



Visit Nepal, it's cool

Durga Rana Magar in Pokhara

Climate change is driving record numbers of Indians to Nepal to escape the heat. Pokhara Lakeside this month resembles Nainital, or other Indian hill stations.

At the World Peace Pagoda, Sarangkot, or the Shiva Temple, Indians outnumber Nepalis. Hotels, restaurants, petrol stations, night clubs are crowded with Hindi speaking tourists. There are traffic jams of cars with Uttar Pradesh number plates on the highway to Muktinath (read guest comment, page 2).

The mercury has hit 45°C for weeks in North India. Other reasons for the surge are: posts by social media influencers, no passport entry, cheap and easy vehicle permits, and improved roads.

Visitors include tourists, content creators and even politicians. Bihar's Cooperatives Minister

Ram Kripal Yadav and family visited Pokhara earlier this month. It is supposed to be the lean season, but hotels have 90% occupancy with Indian and Nepali tourists from the Tarai.

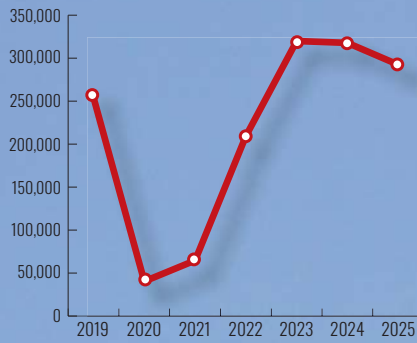
Mumbai Memoirs, a boutique travel company, is using social media with messages like: 'Every Summer I advise my Guests to take a break without breaking the Bank. And Nepal is the best Destination for us Indians.'

As global heating gets worse, experts are predicting mass migration of people to higher latitude and altitude. Within Nepal, this could mean a reversal in current migration from the mountains to the plains in the coming decades.

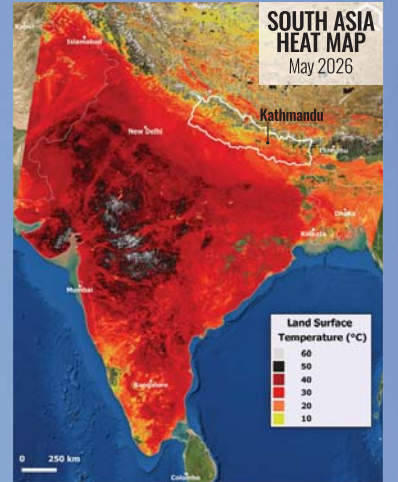
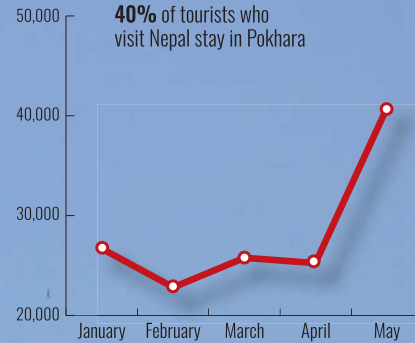
nepalitimes.com

Full story online

Indian Tourists Visiting Nepal



Indian Arrivals January-May 2026



Pokhara is clean and beautiful, I liked it here, and we plan to drive up to Muktinath next.

Mausa Daiya, Haryana

Why stay in 45°C when you can come to 15°C? I am in Pokhara... look at the mountains, and it's raining here.

Keshav, Indian Instagram influencer

Ten years ago, Nepal Tourism Board launched its famous 'Garmi se behal? Chalo Nepal' campaign in Hindi. Now, entrepreneurs here are promoting a 'Chaliye Pokhara' drive through social media.



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स्टेन्लेस स्टील पानी ट्याकी

माथि चढ्न, भित्र पसेर सफा गर्न र प्लम्बिङ काम गर्न सकिने, आवश्यकता अनुसारको मोटाइ, आकार र क्षमताको उपलब्ध छ ।

महर्जन मेटल इण्डस्ट्रीज
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Indian off-season tourism boom in Nepal

The surge in tourists and pilgrims this summer have raised questions of equity and preparedness



GUEST COMMENT

Shailendra Thakali

India has reimposed restrictions on export of Nepal's tea, but here in the tea gardens of Ilam the roads are jammed with Indian vehicles bringing tourists to the cooler mountains of eastern Nepal.

Over in Pokhara and Mustang, it is the same story. June has traditionally been the lean season. Not this year. An unexpected surge in Indian tourist arrivals has transformed what used to be Nepal's off season (page 1).

Hotels are fully booked, accommodation is increasingly hard to find, and visitors have been forced to spend nights in tents along the highway or by the lake. For many Indian visitors, it is tourism mixed with pilgrimage, plus a refuge from the heat of the plains.

Muktinath remains the ultimate destination with the shrine drawing Hindu and Buddhist pilgrims. Many Indians arrive in their own SUVs, buses or Royal Enfield Bullets. During a landslide-induced traffic jam near Tatopani, there were 50 vehicles waiting for the road to reopen – most of them had Indian license plates.

This surge is undoubtedly good news for Nepal's tourism industry. But it has also exposed deeper questions about who



ultimately benefits, and whether current policies are structured to maximise gains for local economies.

The entry process and cost for Indian vehicles is relatively low. Four-wheelers can enter after paying Rs1,800 in border fees and Rs1,700 for road permits, while motorcycles pay Rs2,400 in combined charges. For many, this makes self-driving significantly cheaper than hiring transport within Nepal.

Local jeep operators, particularly in Mustang, fear that the Indian arrivals do not benefit them. They also say that the playing field is not level: Nepalis wishing to drive into India face lengthy permit procedures and restrictions, whereas Indian tourists can enter Nepal relatively easily, pay modest fees, and travel extensively across the country.

On a recent journey from Gorkhe

to Manebhanjyang, we traveled in a Nepal-registered vehicle but were required to switch to an Indian one to continue along a border stretch and reach Lamedhura, despite the destination being in Nepal.

BHUTAN MODEL

Until 2020, Indian visitors could enter Bhutan without paying ITS Sustainable Development Fee, and charges for Indian-registered vehicles were minimal.

Now, the fee has been raised to Nu1,200 (Rs1,920) per night for Indian tourists and a Green Tax of Nu4,500 (Rs7,200) per day for Indian vehicles. These measures encouraged visitors to hire Bhutanese vehicles and helping retain a greater share of tourism revenue within the country. Policy tools like this in Nepal can also distribute the benefit of

Indian tourism more equitably.

Over the past weeks, social media has been filled with images of littering along highways, waste discarded in public areas, and visitors relieving themselves by the roadside. But in many popular destinations, public toilets are scarce, waste management systems are weak, parking space is limited, and signage for essential services is often missing. As visitor numbers grow, the gaps in infrastructure and management become increasingly visible.

It is easy to blame visitors. Yet Nepalis traveling abroad or even within Nepal, often face similar challenges. Sustainable tourism therefore requires both responsible tourists and effective destination management.

Nepal's natural beauty, cultural heritage, religious sites, and hospitality continue to attract visitors from around the world. But sustaining this growth will require more than rising arrival numbers. Policymakers must ensure that tourism benefits are distributed more equitably, particularly in border regions where local operators risk being sidelined. At the same time, investment in infrastructure and destination management is essential to cope with increasing visitor flows.

The crowded streets of Muktinath and the long traffic queues in Mustang are clear signs that demand for Nepal is strong. The challenge now is not attracting more tourists, but managing them better so that it is beneficial for both visitors and local communities. 🇳🇵

Shailendra Thakali, PhD, is a freelance consultant on environmental conservation, tourism and livelihoods.

Trending Online



Justice for a child soldier named Lenin

Recruited at age 12, former Maoist combatant Lenin Bista fought for decades against the state's dismissal of minor fighters. Now, Nepal's Supreme Court has ordered the government to criminalise child soldier recruitment and ensure proper rehabilitation. Read story on page 12.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Where gods and people mingle

by Sonia Awale
Does the textbook definition of heritage preservation even apply in Kathmandu where gods mingle among people in everyday life? Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust's latest publication attempts an answer. Read the review at nepalitimes.com

Most popular on X



Nepal's PM's PM finsta

by Nobel Rimal
Prime Minister Balendra Shah uses memes, trolls, and shitposts to completely control the national narrative, bypass the press, and keep his base fiercely loyal. Read the analysis on the website.

Most commented

Nepal and Philippine economic models

by Suugam Nanda Bajracharya
The Philippines has an economy much larger than Nepal's, yet the level of visible inequality and consumerism is striking. This presents a clear case study for Nepal as the government charts a national development strategy. Read the article online and page 4-5.

Most visited online page

Letters

SHITPOSTING

The social media usage does feel over the top by some ministers ('Nepal's PM's PM finsta', Nobel Rimal, #1315), but what's wrong with working hard and playing harder? Besides, no one seems to really care.

Eemā Budhā

Finally someone is seeing the social media manipulation that's going on.

Aseem Khatiwada

Should we feel sorry for the guy who was detained for nine hours? Read the room.

Karishma Chand Thakuri

So we should feel sorry for the guy who was detained by the police? This page is shitposting more than the PM.

Utsav Dhungana

Mark my words, he is going to end up as the most unworthy PM in Nepali political history.

Aviv Adhikari

When you elect a clown, you should expect a circus.

Roshan Delonge

BENEFIT OF DOUBT

Great article ('Giving the government the benefit of doubt', Editorial, #1315) and you are so right. I have the feeling that they are running the government with AI algorithms. And conflicts of interest abound, just like in the current US government. Excellent journalism.

Julie Palais

This editorial is one of the most relevant reads in recent times.

Sheershak Dhakal

This time you were so full of

negativity in your issue. Why don't you spell out what you need from the government? You think all the illegal land clearing, the action on corruption, the improved government services are not good enough for the first two months?

Alpa Badani Shakya

HERITAGE

In the UK there is a process for 'listing' heritage buildings. Kathmandu needs to develop its own, but the public should be involved ('Where gods and people mingle', Sonia Awale, #1315)

David Seddon

Thanks for this review. Such an informative book, I bought it immediately.

Prajwal Raj Gyawali

Some people just don't get it do they? Restoration is not redesigning a monument, it is bringing it back to the way our

forefathers would have loved and remembered it.

Tony Jones

GEOPOLITICS

The best chance the world has right now in securing peace is to keep the warmongering USA at bay ('The US and India have become regional rivals', Brahma Chellaney, page 10-11).

Sumay Sarangi

LENIN BISTA

Great news, and commendable steps by the Supreme Court ('Justice for a child soldier named Lenin', Kunda Dixit, page 12). Looks like the newly elected government made this justice possible. Hope the process of transitional justice will actually move forward swiftly to provide justice to all other victims of conflicts, which remains a big scar in Nepal's history.

Bishow Parajuli

Online Package



THULAGI WARNING BELL

In Manang, communities live directly below the Thulagi, one of the most dangerous lakes to emerge in the Nepal Himalaya due to the climate crisis. Watch the video on our YouTube channel.



THE WAR IN YOUNG MINDS

There is entire generation of young people who were either not born or were too young to remember the decade-long insurgency. Subscribe for multimedia content.

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PMO

TÊTE-À-TÊTE: Prime Minister Balendra Shah's political adviser Asim Shah (above, left) last week met some of Nepal's former prime ministers for inputs on the Constitutional Amendments Discussion Paper that he is tasked with preparing. At least three former prime ministers including K P Oli, Sher Bahadur Deuba and Baburam Bhattarai were not present at the meeting held at the residence of former prime minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal (right). Meanwhile, Deuba and his wife Arzu Rana who are in Hong Kong, have expressed their desire to return to Nepal.

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Nepali and Philippine economic models

Income inequality in the Philippines presents a case study for what Nepali planners should avoid

Suagam Nanda Bajracharya in Manila

A Nepali travelling through Metro Manila or Cebu City in the Philippines will notice a strong cultural similarity to Kathmandu.

Filipinos are famously laid back, just as Nepalis are. The pace of life can be slow, and daily operations run in a form of 'managed chaos' that feels very familiar for someone from Kathmandu.

Like Nepal, the Philippines also relies on exporting migrant workers. In 2024, personal remittances from Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) reached \$38.34 billion, about 8.3% of their total GDP. Nepal is much more dependent on remittances which account for nearly 25% of its GDP.

However, the Philippines has an economy multiple times larger than Nepal's, yet the level of visible inequality and intense consumerism is striking. This presents a clear case study for Nepal as the new government charts a national development strategy.

On paper, the gross economic output and individual income

averages in the Philippines are much higher. The archipelago's GDP per capita is about three times more than that of landlocked Nepal, so one might expect better urban living conditions. Instead, the inequality is inescapable and highly visible.

Directly adjacent to high-rise corporate offices of Bonifacio Global City (BGC) in Manila or the Cebu Business Park, the urban poverty is glaring. Slums, dilapidated streets, and families living in shacks exist right next to modern financial centres.

This observation is backed by data. The Philippines has a high Gini coefficient (a metric used to measure income inequality) of around 39.3. A higher number means greater inequality. Nepal's Gini index stands at around 30.

UNIFORMLY POOR

Nepal may be statistically poorer, but its income distribution is more balanced. The average Nepali often enjoys a better economic baseline. Yes, poverty is widespread in Nepal, but it is more evenly distributed.

In the Philippine model, hyper-wealthy pockets exist side-by-

side with severe urban deprivation. The level of retail capitalism in the Philippines is higher than in other Southeast Asian countries like Thailand, Vietnam, or Indonesia.

In Manila and Cebu, mega-malls, cafes, and restaurants are constantly packed. The urban population is visibly much more influenced by Western-style consumerism, where life revolves around purchasing goods and services. There is a strong sense that people are earning primarily to spend on immediate consumption rather than building long-term assets.

This behaviour is a major driver of the Philippine economy. Household consumption accounts for over 70% of the country's GDP. This is heavily funded by external income from overseas Filipinos sending money home.

In Nepal, remittance cash is used differently: it generally goes toward buying rural land, paying off family debt, education, health, and basic household survival. In the Philippines, it is injected directly into the urban retail sector, fueling a fast-moving consumption cycle



BRIEFS



Nepal-Germany

Nepal and Germany this week concluded negotiations on priorities and areas of collaboration on development cooperation over the next two years in energy, economic development and health. Germany committed up to €37.6 million for them 2026–2027. Dhani Ram Sharma of the Ministry of Finance and Barbara Schäfer, Head of Division for South Asia at BMZ, led the talks. "Germany's development policy will remain constant and reliable, focused on the long term and fully committed to the UN Sustainable Development Goals," Schäfer said.



Mango Diplomacy

The Bangladesh Embassy in Kathmandu is promoting the soft power of the country's mangoes by gifting 1,750kg of the fruit to 360 Nepali figures. The fruit was harvested from two orchards in Chapai Nawabganj and transported to Nepal via Siliguri. Disclaimer: Nepali Times was one of the recipients.

Social media rules

The government has introduced a new code of conduct for CDOs and other officials, banning personal social media use during office hours. It covers eight areas including professional, social, and personal conduct. Officials are also barred from accepting food, transport, or accommodation from service recipients during field visits, and from consuming alcohol on office premises. Social media activity outside office hours will also be scrutinised.



BYDs cleared

Chinese BYD EVs stranded in Jomsom and Korala customs on the Nepal-China border have been released after nine days. A total of 775 vehicles imported by Simon Electric that arrived via Korala during late May and early June were held by the Armed Police Force (APF) over procedural concerns. No one knows who gave the order to the police, but the Ministry of Finance found no evidence of irregularities.

NAIMA Stalls sorted

Nepal Automobile Importers and Manufacturers Association (NAIMA) has completed the 49-stall allocation for its Mobility Expo 2026, 11–16 August at Bhrikuti Mandap. The stalls will feature four-wheeler, two-wheeler, and commercial vehicle segments with Toyota, Hyundai, BYD, Royal Enfield, KTM, Honda, and Bajaj, among others participating.

Ather delivery

Vaidya Energy that distributes Ather e-scooters delivered 208 units in one day at a Mega Delivery event. Customers travelled from across the country for the handover. This proves growing consumer trust and increasing enthusiasm for electric two-wheelers.

Flavours of Thailand

Kathmandu Marriott Hotel is hosting Flavours of Thailand at its Edamame restaurant up to 25 June starting 1PM every day. Running the event will be Chef Nattawud Rueangsamut from Marriott North Pattaya, who has cooked Asian cuisine for 19 years.

Titan Marks 22

Watchmaker Titan celebrated 22 years in Nepal with Jitendra Sinha of Titan and 40 dealers and partners attending. Bollywood actress Alia Bhatt was announced as brand ambassador for Nepal. Titan is offering a 20% discount on all products during this Nepali month.



Starlink in Nepal

With a new government, SpaceX's Starlink has renewed efforts to enter Nepal. Starlink Global Licensing Director Rebecca Hunter met Communications Minister Bikram Timilsina to discuss expanding satellite internet services in Nepal. Starlink requires 100% ownership to operate, conflicting with Nepal's telecom regulations, which mandate local partnership. Visiting US officials have backed Starlink's case. Local internet providers oppose entry.



Nagdhunga Tunnel

Nepal's first commercial highway tunnel at Nagdhunga will open by mid-July as final operational preparations are completed. The 2.7km tunnel will cut travel time by 30 minutes on the Prithvi Highway, and be operated by Yusin-ART JV with a five-year management contract. An electronic toll collection system is installed, with projected daily traffic of 8,000 vehicles and annual toll revenue of Rs350 million.

Street Lighting

Kathmandu Metropolitan City is increasing street lamps and high-mast lamps across the capital in the coming year. Acting Mayor Sunita Dangol said this would enhance night-time safety. The KMC also plans to develop a GIS-based monitoring system, update the electronic building permit system, and interlink the biometric system with national identity cards.

World Cup scams

Cybercriminals exploiting excitement around the FIFA World Cup have stolen approximately Rs7.5 million from Nepalis in under two weeks, according to Nepal Police. The Cyber Bureau received 50 complaints about fraudulent Facebook advertisements promising free World Cup streaming which directed users to malicious APK files that granted hackers remote access to phones and bank accounts. Official World Cup broadcasts in Nepal are available only through Himalaya Sports HD and the DGO app.



PHOTOS: KUNDA DIXIT

TALE OF TWO CITIES: High-rises in the Makati district of Metro Manila soar above shantytowns (left) pointing to a wide wealth gap. A view of Kathmandu shows haphazard development, suggesting widespread and more uniform poverty.

that keeps dependency on imported consumer items high.

The result is an expensive economy where the cost of living outpaces the earning capacity of lower- and middle-class individuals.

Nepal is far behind the Philippines in infrastructure development and overall GDP. However, its lower starting point gives Nepal a policy advantage. We can choose to avoid the pitfalls of unequal, consumption-driven growth.

If Nepal allows its future growth to be driven entirely by the consumption of imported goods, high inflation, and neglected agriculture, we will replicate the extreme inequality seen in the Philippines.

Economic growth is necessary for Nepal, but the type of growth matters. The Philippines shows that a high GDP and modern city centres do not automatically solve the poverty problem if the underlying economic structure rewards consumption over production and concentrates wealth in too few hands.

As Nepal works toward LDC graduation, its focus should not just be on increasing output, but on ensuring that growth is decentralised, productive, and equitable. **■**

Suugam Nanda Bajracharya specialises in economic policy, private sector development, and sustainable growth, focused on market systems and inclusive economic development.

WHY THE PHILIPPINES IS MORE EXPENSIVE

The Philippines is noticeably more expensive for tourists and residents alike compared to other Southeast Asian nations, and there are three structural reasons for this inflation:

Low Agriculture Productivity: Unlike Vietnam or Thailand, which export food, the Philippines runs a food trade deficit. The agricultural sector has faced low domestic investment, making the country reliant on food imports.

Import Reliance: Because the country imports basic food items like rice, it is vulnerable to

global supply chain disruptions. When prices rise internationally, domestic food inflation spikes, sometimes quickly peaking above 8%. This directly impacts poorer families who spend more than half their income on food.

Service Sector Expansion: The rapid growth of the service sector, specifically the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry, has brought significant cash into urban areas. This increases the demand for services and housing in cities, driving up prices while actual local production of physical goods remains low.

HOW NEPAL CAN BE DIFFERENT

Learning from the Philippine case study, Nepal's national strategy needs to focus on three specific areas:

i. Decentralise Urban Development

Nepal must avoid concentrating all modern infrastructure inside the Kathmandu Valley. Government investment should focus on secondary cities such as Butwal, Pokhara, Biratnagar, and Itahari to create self-sustaining economic hubs. This will distribute jobs evenly and prevent the formation of massive urban slums.

ii. Prioritise Domestic Agriculture

Nepal cannot afford to abandon

its agricultural base in favour of a pure service economy. It must modernise local supply chains, protect agricultural land, and improve domestic yields. Maintaining food self-sufficiency is the best way to cushion the population from global inflation shocks.

iii. Channel Remittances into Capital Investment

Instead of allowing remittance inflows to fund the consumption of imported luxury goods, the government must create financial instruments that direct this money into productive assets. This could include hydropower projects, infrastructure bonds, and localised manufacturing sectors.

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Markets and monasteries of the Manang mandala

Prista Ratanapruck

Every November, the Manangi community in Kathmandu pools social and material resources to organise a three-week-long fasting retreat in Swayambhu, where participants chant, prostrate, count prayer beads, and fast.

While the austerity of this retreat, known as Ngungne, reflects the Manangis' commitment and devotion to their spiritual practice, a closer look at the organisation and investment of resources involved reveals an alternative and intriguing form of capitalism.

The history of capitalism has often been understood from the Western perspective, and the free-market economy. However, the ways in which the Manangi have produced, accumulated, redistributed, and reproduced capital in their society at the interface of spiritual commitment and kinship obligations open new ways to think about capitalism.

In Nepal, the Manangi community has been known more for the success of its trade than for its social and spiritual aspirations. Manangi trading goes back several centuries, predating the formation of modern nation-states. It connected two distinct ecological regions on either side of the Himalaya and connected them to maritime commerce.

The Asian merchant diaspora, including the Manangi, formed the backbone of trade in Asia until the arrival of Western empires armed with gunpowder and capital stocks. The networks of most traditional merchant diaspora were disrupted, but a few such as the Manangi continued to thrive.

The Manangi received privileges from the Nepal government to conduct international trade, much less is known about the social institutions and cultural ideas that have enabled their society to thrive. The fact that their trade has continued to expand long after those privileges ended merits a sociological

examination of their society.

My book, *Market and Monastery: Capitalism in the Manangi Trade Diaspora*, highlights a specific cultural logic regarding partnership that has shaped relationships within the community, both in the pursuit of material wealth and the cultivation of shared social and spiritual aspirations.

The Manangi transregional trade thrived and expanded in the last few hundred years, generating surplus to fund collective rituals, extensive family reunions, construction of schools, roads, health clinics, religious monuments, support for the underprivileged, and more recently, humanitarian initiatives that serve the broader Nepali society.

SELF-INTEREST

This logic of partnership that has shaped relationships is a cultural premise that is not entirely different from the neoclassical economic assumption that humans are self-interested individuals whose social actions and underlying motives align with the maximisation of their individual interests, however broadly defined.

In the Manangi community, this logic of partnership has enabled the creation of social and material conditions that have sustained the community across vast geographical spaces and successive generations.

This is not a story of an ideal society. Rather, it is an account of how a community that thrives on cooperation and partnership has preempted and responded to conflicts that are bound to arise among individuals. Collaboration is not an innate characteristic of Manangi society, but the outcome of conscious efforts to create institutions and practices that foster and sustain cooperation often considered desirable and important.

These have been formed despite the presence of conflicts and internal rifts, and is, indeed, the story of a society at work.

The book traces the Manangi's engagement across South and Southeast Asia to



The economic success and spiritual commitment of the Manangi

understand how they created the social and material conditions that enabled them to sustain their trade while also fulfilling social and spiritual aspirations.

Abroad, these social institutions built trust, supported productive social relations, and enabled the pooling of trade knowledge among individuals. At home, the Manangi developed intricate systems to pool social and material resources for religious rituals and social festivals vital to their collective life.

Through these processes, they have been able to circulate funds for personal and entrepreneurial projects while nurturing values important to the viability of their society.

The diversity of the religious rituals and festivals has endowed the Manangi with social and financial capital involving different

degrees of intimacy. Their social and financial institutions have facilitated collective savings.

Capital production in the Manangi community has emerged contingently to align life projects towards different ends: for social, entrepreneurial, and spiritual aspirations. Accumulation and redistribution of capital transpire alongside accrual of religious merit, social reputation and obligations.

The Manangi also extend non-interest-bearing loans among one another to support those in need of investment capital. This is key to enabling them to establish and expand their businesses, allowing them to rise collectively and



Ethnographic documentation of the

Kunda Dixit

When Gabriele Tautscher was a young student at St Mary's School in Kathmandu, she was close to her family's household help from the Tamang community. That connection inspired her to return to Nepal in the 1980s for her PhD.

Tautscher could have studied Tamang settlements around Kathmandu, but the Austrian chose the remotest village: Chayarsaba on the northern tip of Dolakha district.

In over three decades of anthropological research, she travelled across the Tamsaling homeland. Her latest book, *Tamang Portraits*, contains photographs she took from 1980-2004 in Chayarsaba, Sailung, Kalinchok and Gosainkunda.

The Tamang are Nepal's largest ethnic group, forming about 6% of the population, with the diaspora scattered across northeastern India, Malaysia, Japan, Korea and Europe.

The 25 April 2015 earthquake is officially called the 'Gorkha Earthquake', but its ethnic epicentre was around Kathmandu Valley. An investigation by this paper in July 2015 showed that

of the 8,962 killed in the disaster, 3,012 people (34%) were from the Tamang community — half of them in Sindhupalchok.

Anthropologist Mukta Singh Lama told us at the time the reason was that despite living so close to the capital, the Tamang were historically neglected.

The Tamang are believed to have crossed the Himalaya from Tibet with the Tamu (Gurung) and branched off to settle around Kathmandu Valley. Through the centuries, their language, faith and way of life evolved in central Nepal, shaping the Tamang civilisation.

Parshuram Tamang of the Nepal Tamang Ghedung explains in his Foreword: 'The Tamang village (namsa) is a socio-political entity, and its life and agriculture are guarded by spiritual forces that inhabit their houses, villages, agricultural fields, mountains, forests, rivers, lakes, and burial grounds, and these spirits may be either benevolent or malevolent.'

Tamang festivals, rituals and beliefs are intimately linked to their daily lives, and this is why Tautscher's lifelong work to document them is so important at a time when connectivity, communication and globalisation force assimilation.

The photographs are accompanied by testimonies and portraits of people and families the author interviewed over the years. Chapters contain meticulous descriptions of festivals at sacred locations, where shamanistic rituals are overlaid by Hindu and Tibetan Buddhist rites.

Tamang Portraits is nuanced visual anthropology, documenting not just the orthodoxy of the ceremonies, but also how historical events like the closure of the border with Tibet and demographic trends within Nepal shaped and are shaping Tamang society.

The most poignant part of the book is where the people of Chayarsaba spoke to Tautscher in 1986, their testimonies describing the hard life of subsistence farming in the steep mountains.

A father of three tells Tautscher: 'This corner is not seen by anyone ... Even our king does not see it.'

A grandfather holding his granddaughter says, 'We plough, we dig, we produce manure, we bring fodder, look after cattle, we eat. That's how it is. Without hard work, there is nothing to eat.'

A mother says: 'Happiness means not having to work in the field, not carrying heavy loads,



going to an easier place to raise children ... I would like to live in an easier, more joyful village.'

It seems the only comfort

from the struggle to survive are family bonds and faith. Which is why the book's photographs and descriptions of the full moon



Manangi community opens new ways to think about capitalism

MANANGI becoming well-off as a community. Over the course of a few generations, the Manangi community has become both affluent and educated. Profits from international trade have also served as important seed money for new enterprises in the formal economies of Nepal and the Southeast Asia where many Manangis have married and settled abroad.

As of 2023, Manangi-owned enterprises are estimated to contribute to about 0.5% of Nepal's GDP — not a small share given that roughly 7,000 Manangi constitute only 0.00025% of the total population. The Karma Group of Companies is the largest taxpayer in Nepal's agricultural sector.

As the Manangi community became more affluent and educated, those from the younger generation have become doctors, engineers, pilots, artists, biologists, BBC news staff, and UN officers. Manangis abroad send back remittances to support the Manang Social Service Committee and women's social service groups.

While the older generation has valued collective religious practice, younger Manangi are less inclined to participate in religious rituals and are more involved in diverse social and humanitarian initiatives.

The social practices of the Manangi offer a model of social and economic relations that challenges dominant Western understandings of capitalism and society. They demonstrate that the process of capital production, accumulation, and reproduction

is not uniform across the world.

Manangi social practices demonstrate that the motives driving capital production are not universally material. Rather than competing with one another in the market, individuals may collaborate to engage in productive activities, enabling individuals to achieve larger goals than what each could accomplish alone. Moreover, the economic surplus generated through collective effort can itself be accumulated collectively.

Capital can be accumulated in many forms, not only as private wealth, and the redistribution of such capital, rather than its concentration, can stimulate broader economic activity, growth and prosperity. This particular capitalistic process within the Manangi community provides a counterpoint to Max Weber's historical account of the rise of Western capitalism, which is predicated on individual accumulation of private wealth.

SHARED WEALTH

The Manangi disdain hoarding individual wealth or displaying it without sharing. Unlike in societies where prestige and social status derive from an individual's ability to acquire what others cannot, in Manangi society, prestige comes from an individual's ability to enable others to do what they otherwise could not.

In 2010, the Manangi community organised a Ngungne fasting retreat in Bodhgaya. Notably, the 300 participants did not pay their own expenses directly. Instead, 43 couples pooled financial resources to sponsor the trip, allowing many more community members to join.

By forming partnerships, the community expanded participation in the retreat and enabled individuals of unequal means to pursue similar aspirations. Such cultural attitudes have motivated the Manangi to relinquish private wealth in service of larger spiritual, social, and economic goals.

In Manangi society, capital is accumulated collectively and circulated widely, enabling a large proportion of people to access resources for further investment in activities that generate even more capital.

This collective accumulation has facilitated redistribution, which has, in turn, reduced internal disparities. The capitalistic process in the Manangi community is embedded in a broad range of social institutions and rests on mutual dependency and the value placed on social relations.

This process is strikingly different from capitalism, in which the market as an economic institution disembeds economic interactions from social relationships, and whose abstract forces can produce extreme consequences for capital, labour, and natural resources. In contrast, within the Manangi community, social relations provide social and economic security that cushions individuals from the harsher effects of the free-market, while mechanisms of redistribution act as a corrective force against excessive accumulation of private wealth.

In an economy regulated by the free-market, the returns to capital and the returns

to labour eventually diverge over time, ultimately undermining economic growth. French economist Thomas Piketty showed how perpetual accumulation of wealth by individuals already richly endowed has widened inequality, enlarged public debt, and financial crisis.

This inherent instability is an outcome of the structural contradiction of a capitalist economy driven by private wealth accumulation. Interestingly, the remedy that Piketty proposes, a wealth tax, is precisely what the Manangi have been practicing: progressive income taxes of various forms.

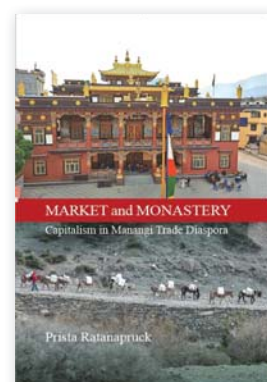
Whether individuals create social and economic security through accumulation of private wealth or by banking it with others, either in a larger collective such as the welfare state or in the form of social relations as the Manangi have done, ultimately depends on the normative value orientations that lie outside of economic reasoning. This is a moral choice that individuals in a society can make together collectively.

This observation from the case of the Manangi finds a parallel in a thought-provoking argument by economist Benjamin Friedman in his recent book, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (2021) where he traces the influence of religion and theology on modern economic concepts and policy: from Adam Smith's 18th century economic thought to 21st century American debate about the role and limits of the market in delivering what human societies need.

Having a window into another society can help us become more conscious of our own social and moral values so that we can engage in public debates to shape social and economic institutions in ways that will enable us to realise our true aspirations.

Market and Monastery tells the story of how a particular form of capital accumulation, circulation, and redistribution, rooted in a specific value orientation, can structure and restructure society, curbing instead of reproducing inequality. 🇺🇸

Prista Ratanapruck received her PhD in Anthropology from Harvard University. She is faculty member at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology of Chiangmai University, Thailand. She previously taught at Rutgers University, Singapore University of Social Sciences and also served as a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Integrated Development Studies (IIDS) in Nepal. Go online for a longer version of this piece.

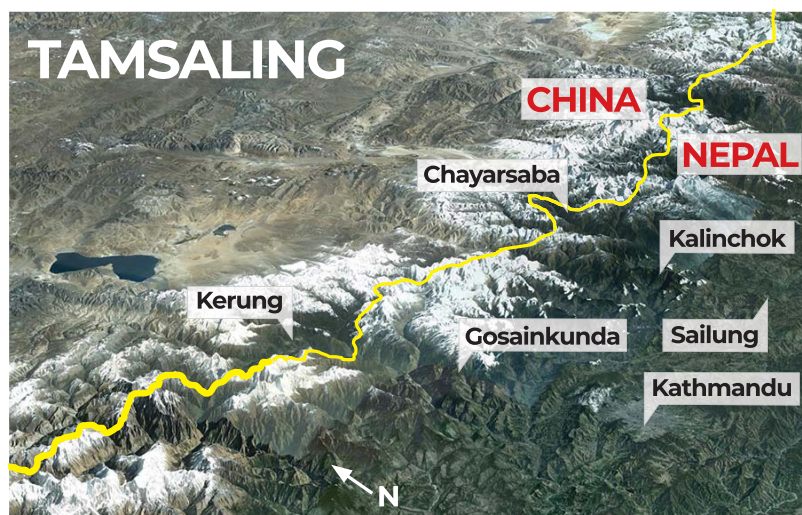


Market and Monastery: Capitalism in the Manangi Trade Diaspora
Prista Ratanapruck
Berghahn Books, 2025
Oxford, New York
An Open Access edition is available for free at <https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/RatanapruckMarket>

The Tamang civilisation



festivals in Sailung, Kalinchok and Gosainkunda hold such significance. The Sibda/Mabun/Janai Purnima pilgrimages show how Shamanism,



Shaivism and Buddhism mix while retaining their own identities and practices in sites sacred to the Bon, Hindu and Buddhist belief systems.

rites of passage

Every life event has its own rituals from the cycles of birth, adolescence to marriage and death. Tautscher records intricate descriptions of the rites and their significance. The practice of 'wife-takers' returning to the village of the 'wife-givers' bearing gifts, the skull-bone of a dead relative kept

wrapped for 21 days in an altar after cremation, reverence of the 'tripartite world' of mountain peaks (gods), forests and farms (people), and rivers (spirits) in which the shaman plays the intermediary between temporal and spiritual realms.

Tautscher introduces us to the pre-Buddhist concept of 'local binding' ingrained in Tamang culture that propitiates ancestral and local protector deities to consecrate the land. This reverence of nature links individuals to the creator, sanctifying terrace farms,

rocks, mountains, rivers and lakes of their villages.

Writes Tautscher, 'Nature is imbued with spiritual, transcendent meaning and value, and in the Himalayas a geomorphic up-and-down cultural model of space where sacred mountains are prominent.'

This is a sequel to Tautscher's earlier book *Himalayan Mountain Calls* and the 1998 documentary *Chickenshit and Ash – A Visit to Paradise* which got mixed reviews with critics calling it 'condescending reverse anthropology' for filming two Chayarsaba residents in Europe. Many of the protagonists in the film also appear in this book.

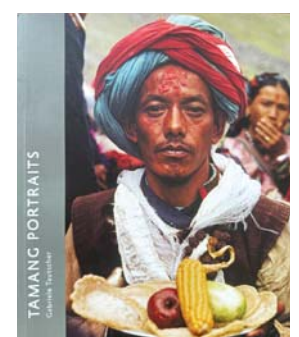
In her epilogue, Gabrielle Tautscher returns to Chayarsaba in 2022 to find signs of progress: households have water taps, toilets, electricity, and Kathmandu is only a day's travel away by road. The "Lhaso phyaphulla" greeting now spans ethnicities.

But along the way the rivers are desecrated by sand-mining, bulldozers have clawed at sacred mountains, there is a local Tiktok Queen, villages are emptying, the local school has shut because there are no students.

Kori below Kalinchok has a

cable car terminal, and the shrine has become a selfie spot. Sailung and Gosainkunda are also more accessible, and attract many more pilgrim-tourists.

Tautscher writes: 'Only interventions that are not dislocated from local contexts and local people can lead to more sustainable livelihoods with rich self-determined cultures. Such efforts require the active involvement of both local youth and local governments.' 🇺🇸



Tamang Portraits
by Gabriele Tautscher
Himalayan Traditions and Culture Series, no. 19
Saraf Foundation for Himalayan Traditions and Culture, 2026
Rs 4,000 248 pages



Events



Candle Making

Thinking of taking up crafting? Join Connect Cafe's candle-making workshop and meet like-minded creatives.

20 June, 3pm onwards, Rs1,200, Connect Cafe, Jhamsikhel

Poetry and Gazal

Interested in poems and gazals? Go with friends to Shabdakiri Saajh and immerse in an evening of expression and music.

20 June, 4pm, Taragaon Next, Boudha

Weekend hike

Be one with nature and join the Mahesh Narayan- Banban Danda hike. Enjoy views of lush green hills and good company throughout.

20 June, 6:40am, Rs1,000, Bhrikuti Mandap, Kathmandu

Yoga Day

On International Yoga Day, join fellow enthusiasts in performing 108 Surya Namasakars. Calm the mind and body through mindfulness.

21 June, 6:30-8:30am, Rs1,499, International Club



Monsoon Observations

Experience a peaceful nature walk with botanical artist Neera Joshi Pradhan and create beautiful paintings at the end of the session.

21 June, 9am-11am, Rs550, Ranibari Community Forest, Lazimpat

The Taste of सेलरोटी

In The taste सेलरोटी, three stories unfold across different eras bound together by a shared theme. The two-actor play is directed by Milson D. Chamling. Catch some shows.

21 June - 12 July, 5:15pm, Kausi Theater, Teku



Writing Workshop

Explore your creative side and let your imagination spill onto paper at Photo Circle's writing workshop.

20 June, 2pm-5pm, Rs300, Photo Circle Library, Sanepa



Music

Gone Elvis Band

Gone Elvis is set to rock n' roll in tribute to their namesake this weekend. Listen to the band perform Elvis' greatest hits.

20 June, Hard Rock Cafe, Darbar Marg

Young Wave

Golden Culture's Young Wave will appeal to all the hip-hop and rap music lovers in the city. Expect a lively night out this weekend.

20 June, 10pm onwards, Club 10X, Thamel



Jhuma Limbu

Jhuma Limbu serenades the audience with some of her most popular tracks. The musical evening will be accompanied by good food and drinks.

26 June, 8pm onwards, Rs1,000-Rs2,000, Moksh Live, Jhamsikhel

Rewind Fest

Rewind fest features a line-up including Swar, Chakra, Ankit Shakya and more. Get tickets viae-sewa.

19 June, 1pm onwards, Sallaghari Ground, Bhaktapur



Abhijeet Bhattacharya Live

Noted Bollywood singer Abhijeet Bhattacharya will be in Nepal to perform fan-favorites from some of the most beloved Hindi movies of the 90s.

20 June, 7pm onwards, Club Nova, Thamel



Getaway



Maruni Sanctuary Lodge

Chitwan National Park is home to a wide range of flora and fauna. From the comfort of the cabins and cottages of this lodge, visitors can take a peek at the wandering wildlife and nature of the park.

Sauraha (01) 4700632

Begnas Lake Resort

Located in one of the most agriculturally flourishing areas of Pokhara, guests staying at Begnas Lake Resort & Villas have the opportunity to explore and try locally grown coffee, grains, oranges and more.

Begnas Lake, Pokhara, 9856061080



Chhaimale Resort

Adorned with pear trees, the Resort is an idyllic getaway from the concrete of Kathmandu, particularly for those who do not want to venture too far outside the city for a brief vacation.

Chhaimale, 9851181409

Tiger Tops Karnali

Enjoy the monsoon offer at Tiger Tops Karnali Lodge, with a package that includes bird watching and village walks.

Thakudwara, Bardia, 9851217265

Chandragiri Hills

The resort sits atop lush green hills overlooking Kathmandu Valley. Catch glimpses of the mountains, marvel at stunning sunsets and take a dip in their infinity pool this summer.

Chandragiri (01) 5970796



Dining

Soul Square

Cold beers, football fever, DJ, great company. Join the Beer Fest at Soul Square at the newly opened Garden Project.

Also join the Artha Run Club every Saturday morning from Garden Project.

Bhanimandal

Saturday 20 June, 12 PM onwards



Koto

Maki sushi, cold or fried tofu, tempura, fried chicken, miso soup, chicken karage, Katsu Don, anything to satisfy one's craving for Japanese cuisine is right at the restaurant.

Darbar Marg (01) 5320346

Himali Farmer's Kitchen

This restaurant serves Nepali dishes like bhatmas sadeko, aloo jeera and sukuti and khaja sets. Explore the menu for more classics.

Chaksibari Marg, 9823556622



Embassy

Enjoy a hearty meal in this centrally located restaurant known for its lively ambience and assorted menu. Try the Duck Breast, served on a bed of mashed potatoes and roasted vegetables in a rich peppery steak sauce.

Lazimpat, 9802024040

Weekend Weather



FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY
29° 20°	28° 20°	28° 19°	28° 19°

Wet June-July

The monsoon is running five days late, but is expected to arrive with a bang over Kathmandu Valley around 20-21 June. Till then, the mountains will get brief stormy showers in the later afternoons. Weather models are forecasting a wetter than usual June-July because the hotter moist air from the Bay of Bengal carries more water vapour. After that, August and September are predicted to be drier and hotter than usual. However, when the rain does fall it could be in torrents.

Our Pick

The 2025 American psychological horror *Obsession* follows Bear, a music store employee who has romantic feelings for his friend Nikki and buys a supernatural toy "One Wish Willow," to make her fall in love with him. The toy grants his wish but before long, Bear starts experiencing disturbing and sinister consequences. *Obsession*, written, directed, and edited by Curry Barker, stars Michael Johnston, Inde Navarrette, Cooper Tomlinson, Megan Lawless, and Andy Richter. Watch it in theatres near you.



सामाजिक सञ्जाल प्रयोगमा सचेतता अपनाऔं

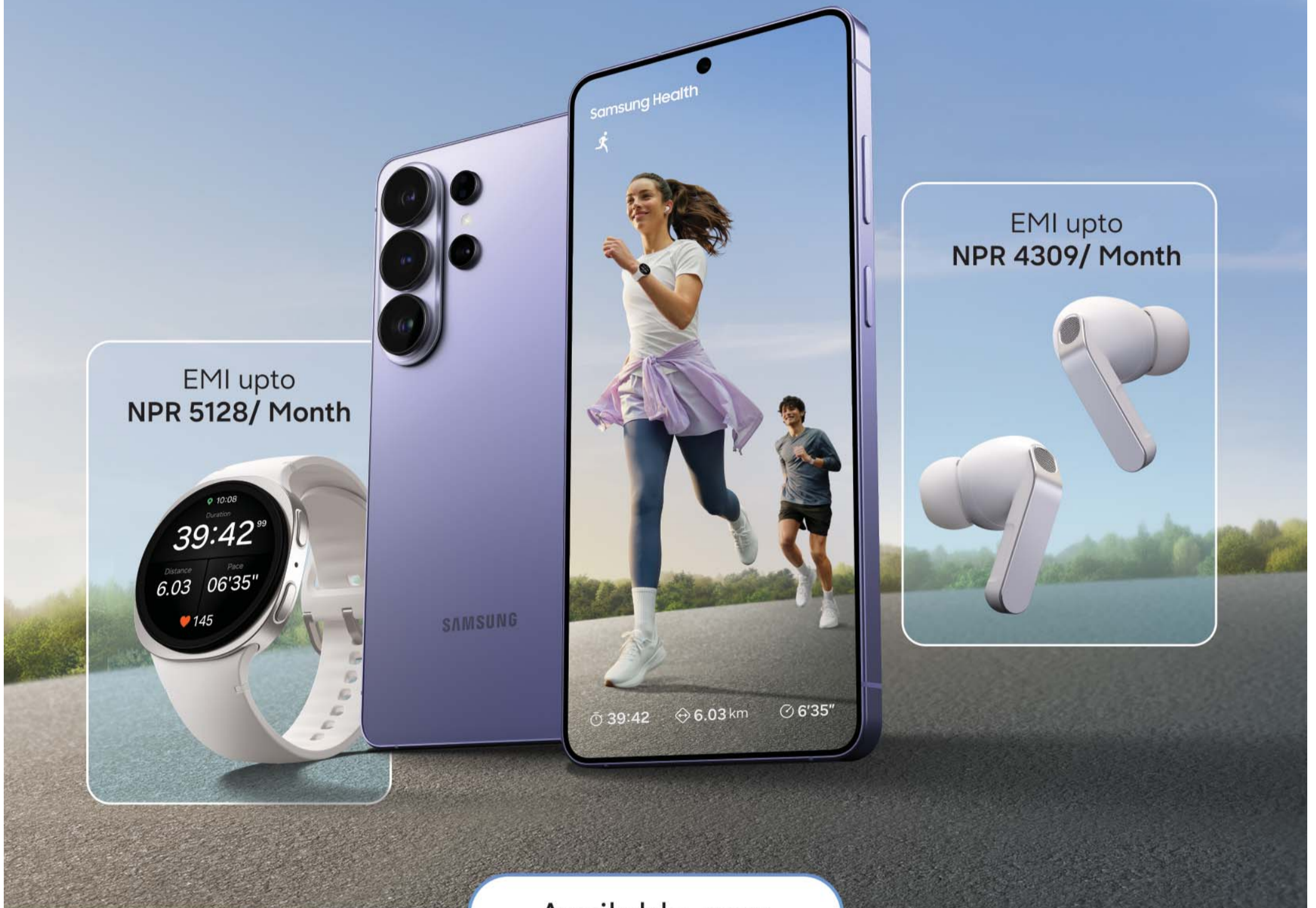
- सामाजिक सञ्जालमा अपरिचित व्यक्तिको साथी बन्ने अनुरोधलाई विश्वस्त भएर मात्र प्रतिक्रिया जनाऔं ।
- अपरिचित व्यक्तिलाई जथाभावी साथी बन्न अनुरोध नपठाऔं ।
- सामाजिक सञ्जाल तथा अन्य विद्युतीय माध्यमबाट चिड्डा पुरस्कार जस्ता आर्थिक प्रलोभनका प्रस्तावको भरमा नपरौं ।
- आफूले प्रवाह गरेका सन्देश वा सूचनाबाट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



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विज्ञापन बोर्ड

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Only some roads lead north

The main obstacle to better Sino-Nepal relations is not geopolitics, it is in Nepal itself

Sonia Awale

Foreign Minister Shisir Khanal returned from a three-day visit to Beijing on Tuesday, during which he tried to allay Chinese qualms about the GenZ protests that led to regime change in Nepal.

In meetings with Foreign Minister Wang Yi (pictured, right), Khanal went out of his way to assure China that Nepal would not allow itself to be under any security umbrella, and to reassert Nepal's one-China policy.

In a statement after the meeting, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said that Wang urged Nepal to work on a conducive business environment for Chinese investors, and said that "distant relatives are not as good as close neighbours", a remark that was taken as a pointed reference to US projects in Nepal, like the MCC.

China's own BRI projects like the Kerung transmission line, trans-Himalayan railway, and other infrastructure signed by former PM K P Oli in 2024 are stalled.

Beijing previously urged Nepal to sort out its Kalapani border dispute with India, while allowing Indian pilgrims to Mansarovar over territory claimed by Nepal.

The visit came right after Khanal's Delhi trip last week, and proves Nepal is giving continuity to its equidistance doctrine. The trip also coincided with the ceasefire agreement between Iran and the US, and the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz through which China and India both import most of their petroleum products.

The PM's erratic behaviour has in fact brought Beijing and Delhi together to coordinate policies on Nepal, diplomatic sources say. Both believe that the protests that led to Balendra Shah's premiership were a US-backed colour revolution.

Nepal is overwhelmingly dependent on India for all of its own petroleum imports, most of its trade, and access to the sea. But proximity to China has allowed access to latest advancements in EVs, batteries, and solar panels. Battery-powered vehicles now account for 70% of new four-wheelers, placing Nepal only behind Norway in EV uptake.

And yet, Nepal's understanding of its northern neighbour is so limited that the government and businesses have not been able to make use of even the zero-tariff access since 2009 to over 8,000 Chinese product categories. Nepal's import-to-export ratio with China is grossly skewed.

In an interview as a RSP candidate in the March election, Shisir Khanal lamented the foreign ministry's lack of expertise and low institutional capacity on China. Now as foreign minister, he has a chance to set that right.

Khanal's team also held bilateral talks and engaged with members of the Nepali community and Chinese businesses to discuss bolstering bilateral investment, trade, as well as promoting connectivity and tourism.

LETHARGIC STATE

Back in Kathmandu, the Nepal Economic Forum (NEF) has published a cross-sectoral analysis of Nepal-China relations by Nepali researchers. The conclusion is that the main obstacle to progress in improving economic ties lie within Nepal itself. Bilateral agreements on many projects are never implemented by a lethargic state.

Indeed, Nepal was the first



SHISIR KHANAL / X

South Asian country to receive Chinese Approved Destination Status in 2002, and yet is still not effectively competing for Chinese tourists nearly a quarter century later. Nepal has no power trade agreement with China despite the demand for electricity across the border that would yield Rs22 per unit against Nepal's power export rate to India of about Rs8 per unit.

Arya Awale, one of the authors of the NEF report, told Nepali Times: "Our main question was whether Nepalis can BET (Business, Energy, Tourism) on China, but as we progressed we found that a lot of failures are institutional rather than external or geopolitical."

Nepal imported goods worth \$2.67 billion from China in 2025 while its exports stood at \$17.3 million — a ratio of 130:1. In contrast, the trade ratio with India is 5:1. Nepal exports more in value terms to the US, Germany, and the UK than its northern neighbour.

Nepal continues to approach trade with China using frameworks and assumptions developed

primarily for trade with India, despite the Chinese market operating under fundamentally different regulatory, logistical, linguistic, and consumer systems.

For instance, China enforces stringent quarantine measures, administered through a regulatory system led by the General Administration of Customs of China (GACC) which imposes detailed requirements on product safety, traceability, processing conditions, and facility-level inspections that many Nepali producers are just not equipped to meet.

The absence of accredited testing laboratories and SPS facilities at Nepal's northern border points means Nepali exporters must send product samples to laboratories in third countries such as India, Hong Kong, or Thailand for certification, significantly increasing transaction costs, delays, and uncertainty.

"The trade deficit is increasing due to infrastructural and institutional limitations. Border

infrastructure, or lack thereof, is also a major limiting factor. We cannot afford to wait for China to build it for us, we have to do it ourselves," says Mahotsav Pradhan, co-author of the report.

China has the largest foreign joint venture investment projects in Nepal like Hongshi-Shivam Cement, but the company faces operational hurdles despite government assurances of infrastructural support, adds Pradhan.

India has put a 900MW cap on power import from Nepal after subtracting projects with Chinese contractors or equipment. The report says Nepal needs a 'parallel-track strategy for advancing the northern relationship without foreclosing the southern one'.

India's 2018 Cross-Border Electricity Guidelines has meant that Nepal was forced to remove Chinese developers from at least six hydropower projects and award them to export-oriented Indian companies. But Nepalis pay more for their own electricity

than what India pays per unit. So, instead of stoking geopolitical tensions, Nepal's strategy should be to electrify households, domestic industries, tourism, and agriculture.

Co-author Suyasha Shakya argues that a legal framework for cross-border electricity trade would not require Nepal to abandon its southern relationship. Negotiations with China that started in 2018 have stalled. Nepal has drafted a power trade agreement text and there have been six rounds of bilateral technical group meetings, but things have not moved.

"The power trade agreement has nothing to do with geopolitics, nor does developing our solar and storage potential as well as implementing foreign currency hedging for power purchase agreements," says Shakya, who thinks solar energy has lower political risk than large hydropower projects. Solar installations can use Chinese equipment and expertise, but do not need Chinese equity.

The report adds that pump hydropower storage, in which solar power lifts water uphill to a reservoir for later release through turbines for peak hour generation, is well-suited to Nepal's topography, in which China has vast expertise.

VISIT NEPAL

Chinese tourists started flooding into Nepal after it became the first South Asian country to receive China's Approved Destination Status in 2002, and arrivals peaked in 2013/14 before the earthquake. Waiver of visa fees for Chinese citizens in 2016 helped boost figures again to nearly 170,000 in 2019 before the pandemic put a brake on everything.

Last year was Visit Nepal Year in China with a target of bringing half a million Chinese tourists to Nepal, but only 95,480 came. Another co-author of the NEF report Manju von Rospatt explains why: "NTB spends around 70% of its budget on international marketing but very little is deployed to target Chinese tourists. We were also nowhere in Chinese platforms such as RedNote, Weibo, Dǒu yīn or Wechat, making Nepal completely invisible as a tourism destination."

There are 150 Chinese restaurants and 24 hotels just in Thamel and more in Pokhara. The share of fully Chinese-controlled operations in key zones must be capped unless they partner with Nepali firms, notes the report.

Nepal also needs to cater to changing visitor preferences like solo traveling and spiritual tourism for potential longer-stay and higher-spend segments in trekking, wellness, and cultural immersion.

Chinese tourists are deterred by negative perceptions about Nepal regarding expensive flights, safety, political stability, and service quality — concerns that were amplified after the September 2025 violence, the report adds.

Foreign Minister Khanal assured an investment conference organised by the Nepali Embassy in Beijing as well as his counterpart Wang Yi that Nepal is seeking a more balanced approach that benefits both countries.

A good place to start would be to follow through with past agreements. Says NEF's Arya Awale: "We are closely observing the outcome of the visit, and expect progress in trade, investment, and infrastructure." 🇳🇵

The US and India have become regional rivals

How Washington may be viewing India less as a strategic partner and more as a longterm rival

Brahma Chellaney

On his recent visit to India, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio predictably touted India as one of America's "most important strategic partners," citing the two countries' shared values, "people-to-people ties," and strategic alignment on "all of the key issues that will define the new century."

But this familiar language of partnership rings increasingly hollow with Donald Trump's public insults and weaponisation of tariffs. The bilateral relationship was under pressure well before Trump's return to the White House in 2025.

In recent years, as India's regional standing has been steadily eroded by China's expanding strategic footprint, the US has pursued policies in India's strategic backyard that have disregarded Indian interests — and sometimes run directly counter to them.

Bangladesh is a case in point. After the military-backed ouster of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government in 2024, the US endorsed regime change. But India knew this posed serious risks, which have since materialised: Bangladesh is now gripped by Islamist violence, jeopardising stability on India's eastern flank.

Then there is **Burma**. Since the military's 2021 overthrow of a civilian government, the US has maintained a punitive approach toward the junta, including sanctions and 'nonlethal' military aid for rebel groups, despite the security risks this has created along India's sensitive northeastern frontier. In March, a US citizen, along with six Ukrainian nationals, were arrested in India for entering the country's northeast without permits and crossing into Burma to train and arm anti-junta fighters for drone warfare.

The US has also begun treating **Nepal**, a country bound to India through geography, culture, and economics, as a strategic priority in its own right, rather than as part of its India policy. In recent years, high-level US officials have visited Kathmandu more frequently, often without making the once-customary stop in New Delhi.



WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Trump has made matters much worse, not least by pursuing closer ties with **Pakistan**. Never mind that Pakistan continues to provide safe haven, as well as military and intelligence aid, to terrorist groups, or that Pakistani Army Chief Asim Munir staged a constitutional coup last November.

Trump's family and business associates have struck lucrative deals in the country and that is apparently good enough reason for the Trump administration to revive dangerous strategic dynamics on the subcontinent.

The US has even begun taking a more conciliatory approach toward **China**. Though the strategic competition between the two superpowers remains intense, Trump's recent shift toward accommodation in some areas has created considerable uncertainty — not least for India, whose value to the US has long been rooted in its ability to act as a regional counterweight to China.

But while the US has long viewed India as a critical

democratic bulwark against Chinese dominance in the Indo-Pacific, it also balks at the idea of Indian regional dominance. As US Assistant Secretary of State Samir Paul Kapur explained in February, the United States is seeking to prevent any single power from gaining too much influence in South Asia.

Kapur's remarks echoed the Trump's National Security Strategy (NSS), according to which the US "cannot allow any nation to become so dominant" that it could "threaten interests" and must maintain "global and regional balances of power."

In America's view, a more pluralistic regional order is inherently more stable and favourable to US interests than one dominated by any country — even a close 'strategic partner'. Unlike its 2017 predecessor, the NSS barely mentions India, noting only that the US wants to 'improve commercial (and other) relations' with the country, in order to encourage it to 'contribute to Indo-Pacific security'.

CONTAIN, NOT NURTURE

America's reservations are not just geopolitical. "We are not going to make the same mistakes with India that we made with China 20 years ago," Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau said on a recent visit to New Delhi, letting it "develop all these markets" and then start "beating" the US in "a lot of commercial things". The message is clear: the US now views India less as a strategic partner to be nurtured than as a regional and economic rival to be contained.

India must adapt to this new reality, which demands a fundamental shift in its strategic thinking. India can no longer count on its close relationship with the US to sustain its influence across South Asia and beyond. Instead, it must cultivate regional influence through economic engagement, political sensitivity toward neighbouring states and the delivery of tangible public goods that appeal to smaller countries.

The US should rethink its approach as well. It might want a more diversified regional order, but this cannot come at the expense of its partnership with India, with which it continues to share important interests, from managing China's rise to preserving stability across the Indo-Pacific. Policies that systematically weaken India's position in its own neighbourhood risk undermining these shared objectives.

The Trump administration seems to hope that the US and India can remain global partners, even as they become regional rivals. But this will be no easy feat, and the outcome will shape not only the future of the bilateral relationship, but also the strategic landscape in South Asia and beyond. 🇺🇸

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Brahma Chellaney, professor emeritus of strategic studies at the New Delhi-based Center for Policy Research and Fellow at the Robert Bosch Academy in Berlin, is the author of *Water, Peace, and War: Confronting the Global Water Crisis*.

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Justice for a child soldier named Lenin

Nepal's Supreme Court verdict clears way for recruitment of child soldiers to be declared a war crime

Lenin Bista was 12 in 2002 when Maoists came to his school in Kavre to recruit students. The students gathered for an assembly, and the troupe performed a revolutionary song.

Every household was forced to commit one person to join the militia. The young Bista was attracted by their pitch about taking up arms against injustice, exploitation and discrimination.

Along with four other classmates, he joined the guerrillas even though (despite his name) he had no idea what Communism was.

Bista was assigned to an intelligence unit and worked as a spy, gathering information about army and police bases that the guerrillas planned to attack. Because he was a child, he could easily go undercover, and the students were also trained to make improvised explosive devices.

"We took part in two attacks on army bases," Bista recalls. "It was a case of kill or be killed. Two of my classmates were killed in action."

After the 2006 peace accord, Maoist fighters were kept in UN supervised demobilisation camps for four years. Because they were minors, Bista and nearly 3,000 other child soldiers were 'disqualified'.

When he finally came home to his family, Bista was a young lad of 18. The label 'disqualified' stung, and he decided to fight for justice, setting up an organisation called Discharged People's Liberation Army (D-PLAN).

By this time the Maoist party was elected to government, and



it jailed him for one year for his activism. Once, he was even stopped at the airport and could not attend an international peace conference. With the government actively shutting him out and the

UN having washed its hands, Bista filed a case in the Supreme Court on behalf of an estimated 3,000 other child soldiers.

DELAYED JUSTICE

Last week, the Supreme Court finally recognised the recruitment of child soldiers as a heinous war crime, and directed the government to retroactively make up for the injustice by providing adequate compensation and by enacting laws criminalising child recruitment in conflict.

This was in response to Lenin Bista's writ petition filed three years ago against Maoist leaders and former prime ministers Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Baburam

Bhattarai for the recruitment of minors under their watch.

However, the Court refrained from holding the two Maoist leaders accountable, leaving that decision to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons that were formed as a part of the 2006 Comprehensive Peace Accord.

The Supreme Court case had kept getting postponed, and the ruling finally came after Nepal's GenZ protests led to the election of a new government.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the ceasefire and 30 years after the Maoists took up arms in 1996 against the monarchy.

"The Supreme Court ruling is not just a victory for Nepal, but sets an international precedent," Bista told Nepali Times after the verdict. "It has been a long and hard battle to regain our lost childhood. We are happy that even though justice was delayed, it was not denied."

Bista, now 36 and married with two children, took part in the GenZ movement. He had been offered an election ticket by advisers to PM Balendra Shah. He declined, and contested unsuccessfully as an independent candidate from Kavre (pictured, left).

Bista says he is used to getting intimidating messages from former comrades for his activism, and after the Supreme Court rulings the threats have become more vicious. Some use fake IDs to warn that he will be beheaded for being a traitor to the Maoist cause.



30/20
CONFLICT
ANNIVERSARY
1996-2006-2026

The Court has also directed the Transitional Justice commissions to provide compensation at par with adult combatants who received Rs800,000 after being discharged from the UN camps.

The child soldiers only received Rs10,000 at the time, and were promised another Rs100,000 which never materialised.

"Many combatants suffer post-traumatic stress, the health and educational needs of the former child combatants must also be addressed, as well as societal stigma," the Supreme Court justices wrote in a summary of their verdict.

It added that derogatory terms 'disqualified' and 'discharged' that belittled their role in the conflict no longer be used. Bista himself says he has faced ostracisation from both sides of the conflict because of his Maoist past.

Surveys conducted during the conflict estimated that up to 30% of the Maoist military consisted of minors, some known as 'wholetimers' who were assigned spying or sentry duties. The security forces were also accused of torturing some minors they captured, suspecting that they were Maoists. 🇳🇵

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