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JANA ASENBRENNEROVA

climate-induced disasters," says Yamuna Ghale at the Institute for Integrated Development Studies.

Sixty percent of Nepalis are engaged in farming, and agriculture makes up a quarter of the GDP. But mass migration of rural youth has affected food production.

Irrigation would increase Nepal's agricultural productivity by as much as 30%, say experts, but major irrigation projects have been stalled for decades because of corruption and mismanagement.

ZERO HUNGER

A recent nationwide survey of 1 million children under five showed that the discontinuation of USAID-funded food and nutrition programs had increased childhood malnutrition to 7.8%, with Madhes at 12.3% (Editorial, page 2).

All this now begs the question: what is the RSP government doing about addressing food insecurity? Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle said in his budget speech in May that reviving the agricultural sector was "top priority".

But the Rs47 billion allocated for agriculture is less than 3% of the total budget and is the lowest for the sector in nine years. More than half of the allocation is for chemical fertiliser imports.

Wagle defended his emphasis on commercial agriculture and raising middle class income, but critics say this will come at the expense of poorer farmers.

Yamuna Ghale believes that like everything else, the solution lies in political priorities and policy implementation. She says, "Policies are political, and what the new policies and the size of the budget tell us is that agriculture is

not a priority for this government. The impact of this is most keenly felt by those from marginalised and excluded communities."

Interestingly, both Krishna Pahari and Yamuna Ghale used the same words to sum up: "Food security is national security." 🇳🇵

Water > Energy > Food

Shristi Karki

Extreme weather due to climate breakdown, disruption of global supply chains and domestic mismanagement have created a perfect storm for Nepal's food security.

At no time has the nexus between water, energy and food

been as stark as this year. Most farms are rain-fed, the fertiliser shortage is aggravated by the West Asia war, even as rural out-migration leaves fallow farms.

Paddy Day on 29 June last week was subdued, there was little playful mud-wrestling and even little planting. A wetter than usual pre-monsoon led many farmers to plant rice early, but the actual rains were delayed by two weeks.

Scanty rain lowered rice harvests to 5.7 million tonnes in 2024/25 from 6 million the previous year. Weather models tracking the Super El Niño forecast severe drought, and combined with fertiliser shortage, this will further fall in grain harvests.

"The production of staples like rice is hostage to climate shocks," explains Krishna Pahari at the National Democratic Research

Institute. "The climate crisis is compounded by conflict in West Asia that has led to supply disruptions and fertiliser shortages."

Many of the structural problems with agriculture pre-date the climate crisis, but unreliable monsoons and lack of irrigation have made the situation more dire. Last year, Nepal imported more than 1 million tonnes of grain worth Rs60 billion.

"Nepal is severely impacted by the climate crisis, but we lack solid recovery plans from frequent

What hunger does before a child can even speak

GUEST COMMENT PAGE 2

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What hunger does before a child can even speak

After decades of 'development' one in three children in the Karnali is still underweight



GUEST EDITORIAL
Shalav Rana

Sarmila was 19. She already had three daughters and was four months pregnant with a fourth child.

She was thin, in ragged clothes and worn-out slippers, but with thick dark hair, comely in a way hard work slowly tries to erase. Her youngest child, 13 months old was found to be underweight during the monthly mothers' group meeting at the health post.

When the nurse asked what the baby had been eating, she smiled softly. Rice and dal, she said. Sometimes nettle soup. Her husband was in India, there was no one to help at home. She had eloped at 14.

When tea and millet bread were passed around in the meeting, another woman pressed an extra piece of bread into her hand and told her to take it home. Sarmila refused.

I have sat in circles like this across the Karnali for years. The faces change, but the story remains the same. What strikes me every time is how ordinary it all looks.

They are sitting in a circle on the health post's green grass. Birds are chirping in the trees. The sky is bright blue, the mountain air is clean, and there is no traffic or smoke.

But more than one in three children under



SHALAV RANA

five in the Karnali is stunted, the highest rate in Nepal. Stunting has fallen, but in the mountains of western Nepal progress has slowed and in some places even reversed.

Health workers in districts like Kalikot now speak quietly about severe malnutrition cases rising again. This is not simply hunger.

EMPTY STOMACHS

An undernourished child's brain development is undermined, impacting attention, memory, and learning capacity even before the child enters a classroom.

The first time I understood malnutrition

differently was in Sindhuli in 2007, just after the Maoist conflict had ended. Children from the Majhi community were not just thin, they seemed motionless. They had pale hair, severe pallor and no energy. That listless stillness has stayed with me ever since.

The quiet hunger emergency of the Karnali is not an accident. Even today, it follows caste and class, geography and gender with brutal consistency. Pregnant women often survive on little protein, at faraway health posts many are met with indifference or contempt by staff.

Between 2001 and 2011, child stunting fell due to better sanitation, maternal education, community health programs and rising household incomes.

But progress is fragile when the state's attention span is short. This year, the government stopped its fortified flour program across Karnali because of budget cuts. Some of the past gains may already be reversing. The tragedy is that the money needed is tiny compared to other sectors.

Cheap instant noodles, sugary biscuits, and sweet drinks are also replacing traditional foods. Even when families manage to feed children, the body struggles to use the nutrients. In the Karnali, most households still lack access to safe drinking water.

Repeated diarrhoea and infections strip nutrition from children already surviving on poor diets. Empty calories and unsafe water reinforce each other. Yet it is hospitals, surgeries, and clinics that get priority.

By the time severe malnutrition reaches a hospital ward, the damage is already done. Hospitals can treat complications, but cannot restore lost early childhood development.

Prevention is not glamorous. It means food during pregnancy, clean water, delaying early marriage, and keeping girls in school longer so they enter motherhood healthier and with more control over their lives. It means confronting the quiet discrimination that still shapes who eats first, who drops out of school, whose suffering in poor, patriarchal communities is normalised.

Nutrition is a responsibility of local governments, not an occasional act of charity. Municipalities prioritise visible curative services, neglecting slower, less visible public health work. Mother groups and Female Community Health Volunteers are among few institutions reaching communities, yet their aging staff get little support despite demand.

In Kalikot, modest supplies of eggs, beans, ghee, regular follow-up visits, nutritional support for mothers after childbirth work. None of this is revolutionary. But it only works when families can rely on it year after year. Not as short-term programs tied to donor cycles or political attention, but as part of a basic contract between citizens and the state.

Pride prevented Sarmila from accepting bread at the mother's group meeting in Kalikot that day. She went home to her underweight child, carrying her infant.

Maybe she has family support. But it should not be a maybe. Not for her, and not for the thousands of women whose children are permanently diminished by a crisis Nepal already knows how to prevent. ■

Shalav Rana has worked in community development and education support across Nepal for over two decades, including in the Karnali.

Trending Online

No tiger is an island

by Sudiksha Tuladhar
Nepali sisters Sushila and Manju Mahatara play an important role in tracking tigers for the acclaimed new BBC documentary Tiger Island which was shot in Bardia over two seasons last year. Experts uncovered behaviour that is rewriting knowledge of the big cats. Visit nepalitimes.com for the review.

f Most reached and shared on Facebook

Hetauda-Kathmandu ropeway

by Dan Edwards
In 1957, the US helped Nepal build a new cargo ropeway between Kathmandu and Hetauda. But it became a victim of mismanagement and competition from the truck lobby. The ropeway shut down for good in 2001. Read the full story on our website and watch its video summary on YouTube.

X Most popular on X



A shadowy 100 days

by Shristi Karki
From walking out of Parliament sessions or delivering controversial remarks when he finally addressed the House, to his midnight posts on social media, critics see gimmicks. Supporters admire statesmanship. A SWOT analysis of Prime Minister Balendra Shah's eventful three months in government. Join the discussion online.

66 Most commented

Kathmandu Valley to Silicon Valley

by Vishad Raj Onta
Meet Sudip Rokaya and Kartikesh Mishra, two Nepali MIT alumni who founded Lamina Labs. Their AI tool, Simi, turns simple text prompts into brilliant whiteboard explainer videos in minutes. They have now secured \$3 million in funding. Go online to read about their success story.

100 Most visited online page

Letters

100 DAYS

Cleaning 35 years long corruption and handling other works side by side is a hard battle, which Mr Prime Minister is doing great till date ('A shadowy 100 days', Shristi Karki', #1317).

Saurabh Ghimire

■ Whether liked or disliked, he is the right man for the country now as he was for Kathmandu as a mayor.

Dipak Jaru Tuladhar

■ Seems like there are hard tasks in line for him especially dealing at various critical fronts when three months ago country came out of turmoil. Cleaning the political corruption followed by irregularities in bureaucracy while keeping the image of a solid leader intact is tough. A long and topsy-turvy road ahead.

Interesting for political observers to follow the aftermath of youth-led political resurgence.

Shubham Dubey

■ He sounds a lot like our President, Mr Trump! '... from walking out of or cancelling events or delivering controversial remarks.... to his midnight posts on social media... and the authoritarian leanings. Exactly Trump's playbook.

Julie Palais

■ 100 days of No Corruption.

Biplav Koirala

■ This government is also of no use.

Sanim Khan

■ There is no vaccine for rabies, prices keep increasing, traffic rules and taxes are not in line with the road infrastructure. Is this government slowly heading towards failure?

Dipendra Jung Karki

■ Don't dig up a plant to see how it's growing ('Performance vs Process', Editorial, #1316).

Tony Jones

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

What happened to the red express bus lanes? Never saw them operating and now it seems the road lanes aren't red anymore ('First public transport, then only mass transit', Bhushan Tuladhar and Kanak Mani Dixit, nepalitimes.com).

Stephanie Suhowatsky

JUJU DHAU

So delicious; I would love to be able to buy juju dau it in the Netherlands, (Bhaktapur's curd is not just for paddy planting day, https://nepalitimes.com). But then again it will never be as special as eating it in Bhaktapur.

Karen Wassenaar

ROPEWAY

The rise and fall of the ropeway is so typical of Nepal ('The Hetauda-Kathmandu Ropeway', Dan Edwards, #1317). The Imja Tso flood warning system in Khumbu has not been working for a decade already, batteries stolen from the village warning stations along the Imja Khola River, and no upkeep at all in general. In spite of this \$36M of foreign money is allocated for four more similar systems in Nepal, more pockets will be well lined...

Tapio Portimo

SILVER ECONOMY

Geriatric care and wellness tourism would both be helped significantly by reducing air pollution both from Nepal, and from India ('Nepal's emerging silver economy', Yanki Ukyab, #1317). This needs to be a major policy priority.

Michael Mastin

Online Package



MIGRATION FROM MUKTIKOT

For decades, nearly every household in Mukti Kot has sent its men to India to work. What is new is that women have also started to leave the village, and for longer periods. Watch the video on the Nepali Times YouTube Channel.



TASTE OF NEPAL IN TOKYO

Ryo Honda is a Japanese chef who specialises in authentic but innovative Nepali cuisine using local ingredients and spices, infusing it with indigenous knowledge and nature. Subscribe to our YouTube channel for multimedia content.

1,000 Words



GEOGRAPHY AND POLITICS: Former Prime Minister and ex-Maoist ideologue Baburam Bhattarai delivered the main speech at the Fifth Edition of the Yadunath Khanal Lecture Series organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Bhattarai spoke about the new geopolitical landscape that has made Nepal more of "a flower between two boulders" rather than a "yam". Foreign Minister Shisir Khanal and Foreign Secretary Amrit Bahadur Rai also addressed the gathering attended by Nepal-based foreign ambassadors and government officials, charting out the new government's emphasis on economic diplomacy.

The gathering took place even as MoFA was trying to do damage control over a row with the PMO over the printing of new passports by competing French and German firms.

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Kathmandu is becoming a 'fine' city

Road safety cannot be legislated with penalties, driver education and better roads come first



DRIVE LINE

Arnav Upadhyay

Nepal's leaders want to be reincarnations of Lee Kuan Yew, and like to say that they want to turn Nepal into Singapore. It may take several decades to attain the income level of that city state, but Kathmandu is already like Singapore with its new fines for traffic violations.

Nepal's cybersphere is rife with debate about the government's decision to slap exorbitant fines on traffic violators. Cars with shaded windows will henceforth fork out a whopping Rs100,000. Jaywalkers pay Rs500, speeding tickets have tapering fines depending on velocity of the infraction.

Social media is filled with videos of police pulling out aftermarket plastic window tints (pictured), and car owners saying they would rather lose some plastic than pay one lakh to the police.

In the last couple of months, Nepal has seen an alarming increase in road traffic accidents, a subject which we discussed in my last column in this space. Nepal Police launched stricter enforcement of road rules in a bid to improve safety with limited success.

But what seems to have eluded the Police as well as the designers of the new pecuniary penalties is the wisdom of the age-old saying: prevention is better than cure.

With an average of seven



TINT FOR TAT: Removing the shade sticker from the window of Home Minister Sudan Gurung's SUV.

METROPOLITAN TRAFFIC DIVISION KATHMANDU

daily deaths on our roads, a new Bill that will increase fines ranging from Rs500 to as high as Rs100,000 for violations to deter dangerous driving has been drafted by the Ministry of Infrastructure Development. It is currently being vetted by the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs.

According to this new law, motorists caught driving under the influence will face fines

of Rs25,000 for two wheelers, Rs35,000 for light vehicles and Rs50,000 for heavy vehicles. What is baffling is that tinted windows are penalised more than DUI.

Trying to set an early example, Home Minister Sudan Gurung, went public removing his own vehicle's tinted window citing security reasons. And while this may have been true in older more tumultuous times, vehicle windows

are a meticulously developed component today.

Many modern car manufacturers offer factory tinted windows where the molten glass mixture is baked with metal oxides creating different shades. Premium vehicles sold in Nepal even offer double glazed glass for better insulation from heat and noise. This results in a cooler cabin, less noise and comfort while pushing less load on the AC and thereby improving mileage and range, and, in effect, saving energy.

Globally, countries regulate vehicle window tint through Visible Light Transmission (VLT) standards. Countries like South Korea, Canada, France and Italy all allow different VLT figures. For example, in India the law requires 70% Visible Light Transmission on the front and rear windshield but allows 50% VLT on side windows. Nepal's outright ban in this day and age in the name of 'better security' and visibility sounds like a regressive slap.

The new Bill prosecutes overspeeding progressively, but also fines Rs3,000 to Rs5,000 for driving too slow when slower drivers on Nepali roads could be those cautious of the chaotic traffic, or still beginners. There are also a certain number of older vehicles that struggle to pick up speed.

Noteworthy are fully loaded safe tempos that run routes climbing uphills — they simply do not have the torque. Not to mention, a three-wheeler carrying 10-14 passengers has no business going at the 50kph speed limit on Ring Road either.

And then there is always the underlying question whether citizens can afford such steep fines when the country still has a GDP per capita of less than \$1,500 and the fines are several times the

monthly salary of most people.

The new fines also overlook the poor condition of roads that need to be fixed first. An MP quipped in Parliament that it is the government that should be fined Rs100,000 for a pothole not patched up.

SAFE DRIVING

There needs to be better road safety education for sure, but for that the roads also need to be better. The old figure 8 driving trial system needs a substantive update.

Current driving tests evaluate basic vehicle control, but do little to prepare motorists for the realities of our chaotic roads. Practical on-road exams should test not only maneuvers like parallel parking, multi-point turns, and blind-spot awareness, but also lane discipline, proper indicator usage and speed compliance.

Safe driving is learned through real-world experience, and those habits should be drilled before obtaining a license — not through steep punitive measures afterwards.

So while higher fines may make headlines, they will not on their own make Nepal's roads safer. This bill appears to treat road safety as a problem that can be solved with bigger penalties, when the real challenge lies in decades of inadequate driver education, inconsistent enforcement, and poor road infrastructure.

Discipline on the road cannot simply be legislated into existence, it must be learned, reinforced, and practiced over time.

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

NMB BANK एनएमबि बैंक



Turkish awarded

Turkish Airlines bagged the 2026 APEX Award for Best Food and Beverage Airline in Europe, making it the fifth time that the carrier has been awarded. The awards were determined on the basis of unbiased, anonymous, and verified passenger feedback collected in partnership with TripIt® by Concur®. During the 2026 evaluation period, more than one million flights operated by over 600 airlines worldwide were rated by passengers using a five-star system. Turkish Airlines CEO Ahmet Olmüstür said: "This award speaks to the passion and craftsmanship our teams pour into every meal we serve above the clouds."

Fuel prices cut

Nepal Oil Corporation reduced fuel prices effective 1 July after the partial opening of the Strait of Hormuz and lowering of prices in India. Petrol fell by Rs20 per litre to Rs197, while diesel and kerosene dropped by Rs30 to Rs195 per litre. A 14.2 kg LPG cylinder dropped by Rs100 to Rs2,060. Aviation fuel prices at Kathmandu airport were also lowered slightly.

IME Udyamshala

Global IME Bank opened applications for its Udyamshala incubation and acceleration programme to support entrepreneurs and MSMEs by providing mentorship, business networks, modern technology expertise, marketing support, and guidance on registration, tax, finance, and market access.

Paddy plantation

Only 11.3% of Nepal's 1.38 million hectares of rice fields had been planted by late June 2026 due to the delayed monsoon. This is 4.3% less than last year. Lumbini Province leads with 20.8% progress, while several districts remain near zero. Planting is expected to pick up with the arrival of the rains after Paddy Planting Day on 29 June.

Bird flu

The bird flu outbreak at Central Zoo in Jawalakhel is now under control. No new infections have been recorded since 26 June after intensive disinfection and treatment. The zoo remains closed while a study committee prepares a report and experts advise on safe reopening. The risk of bird flu remains high in Kathmandu Valley and is being spread by crows.



Sunmaya ultra win

Nepal's Sunmaya Budha won the 120km Lavaredo Ultra Trail in Italy this week, adding to the impressive showing by Nepali women in international ultra marathons. Budha even outdid Mira Rai's achievements by finishing the race in 13 hours, 33 minutes and 18 seconds, breaking the previous record by 6 minutes and ahead of Australian Lucy Bartholomew by nearly 2 minutes.

Financial literacy

NMB Bank held financial literacy programs at schools and colleges across Nepal during Global Money Week. Students learned about savings, digital banking safety, and long-term financial planning.



Terraces awarded

The Terraces Resort and Spa received four Haute Grandeur Global Excellence Awards for 2026: Best All-Suite Resort in Asia, Best Activity Hotel in Nepal, Best All-Suite Hotel in Nepal, and Best Destination Resort in Nepal. The resort is located on the south-eastern rim of Kathmandu Valley.

Power disruptions

The Ministry of Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation is deploying extra workers and technical resources nationwide to quickly restore electricity supply disrupted by monsoon rains and related interruptions. Priority is being given to replacing worn transformers, upgrading infrastructure, and strengthening distribution lines. Dial hotline 1151 for complaints.

e-Passport Bail

The Special Court ordered bail for five people arrested in the CIAA's e-passport procurement case. Former Department of Passports Director General Tirtha Raj Aryal, IT Director Sunil Kumar KC, section officer Somesh Thapa and computer engineer Bipin Prasain were each granted bail of Rs 300,000–500,000. As passport stocks depleted, the PMO and the Foreign Ministry agreed to settle their differences over French and German companies.

Private transmission

Nepal's first private-sector 220kV transmission line, the 28 km Markichok-Bharatpur section under the Marsyangdi Corridor, has been completed and is undergoing testing. The project stalled for seven years under a Chinese contractor, seven private hydropower companies completed it in 19 months at a cost of Rs49.69 million. The line will evacuate power from Super Dorado, Dordi Khola and Nyadi, into the national grid.

Nabil awarded

Nabil Bank won the Gold Award for Excellent Annual Reporting from the Nepal Chartered Accountants Association for its FY 2025 report. It also received the Bipie Award for Corporate Governance Disclosure and a certificate of merit for Sustainability Reporting. The bank was recognised for financial transparency, accountability, and strong governance practices.

Proton e.MAS 5

Jagdamba Motors, the authorised distributor of Proton vehicles, will introduce the Proton e.MAS 5, a rear-wheel-drive compact SUV EV. Built on a dedicated RWD platform, it offers balanced handling and stability, making it suitable for Nepal's diverse driving conditions. The slightly bigger e.MAS 7 has proved popular in Nepal.



Phewa rules

Pokhara authorities have banned all boating, kayaking, and surfing on Phewa Lake after 6PM due to frequent accidents, sudden storms and waves. Children under 16 are prohibited from solo kayaking or surfing. Life jackets and insurance are now mandatory, operators must give safety briefings, and activities must take place within designated area limits.

It's a Messi situation in Nepal

There are many reasons why Argentina and its star footballer are so wildly popular in Nepal

Vishad Raj Onta

The Jhamsikhel restaurant screening the 2026 World Cup Argentina vs Austria match exploded last week. It was a sea of blue and white striped jerseys, there was wild cheering and many orders for more beers.

At this point in the sport, any semi-serious football fan accepts Lionel Messi as the GOAT, he is indeed the Greatest Of All Time. But there is a select group of Nepalis who have followed him his whole life at Barcelona, PSG and now Inter Miami. For them Messi is just divine.

"I support Messi because he isn't the flashiest, the tallest, the loudest or the most muscular and yet he has stapled himself as the greatest athlete in the world," says long-time Barcelona fan Aryan Tamrakar, following the World Cup from Cleveland. "This is not just because of all his statistics. It's because he does things that the score can barely capture."

The fascination of Nepalis for Argentina actually pre-dates Lionel Messi. It started with Maradona, and his performance in various World Cups when Nepalis watched the matches on grainy black and white TVs in the backwaters. The star player's humble beginnings, his style and swagger helped, as did the fact that Maradona could almost pass off for a Nepali.

In fact, Nepalis have been fans of Argentina even though this country's Gurkha soldiers in the British Army took part in the Malvinas War, and saw action against Argentinian troops.

The British used the image of the fierce fighters from Nepal in a psywar campaign. Colombian author Gabriel Garcia Marquez added to the reputation describing the Nepali warriors as bloodthirsty.

One reason that Argentina, Maradona and Messi have been popular in Nepal despite the two countries being at the antipodes could also perhaps be that Nepalis like backing underdogs because the country is an underdog itself compared to its giant neighbours.

Messi himself has been at the top of his game for 20 years now,



SUMAN NEPALI



and fans have grown up watching him deliver again and again.

"I started watching football properly since the 2010 World Cup in South Africa and one man was the talk of the footballing world," says Rishav Rupakheti, who has followed Messi ever since. "He led a historic Barcelona squad to European and domestic success. At the 2014 World Cup I was already

a massive fan. I remember his last minute goal against Iran as the point where I truly started to appreciate Leo's greatness."

"Every international tournament as a Messi Argentina fan was heartbreak until 2022 when he finally realised his dream," continues Rupakheti. "It was euphoric, emotional and surreal to finally witness Messi lift the ultimate prize. It has been quite the roller coaster."

Baibhav Parajuli is such a fan that he was called Messi through his high school days playing football, and he waited to have his first taste of alcohol until he visited Barcelona in north-eastern coastal Spain. Parajuli sums up Messi's popularity: "Simply because there is not a more beautiful player who has ever played the game."

On a recent social media post, a man from Jhapa went viral for

holding a puja (pictured, left) praying that Argentina wins the World Cup again. Another video features a long line of school-aged children all clad in Argentina jerseys parading through Dolakha screaming 'We Want Argentina.'

Commentators are perplexed, calling it the 'Height of nonsense,' a 'Gaijatra,' and a waste of parents' money. Others are happy that the kids are having fun.

MAN OF MATCH

For ecstatic Nepali fans, Lionel Messi's fifth goal at the 2026 World Cup for Argentina against Austria cemented his GOAT branding. It summed up his genius and his efficiency: from the initial pass to the finish it was an improbable goal that combined creativity, vision and sheer will.

Earlier in the same game, the Argentine had already missed a penalty and scored one. This means that Messi, who turned 39 last week, had scored all of Argentina's five goals at this World Cup until that point. It also made him the highest scorer in the history of the World Cup, with 18. He has since scored another goal in the match against Jordan on Sunday.

Although French star Kylian

WORLD CUP 2026 FIXTURES

Remaining matches (yet to be qualified)
2 July

Spain	vs	Austria
Portugal	vs	Croatia
Switzerland	vs	Algeria

3 July

Australia	vs	Egypt
Argentina	vs	Cape Verde
Colombia	vs	Ghana

Round of 16 (based on results so far)

Canada	vs	Morocco
Paraguay	vs	France
Brazil	vs	Norway
Mexico	vs	England
USA	vs	Belgium

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Suman Nepali in Denmark

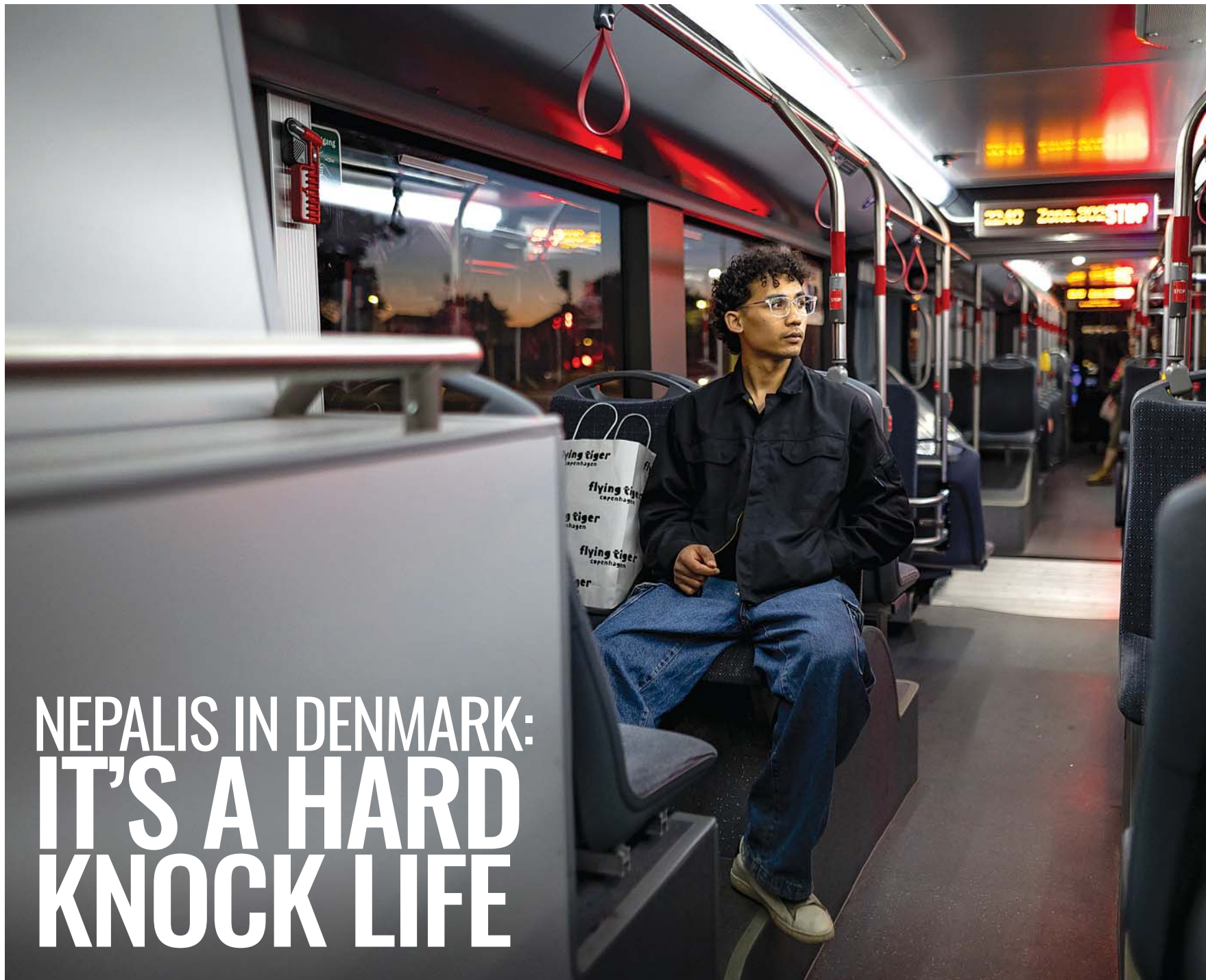
The alarm goes off exactly at six in the morning. Outside, the seaside town of Aarhus in central Denmark is pitch black, a deep, impenetrable darkness that a Scandinavian winter brings.

Prabesh pulls on his jacket, laces his shoes, and heads into the cold. There is a shift to complete, and later, a lecture to attend. He is far from Nepal, away from his mother's cooking, and far from the sunny winter afternoons when the whole family would gather in the roof terrace.

Karan's mornings look different but feel the same. He found work in Aarhus, not in Kolding where his university is. So every day he boards a train and travels three hours each way to attend classes.

He took out a loan to come to Denmark two years ago. The debt travels with him on every commute.

Prabesh arrived in 2022. Karan followed in 2024. Both came with the same quiet conviction that a degree from a Danish university would open their career doors. Prabesh studies fashion design. Karan is pursuing business. Both are chasing happiness.



NEPALIS IN DENMARK: IT'S A HARD KNOCK LIFE

Prabesh's wife, Saina, works full-time at a restaurant. Karan's wife, Sita, works afternoons. On holidays, Karan is up by seven and back home by 11 at night. During the week, it is the same rotation of early mornings, long shifts, and exhausted evenings.

Money is tight and calling home has become difficult. It is not that they do not want to speak to their parents, but the conversation always drifts to the question: How are they managing? And the honest answer is hard to say out loud.

“If it were not for responsibility, I would never have come to a foreign land,” Prabesh now admits. “I want to make my family proud and happy, I want to be able to repay them for everything they have done.”

In Nepal, the decision to send a child abroad is a family investment: financially and emotionally. Savings are pooled, money borrowed, property sold. The unspoken contract is clear: go, succeed, come back and make it worth it.

That weight did not end when the plane landed in Copenhagen, that is when the clock started ticking. Every euro saved counts.

Denmark is not an easy country for first-timers. Winters are long, dark and cold. The language is difficult to master. The culture can feel alienating in the beginning. There are days when the city feels exotic and alien in equal measure.

Karan misses home food the most, specifically the taste only his mother can make. It is a kind of flavour that no Nepali restaurant

in Aarhus can replicate. “We miss home,” says Prabesh, with a wistful look.

SHARED DREAMS

What keeps them going, in part, is each other. Prabesh and Karan met in Denmark: two strangers from the same country, now family. They celebrate Nepali festivals together, sharing the small, practical details of how to survive in a place not built for them. The Nepali community scattered across Aarhus and Kolding functions as a second home, it is

A Nepali's African

Overcoming many hurdles along the way, migr



DIASPORA
DIARIES 96

This is the 96th episode of Diaspora Diaries, a Nepali Times series in collaboration with Migration Lab providing a platform to share experiences of living, working and studying abroad.

Amrit Chhetri

Growing up in Gulmi, I always wanted to enroll in the British Army. But I never made it. The natural fallback was the Indian Army.

My father was a migrant in India, as was my grandfather. We were four brothers and a sister, and remittances helped with our education and growth. Back then, ‘galla’ recruiters would come to villages looking for strong, young men to enroll in training centres.

I was selected in the physical tests at the British Army recruitment centre in Butwal, but I did not make it at the next stage in Pokhara. The British Army was ideal because

of its reputation, better salaries and benefits. Seeing British ‘lahure’ visiting the village was the best publicity for recruitment and motivated us young folks.

You had to be perfect to get selected: physically, mentally and emotionally. It was a fair process where your capabilities mattered more than anything. Perhaps they detected some weakness in me. I did not retake the tests the next year, and migrated to Mumbai instead.

I had taken Indian Army training for six months, and had to wait for some time because of my age. I did various jobs, mostly in administrative positions but also joined hotel management training. I got a chance to work at the Taj Hotel as a chef trainee.

One day, a Canadian Indian wanted to talk to me after tasting my basil pasta. I don't think the pasta was that special. This introduction soon led to conversations over the next few weeks. His nephew had married a Nepali and he had a soft corner for us. He probably saw something in me or it was just my luck, but I was offered a job in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

I had heard of Africa and thought it was a country, but knew nothing about Congo. I took up the offer as his steel company, Mangalji, with operations in many countries including Canada and the UK, looked like a good option that would help my career.

Without knowing all the details about



the country or the company, I agreed to join. My family was not happy because they still wanted to see me in the army. The salary in the Congo was in dollars and there was a chance to move to Canada afterward.

This was 2009, and Mumbai airport immigration gave me a difficult time, and I had to show them all my documents. I

first stopped by Kenya which was already a different world, and when I arrived in Kinshasa, my heart sank. The airport was like a bus stop in Butwal, and I started questioning my decision.

After three days at the company, I resigned. I could not comprehend where I was: the food, the language and the culture



SUMAN NEPALI



HOME AWAY FROM HOME: (clockwise)

Prabesh returning from his late night shift from work in Aarhus.
Karan in his apartment in Aarhus.
Prabesh with wife Saina.
Prabesh at his work.
Karan with his wife Sita.

imperfect, improvised, but real.

Meanwhile, the Danish government recently announced new measures aimed at international students from outside the EU. Tighter verification of foreign educational qualifications,

stricter monitoring of academic activity, and restricting family members. This is a direct response to rising student numbers from Nepal and Bangladesh, and concerns that some are using their student visas to gain work permits.

The number of Nepali study permits in Denmark jumped from 152 in 2023 to 487 in 2024. Prabesh and Karan are not abusing the system, they are building something from almost nothing for themselves and providing less expensive labour

for the host country. The Nepalis here work because they must, Denmark needs calibrated induction of foreign migrants for its economy to run. Prabesh and Karan study because that was the whole point. They

stay because going back now would mean unfulfilled dreams. Night falls quickly here. Karan is back from another exhausting train ride, and Prabesh calls his parents in Nepal. They set their alarms for six. 🇳🇵

n dream

grant worker went from Gulmi to Goma



Indian colleague named Yadav told me to stay. He saw potential in me to one day rise up the ranks in the company and become a DG. I stayed on reluctantly, but for the next few weeks I would call my dad in tears and confess that I made the wrong decision.

SECOND CHANCE

I decided to stay on for three months, and in that time, I was told that I would be included in the sales and purchase division of the steel company if I learnt the local language. My salary then was \$450 a month, and they said it would double.

So I made it a priority to learn the Lingala language. I would ask locals for common words which I would note and learn by heart. Within three months, I was fluent in the language. I did not need formal classes because I had real life language lessons.

I got promoted, and my salary increased. Before I knew it, just like Yadav had predicted, I became a DG. I spent a lot of time with locals to understand the DRC. As I engaged with them, I started feeling that the Congolese people had a big heart just

like Nepalis and I felt a close attachment to them.

From 2017 till 2020, I started my own business as a contractor to the UN after leaving the steel company. I also tried my hand at other businesses and branched out into part-time work, including as a general manager at a manufacturing plant that supplies to industrial areas. I also run my own businesses including a restaurant in Kenya and Congo.

Six years after I first went to the DRC, I got married in 2015. My wife finally moved to Congo in 2023. Once again, we doubted if we made the right decision to work in Africa, especially about the future of our children who had joined us. Perhaps Nepal would have been better for us, as we had our parents, in-laws and family to rely on.

The first few months in Kinshasa, my wife used to ask me how I had spent so many years because she had struggled to adjust. But today, whenever she is in Nepal for holidays, she misses the Congo.

The initial period was difficult, but we like it here now. We live in a community of hundreds of Indian businessmen and their families. Our children have good quality education under the Cambridge system. My daughter is multi-lingual in Swahili, Gujarati, Hindi, Arabic, English and French. She is a topper in her class and wins student of the year every year.

I have built a good rapport with Congolese people, and am also intensifying

efforts to mobilise the Nepalis who work here through diaspora groups like NRNA. There is a growing Nepali diaspora here, we are above 500 Nepalis excluding around 1,400 peacekeepers and we have prioritised efforts to strengthen Nepal-Congo ties. Despite the conflict and the problems, the DRC has enormous mineral wealth and I have seen the country develop dramatically in the time I have been there.

My elder brother is back home from the UAE to be with our father. My other two brothers are in the UAE and Korea.

I had never thought I would end up in the DRC and remain there for over 17 years. Now, even though I often go to the USA, I still prefer being in the Congo. There is a lot to be done here in many sectors, and it is safe to do business.

Labour costs are also low, so investments in services and manufacturing can be successful. I have also made a name for myself through my work and got to meet and learn about people and society. I may have become a soldier if I had not opted for Congo, but then this lifestyle would not be possible.

Congo has taught me how to struggle. It changed many perceptions I had about life, my career and family. The country has made me less ambitious in a good way as it has taught me that wealth is temporary.

You do not need a lot to be happy. 🇳🇵

were all so different. The lack of language and ability to speak made me feel blank and lost. I just did not feel at home. The Indian Army option was still open and I had good career prospects in the chemical company I was working at in Mumbai. In fact they were offering me a ticket to return.

Congo was not for me. But a fellow



Events



Sushi Jatra

The Japanese delicacy gets an upgrade with Sushi Jatra. A premium experience on sushi flavours and rolls. Reserve your seat now.
4-5 July, Rs1,499, Naulo Pan Asian, Jawlakhel, Lalitpur

Salsa Night

Meet fellow dance enthusiasts and salsa the night away. Join for an evening full of energy and good vibes.
Every Sunday, 7pm onwards, Moxxy, Darbarmarg



The Taste of सेलरोटी

Three stories unfold across different eras bound together by a shared theme in this play directed by Milson D. Chamling and with only two actors performing.
Until July 12, 5:15pm, Kausi Theater, Teku

Ropai Hike

Want to experience paddy planting alongside hiking? Check out this special ropai hike and raise your adventurous spirits. Make new memories with closed ones.
4 July, 6:45am, Rs2,500, Brikuti Mandap, Kathmandu

Mask Making

A unique opportunity to explore your creative side: traditional mask making guided by a master artisan. Materials will be provided along with snacks and a colouring book.
4 July, 3pm onwards, Rs2,499, Pulkisi Restaurant, Lal Colony Marg, Kathmandu



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

4 July Celebration

Join for a weekend filled with backyard barbecue, local artisan stalls and interactive crafts.
July 4, 11am-6pm, Embassy Restaurant, Lazimpat



Music

Himalayan Rhythm & Fest

Ujan Shakya Wo Emerge, Kuma Sagar & The Khwopa and more are coming together for an unforgettable musical night
4 July, Rs1,000, Everest Hotel, Baneswor

Mark Band

Jam with the Mark Band as they perform high-voltage rock 'n' roll, AC/DC tributes, and top-charting hits.
July 3, 6-9pm, Hard Rock Cafe, Darbar Marg



Swar Band Live

Catch Swar band will perform their popular tracks this weekend in Thamel. Enjoy good food and good music.
4 July, Rs1,000-1,500, 7pm onwards, LOD, Thamel

Good Grass Bad Tunes

Fan of alternative rock? Good Bad and the band and the Grasstunes band are performing in Thamel this Sunday. Book your seat.
5 July, 8pm onwards, Rs350-500, Titos Pub, Thamel



Rina Giri

Check out Rina Giri's soulful melodies in Moksha this Friday. Have a fun night out with friends.
3 July, Rs1,000, 7pm onwards, Moksh, Jhamsikhel



Getaway



Soaltee Nagarkot

A peaceful resort located in the hills of Nagarkot, Soaltee Westend Resort offers breathtaking views of the surrounding and sunrise. There is a spa, outdoor pool and jacuzzi along with other amenities.
Nagarkot, (01)6680244

Lake View Resort

The resort's private huts, featuring hand crafted wooden furniture, local stone exterior and a private veranda, offer a great weekend escape.
Lake Side, Pokhara (061) 451477



Summit River Lodge

The Summit River Lodge is an expansive 16-lodge property that boasts an infinity pool, semi-tropical vegetation and authentic Nepali cuisine made from local organic produce. The rustic lodge incorporates traditional wood designs with minimalistic accents.
Kurintar, Dhading, 980-1151166

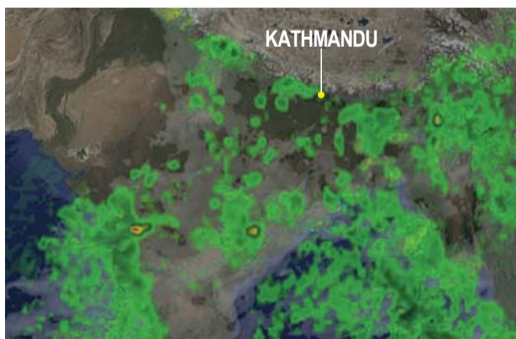
Balthali Village Resort

A simple and cosy retreat just beyond Kathmandu Valley, Balthali Village Resort is ideal for anyone seeking to getaway but not too far away from the city.
Panauti, Kavre, 9851087772

Sukute Beach Resort

Just about 69kms from the capital, Sukute Beach Resort offers a beautiful destination at the shores of Bhotekosi. One can enjoy multiple activities including rafting and camping.
Chautara, Sindhupalchowk, 985-1316057

Weekend Weather



Better Late than Never

Across the Subcontinent, the southwest monsoon has been struggling to move. It is running late, and precipitation is already 43% below average in many places. Weather modelling forecasts a drier and hotter July, so brace for it. Over Kathmandu, the clouds have been hesitant dropping just enough rain to make the 29°C feel like 35°C because of humidity. The Tarai is finally getting some respite from the heat. But rains are going to pick up, be alert for landslide risk on highways from localised cloudbursts.



Our Pick

Viewers can now binge-watch all the episodes of the award-winning Hulu series *The Bear* with its fifth and final season out last week. The drama follows young chef from the fine dining world Carmy Berzatto return to Chicago to run his family's sandwich shop after his older brother Michael dies by suicide. Leaving behind his world of Michelin-starred restaurants, Carmy now has to deal with his brother's unpaid debts and an unruly staff while battling his own trauma. Stars Jeremy Allen White, Ebon Moss-Bachrach, Ayo Edebiri, Lionel Boyce and Liza Colón-Zayas.



Dining

Capital Grill

This American style diner offers a large assortment of appetisers and entrees to suit everyone's taste. Present this paid bills from the same month and get a privilege membership for discounts and seasonal offers.
Bhatbhateni, 01-4537674

New Orleans

Offering a wide variety of western dishes that are scrumptious yet healthy. Rosemary chicken and hamburgers will make you come back for more.
Thamel, 014700736, 9813057100



Invoke Café & Bistro

Pick your favourite: pita bread, baguette or multigrain bread sandwich all served with homemade fries and salad on side.
Jhamsikhel, 01-5432021

Pawan Sweets

In the mood for Indian? Enjoy sweets, South Indian cuisines and other meals. The Pawan Special Dosa is a must-try.
Baneshwor (01) 5906437



Haopin Hotpot

Make sure to take a couple friends because hotpot is best served with a side of good, and hungry company. They offer a wide variety of meats and vegetables to dip in flavoured soups and delicious sides to keep you satiated.
10am-10pm, Narayan Chaur, 9808064999

सामाजिक सञ्जाल प्रयोगमा सचेतता अपनाऔं

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



नेपाल सरकार
विज्ञापन बोर्ड



SWORUP RANJIT

Sneha's homecoming

Calligraphic artist returns to her roots to give her murals new meaning

Vishad Raj Onta

After literally making her mark in American cities with 'calligrafitti', artist Sneha Shrestha is back home to rediscover her roots and give new meaning to her murals.

Shrestha is in Nepal to complete an installation named 'Traveling Chautari' in Lo Manthang which is a large portable bamboo tent on which Shrestha painted the roof (pictured, right). The project is a collaboration between an Italian art collective, Abari architecture, Siddhartha Art Foundation, among others.

"I am interested in what makes a place feel sacred, what goes into creating an immersive atmosphere," says Shrestha, a feeling she finds in Nepal's mandir and gumba but also in mosques in Türkiye. "The Lo Manthang project draws from the idea of a Chautari as a place of informal discussion in Nepal."

In Mustang, Shrestha also came across ancient Luri cave paintings, perfectly preserved in the dry thin air at 4,300m altitude.

For Shrestha who has gained acclaim in the United States for her unique combination of calligraphy and graffiti (calligrafitti) this is a homecoming in more ways than one. She says, "In those caves I saw letters and realised that I am just continuing a traditional art form that is centuries old."

Based in Boston, Sneha Shrestha's paintings, sculptures and large scale public art and murals use spray-painted Devanagari and Ranjana scripts from Nepal. She aims to preserve culture, ritual and



memory, especially for the diaspora by transforming letters into visual experiences.

Shrestha has been commissioned by Google and Facebook, Northeastern University, and her work has been acquired by Harvard Art Museum and the Museum of Fine Art in Boston. She also featured in an exhibit at the Rubin Museum in New York.

One of her most prominent works is a 7-storey tall mural on the side of an MIT building in Boston that she completed in 2024 using a cherrypicker to lift her high above the street.

Shrestha also holds a Master's

from Harvard, and is the Arts Program Manager at the university's Mittal South Asia Institute.

"I had never met a professional artist, and did not go to museums or galleries much, although I always liked painting and drawing," said Shrestha, wearing large glasses and a bleached afro. She was in conversation last week with Nepal Art Council curator Swosti Rajbhandari Kayastha.

Shrestha recalled discovering graffiti in Boston, and liking the fact that it involved letters as primary expression. But she felt her calligrafitti was "too American", so she moved briefly back to Nepal.

While she had no calligraphy training as a child, she did take an Arabic course in college that taught her to see letters as images.

ART AND COMMUNITY

"Where in my work was my voice? That is when I started wondering if our culture had an appreciation for clean, beautiful writing," says Shrestha, whose MIT mural was inspired by the vibrant oranges and reds found in flowers and rituals back home.

"It was a challenging piece, so prominent and central in Cambridge," says Shrestha. "The work has become part of the city

and the community, it does not belong to me anymore."

Previously, Shrestha would have seen success as an individual achievement. Now, she regards herself and her art as a continuum of family, community and the Newa heritage.

Shrestha is close to both parents. Her artist nom de plume IMAGINE is a translation of her mother's name Kalpana, and she makes sure all the art she makes is up to the standard to carry that emphasis on mindfulness. Shrestha's mother also features in her latest series 'Celebrations' about immigration.

Shrestha has fond memories of her father gifting her an iPad which speeded up her process of sketching and outlining. Father and daughter go shopping to stock up on lokta paper whenever she is in Nepal.

Sneha Shrestha has some pragmatic advice for young Nepali artists: "You must do a lot more behind the scenes to make art," she says. "You have to learn how to speak and write about your work, no one else will do it for you."

She is active on Facebook and Instagram, promoting her art through short form content in which she talks to the audience. Shrestha hopes that her work helps viewers feel cultural pride, a reminder that we come from an important place. At the same time, she also wishes for her audience to be inspired to express themselves in any unorthodox ways.

Her last message is one of detachment and impermanence when her murals get painted over: "This is part of the medium. These walls belong to everybody. These pieces are transient." 🇳🇵

Nepal's emerging silver

Yanki Ukyab

Over the past 70 years, Nepal's elderly population (aged 60+) has grown 7.3 times while the total population grew only 3.5 times. In 2023, the country quietly crossed the international threshold of an ageing society defined as when 7% of the population is aged 65 and above, and is projected to be an aged society, 14% of population over 65, by 2049.

In one of Nepal's more pointed historical ironies, the country is now older than it has ever been, while being governed by the youngest leadership it has ever seen.

Development economists have long worried about countries growing old before growing rich, where the costs of an ageing population arrive before a country has built the wealth to meet them. Nepal sits squarely in that conversation.

And yet the same shift that creates the cost also creates the opportunity. The silver economy, the economic activity generated by older populations, reached \$45 trillion globally in 2020, roughly one-third of global GDP.

It encompasses the growing demand for geriatric care, home-based services, pharmaceuticals, age-friendly housing, financial services, wellness, tourism, assistive technologies and a wide range of products tailored to older consumers.

Three forces have driven this demographic shift in Nepal over decades: a dramatic fall in fertility, rising life expectancy, and the outward migration of millions of working-age Nepalis.

For years, Nepal banked on its youth dividend, the economic boost that comes from a large, young working population. That dividend is narrowing. But something else is coming into view, call it the silver dividend, and it may be Nepal's next economic chapter.

HOW WE GOT HERE

For generations, Nepal was a country of children. In 1961, the average Nepali woman had more than six children. Today that number has fallen to 1.9, below the replacement rate of 2.1 and among the lowest ever recorded in South Asia.

The UNFPA 2025 State of World Population report points to the reasons: economic pressure, rising costs of living, and the migration of young couples abroad are all suppressing family size.

At the same time, Nepalis are living longer and the old are outpacing the young at double speed. Life expectancy has risen from 62.5 years in 2000 to 71.3 years today.

According to the 2021 Census, 10.2% of the population, nearly three million people, are now aged 60 and above, up from 8.1% in 2011. Some provinces are already well ahead: Bagmati records 21.9% of its population as elderly.

Migration adds another



Nurturing care economy

Monetary value of unpaid care work must factor in female contribution to the economy

Bina Pradhan

There is a long-standing economic assumption that work without a wage is not 'real' work, yet the deeper issue lies beyond adding monetary value to it.

Can assigning a price to care meaningfully address the structural inequalities that have historically confined women to subordinate social and economic roles? Furthermore, what is being measured—and how?

Is this amount based on replacement cost (what it would cost to hire multiple workers), minimum wage standards, time-use surveys, or merely a judicial estimate for compensation claims? Valuation is not just a technical exercise; it reflects how society understands the role of care.

Care work is not a single, measurable activity. It includes cooking, cleaning, childcare, eldercare, and emotional support—

requiring skill, responsibility, and constant availability. A single number cannot capture this complexity.

More importantly, such valuation risks reframing the issue: instead of recognising women's contribution, it reduces care to the cost of replacing it.

The Indian Supreme Court's recent recognition of homemakers as 'nation builders', alongside a notional valuation of ₹30,000 per month for unpaid care work has sparked debate across South Asia, including in Nepal.

In practice, such valuations apply when a homemaker dies or becomes unable to provide care. This creates a paradox: women's labour remains invisible in everyday life but becomes measurable when it is lost.

But why must women's labour require absence, injury, or death before it is acknowledged? Care is not valuable because it is lost. It is valuable because it sustains daily economic and social life.



UNDERVALUED

Unpaid care work cannot be separated from broader gender inequality. The issue is not only that women perform unpaid work, but that work associated with women has historically been undervalued.

Across societies, activities linked to men have been treated as economically productive, while those linked to women have been seen as natural responsibilities. This has resulted in a systematic undervaluation of women's contributions—within households and in labour markets.

This persistent undervaluation implies that women's work is inherently inferior. It legitimises economic exclusion, including denial of fair wages, limited access to employment, and weaker labour protections. At its most extreme, this hierarchy of value feeds into broader patterns of violence against women—ranging from structural denial of economic rights to everyday exploitation and physical violence.

The scale of this invisible labour further underscores the limitation of a compensation-based approach. Home-based workers—most of

whom are women—constitute a significant share of total employment across South Asia, yet remain largely unrecognised within formal economic systems.

The chart (pictured right, inset) highlights that in countries such as India and Bangladesh, home-based workers account for a substantial proportion of the workforce, while in Nepal and Pakistan too, they represent an important but largely invisible segment of employment. In absolute terms, this amounts to tens of millions of workers.

A recent study by WIEGO and HomeNet South Asia (2026)

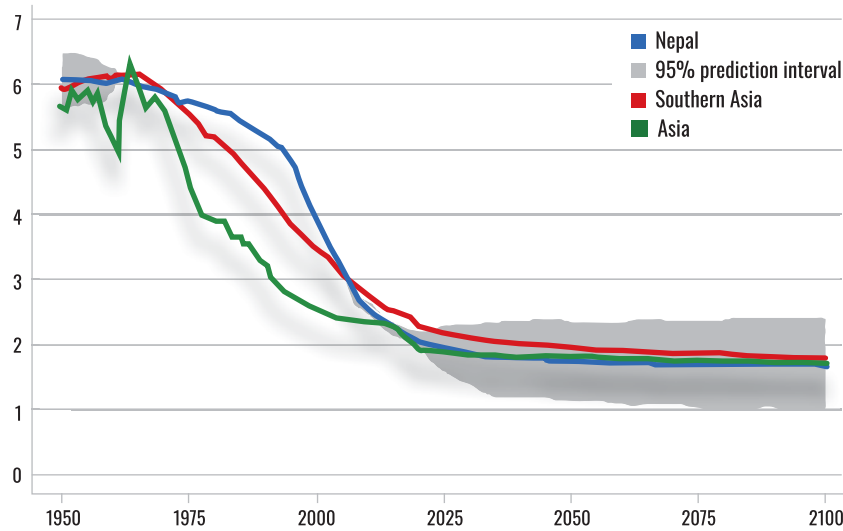
economy

Ageing which was once framed almost entirely as a fiscal burden is increasingly being recognised as an economic frontier



PHOTOS: SUMAN NEPALI

Declining fertility rate in Nepal



SOURCE: UN DESA, WORLD POPULATION PROSPECTS 2024.

dimension to this shift. More than 3.5 million Nepalis work abroad, sending home roughly \$11 billion in 2023, more than a quarter of GDP. The young are in Doha, Dubai and Seoul, and the families they left behind are growing older.

Nepal is not alone in these trends. South Korea's fertility rate has collapsed to 0.72, the lowest ever recorded for any nation. Closer to home, Sri Lanka's 2024 Census recorded 18% of its population as aged 60 and above, a clear signal of where we are heading.

The global conversation about ageing is shifting. What was once framed almost entirely as a

fiscal burden is increasingly being recognised as an economic frontier.

By 2050, people over 50 are projected to account for approaching half of consumer spending in many advanced economies. In Asia-Pacific, the silver economy is already the fastest-growing in the world, projected to exceed \$4 trillion in 2025 with 7% compound annual growth forecast through 2032.

China elevated its silver economy to a national strategic priority in 2024, issuing its first dedicated policy document on the sector. The IMF's April 2025 World Economic Outlook observed that demographic differences across countries create cross-border

investment opportunities, with capital from older, high-savings economies flowing toward younger economies building care infrastructure.

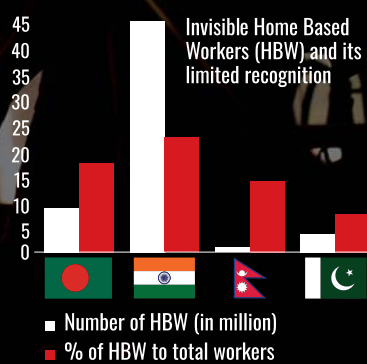
Nepal's new budget reflects this shifting demographic picture. Social security spending has risen steadily from Rs96 billion in 2021/22 to Rs109 billion in 2025/26, with more than 3.8 million Nepalis now receiving some form of support.

For decades, Nepal's development story centred on its young and mobile workforce, the millions who built homes, sent remittances, and kept the economy afloat from Doha to Kuala Lumpur. That story is not over. But a new one is beginning to take shape alongside it.

Nepal has formally sought to defer its graduation from least developed country status to 2029, with its longer-term sights set on middle-income status by 2043. A large and expanding older population, with growing purchasing power supported by pensions, remittances and accumulated household assets, together with rising demand for care and age-related goods and services, need not be a detour from that ambition.

Rather, the emerging silver economy may well prove to be one of the engines of Nepal's next economic chapter. 🇳🇵

Yanki Ukyab is an economist trained at Oxford, working internationally in development and multilateral policy.



estimates that over 57.5 million home-based workers are engaged in production across India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan—most of them women working from within their homes and outside formal labour recognition.

Beyond this, unpaid care work is performed by approximately half the population—primarily women—whose labour sustains households, reproduces the workforce, and underpins entire economies. Taken together, the issue is not simply compensating for the loss of women's care work

in isolated cases. It is the vast extent and systemic invisibility of labour that remains outside markets, measurement, and policy frameworks. A notional monetary value applied after loss captures only a fraction of this reality.

Assigning compensation may acknowledge care, but it does not dismantle the social norms, institutions, and power relations that have shaped this inequality.

Women have long been celebrated symbolically as mothers, cultural bearers, and embodiments of strength. Yet

symbolic recognition often coexists with material inequality. Societies still restrict their access to property, income, decision-making power, and public life, and hence do not treat them as equal citizens.

Calling women 'nation builders' has meaning only if it translates into rights, opportunities, and agency. Nation-building is not sustained by praise alone, it requires recognising women as economic actors, political participants, and equal holders of power.

The question, then, is not whether women are valuable—

this has long been acknowledged rhetorically. But why has this recognition not led to substantive equality?

The debate also exposes a deeper flaw in economic thinking: what counts as 'production'. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) measures market transactions. Work performed within households without monetary exchange remains largely invisible. Yet unpaid care work underpins the entire economy. It raises future workers, sustains the current workforce, and maintains the social fabric.

Care is not outside the economy, it is one of its preconditions. However, assigning a monetary value to care in compensation cases does not automatically integrate it into economic policy, budgeting, or planning. There is a risk that care becomes symbolically recognised but remains structurally excluded.

ECONOMIC JUSTICE

This is why the debate must move beyond compensation toward economic justice. Compensation asks: what is the financial value of lost care? Economic justice asks: how should care be organised, supported, and shared in society?

Compensation responds to inequality after harm occurs. Economic justice seeks to transform the structures that produce inequality in the first place.

A justice-oriented approach would mean recognising care as essential economic infrastructure. It would require sustained investment in childcare, eldercare, healthcare, and social protection systems. It would aim to reduce women's disproportionate unpaid workload and expand their access to paid work, leadership, and decision-

making.

The goal is not simply to pay women to remain within care roles but to transform the conditions that restrict them to those roles.

Nepal has made important commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment, yet women continue to bear a disproportionate burden of unpaid care. This affects their time, mobility, employment opportunities, and participation in public life.

The question Nepal faces is therefore larger than whether to adopt a monetary valuation of care. Will Nepal recognise women primarily as caregivers, or as full economic citizens whose contributions in care, in paid work, and in public life are equally valued?

The Indian judgment offers an important lesson: recognition is necessary, but it is not transformation. The more difficult—and necessary—task is to move from valuing women only in their absence to recognising their contributions, capabilities, and rights in their everyday lives.

Economic justice requires more than compensation. It demands a transformation of the social, economic, and political structures that have historically produced inequality.

The real question is not how much women's care work is worth but what kind of economy and society we want to build. One that compensates for inequality after the fact, or one that actively dismantles it? 🇳🇵

Bina Pradhan is a feminist economist and founder and board director of the BEES (Business, Enterprise and Employment Services) Network for Women in South Asia.



Attire into art, art into attire

Former hotelier turns fine pashmina into wearable works of art

Sudiksha Tuladhar

Shivangini Rana used to paint as a hobby whenever she had free time from her hotel job. During the long lonely days of Covid lockdowns, she took to art more seriously.

She sold her debut piece on social media, launching her artistic career in a unique format. Painting on pashmina shawls, she has turned attire into art and art into attire.

Now, 72 of her acrylic, oil and spray painted shawls are on display under Roots & Blooms, a solo exhibition at The Kalā Salon in Thamel. "My paintings all depict lines are roots and their network, representing where we come from," Rana explains. "And the blooms depict what we see on the outside: achievements and beautiful things happening around us."

LIFE AND LIBERATION

Rana uses metallic gold dye which she says represents the sun and light without which no life is possible. The abstracts are rooted in liberating ethos — stripping away literal representation to let the viewer dictate the meaning.

"Life itself does not come with a single meaning, and neither should art. I want each viewer to bring their own memories, emotions, and experiences to my work," says Rana. "What begins as my story may become a reflection of theirs."



PHOTO COURTESY: SHIVANGINI RANA



An example is her peacock series where the bird's feather is painted on backgrounds with various colours giving viewers an impression of a nervous system or veins of a leaf painted over bold red and black with a dash of yellow.

The paintings are expressions of Rana's emotions, experiences and cultures she has been a part of. "Every layer, every mark, every burst of colour carries a fragment of a moment lived, a lesson learned, a wound healed, or a hope still waiting to bloom. Sometimes my work emerges from happiness, sometimes from longing, and often from the beautiful uncertainty that exists between the two," says Rana.

Rana's pashmina and silk shawl works are the most popular and sell out each time she has exhibited in Qatar, India, and Kathmandu.

Each painted shawl has a story. The shawls pair well with both traditional and modern attire and come in a Nepali lokta paper box, which includes the creation year and painting details for limited editions.

Says Rana, "The shawl is not just a piece of clothing, it is art you wear and the stories that you carry."

This unique exhibition is getting known around town by word of mouth, and visitors are snapping up the shawls for Rs10,000 and above, and paintings starting Rs15,000. 🇳🇵

Roots & Blooms
by Shivangini Rana
Kala Salon, Chaya Centre, Thamel
Until 11 July
11AM - 8PM




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