5–10%, and road maintenance charges of Rs 4/l on petrol and Rs 2/l on diesel.

The budget also wants industries and banks to deposit CSR funds into a government-designated account for priority sectors. FNCCI oppose this, arguing that the centralised fund could be misused. The law requires firms to allocate at least 1% of net profit to CSR.

Nepal-Korea

Nepal's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the South Korean Embassy co-hosted a seminar in Kathmandu on regional integration in South Asia. Participants discussed cooperation in energy, transport, connectivity, and sustainable development. South Korea has held SAARC observer status since 2006 and engages in trade, infrastructure, and supply chain initiatives in the region.

NTB + UNDP

Nepal Tourism Board and UNDP held a discussion on a five-year international marketing strategy for sustainable tourism, covering 2026–2030 after consultation with 135 stakeholders. The plan aims to shift from volume-based to value-based tourism with a coordinated marketing strategy, especially for promoting new destinations.

MoFA Mitra app

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched its MoFA Mitra app to let Nepalis abroad submit complaints and assistance requests about labour, disputes, emergencies, repatriation. Previously, complaints went through the Department of Consular Services before reaching embassies, causing delays.



Ncell Lit Fest

The second Himalayan Literature Festival and Writers' Workshop runs 29 May–5 June in Kathmandu, in collaboration with Ncell Foundation. The eight-day program is themed healing, memory, and cultural dialogue. Participants from Ireland, India, Austria, Poland, and the US are attending.



Sipradi boats

Sipradi donated boats, life jackets, paddles, helmets, and chain saws to the District Police Office in Sunsari to help with rescue efforts during floods and other disasters as the monsoon approaches.

Luggage tag system

A luggage tag system will be enforced on long-distance public transport from Kathmandu Valley starting 29 May. Baggage will be tagged at boarding and matched at the destination before release, aiming to curb theft and mix-ups.



Samsung Savings

Samsung Nepal's Saving Days campaign 21 May–19 July offers discounts of up to 23% on washing machines and 17% on refrigerators. 24-month EMIs start at Rs1,370/month for washing machines and Rs1,408/month for refrigerators. Customers can also exchange old appliances through Samsung's ArkoStore service.

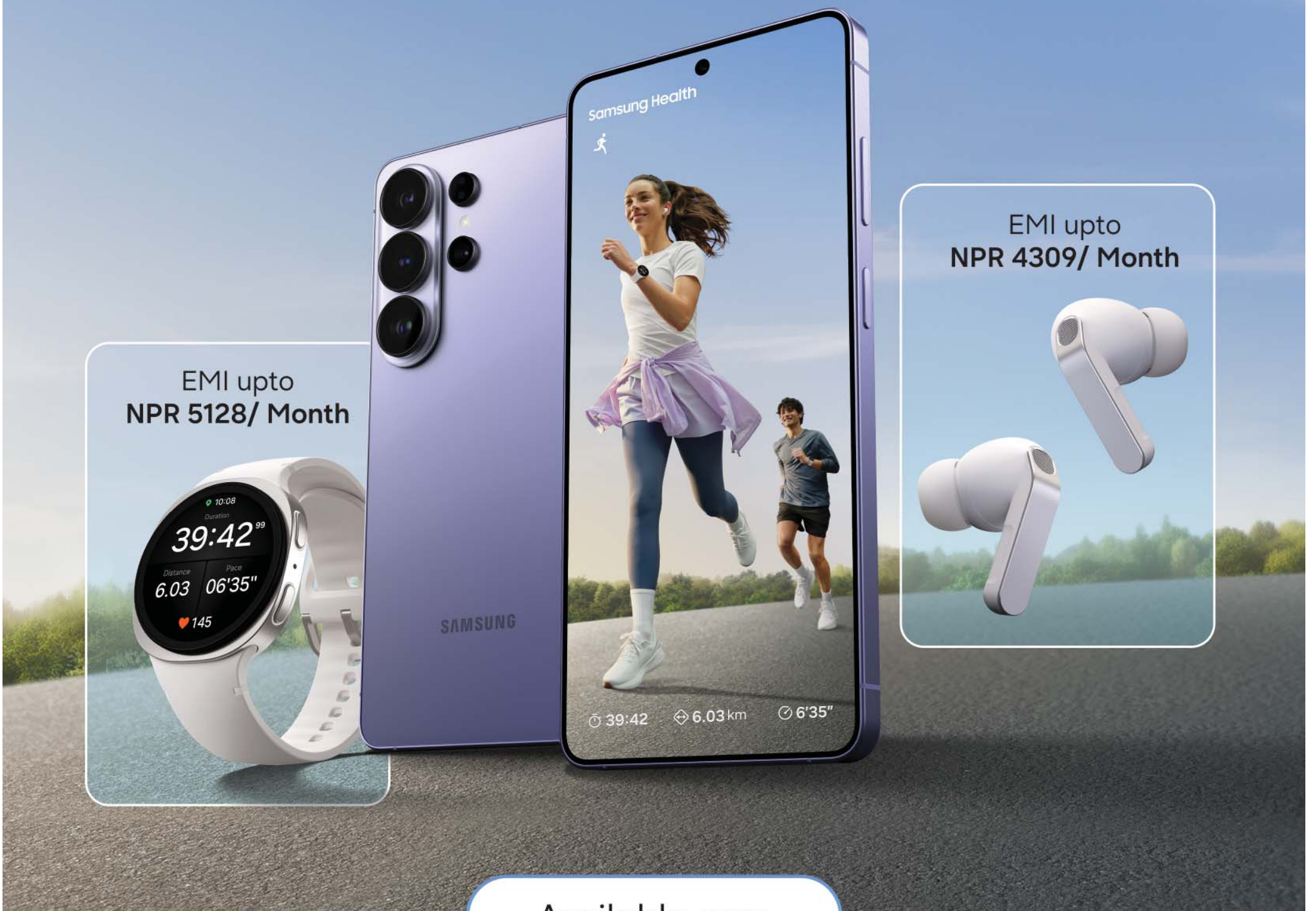


Ather Birtamod

Ather opened its 11th Experience Center in Birtamod on 24 May showcasing the Ather 450 series and family Ather Rizta series e scooters. Opening offers such as including 0% financing and exchange bonuses run until 31 May.

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NEPALI ARMY'S VIRAL VIBE VIDEO

Nobel Rimal

The film *Ranger* begins with force. Soldiers crawl through mud, run through obstacle courses, carry weapons, move in formation, and stare into the camera with the tight jaws expected of military men.

Rap carries histories of street voice, ego, humour, anger, and suspicion toward authority. In Nepal, Balen made that energy politically electric before making it electoral. Rap usually sounds best when it refuses to stand in line.

It is noteworthy that the Nepali Army releases a rap video called *Ranger* making the rebellious flow of rap report for disciplined duty. The first thing to notice about *Ranger* is that emotion precedes the message. With the first line: “उमेर नि १८ भो, रेडी छु म लड्नुलाई, सेनामा जाने हो कि, मर्छु कि मारनलाई।” The video wants the Army to feel young, physical, disciplined, dangerous, and most of all current. Aura intact.

IDGAF

One TikTok commenter caught the mood neatly: ‘Haith kada, purai des hiphop vai sakyo’. The joke works because the format still feels slightly absurd. Aura is what older theorists would call social capital: the accumulated recognition that makes people, symbols and institutions feel legitimate before they explain themselves.

In older Nepal, institutions built this through uniforms, office buildings, ceremonies, family names, medals, newspapers, and proximity to the state. For young people who grew up online, aura is built differently. It comes from being current, unbothered, visually fluent, and slightly above explanation.



An IDGAF attitude feels like authenticity because it suggests that a person or institution does not need to beg for approval. This also helps explain the appeal of the prime minister walking out of Parliament and posting a casual photo with the caption ‘Say cheese’.

The Nepali Army’s decision to make a rap

video belongs to the same world of perception. It is trying to build aura with current vibes: rap flow, hard edits, combat imagery, physical confidence, and the feeling that discipline can still look cool on a phone screen. And these vibes are what can get young Nepalis to enlist at a time when recruitment into the Army is falling as young men migrate.

The Nepal Police and Nepali Army are finally capturing GenZ attention. An 18-year-old watching this video is probably not comparing military communications strategy. He is lying on a bed after dinner. The phone is open. The thumb is moving. Within a few minutes, the feed has already shown him several versions of adulthood.

Cockroach digital revolt

The online spread of the Cockroach Janta Party in India is a warning to populists in South Asia

Binod Dhungel

Over the past few years, Nepali politics has been swept by a digital ‘youth wave’ as a reaction to established parties’ inertia, the crushing despair of unemployment, and a fierce desire for change. Any change.

Meanwhile, in the past weeks India has been swept by a digital tsunami of the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP), triggered by a fusion of similar youth anger and algorithms. The state has reacted by banning its handles and site.

On 15 May, India’s Chief Justice Surya Kant referred to young people as “cockroaches and parasites”. The remarks immediately exploded into an online satirical movement. The CJP’s Instagram account amassed 20 million followers before it was blocked — overtaking even the official handle of the ruling BJP.

NEO-POPULISTS

Abhijit Dipke, a 30-year-old political communication strategist and a postgraduate student at Boston University, decided to weaponise this insult. Using AI tools, he built a website, a Google Form, and a satirical manifesto, naming it the Cockroach Janta Party. He has received death threats.

“A cockroach lives only where there is filth and a rotten system, and this system has plenty of it,” Dipke said.

Looking at the wave of support for figures like rapper Balen Shah or other neo-populist forces in Nepal, one also finds a glaring void in their political ideology, economic vision,

and roadmap for governance.

They talk of ‘change’ and ‘clean-up’, but remain silent on the fundamental structure of the state. CJP appears strikingly different and ideologically mature by comparison. The party has articulated its position on serious and complex issues, like socialism, secularism, and social justice, with remarkable clarity and conviction.

The CJP’s foundational agenda targets the judiciary by demanding a strict, complete ban on appointing retired judges, specifically Chief Justices, to political or public offices. This proposal directly attacks the systemic practice of granting post-retirement rewards.

To secure democratic integrity, the CJP calls for the absolute protection of citizen voting rights across all states. It demands a 50% reservation for women in Parliament and Cabinet positions instead of the standard 33%.

The CJP also targets corporate monopolies over India’s national news by calling for the complete cancellation of broadcasting licenses held by mega-conglomerates like Ambani and Adani to make space for independent journalism. To eliminate biased ‘Godi Media’, it demands that the bank accounts of hyper-partisan, pro-government news anchors be probed.

This meme-based digital political movement may sound like satire, but represents a serious desire for change. Young people have taken to the streets in cockroach costumes, joining clean-up drives and public demonstrations, saying: “If we

are cockroaches, then it is we who must clean up this filth.”

Pro-government commentators in India have dismissed parallels to similar youth-driven movements that toppled governments in Sri Lanka (2022), Bangladesh (2024) and Nepal (2025), saying Indian youth are “too busy with exams”.

Abhijit Dipke once handled social media for India’s Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), and he posted on X: ‘Many journalists have been asking me whether this GenZ movement will turn into what happened in Nepal or Bangladesh. Let me make this absolutely clear. Do not insult or underestimate the GenZ of India by making such comparisons. The youth of this country are far more mature, aware, and politically conscious than many give them credit for.’

In a rebuke of the violence in Nepal and Bangladesh that drew outrage from Nepal’s GenZ, he added: ‘They understand their constitutional rights and will express their dissent through peaceful and democratic means. And please, do not demean them.’

The new forces that were elected after Nepal’s Gen-Z movement praise the youth and condemn the massacre of 8 September outside Parliament. But they have remained largely silent about the human cost of the arson and mayhem of 9 September. Dipke was critical of precisely this tendency.

Many of the issues being

pushed by the CJP in India are already being addressed in Nepal by Prime Minister Balendra Shah’s RSP. But judicial accountability is especially relevant because of his recent move to change voting rules to install his own chief justice.

A new intellectual class in Nepal dismisses critics of the RSP as pseudo-intellectual status-quoists. They promote a new narrative in the public sphere that excuses excesses of the new government.

But the government’s supporters show similar behaviour to prove their loyalty to the prime minister. There are people with traditional establishment views in the new party, just as there are populists in the old parties.



Under a rapper prime minister who is also defence minister, military builds aura in recruitment drive



NEPALI ARMY / YOUTUBE

A cousin in Australia posing in a puffer jacket. A friend in Dubai filming the skyline after work. A student in Japan showing a clean room, a rice cooker, and a part-time job. A Gulf worker on a construction site, sweaty and tired, but still earning more than he could at home. Each one carries the same message: if you leave

the country, you become someone.

Then Ranger appears. The video gives a different answer to the same private status anxiety. The body can be trained and the cool uniform can make you visible. Army brotherhood can replace the loneliness of migration and discipline can give shape to a life that otherwise feels suspended between family pressure, exam results, visa forms, and weak local job prospects.

GAMING GRAMMAR

This is why the rap video has to look cool. A normal recruitment notice cannot compete with the abroad feed. It has no chance against a cousin in Sydney or a friend in Qatar posting pictures of skyscrapers and the car they are driving. Ranger understands that the Army has to compete at the level of desire, not information.

For a young Nepali person surrounded by exit routes, this vibe definitely has resonant emotional pull. All the video needs is to establish the initial feeling: this life has aura too.

For a long time, the Nepali Army's public image has been built through parades, disaster rescue, peacekeeping, state ceremonies, and recruitment notices. These carry authority, but they do not travel easily through youth culture. They rarely become jokes, edits, reactions or group-chat material.

The video understands the first rule of short-form attention: show the body before explaining the idea. That is how a 'vibe' or an 'aura' is constructed. This matters because the recruit is not being sold comfort, but a harder kind of dignity — that difficulty can be meaningful. It does help that our rapper prime minister is also defence minister in charge of the army, and as home minister, of the police.

The video does that through repetition. The song also leans into simple, sticky repetition. 'Ranger' and 'danger' are paired again and again, making the identity of the unit sound like a threat and a rhyme at the same time.

Then comes the gaming grammar. Around the 1:32 mark, the video shifts into a POV-style shot. The viewer is no longer watching soldiers from a distance. For a second, the camera feels playable. Anyone raised on PUBG, Free Fire, combat edits,



kill-cam clips, and squad gameplay will recognise the visual language immediately.

Here, the young potential recruit enters the game, or reality. (Is there even a difference anymore?) That shot is small, but it does a lot of work. It makes the Army feel closer to a game world young people already understand. Weapons, terrain, movement, command, survival, team identity. These are already familiar pleasures on a phone screen.

The comments easily slip into gaming weapon talk. One viewer wrote, 'अब SLR change गरेर AK आउनु पर्यो नेपालमा. Jay Nepal'. It reads like an insider joke, but it shows how naturally the video's combat aesthetic meets gaming and gun culture online.

The Army does not try to sound soft or friendly. Yet it still makes obedience look spectacular. The editing helps. The cuts are quick enough to feel current, but the images still return to order: bodies lined up, bodies moving together, bodies under command. Even the chaos is organised.

Mud, weapons, helicopters, shouting, and movement all point back to one promise — if your life feels scattered, this institution can give it a shape. Ranger works because it does not sound like a government notice.

The rap video changes the route. It gives the Army a cultural surface that can be shared without feeling like official propaganda, and it reflects the times we

are in. Someone can laugh at it, admire it, mock it, repost it, but all those reactions still keeps the Army inside the feed.

One line seems to have landed with viewers: 'उमेर नि १८ भो, रेडी छु म लड्नलाई, सेनामा जाने हो कि, मर्नु कि मर्नलाई।' A YouTube commenter singled out 'मर्नु कि मर्नु' as 'epic'. The line turns death and killing into a desired career option.

Military power feels different when it becomes cool content, especially paired with the already existing shooter game universe that young men are already familiar with. A muddy training montage can turn obedience into self-improvement. The viewer is invited to admire the body, the unit, the weapon, the stare, the ability to endure pain without complaint.

That is exactly what a recruitment video is supposed to do. Still, the cultural form matters. Rap gives the Army borrowed youth legitimacy. Gaming language gives it familiar combat pleasure. Patriotism gives it emotional cover. The result is highly watchable, and that is why it needs to be read carefully.

Coolness can soften scrutiny. Once an institution has aura, people judge it first by feeling: was it cringe, was it fire, did it look current? Accountability enters later, if it enters at all. This is why Balen's political auramaxxing works so well. A walkout from Parliament becomes a flex before it becomes a question about conduct.

Ranger is more than a funny institutional rap experiment. It shows that the Nepali Army under a prime minister who is also defence minister now understands a basic rule of the current internet: before young people believe an institution, they have to feel that it has a place in their world. The Army is trying to earn that place through rap, spectacle and physical intensity.

For the 18-year-old scrolling in bed, the message is simple: your contributions can help the country, your body can matter. Your confusion can be turned into discipline. Your invisibility can be replaced by uniform. That is a powerful promise. It is also a promise made by an institution built on hierarchy and command. ■

in India

The new generation of young Nepalis who voted for the RSP because they were fed up with the old parties will not wait much longer for results. This generation is impatient, and can use the same social media platforms that brought the populists to power to bring them down with another digital wave.

Nepal's populist leaders and their defenders may harbour the illusion that the monopoly on digital power, the ability to understand social media algorithms and exploit them for political gain, belongs to them alone. That critics can easily be trolled into silence.

But the unexpected and unprecedented rise of India's 'cockroaches' proves that the internet and technology are not the exclusive preserve of Balendra Shah or Narendra Modi. Digital technology moves at a pace that is both dynamic and merciless, it can forget its old heroes in an instant and give birth to new, even more aggressive voices.

The same generation that showered Balen Shah with Facebook likes and TikTok shares and carried him to power can deploy even sharper satirical digital weapons against him. If populists do not perform, the virality of the internet will bring them down.

If populists rely merely on algorithms and fail to address structural problems, another digital wave can sweep them away. Nepal's new rulers rose on the foundation of youth outrage, they must engage sincerely with society and understand the true character of internet-driven revolt. ■

Binod Dhungel is the Nepal Correspondent for Reporters Without Borders (RSF)



MODI and BALEN

The rise of the Cockroach party in India has spotlighted two populist figures: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Nepal's Prime Minister Balendra Shah.

In terms of style, there are clear differences. Modi is twice Shah's age, and although he avoids journalists, he can speak aggressively and fluently in forums of his own choosing. The Balen brand is built entirely on silence. He communicates not through speeches but through sharp, targeted social media posts.

Yet there are also striking similarities between them. Both are well-groomed and dress immaculately, building their own wardrobe brands. They have a shared contempt for the mass media and bypass it to communicate

directly with their audiences one-way.

Both have cultivated an image of being ruthless and action-oriented. Neither really minds being called authoritarian, and both bulldoze over laws and systems.

"The opposition and the young protesters knew very well that the old order had to end and that its fall was inevitable — but they had no concrete blueprint for what should come on the day after," Czech democratic leader Vaclav Havel once said.

This is the dilemma facing Balendra Shah and his RSP, India's BJP and other rebellious youth movements across South Asia. They have removed bad actors, but what is the plan to run the country once the old order is swept away?

SUBCONTINENTAL SPREAD

CJP's support has been propelled by internet memes, AI-generated tools, and Instagram Reels much in the same way as young people have attempted to shake established power by riding social media platforms, each with its own story of success and failure.

Nepal: Facebook and TikTok became mainstream channels for building an alternative political wave in Nepal. But the most strategic and clandestine communication took place on Discord where 20,000 young people crafted the movement's strategy and trolling guidelines without the traditional media even noticing. This managed to shake the old parties, but the wave has yet to produce an institutional blueprint for nation-building.

Bangladesh: Young people steered the movement through Facebook groups, WhatsApp, and the encrypted messaging app Signal. When the government shut down the internet, they resorted to offline mesh-networking technology. While they succeeded in toppling Sheikh Hasina's 15-year rule, the movement appeared to fail in managing the political instability, attacks on minorities, and anarchy that followed.

Sri Lanka: 'Aragalaya' means 'struggle' in Sinhala. In 2022, Sri Lankan youth suffering from a severe economic crisis used X and TikTok with the hashtag #GotaGoHome. Through crowdsourcing, they digitally mapped crisis locations using Google Maps and eventually stormed the Presidential Secretariat, forcing the ruler to flee the country. But the revolution

could not be institutionalised, the country ultimately returned to the hands of the same old political elite.



Pakistan: When the military establishment and

the government moved against former Prime Minister Imran Khan, Pakistan's youth launched a counteroffensive through X Spaces, TikTok, and YouTube via AI-generated virtual rallies. In the general elections, they achieved what was seen as the greatest digital success in history, winning seats for Khan's independent candidates while he remained behind bars. However, the military's crackdown and legal entanglements prevented them from changing the country's power equation.



Maldives: Young people used Facebook and X to drive ultra-

nationalist and geopolitical sentiment. The #IndiaOut campaign brought a change of government, but when that same government became mired in debt and economic recession, it confirmed that the youth were political pawns.



Bhutan: Commenting on CJP's rise in India,

Bhutan journalist resettled in the United States, posted on Facebook: 'In Bhutan too, educated young people are dreaming of leaving the country due to lack of employment and rising costs, which is dangerous for any nation. Stability alone is not enough; without opportunity, frustration is born. Leaders must respect the intelligence of young people, otherwise this satirical revolt will turn into a serious one.'



Events

Knitting Workshop

Learn the art of knitting and make new friends. All materials will be provided.

29 May-2 June, Rs5,999, 4pm-6pm, Manjari The House of Arts, Patan

Paubha Masterclass

Interested in devotional art and want to hone the skill? This 15-day paubha masterclass is for you. Participants will be mentored by Narendra Malla.

7-23 June, 7:30-9:30pm, The Drawing Room, Gyanmandala, 9841954000



Indoor Sports

Join to play pickleball with music, food and shopping. Attend 'BoxFest' in the evening and vibe with like minded people.

29 May, 2-10pm, BoxArena, Bhatbhateni, Naxal

Flea Market

Explore local artisanal crafts, handmade products, and pre-loved collections alongside live food stations. Visit with family and make your weekend eventful.

30 May, 11am-6pm, Sanskar Fine Dine, Bakhundole



Area 13 Market

Bored of the same farmer's market every week? Visit Area 13 Market and enjoy live music, food stalls, shopping from local businesses, games and more. They also have a night market every Wednesday.

Every Saturday, 2pm-8pm, Area 13, Chhauni

Tote bag Workshop

Make your own tote bags, with your choice of colours, creativity and imagination. make something that is uniquely yours.

30 May, Rs500, 3pm, Masta Kala Store, Sanepa



Dining



Kaiser Cafe

A quaint restaurant and an attentive service hidden in the corner of Garden of Dreams. Enjoy fine dining after a relaxing walk around the serene garden.

Thamel (01) 4525340



Music



Ekaya Live

Catch Ekaya band perform live at Ason this Saturday. Go with friends and family and enjoy good music in the heart of the city.

6 June, Ason Tole

Nepali Folk Music

Indulge in a guided walk and experience the culture and music embedded within. Led by Paamila Kapali, the tour incorporates a visit to the Music Museum of Nepal. DM @duluwaoutdoors on Instagram for details.

31 May, Rs1,000, 1pm-3:30pm, Teku

Gazal Night

Slow down your weekend with ghazals and rhythms that touch your soul. Enjoy with good food and company.

30 May, 7pm onwards, Banmanche, Uttar Dhoka

Bikki Gurung Live

Join Bikki Gurung in his homecoming tour. Get ready for an unforgettable evening filled with music and soulful vibes.

6 June, Rs1,299-Rs9,995, 5pm onwards, Club Nova, Thamel



Rhythm Festival

Catch popular artists Purna Rai and DajuBhaiharu, Ujan Shakya, Achal and Amicus, and Pratikshya perform live.

30 May, Rs700-Rs2,000, 11am onwards, Sallaghari Ground, Bhaktapur



Getaway

Tiger Mountain Pokhara

Designed with bricks, rustic accents and woody undertones, private rooms are tucked away in greenery while the common buildings are located on decks overlooking the Annapurna range.

Kandani Danda, Pokhara (01) 4720580



Chhaimale Village Resort

Adorned with pear trees, the Resort is an ideal destination for anyone seeking to escape the madness of Kathmandu.

Chhaimale, 9860676495



Grand Norling

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

Gokarna (01) 4910193

Maruni Sanctuary Lodge

Chitwan National Park is home to a wide range of flora and fauna. Get a peek from the comfort of the cabins and cottages at this lodge.

Sauraha (01) 4700632

Milla Guesthouse

A quaint stay that combines both the old and the new, Milla Guesthouse is the perfect getaway for people who don't want to get way too far from the city.

Bhaktapur, 9851024137



Sam's One Tree Cafe

This cafe has appeared on many social media posts and stories lately. Customers rave about the eatery's lively atmosphere, tempting sizzlers and quick service.

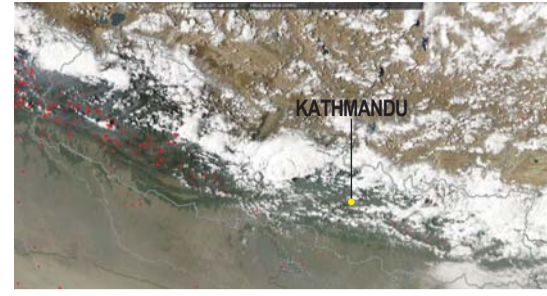
Darbar Marg (01) 5343610

Aloft BOGO

Enjoy the Buy One Get One Free Dinner Buffet for two at Nook all through this month.

Till 31 May, Rs3,500 (beer package) / Rs3,000 (soft beverage package), 6:30pm-10:30pm, Aloft Kathmandu Thamel

Weekend Weather



Warm Rain

The Tarai is baking at 40°C and super-heated air is rising along the foothills, creating massive storm cells. This trend is expected to continue in the coming days with moderate to heavy thunder showers on Friday and Saturday. Things will get drier next week, but the humidity level will be high. The rain leaves dusty stains on cars because it is washing down sand from dust storms in the Indian desert. The air is still smoky because there are extensive wildfires in Garhwal in India and far-western Nepal.

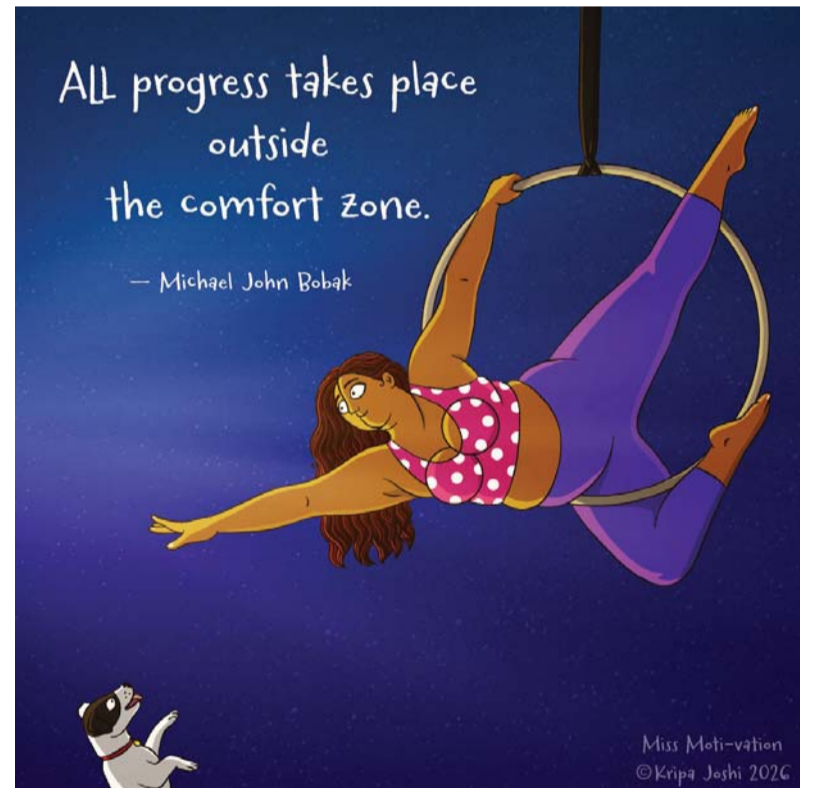


Our Pick

Remarkably Bright Creatures is based on the 2022 novel by Shelby Van Pelt and follows elderly widow Tova Sullivan who forms unlikely but life-changing bonds working nights at a small-town aquarium. She first takes to Marcellus the octopus, who longs to escape from aquarium, and then Cameron Cassmore, an adrift young man hired to replace Tova while she recuperates from an accident. Stars Sally Field, Lewis Pullman, Joan Chen, Kathy Baker, Beth Grant, Sofia Black-D'Elia, and Colm Meaney, with Alfred Molina as the voice of Marcellus the octopus.

MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



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 नपराँ ।
- 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

Platter to plate, and palate

New cookbook of Nepali-international fusion cuisine is a feast for the taste buds



Rohini 'Dolly' Rana's third book on culinary art, *Memories on a Platter: My Fusion Cookbook*, adds to the kitchen shelf another rich gastronomic hardback.

If this was Hollywood, the book could be called *Nepal Cook Book - 3*, a sequel to Rana's first two that take foodies through Nepali cuisine that is as diverse as its ethnic richness, and an exploration of her Indian ancestry infused with Rana recipes (*The Rana Cookbook: Recipes from the Palaces of Nepal*). Both books have received mouth-watering reviews in this paper.

Memories on a Platter should not be confused with another book on Nigerian recipes of the same name. It is about combining the flavours, aromas and tastes of Nepali food with those from Rana's own childhood in India with the menus she sampled from across the world where her husband, former Army Chief Gaurav Rana, was posted.

As with Rohini Rana's previous recipe books, this is not just about the food but delves into the traditions, cultures, families, clans, kitchens, chefs that make them possible. In that respect, this book is almost a sociological study into the history and geography of foods.

In the timescale of human migrations, all food are actually fusion. Ingredients, preparation methods, presentation styles have all blended when people have moved. In the past, when transportation was difficult the outer perimeter of this influence would be defined by how far people travelled, and how often.

Today, with global connectivity

and communication, distances have narrowed. Mobility makes the melting of diverse cuisines possible. As the numbers and frequency of foreigners travelling to Nepal and Nepalis visiting other countries grows, a foray into fusion was long overdue.

TESTED, TASTED

The danger with some fusion foods is that they lack the authenticity of the original item and not quite attain the impact of what it is being fused with. There is no danger of that with the recipes Rohini Rana has experimented with, tested, tasted and vetted before including

them in her book.

"I have assimilated all the beautiful experiences of my life and travels and recreated original recipes as well as fashioned fusion ones," says Rana, whose main food taster was her husband, who quipped at the recent launch of the book in Kathmandu: "Being a guinea pig for Dolly's creations contributed to my girth."

An example of how food can be improvised is Rohini Rana turning the humble original Samosa and combining it with the Sambousa of Türkiye, the meaty Sambousek from Lebanon. Same with Rana's experiments with Gol Gappa,

stuffing them with scrambled eggs and smoked salmon.

Even reading this has a Pavlov effect on the saliva. Take the Chola Bhatara, Papad, or Pakora from north India, fusing Japanese tempura with Indian edible flowers, Nepali Ferns (niuro) into Edamame.

The book modifies Momo by wrapping pork dumplings into cabbage leaves. No carbs! Rana says getting on in years has prompted her to design recipes for peers that are light, nutritiously balanced and healthy.

And those were just the starters. The middle section


of the book gets into the main courses where we find exotica like Quinoa Pulao and Idli Hamburger, Buckwheat Crêpe, and Mutton Gravy with Scones.

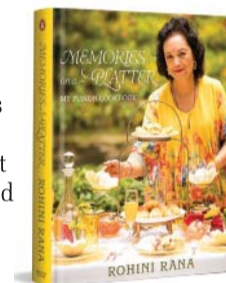
And no book inspired by Rana cuisine can be complete without a wild boar dish. Rana's previous books describe the traditional braised boar dipped in timur pepper, but here she turns them into a Grilled Steak with Sichuan Pepper.

Rana has taken pains not to get too carried away with her experiments, and has ensured that the flavours fuse in harmony to suit the modern palate.

The desserts are so tempting that readers with borderline diabetes may get a spike just looking at the pictures. Food photography is notoriously difficult, but Rohini Rana has collaborated with one of Nepal's best, Mannsi Agrawal.

Can't wait to try the khir with alu bakhada sauce, which sounds much more sophisticated in the book: Rice Pudding with Plum Coulis.

Writes Indian restaurateur Suvir Saran in the Foreword: 'Rohini Rana shares more than recipes. She shares memory made edible, and love made visible. Read it slowly. Cook from it generously. Some books feed you for a night. This one teaches you how to feed others for a lifetime.'  Kunda Dixit



Memories on a Platter
Penguin Random House India, 2026
290 pages, Hardcover
₹2,499

Double Bonanza

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Data & Call



HIMALAYAN JAVA
COFFEE
Serving Nepali Coffee Since 1999

With **Super Value Pack**
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Back temporarily in a new Nepal

Being home after two years erases the struggle, pain and separation of the past



DIASPORA
DIARIES 93

This is the 93rd episode of *Diaspora Diaries*, a *Nepali Times* series in collaboration with Migration Lab.

Hari Prakash Chandara

Since I went to work in Malaysia, my economic situation has improved. I no longer have to worry about supporting my family from day to day. With my savings, I can plan for the future.

I am back on vacation in a new Nepal for two months. Being reunited with the family and sharing my experiences of the past two years is exciting. It does not take a lot to be happy back home, just stepping on Nepali soil is so precious.

I talked to my daughters every day while away. They kept asking me when I was coming back, and I would tell them soon.

Soon is now here. I have gifts, including a doll for my youngest daughter. It isn't a surprise because she chose it virtually on video call while I was shopping. It is the kind of doll whose shoes come off.



New trilingual photo book bridges geographical and cultural gaps between Nepal and Portugal

Sonia Awale

कठिन पाईलाहरू (Hard Steps) is a trilingual book that shows the figurative and literal hardships faced by Nepali migrant workers in Portugal.

This picture book of Portuguese photographer Nelson Miranda's work features text in Portuguese, Nepali and English, illustrating everyday scenes from the land the workers left, and the country where they now toil.

The hard steps are cemented street side portals of homes in Kathmandu that have narrow ramps for motorcycles — something we see here everyday but do not even notice. And then there are scenes of greenhouses and factories where Nepalis work hard to support families back home.

"After a few weeks in Nepal, I began to look differently at the steps leading to many of the houses," says Miranda. "I was immediately drawn to their shapes, colours, and textures, which were incredibly varied and aesthetically very powerful."

He was fascinated by the variety: some steep, some narrow, some serrated so motorcycle tyres did not slip, and saw them as a metaphor for the many difficulties

Nepali men and women face during the migration process.

"I started to see these steps as the visual body of the work and as images accompanying the testimonies I collected in Nepal," says Miranda about the 73 photographs taken in Kathmandu and Odemira in southern Portugal in 2020-23.

The unique design of the coffee table book by Atelier d'Alves does justice to the subject matter so the reader experiences the hardships with every turn of the page.

There are now over 23,000 Nepalis in Portugal, making it the 10th biggest migrant nationality in the country. Until a decade ago, footballer Cristiano Ronaldo was the only Portuguese connection for most Nepalis, writes journalist Bhrikuti Rai in her chapter.

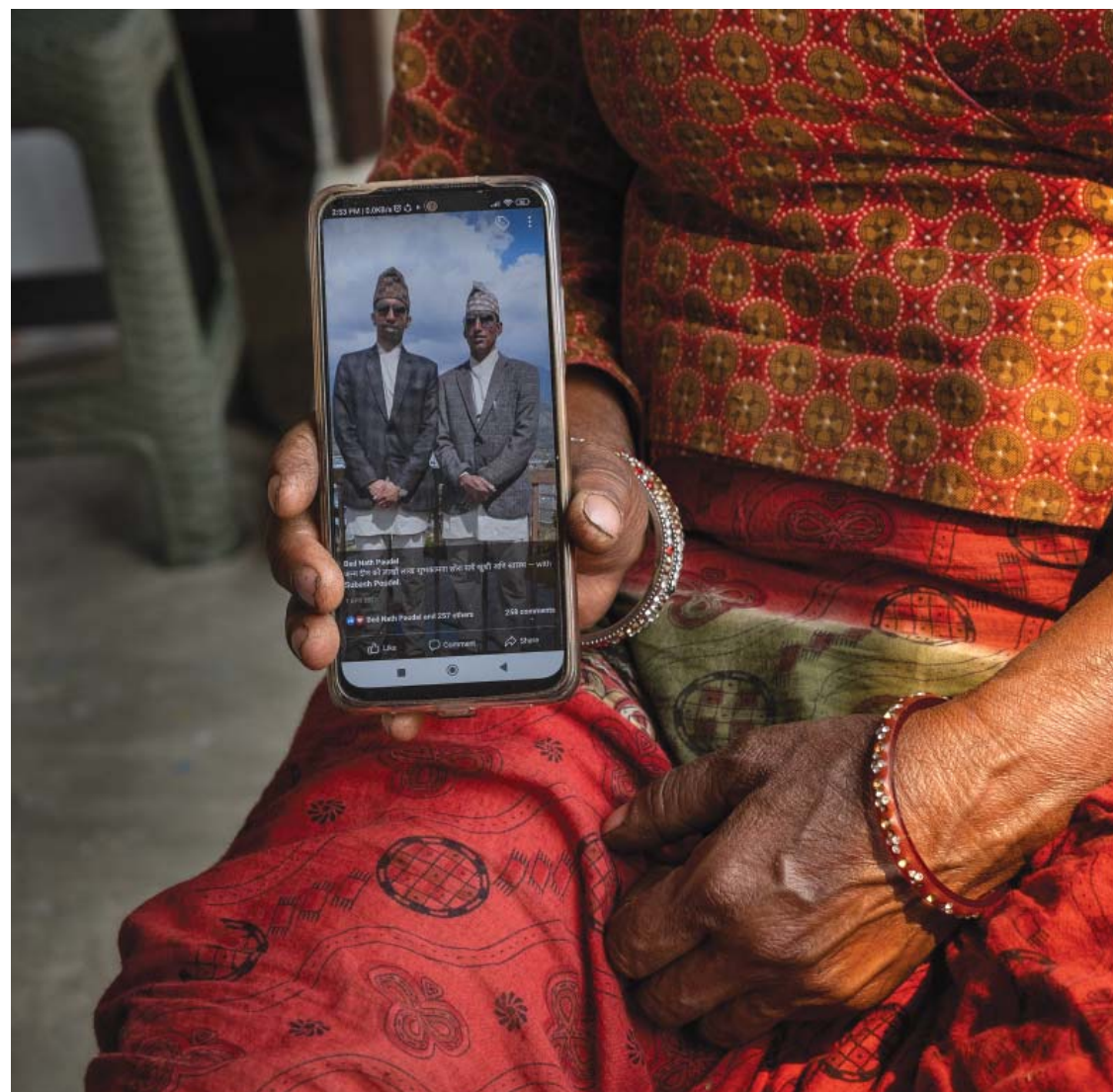
Nepalis liked Portugal because of more relaxed immigration rules that provided pathways to permanent residence or citizenship, the mild weather, as well as jobs in the country's service industry.

Many Nepalis live in Odemira, one of the most sparsely populated areas of the country due to the outmigration of young people to the cities. Portugal encouraged migrant workers of Nepali, Indian, and South Asian backgrounds to fill the labour shortage in the region's berry farms.

Several pages toward the middle of the book are dedicated to select headlines from the Nepali and Portuguese press on migration issues. There is also a 12-page insert titled 'Dreaming of Arrival,' containing testimonies from the workers' families and one returnee. The pages are designed like a broadsheet newspaper with 11pt Arial typeface and black-and-white images.

"When I started the project in 2020, we were all in Covid lockdown. Media reports became extremely important for the research and for understanding the recent phenomenon of Nepali migration to Portugal," explains Miranda. "In fact, the articles published in Nepali Times were

Soil that smells



particularly important in this process, especially the *Diaspora Diaries* series." (Above)

He adds, "Since journalistic articles were so important to the development of this work, it also seemed essential to include headlines from both Portuguese and Nepali newspapers,

revealing the perspectives of the country of origin and the destination countries."

The testimonies reveal that the cost of living in Portugal is high for the average Nepali worker, and earnings are lower than other European countries. Yet, Nepalis bear the hardship in the hope that they will obtain

Knowing my father's struggle, I took up family responsibilities from a young age. My father ensured his seven children got a good education, though he never studied himself. I followed his example.

From age 10, I accompanied my family on month-long treks up to Dolpo every spring in search of yarsagumba. Schools would close during the picking season. I made Rs20,000 on my very first trip. That was the first time ever I was paid for work. With my sister and father, we made Rs90,000.

We walked for a week just to get to the mountains, carrying clothes and food to last us a month. I had sore feet, and could not walk fast. We spent nights in caves or under the open sky. The higher we went, the colder it got. It was difficult to breathe.

We crawled on all fours on steep slopes looking for yarsagumba sticking out of the grass. We were thrilled when we found some good specimens. That meant money.

BETTER VERSED

On days when we did not find any in the snow, we would be crestfallen. Until I was 20, we went every year to pick yarsagumba. As I grew older, every caterpillar I picked was sold for cash to support the family and pay for the education of my siblings.

That was reason enough to endure the hardship. The journeys got shorter as time went on because we could take a jeep to drop us off nearer to Dolpo. For the rest of the year, I focused on my studies. Education was just so we would not be cheated.

At 20, I got married and this added responsibilities. I went to India with my father to pick



Homecoming, 11 May 2026

आफ्नै जन्मभूमि फर्केको छु, मन आज र माएको छ

*I have returned to my homeland, my heart is full
विदेशी पीडाको भारी बिस्तारै हराएको छ
The pain of being away is fading*

परदेशको तातो घामले धेरै पसिना भायो
I sweated it out in the hot sun
आफ्नो माटो छोएपछि मनले शीतल पाएको छ

Now, the soil of home comforts me

आँगनभरिको हँसोले थकाइ सबै बिसांयो
Familiar laughter makes me forget fatigue

दुई वर्षको दूरी आज प्रेमले मेटाएको छ
Love has replaced two years of separation

म आज आफ्नै देशको काखमा रमाएको छु
I am nestled in the lap my own country

जन्मभूमिको सुगन्धले जीवन नै महकाएको छ
The fragrance of my motherland lifts my life

apples in Shimla, then to Punjab. I started out as a labourer but was transferred to accounts because I could read and write. After six months, we travelled to Assam, but the pandemic hit and we ran out of savings. We told our boss, we would rather die in Nepal, and he arranged for us to return.

Back home in Jajarkot, I taught in a primary school. The pay was low and irregular, so we started a small restaurant on the side. But it did not do well. Nothing seemed to work out. Frustrated, I got a passport so I could support my parents, wife and two daughters.

I liked writing poetry since I was 16, pouring out my feelings in ghazals, muktaks or shayaris. I wrote for my friends who had love interests they wanted to impress.

I never saved what I wrote, not realising how important it was. I find comfort in words. With a notebook and pen, I let it all out so my heart feels lighter. I write when I feel tired, sad, or even happy. Sometimes I write in my mind, crafting the words at work, while herding livestock, or chatting with friends, and jot them down later.

I am in my own world. I don't talk much unless it is necessary. Perhaps that is why there are a lot of words that have accumulated inside of me that erupt in writing.

I was in Surkhet with my brother when the 2023 earthquake shook Jajarkot, killing many people. I was unable to connect with my family and feared the worst. I wished I had been with them

because what was the point of being alive on my own? But they finally called and said they were safe although the house was damaged.

When I went to Malaysia to work in a latex glove factory, I left my family in a temporary shelter. Two years later, we have a small house built with my overseas earnings. My wife is now working in Qatar, so we can afford to send the children to boarding school. With two of us working, there is less pressure on me. One of us takes care of household expenses, and the other saves. If we had not migrated for work, it would have been a struggle.

I don't write as much poetry when abroad. We work long hours and after that we just rest or prepare for the next day. The hand that

held a pen now holds gloves in a Malaysian factory. Even keeping in touch with my family takes time because everyone is scattered: parents are back home, daughters in a hostel and wife in Qatar.

I share a dorm room with many others, and this is not conducive to writing. People are doing their own thing: sleeping, chatting, Tiktok, preparing for their shifts. I struggle to keep my mind free.

Back home in Jajarkot, it is a creative environment with mountain scenery, the air is crisp, birds are chirping. The mind is free to wander. You close your eyes and get lost in your thoughts. Rooted in my own land, I become an observer of the world, taking everything in. 🇳🇵

different from home



more than €10,000 to reach Portugal find it difficult to repay loans back home in Nepal.

Most families discuss the chronic lack of jobs and governance failures in Nepal, but one returnee (Binod from Pokhara) says he did not like Portugal and that even young Portuguese are migrating to other parts of Europe.

When we read Lhamo's story, we understand what 'hard steps' really mean. Her husband was working in Portugal but died shortly after being diagnosed with cancer. She is doing odd jobs in Lisbon and hopes to bring her young son over. But her husband had not done documentation properly, and the plan faces difficulties.

Portugal is not a permanent home for many of these Nepalis even after they secure Portuguese citizenship because with an EU passport, many move on to wealthier, better-paying Denmark or Belgium.

Anti-immigrant sentiment is affecting electoral politics in Europe, where many citizens do not realise the contribution that migrant workers make to the local economy, writes sociologist Pedro Góis in his chapter.

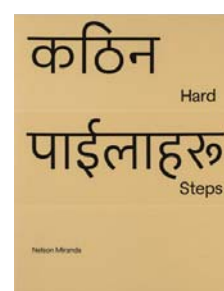
He notes: 'Nepalis in Portugal are still strangers to us ... Nepalis live in our neighbourhoods, work in our factories, hotels

and fields but our social worlds rarely meet.'

He concludes that the answer lies in communication, and that the journey of discovery has to be two-way: 'We lose nothing with the arrival of new citizens; we win in every aspect – economic, social, demographic, political and genetic. True inclusion is not just about allowing immigrants to live and work in our country but about creating conditions for them to thrive, share their experiences and contribute to building a better society.'

The project and the book intend to do just that. It is Miranda's tribute to migrants and migration. He adds: 'In the historical moment in which it is published, it also seems to have become an act of resistance against the "new" anti-migration policies that unfortunately appear to be spreading across Portugal and other European countries.'

The double spread photographs of Nepali families back home holding photographs or phones with pictures of their relatives in Portugal are poignant. The images are interspersed with more evocative photos of marble temple steps, cemented home steps, and broken sidewalk steps. All hard steps. 🇳🇵



कठिन पाईलाहरू (Hard Steps)
Nelson Miranda
Pierrot le Fou, 2025
176 pages, 73 photographs (+12 pages, 8 photos in the newspaper insert)
24 x 32 cm
ISBN: 978-989-36059-2-9



'Dreaming of Arrival'

The book closes with close photographs of a girl drying red mud which she is spreading out with her hands. They tie directly to the poem 'Dreaming of Arrival', penned by Nepali author Manjushree Thapa:

'The soil here smells different from home.
*Where is the red soil, that soft scent.
The continents go on drifting underfoot.
Still you move. Holding onto precious relics.*

A photograph of the ones you love most.

...
*But the present cannot contain the past.
The person you were is gone,
You are a stranger now.
Still – on faith, on a whim, on a dare,
taking
a risk – you've left the home of the past
In search of the home of the future.
Dreaming.*

...
*That one day in the cool shade of a tree
You will be able to rest.
And say: All those years ago, I left.
And maybe now. I have arrived.
You move and keep moving,
dreaming of arrival.'*

long-term residency in the country — which is now getting harder.

Immigration laws are being tightened and applicants need to secure a job before entering Portugal. Those arriving recently are no longer certain about getting a residence permit. Nepali migrant workers who paid



An artist's dotted universe

Exhibition of neo-impressionist paintings in pointillism style portrays the joys and sacrifices of parenthood

Vishad Raj Onta

In the exhibition *Witnesses of the Inner World*, artist Min Thapa explores the theme of parental sacrifice in 21 works in the neo-impressionist pointillism style.

Drawing on his own experiences Thapa paints in vibrant dots parents who navigate obstacles while maintaining careful balance, to create a carefree childhood for their superhero kids to dream in. Thapa draws inspiration from his own observations of his parents, and his own as a father.

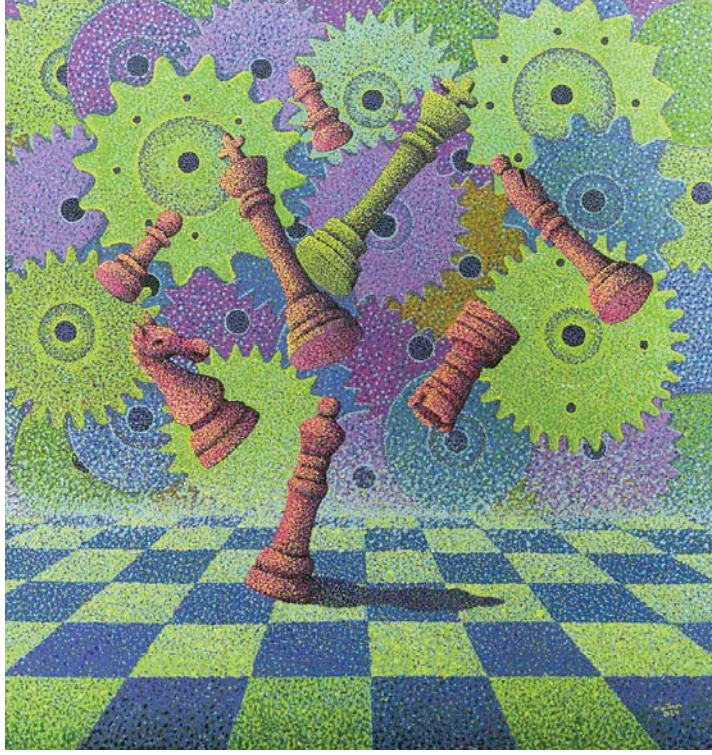
"It is a very labour-intensive painting style, each painting takes a month, even if I work seven, eight hours a day," says Thapa who is committed to the style regardless.

He adds: "I was struck by the view of dots of coloured flowers against a field I once saw while trekking."

This connection shows up in his paintings. The hair of the subject in *The Garden Mind*, for example, is covered with specks of light and colour against black, reminiscent of stars or flowers "to mean that you should keep the mind fresh, always learning." Several paintings also include flowers, particularly sunflowers, that are arranged in perspective.

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

Other paintings recognise and pay tribute to the journey that Thapa has been on. Originally from remote Mugu district near the scenic Rara Lake, Thapa worked in a bookstore



in Thamel for a long time before his art career.

"That was a period of my life where I felt robotic, like I was having the same day over and over again," remembers Thapa, who represents that time in two paintings with a chess board, pieces, and a background of gears. "It was really difficult to see a way out of that routine, and I could not think creatively at all. That's what the chess pieces represent."

Thapa saved money from his job to study painting, and now he is able to dedicate all of his time to

his craft. He also works at Takpa gallery.

In another pair of paintings, *Corn I* and *Corn II*, Thapa recalls the struggles of the Indian Blockade after the 2015 earthquake: "Those were hard times. I had nothing to eat, but corn would hold me over." In keeping with the rest of the exhibit, each cob is coloured vibrantly in yellow, blue, red and purple.

The style instantly sets these works apart from other Nepalis who paint traditionally. Thapa has never been trained in classic paubha or

thank styles.

The dots give the impression of light, so that the paintings seem to be happening at sunset, and others in bright sunlight. There is a dreamlike quality to them, reality fades and only the person and their activity or loved one remains in focus. This is in keeping with the joyous, blissful childhood created by parental sacrifice that Thapa wants to communicate.

Various dots coming together to make up the painting are also suggestive of atoms making up reality itself, and perhaps how

what we see is limited by what we can perceive. Thapa wants the paintings to convey a slight sadness about the parents' sacrifices for their children, which can be poignant for visitors who are parents but for others the paintings feel very vibrant and cheerful.

Thapa holds a Master's in Fine Arts from Tribhuvan University, and his work has been shown at Takpa as part of group exhibitions in previous years. He has also exhibited in Japan and France, winning awards nationally and internationally.

In one fun painting, Thapa places a bird perched on a rabbit that is dancing on a monkey, which is in turn prances on a happy elephant balancing on one foot. The painting depicts a Buddhist fable about respecting elders, and Thapa also has statues of the four animals, made in pointillism using acrylic on resin.

Developed in the 1880s by French artists Georges Seurat and Paul Signac, pointillism applies small dots of colour of various sizes across the canvas, which the eye turns into a painting when viewed from a distance. The style is the precursor to the modern era of screens and phones, which use millions of distinctly coloured pixels to create the illusion of a photo or video. The style can be seen in Pablo Picasso's early work, and Vincent Van Gogh was influenced by it.

Witnesses of the Inner World
Takpa Gallery, Lazimpat
Till 6 June




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