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Shristi Karki

Prime Minister Balendra Shah’s government that was elected four months ago, riding a wave on the Discord platform is now itself ridden with discord.

The Prime Minister, his small inner coterie of advisers and a Parliament in which his RSP has a near supermajority seem to be pulling in three different directions.

Nepal’s public sphere is abuzz with reports of a growing rift between the Prime Minister and his Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle. In budget planning, and in strategy meetings the PM held with business leaders last week, Wagle was conspicuously absent.

RSP chair Rabi Lamichhane is trying to patch things up, and held a retreat at a Kavre resort with Wagle over the weekend which the Prime Minister did not attend.

Even before the election there has been no love lost between Shah and Wagle. One is a populist former rapper who shuns foreign officials, the other is a voluble Harvard and LSE-educated economist who is approachable to the international

community.

The latest tension was over disagreements on tax structure in the budget, particularly a discrepancy that led to the Finance Bill to be altered several times, and the 3% ‘equity tax’ on private education and healthcare.

After the taxes went into effect at the start of the fiscal year last week, there was widespread public backlash. So, Prime Minister Shah on Tuesday bypassed the Finance Ministry to announce via X that the taxes were withdrawn. He added that the decision had been made in consultation with Wagle.

“This has exposed the disconnect between the party, Parliament, and the executive office,” says Bidushi Dhungel of the National Democratic Institute. “This is a worrying sign for stability and sustainability of any government.”

Prime Minister Shah himself seems amused by all the speculation about a rift in the party, and reacted on his handle with a laughing emoji on a rumoured Cabinet reshuffle.

There is no doubt that the prime minister likes it his way, or the highway. Most major decisions in the past months have not been taken

by his ministers, but by his inner circle who are buddies like chief adviser Kumar Ben and political adviser Asim Shah (editorial, page 2).

“The factionalism was evident ever since Balendra Shah joined the RSP, so a partnership of convenience can only go so far,” explains political analyst Indra Adhikari. “If you look at the ministers who have fallen out, they are from Rabi Lamichhane’s faction and have comparatively more political acumen.”

PASSPORT ROW

The passport procurement issue spotlighted just how directly the Prime Minister’s unelected and inexperienced advisers are involved in matters of state.

In a recent series on the Setopati site, sources revealed that PMO advisers tried to force the head of the Passport Department, the Attorney General’s office, and the CIAA to bypass the Finance and Foreign Ministries to cancel a German company contracted to print passports.

“What is happening with the PM’s inner circle seems similar to what we’ve seen in the past with old party leaders,” says Dhungel. “They surrounded themselves with yes-men so decision-making was

done in an echo chamber. We are seeing the same thing now.”

Increasingly, RSP lawmakers are becoming critical of the party’s handling of the eviction of landless, the hefty increases in traffic fines, police brutality against youth activists and intimidation of the mainstream press by blocking their gates.

For now, both PM Shah and Chair Lamichhane need each other, so there is no danger of the party splitting. Lamichhane has found himself playing the mediator’s role, despite being impatient with the prime minister’s parallel government of powerful advisers.

“Nepal has not had stable leadership because previous governments have not been able to complete full terms despite a majority due to power struggles and ego clashes,” says Adhikari. “The RSP is not doing

any better than legacy parties.”

Reports of their high-handedness towards leaders of independent institutions like the Attorney General’s office as well as the CIAA have been condemned by critics as ‘thuggish’.

“RSP is being held to a higher standard than previous governments,” Dhungel says, “The party’s base might be tolerant of the government’s performance for now, but some GenZ activists have already stopped giving this leadership the benefit of the doubt.”

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(३०४ ग्रेड)

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Great expectations

... but distraction and deflection will not work all the time for all the people

Editorial

Sonia Awale

The RSP swept the election four months ago, benefiting from widespread public disillusionment with the past 20 years of misrule and poor governance by the old parties.

That was a vote for a departure from the past. And there were great expectations. Expectations can be unrealistic, but they stem from the hope. Decades of political dysfunction cannot be solved in months, but there are now signs of impatience in the public.

There are many who want to give this government a chance to set things right, but its high-handedness is putting too many people off.

Prime Minister Balendra Shah's government and his advisers seem to be resorting to distraction and deflection. Balendra Shah expected to win, but not with such a huge majority, so he is letting his advisers behave in the only way they know how — with tough talk, intimidation, and bypassing due process.

Instead of strengthening coordination and communication between line agencies, members of the PMO have been acting like a parallel government.

A widely-circulated investigation in setopati.com by editor Ameet Dhakal has meticulously detailed how the prime minister's inner circle threatened officials, including the DG of the Passport Department Tirtha Raj Aryal



and its IT director Sunil KC to cancel German e-passport deal. The CIAA chief Prem Kumar Rai was held hostage for hours in a PMO anteroom.

Also present were Foreign Secretary Amrit Rai and German Ambassador Udo Eugen Volz who were needlessly questioned and harassed for hours, Dhakal quoted sources as saying. Even when reminded that it would cost the country dearly, diplomatically and legally, they ordered proceedings against two German companies and 15 others.

The prime minister's vocal supporters have applauded his move to thumb its nose at what they believe was a tainted deal by a previous government. They blame the

messenger for exposing the bungling.

But bypassing the Foreign Ministry and acting without constitutional jurisdiction or formal expertise has harmed Nepal's credibility in the international arena, and shown once again how feckless and fickle the PM's advisers have been.

Evidence is growing that Balendra Shah and his kitchen cabinet are working to undermine the state mechanism, driven partly by their belief that two-thirds is mandate to uproot everything.

From the eviction of squatters to bungling international relations, Nepal is paying too high a price for signs of change that ordinary citizens have not yet seen. The last straw

for many was the 3% equity tax on private healthcare and education. The prime minister appears to have read the writing on the wall and rolled it back (page 1).

CRACKS IN THE ARMOUR

These recent cases show that one hand of government doesn't know what the other hand is doing. Nearly four months into the RSP government, the cracks in the party's formidable armour are beginning to show.

Everything came to a head this week with fresh rumours of the prime minister preparing to sack Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle over ideological and policy differences. Wagle's equity tax was ill-advised in a country where those seeking private schools or hospitals are not necessarily the wealthy.

The Rabi-Swarnim chat at the Dusit Thani seems to have resolved the issue for now. It now remains to be seen how long party chair Rabi Lamichhane can keep doing damage control and keep the RSP together for the next five years. There are seemingly irreconcilable differences in personality and working style between the party and the PMO.

Feedback about international relations seems to be getting across to the prime minister who is reportedly finally meeting Indian and Chinese envoys separately later this week. He has also been holding consultations with the business sector.

The hope is that the PMO and the RSP will come together as they did during the election campaign and show greater accountability for their own good. Failure is not an option for the country, either. 🇳🇵

Trending Online



Kathmandu's Bicycle Jatra

by Nepali Times
Kathmandu Kora Jatra 2026 began at Patan Darbar Square on Saturday, with more than 7,000 cyclists taking part. It was flagged off by Australian Ambassador Simon Ernst and Lalitpur Mayor Chiribabu Maharjan. Photo feature at nepalitimes.com



Most reached and shared on Facebook

Punishing women for speaking out

by Vishad Raj Onta
As Nepali women politicians and activists become more outspoken, they are being punished for it by anonymous online hate mongers. Women are cyberbullied more than their male colleagues, and face threats of sexual violence. Read the story online.



Most popular on X

Face-to-face with Balen on Facebook

by Nobel Rimal
PM Balendra Shah's Facebook page is a stage with three performers: a politician who posts, an audience that performs, and a platform that arranges the scene and decides who stands where. Analysis on our website.



Most commented



Meghalaya's tunnels of no return

by S B Jero Rai
Nepalis from the eastern mountains have been working—and dying—in illegal coal mines in India for decades. In February, four Nepalis were killed when a dynamite explosion rocked a mine they were digging in. Visit nepalitimes.com for the CIJ-N investigation.



Most visited online page

Letters

DATA CENTRES

It is not just water, the issue is also what data centres expel ('The Himalaya as the next data centre arena', Ayusha Chalise, #1319). Waste flowing downstream from the Himalaya will affect every group, spreading through Nepal. And these companies will happily sacrifice Nepal for big countries and cities. They won't care about you.

David L Merin

■ Noise pollution, ground pollution, melting snow and ice, landslides, using water resources and in turn electricity. In a nutshell climate emergency on steroids.

Jackie Taylor

■ Do we really want to exploit nature for data centres?

Ayush Basnet

■ It is not just about water and energy. Do not sell this precious unique environment to the billionaire tech world.

Clare Alderson

■ The data centre will need so much water and energy, contributing to CO2 emission and speeding up the melting of glaciers.

Renate Schwarz

■ Bad idea. Do not destroy the Himalaya -- the most delicate ecosystem already suffering badly from climate warming.

Shona Wilson

WORLD CUP FINAL

Argentina have completed the destruction of a once holy competition in football ('Own Goal', Kunda Dixit, Nepali Time eSpecial newsletter, nepalitimes.substack.com). Take this structure apart, please. Skipping the final for the first time in my life.

Shaun Sarvey

DIASPORA DIARIES

Stories like these can inspire hundreds of thousands of Nepali migrant workers who lack confidence and decide not to return home ('Cleaning plane toilets abroad to beekeeping in Nepal', Lok Bahadur Rai, #1320).

Vicky Adhikari

WATER SECURITY

Monsoon rains are pounding down while taps stay dry ('Why one house one tap is not enough to guarantee water security', Ngamindra Dahal, page 4). Rulers must wake up.

Hem Sagar Baral

PM ON SOCIAL MEDIA

This is nice analysis ('Face to face with Balen on Facebook', Nobel Rimal, #1320). Simpler writing would perhaps be better at getting the message across - considering different age groups.

Sujan Parajuli

MALNUTRITION

For every three underweight children in Karnali, there is one overweight child in Kathmandu ('What hunger does before a child can even speak', Shalav Rana, nepalitimes.com).

Gus Ferguson

YOUTH MIGRATION

New Zealand and Nepal have another thing in common: mass exit of young for lack of opportunity ('Lands of milk and honey', Janak Bastakoti, #1320). Failed governance and too small economy to make any difference.

Forester

KNOW YOUR WINES

Never thought I'd see the phrase pairing wine with momo and sekuwa ('On cloud wine', Alisha Sijapati, #nepalitimes.com).

Jamie Uhrig

Online Package



NEPAL'S FLYING START

The early FLYING of civil aviation in Nepal is a tale of accomplishments and missed opportunities. Read story on page 6-7. Subscribe for multimedia content.



MEDITATIVE ART

Nepal's celebrated artist Lok Chitrakar talks about paubha as he adds meticulous brush strokes to his masterpiece. Watch video on our YouTube channel. Read story on page 10-11.

1,000 Words



UNDP NEPAL

OLD FRIENDS: Finance Minister Swarmin Wagle with UNDP Nepal Country Representative Kyoko Yokosuka and other officials during a ceremony marking the 60th anniversary of the collaboration between UNDP and Nepal government in Kathmandu last week. Wagle was formerly an economist with UNDP and delivered a keynote during the event.

Times

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NT ARCHIVE

Why one house one tap is not enough to guarantee water security

Equal distribution of infrastructure does not produce equal access to water

Ngamindra Dahal

For years, Nepal’s local politicians at election time have promised one tap of drinking water for every household.

Communities installed plastic pipes for household taps, removing the drudgery of walking for hours to distant springs to collect water. But a recent study in Sindhuli, Syangja and Kailali districts show that a tap does not necessarily mean adequate water.

The question is whether that tap actually delivers water when it is most needed: during the long dry months. Most community water schemes locate a spring, build a collection structure, lay pipes, construct a reservoir, and run connections to households.

This approach has improved access for millions, but it rests on an assumption that the spring will keep flowing, reliably, throughout the year. Now, climate change is dismantling that assumption.

Many perennial springs have become seasonal. Droughts, erratic rainfall, forest fires, loss of traditional ponds are eroding the natural processes that recharge these sources. Many households therefore receive water for only a few hours a day.

For families with a financial cushion, this is just an inconvenience. They install household storage tanks (a 1,000 litre tank costs Rs25,000). That is unaffordable for poorer households.

For many, actual water security depends not on the tap itself, but

on whether a family can afford the extra infrastructure when that tap runs dry. A landslide, a forest fire, or a flood can stop water delivery for days or weeks. When that happens, people must walk for hours each way, carrying water in jars.

Drudgery is hardest on women, who bear the primary responsibility for water collection, the elderly, and on households dependent on livestock, where limited water undermines sanitation, hygiene, and livelihoods.

Equal distribution of taps does not produce equal access to water. What separates the water-secure from the water-insecure is not the presence of a connection, but the capacity to prepare for uncertainty. This is not deliberate discrimination. It is structural and invisible.

THE SOURCE

A water supply scheme cannot be considered complete at the point where a spring is tapped. The source itself, the landscape that feeds it, the forest that holds moisture in the soil, must become the first priority, not an afterthought.

When a municipality invests millions in pipes and reservoirs, a comparatively modest additional investment in protecting the recharge area can determine whether that system serves communities for decades or begins to fail within years.

Spring conservation by identifying recharge zones, protecting forest catchments, restoring degraded slopes, adopting nature-based solutions, must

become a core component of every water supply project, not a standalone environmental concern.

Traditional practices offer lessons here too. Small ponds, recharge structures, and careful stewardship of forest landscapes-built resilience into water systems long before modern infrastructure arrived. Reviving these approaches can retain moisture, reduce forest fire risks, and keep springs alive through the dry season.

If household storage has become essential infrastructure in a climate-stressed system, then treating it as a private purchase means quietly accepting that water security is something money can buy — and that the poorest families simply go without.

Municipalities can support vulnerable households in accessing reserve tanks with targeted, practical steps. A truly water-secure community needs protected and recharged sources; climate-resilient infrastructure; adequate community storage; and household-level support for families who cannot invest on their own.

The true measure of success is whether families can access sufficient, safe water during the hardest months of the year, not just when the rains are generous, but when the dry season bites and the springs are low.

A tap at every doorstep is an important milestone, but without reliable flow, it is only a symbol of access, not security. 

Ngamindra Dahal, PhD, is Senior Research Fellow and the Chair of the Nepal Water Conservation Foundation.

BRIEFS

Turkish + CAE

Turkish Airlines has signed a contract with CAE, a global leader in aviation training technologies, at the Farnborough Airshow for the delivery of five full-flight simulators (FFS), two flight training devices (FTD) with an option for two additional FFSs. This supports the



carrier’s strategy to expand pilot training capacity in line with fleet growth. It will add to the airline’s new, state-of-the-art Flight Training Center January. The new facility’s simulator hangars are scheduled to become operational in 2027, with the full center set to be completed and fully operational in 2028.

Says Turkish Airlines Chair Murat Şeker: “The addition of these advanced training devices will enhance our ability to prepare pilots across multiple fleet types with the highest levels of safety, consistency, and operational excellence.”

Buddha ATR72-600

Buddha Air, Nepal’s largest domestic airline is inducting two ATR72-600 series aircraft, and the first one is being ferried in from Toulouse on Friday. The -600 series is more advanced than the 16 ATR-72-500s that the carrier now operates and consumes 25% less fuel.

Deuba returning

Former Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba who has been in Singapore and Hong Kong for five months has said he is returning to Nepal and expects vengeful action from the government. His wife Arzu was Foreign Minister when the couple was attacked and their home looted and set on fire on 9 September last year.

New coin, no map

The Cabinet this week directed the Nepal Rastra Bank and the Mint to issue new Rs1 and Rs 2 denomination coins without Nepal’s map depicting the disputed Limpiyadhura region claimed by India. The new coins will be engraved with an image of Nepal’s oldest monastery in Mustang. A news agency report from Kathmandu has been carried widely in the Indian media which said Nepal had ‘backed down’ from the territorial claim.

Kolkata-Biratnagar

Indian Railways cargo services have now extended to Biratnagar from Kolkata. Goods can reach Biratnagar Integrated Check-post from Calcutta port within 24 hours.



British Council Conference

The British Council has announced the South Asia Teaching English Online Conference 2026 23-25 July, a free three-day event that will convene educators, researchers and teacher educators from across the region.



Sipradi training

Sipradi Autoparts has launched ‘Channel Partners Entrepreneurship Development 2026’ to train the next generation to get a job and retain them in the domestic market.

Nepal-UK trade

UK has offered duty-free access to 99% of eligible Nepali exports. The Developing Countries Trading Scheme (DCTS), is expected to boost Nepal’s exports.

Birganj Customs

Birganj Customs Office recorded the total customs revenue at Rs 243.82 billion for the fiscal year 2025/26, meeting 89.19% of the annual target.

Shake and Win

Ncell has launched ‘Shake and Win’ campaign wherein customers can shake their phones to avail exciting rewards every 24 hours. Go to Ncell app.

Zonta honoured

For the second time in a row, Zonta Club Kathmandu has been honored with the Zonta Excellence in Service and Advocacy Award for the 2024–2026 biennium, in recognition of its action to prevent both offline and online violence against women and girls.

Honda Airbag

Syakar, the authorised distributor of Honda in Nepal is conducting a ‘Free Airbag Safety Recall’ initiative to address potential risks associated with the SRS Airbag Inflators in older Honda car models between 2001-2014 including City, Civic, CR-V, Jazz, Insight, Stream, and Accord.

MetLife WWF

MetLife Foundation has awarded a grant of \$120,000 to WWF Nepal to implement the ‘Joint Efforts for Ecosystem, Wellbeing and Alternative Livelihoods of Local Communities Based on Nature (JEEWAN)’ project in Rajapur Municipality in Bardia to strengthen climate resilience and improve economic opportunities for low-income households.



Proton e.MAS 5

Jagdamba Motors has launched the Proton e.MAS 5. Available in Prime and Premium variants, the introductory price is Rs 2.99 million and Rs. 3.49 million for the first 100 customers.

Pradesh Bachat Khata

NMB has rolled out ‘Pradesh Bachat Khata’ to improve savings throughout the seven provinces of Nepal with benefits such as free mobile banking, internet banking, and a visa debit card, DEMAT and MeroShare account registration for the first year.



UPPER TAMAKOSHI HYDROPOWER LIMITED

Nepal has to plan beyond megawatts

As a net power exporter, the country now needs to ask whether we are building hydropower right


COMMENT
Minakshi Rokka Chhetri

For close to a decade, my work has taken me to the places where hydropower actually gets built, walking to huge concrete structures in a deep river valley. I have argued with site managers about hard hats no inspector will ever check, spending afternoons with community leaders who want to know what happened to the fish. From those construction sites, the national conversation looks oddly narrow.

The story at conferences and seminars in Kathmandu is almost entirely about megawatts. It is a good and uplifting story, but it is also incomplete.

If Nepal means to be South Asia's source of clean energy, what is sold across the border must carry more than electrons. It must also carry credible proof that the electricity was generated in a way that the buyer, the lender and the family displaced by the dam can all defend.

By March 2026, Nepal's installed capacity topped 4,105MW, almost all of it hydro. It was only 700MW fifteen years ago. The grid now reaches nearly the entire population of Nepal.

Last year, the country earned

\$130 million from power exports to India and Bangladesh and, for the first time, Nepal sold more electricity than it bought.

But these accomplishments hide the wide seasonal variation in generation capacity. Nearly 90% of the electricity is generated from run-of-river plants where output depends on the water flow of rivers. In the monsoon Nepal now has a surplus of 1,200MW, while in winter there is still a deficit that has to be covered with imports from India.

The country is therefore a net annual exporter but is structurally import-dependent. The boast and the vulnerability are derived from the seasonal variation in power output. This is the strongest argument that Nepal's next phase in energy development has to come from storage schemes.

The Energy Development Roadmap sets the target of 28,500MW by 2035. This year's budget allocated \$640 million for generation, transmission and distribution, and a plan to add 670MW of hydro and 370MW of solar this year alone. This is a clear admission that the dry-season gap needs move beyond run-of-river plants.

However, the project development documents for hydropower are limited to the EIA or IEE rituals and do not mention cumulative impact on the ecology and communities in the valleys.

Then there is the overarching risk of climate breakdown. The same warming that makes Nepal's clean power valuable to its

neighbours is destabilising the rivers that the power depends on.

CLIMATE RISK

The Himalaya is heating at roughly twice the global rate and run-of-river schemes are affected directly. The hydropower plants have been built directly downstream from 47 potentially dangerous glacial lakes.

In 2016, a glacial lake outburst flood swept away the 45MW Upper Bhotekosi plant; in July 2025 a glacier collapse in China knocked out roughly 200MW in one morning, including the 111MW Rasuwagadi plant commissioned only a year earlier.

New and well-built is not the same as safe. Addressing climate risk can no longer be an afterthought, it has to be engineered into the asset and assessed across the whole basin, because a flood has never respected a project boundary.

The change I see on the ground is real, if uneven. Developers that a decade ago had no one on staff to answer for the river are hiring their first environmental and social professionals and writing E&S policies that sit above any single project.

Community engagement is shifting from a signature-gathering formality towards genuine consultation. International investors have funded a basin-wide cumulative impact assessment of the Trisuli, the kind of whole-river study that our regulators can take a lead on for all basins.

And engineers are beginning to design fish passes built for the species actually in the river, a route

the snow trout will use rather than a concrete staircase that only looks right on a drawing. The momentum is unmistakable, but it is still felt far less across the regulatory and private mainstream.

Three changes are needed in order to go beyond megawatts;

1. Regulation must be proportionate to risk. The core parameters have barely moved in decades. The environmental-flow approach traces back to the 2001 hydropower policy and the EIA framework to the early 1990s, and they are applied almost the same way to every project and the same checklist for a 6MW plant in a quiet valley as for a 900MW reservoir that displaces thousands. That is not a system, it is a formality.
2. Climate-proof the infrastructure itself and strengthen every project to be engineered and stress-tested against glacial-lake outburst floods and shifting river flows, and fund upstream monitoring and cross-border early-warning systems.
3. Require a basin-level cumulative impact assessment before licensing on the Kosi, Karnali, Gandaki and Mahakali, held by a body with the authority.

The domestic story cannot be lost inside the export one. Traditional biomass such as firewood, dung, and crop residue still makes up the bulk of the energy Nepal actually burns. Clean electricity is a small fraction of total consumption, and most kitchens are not yet electrified.

We have to build for the region and electrify our own homes at the same time, not in sequence. Nepal's neighbours are not only buying electricity — India's decarbonisation and Bangladesh's energy security both depend on the power they can defend to their own regulators and voters. That assurance is the product; the megawatts are merely its unit of measure.

People sometimes ask whether responsible business is a luxury that least-developed countries can afford. The answer sits in the project files. The schemes that failed did not do so from spending too much on safeguards, they failed from spending too little, and then paid for it twice.

None of the tools required is mysterious or beyond a country at our stage. International standards exist, the basin studies can be done, the partnership models are already ours. What is missing is the discipline to treat them as the rule rather than the exception, and the will to write that discipline into the next licence, the next financing, the next budget line.

None of it needs new money but requires sequencing, putting the safeguards in front of the megawatts, not behind them. Get that right, and Nepal will not just be exporting electricity it will be offering the region something rarer and far harder to copy — a model of development with a conscience. 🇳🇵

Minakshi Rokka Chhetri leads environmental and social safeguards for Nepal-based Dolma Impact Fund.

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The Westland PV3 that overflew Mt Everest in 1933.



The Westland PV3 in Purnea after the historic flight.



King Tribhuvan inspecting a Beechcraft Bonanza flown in by the nephew of the Indian Ambassador Majithia.



Russian émigré Boris Lissanevitch of the RNAC, his wife Inger welcomed the first tourists to Nepal.



King Tribhuvan welcoming Prime Minister Nehru at Kathmandu airport in 1951.



A MI-4 Helicopter in Lukla.



Indian National Airways DC-3 unloading cargo at Kathmandu in 1952.



Bulls still felt at home at Kathmandu airport next to the Royal Flight DC-3 (9N-RF2) and a Shorts Skyvan (9N-RAA).



One of two AN-2 (9N-AAK) at Kathmandu airport in 1964.



The first two RNAC Twin Otters 9N-ABA and 9N-ABB in Lukla in 1972.

Times

24 - 30 JULY 2026 #1321

Dan Edwards

3 April, 1933

The first recorded flight in Nepal's airspace was by British pilots Lord Clydesdale (Douglas Douglas-Hamilton) Flight Lt. D.F. McIntyre, on two Westland PV3s with Bristol Pegasus engines. The biplanes took off from Purnea in Bihar on 3 April, and were equipped with electric heating, oxygen supplies and cameras.

This was to be the first ever overflight of Mt Everest, and the pilots took photos flying 500 feet over the summit of the world's highest mountain. Prime Minister Juddha Shamsheer Rana gave special permission for 'scientific purposes'.

July, 1942

Acting on a whim, Col Robert Scott, the American commander of the Flying Tigers, while flying from India to China over the 'Hump' made a detour in a Republic P-43 Lancer and flew at 35,000ft above Everest.

1947

British RAF pilot Kenneth Neame made an unauthorised photographic flight over Everest in a Spitfire XIX.

April 1949

The first reported landing of an aircraft at Gauchar in Kathmandu was by RAF Squadron Leader Dalip Singh Majithia while his uncle, Surjit Singh Majithia was serving as the first Indian Ambassador to Nepal. He flew a single-engine 4-seater Beechcraft Bonanza.

1951

Indian National Airways began regular flights between Kathmandu and Calcutta.

18 February 1951

After the end of Rana rule, King Tribhuvan arrived in Kathmandu airport (later to be named after him).

1953

Mahabir and Madan Shamsheer Rana's Calcutta-based Himalayan Aviation initiated flights from Kathmandu to Pokhara, Bhairawa, Simara and Biratnagar using DC-3s aircraft.

August 1953

India nationalised its airline industry and state-owned Indian Airlines took over flights to and within Nepal.



1954

Ticket prices (Indian currency) of Indian Airlines and JAMAIR:

Biratnagar	—	Kathmandu:	Rs44
Kathmandu	—	Simara:	Rs23
Kathmandu	—	Pokhara:	Rs40
Kathmandu	—	Bhairawa:	Rs68
Calcutta	—	Kathmandu:	Rs120
Patna - Muzaffarpur	—	Kathmandu:	Rs50



RNAC's last remaining DC-3 put out to pasture at Bhairawa in 1973.

15 June 1955

Gauchar Aerodrome in Kathmandu was formally inaugurated by King Mahendra.

30 August 1955

Nepal's first fatal aviation accident. Two people died when a Kalinga Airlines C-47 (DC-3) crashed in Simara after trying to avoid a person crossing the grass runway.

15 May 1956

An Indian Airlines C-47 (DC-3) crashed in Kathmandu while attempting a go-around after a hard landing, killing 15, mostly students returning from boarding school in Shimla.

1956-1961

Nepal's First Five-Year Plan brought into service seven fair weather airfields:

- Bharatpur, Dang, Dhangadi, Janakpur, Nepalganj, Palung Tar (Gorkha), and Rajbiraj.
- Kathmandu's grass airfield was paved.

1 July 1958

Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation (RNAC) was established with Maharaj Kumar of Mayurbhang, managing agent, owning 49% of the company. Ganesh Man Singh became Board Chair. Its first Douglas C-47 (DC-3) with tail number 9N-AAB made its first flight to Simara on 4 July. The Civil Aviation Act 2015 (1958) was passed.

1959

The US International Cooperation Administration (later USAID) provided two more WWII surplus C-47 Skytrain (DC-3). The freighters had benches along the windows, and passenger versions had 28 seats in the sloping cabin. Kathmandu was connected to Pokhara, Bhairawa, Biratnagar.

October 1959

Nepal government acquired full control of RNAC and its first Nepali pilots B K Shrestha, R C Upadhyaya and K K Shrestha, were hired in 1960.

May 1960

A Pilatus Porter named 'Yeti' crashed at 5,700m on Dhaulagiri while ferrying supplies for a Swiss expedition. No one was injured, but the plane's earlier successful landings at that height had set a world altitude record for aircraft. - RNAC began international services to Patna, Delhi and Calcutta.

1961

The Swiss provided two Pilatus Porters that could carry up to 10 passengers or a payload of 2,200 pounds. Another DC-3 was bought from Pakistan International Airlines (PIA).

1961/62

RNAC carried 61,955 passengers and 3,218,513 pounds of freight during the fiscal year.

1 August 1962

RNAC DC-3 (9N-AAH) disappeared and was found a week later in Dhorpatan. Nepal's Ambassador to India was among the six passengers and four crew killed.

1962

RNAC bought one DC-3 was bought from KLM and another from Aer Lingus. - RNAC's annual revenue reached Rs7 million.

1962-1965

Nepal's Three-Year Plan aimed to build 20 new STOL (short-take-off-and-landing) airstrips for services by Pilatus Porter type planes including at Jumla, Jiri and Baglung. Five



A RNAC DC-3 in Simara in 1967.



Passenger wait to board DC-3 in the shade of its wing in Dhangadi in 1970.



Pilatus Porter and RNAC Jetranger helicopter at the Silgadi-Doti airstrip.



of the Royal Hotel and
urists to Nepal.



Passengers getting on board a DC-3 bound for Simara at
Kathmandu airport.



RNAC F-27 at Kathmandu Airport in 1966.



Tourists disembarking from a Twin Otter onto elephants in Meghauri in 1968.



RICH PFAU



An Indian Airlines DC-3 in Kathmandu in 1953 with a Himalayan Aviation DC-3 at left. Ganesh Himal looms in the background.



One of two HS-748s of RNAC (9N-AAU) at Pokhara airport in 1971.

TONI HAGEN



King Birendra's Alouette helicopter flying below Mt Ama Dablam in 1971.



RNAC's new Jetranger in a paddy field in eastern Nepal in 1975.

DAN EDWARDS



The inaugural Thai International flight connecting Kathmandu to Bangkok.

THAI



existing grass runways were to be paved, but only two were finished.

Gauchar Airport was to be upgraded with a 6,600ft long 150ft wide cross runway, a terminal extension and ancillary buildings.

1963

China gifted two AN-2 Fong Shee Harvester single engine biplanes, derived from Soviet-era Antonovs.

1964

RNAC's fleet had eight DC-3s, two MI-4 helicopters, and one AN-2 Fong Shee.

The King and the Royal Nepal Army also had their own 'Royal Flight' aircraft, including an Ilyushin IL-14 (9N-RF1) gifted by the Soviet Union and a DC-3 (9N-RF2).

- Kathmandu was connected to airfields in Bhairawa, Nepalganj, Tumlingtar, Biratnagar, Janakpur, Pokhara and Silgadi-Doti, Bhadrapur, Gorkha, Bharatpur, and Rajbiraj.

1965/66

RNAC carried 72,141 domestic and 17,126 international passengers.

1965-1970

The Third Plan again targetted building 20 STOL airstrips

by 1970. Six of the eight other airfields were to be made all-weather. Another master plan to modernise Gauchar into an international airport was revealed.

1966

Nepalis took over air traffic control duties from Indian technicians.

- RNAC introduced its turbo-prop service with a new 52-seater Fokker F-27 (9N-AAR).

March 1967

The first jet aircraft, a Boeing 707 landed in Kathmandu in March bringing West German President Heinrich Lübke on a state visit to Nepal.

- RNAC's F-27 inaugurated weekly mountain sightseeing flights.

January 1968

The first scheduled jet service was launched by Thai International connecting Kathmandu and Bangkok via Calcutta using its Caravelle.

1969

35 people were killed in an RNAC DC-3 crash enroute to Simara from Kathmandu on 12 July.

1970-1975

The Fourth Plan allocated Rs161 million for 19 runway extension and airport upgrade projects.

Simara was supposed to be an alternative airport for jet aircraft in case Kathmandu had bad weather. Other air strips were proposed in Mahendranagar, Tikapur, Ghorahi, Dhorpatan, Jomsom, Ramechhap, Jiri, Udaipur, Rumjatar, Lukla airfields. Most did not materialise, or were not used.

1970

Nepal purchased two 58-seater Hawker Siddeley HS-748 Avro aircraft after the F-27 crashed due to wind shear on landing at New Delhi in 1970, two crew members were killed.

1971

First two of DeHavilland Canada DHC-6 Twin Otters went into service and connected Lukla, Jumla and Tumlingtar.

15 August 1972

RNAC's first Boeing 727-200 (9N-ABD) inaugurated Kathmandu-Bangkok flights.

1972

A DC-3 carrying paratroopers of Royal Nepal Army crashed at Dhulikhel killing 31.

10 May 1973

A Thai International DC-8-33 (HS-TGU) overshot the newly-elongated runway at Kathmandu. One person on the ground was killed.

12 June 1973

A Royal Nepal Airline DHC-6 carrying Rastra Bank cash from Biratnagar to Kathmandu hijacked by underground Nepali Congress militants and flown to Forbesganj in Bihar.

1975

RNAC leased Bell Jetrangers from Singapore Helicopter Services for charter flights.

Dan Edwards was a Peace Corps volunteer in 1966 and is the author of several books on Nepal.

This is the fifth instalment in a Nepali Times series on the history of transportation in Nepal.

BOEING



The first of three Boeing 727s that RNAC acquired (9N-ABD).

Nepal enters jet age

After 1973 Nepal entered the jet age with the acquisition of two more Boeing 727. In 1987, Royal Nepal Airlines became one of the first operators of the Boeing 757-200 in Asia with two planes, including a rare semi-cargo 'Combi' variant. The same year, an Air France Concorde round-the-world tourist charter landed in Kathmandu.

In the 1980s, RNAC operated 10 DHC-6 Twin Otters and two HS-748s on domestic routes, along with four jets for international service. Boeing 757s flew from Kathmandu to Gatwick throughout the 1990s until the airline suffered mismanagement due to political interference.

One of the 757s, named 'Gandaki' (9N-ACB) has been in outdoor storage for the past 10 years at Kathmandu.

Aviation safety remained a concern with 73 fatal crashes between 1962-2025 killing 935.



-Doti grass airstrip in 1975.

DAN EDWARDS



Twin Otter at Nepalganj airport in 1973.



A Pilatus PC-6 at Rumjatar in 1971.

MIKE FURST



An Air France Concorde on a round-the-world charter landed in Kathmandu in 1987.



Events

Utsav Exhibition

A solo art exhibition by Pradip K Bajracharya, 'Utsav: In The Rhythm of Jatra' captures the essence of Newa customs and traditions of Kathmandu.
24 July- 23 August, 11am-7pm, Gallery 108, Durbar Marg

Drama at Kausi Theatre

'जौलिन' is a social drama that looks at love both as sanctuary and prison, and stars Meera Khadka, Anoj Pandey, Nishan Khatri and others.
July 24-August 14, 5:15pm (Except Tuesdays), Teku



Photography Workshop

Enhance your photography skills with experienced guidance. Application deadline is 25 July.
2-16 August, Rs15,000, 10am-2pm, The Yellow House, Sanepa

Drone Film Festival

Aerial filmmakers, professionals, cinematographers, tech and drone enthusiasts come together for the first drone festival in Nepal.
25 July, 6am-9pm, Gokarna Forest Resort, Gokarna



Fabric Painting

Join this workshop and explore painting on fabrics like georgette, chiffon and cotton.
25-26 July, Rs. 3,499, 10am - 2pm, Majari House of Art, Banglamukhi, Patan

In Alignment

Support undergraduate students of fine arts from Kathmandu University who are exhibiting collectively.
24 July-1 August, 11am-6pm, Nepal Art Council, Baber Mahal



Music



Axix Band

Fan of rock music? Get your tickets now and enjoy some of the all time hots of Axix band as they perform live.
31 July, Rs799, 7pm onwards, XO Club, Thamel

Echoes of Heritage

Culture, heritage and music will come alive this weekend with Kuma Sagar performing his crowd favourites in Kathmandu.
25 July, Rs1,000, 3pm onwards, Twa Chhen, Basantapur



Moksh Festival 2026

D food stalls, games and live music, Moksh Festival has something for everyone. Chumbak, Join Family International and others will be performing.
25 July, Rs. 1,000, 12pm onwards, Moksh, Jhamsikhel

Hip-Hop Mandal

Be a part of the hiphop movement in Nepal. Check out Hip Hop Mandal in Thamel this Saturday.
25 July, 8pm onwards, Rs. 499, XO Club, Thamel

Ghazal Evening

Enjoy an evening of soulful musical performance by Indreni Band.
24 July, 6:30pm onwards, Bhumi Restaurant and Bar, Lazimpat



Getaway

Hotel Heritage Bhaktapur

Immerse yourself in the rich culture and heritage of the ancient city of Bhaktapur in this Newa-style boutique hotel. Hotel Heritage also offers some of the best authentic Newa food in town.
Suryabinayak, Bhaktapur, (01) 6611628



Tiger Tops Karnali Lodge

Enjoy the ongoing monsoon offer at Tiger Tops Karnali Lodge, with the package including bird watching and village walks.
Thakudwara, Bardia, 9851217265

Shivapuri Cottage

Shivapuri Heights Cottage offers guests a rare treat: a hillside jacuzzi with sweeping views over the Kathmandu valley. Soak in the evening breeze and watch the city lights come alive after a long day of hiking.
Budhanilkantha, 9846232271



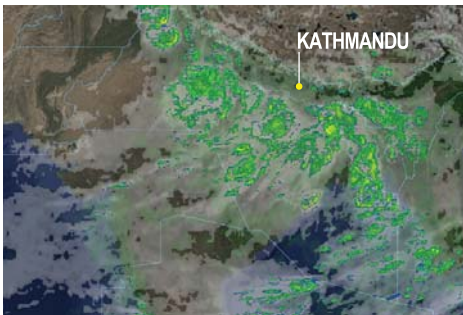
Hattiban Resort

Grab breakfast from the Hattiban Himalayan Height Resort's buffet, lounge by the sunny courtyard overlooking the mountains, get a massage at the spa and take a tour of nearby Pharping, Champadevi Temple and Khokana Village.
Hattiban, 980-1309847

Bodhi Suites

This modern and classy Bodhi Suites Boutique Hotel offers a wide variety of luxury amenities, and is the perfect place to unwind following a day of adventure in Pokhara.
Lakeside (61) 457657 / 58

Weekend Weather



Near Normal Monsoon

After a below-normal total precipitation for June, the southwest monsoon is making up for lost time over the Subcontinent with near-normal total precipitation for July. However, total does not mean regular rain. There is a tendency for localised cloudbursts with long dry spells with the resulting danger of flashfloods and landslides. The effects of the Madden-Julian Oscillation (MJO) is expected to taper off in August, with weather models forecasting above normal rain for most parts of Nepal. Kathmandu Valley will continue to receive 15-25mm of daily rain, falling mostly at night.



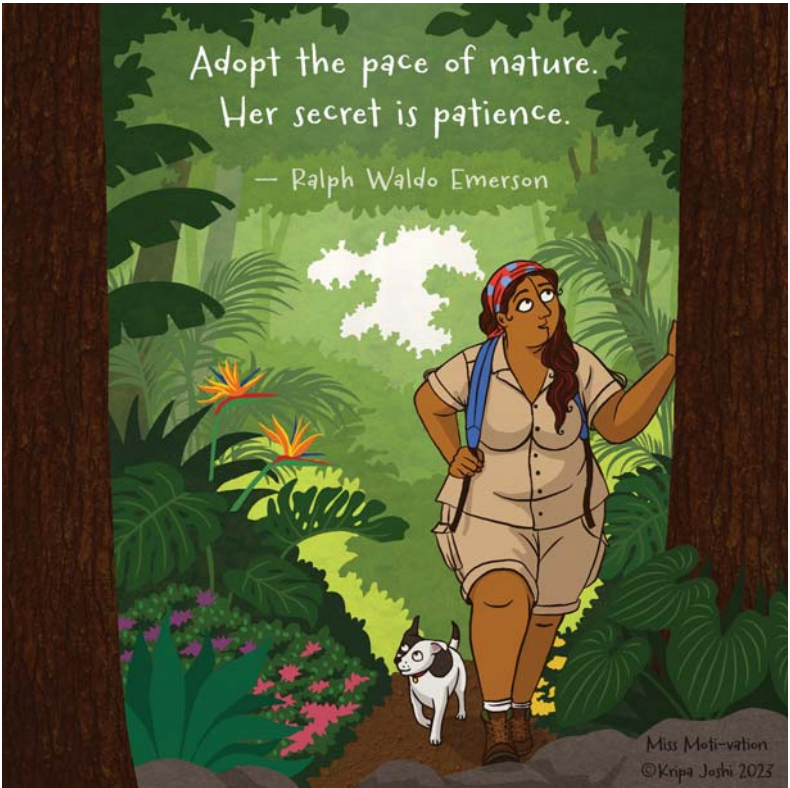
Our Pick



In the fictional North Welsh coastal town of Morfa Halen, former detective Jackie Ellis is haunted by the disappearance of her niece, Nessa, three years ago and her failure to solve the case. Now a schoolteacher, Jackie's life is upended again when she discovers the drowned body of her eight-year-old student. As a storm builds off the coast and threatens to destroy all evidence, Jackie must work with her estranged partner to find the killer, and figure out if this new case is linked to her niece's disappearance. The 2026 series Under Salt Marsh stars Kelly Reilly, Rafe Spall, Naomi Yang, and Jonathan Pryce.

MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



Dining



Kunga

Grab some hot pot, peanut chicken and shredded potatoes in Kunga's cozy and casual setting. One of the best Chinese in town.
8am-9pm, Boudha, (01)4915117

Casa Mexicana

Enjoy a taste of Mexico with an assortment of tacos, quesadillas and tres leches cakes. From vegetarian to meat options, there is something for everyone.
Gairidhara, 9840542082



Alice Kathmandu

Indulge in a wide range of delicacies including Continental, Japanese, Chinese and Thakali. Their momo is also a must try.
01-5357318, Gairidhara, Kathmandu



Tip Top

In the mood for Indian? Enjoy sweets, South Indian cuisines and other meals at Tip Top. And don't forget the Chola Bhatura.
New Road (01) 4240470

Sam's One Tree Cafe

The murals of this cafe have appeared on the background of many social media posts and stories. Customers have raved about the eatery's lively atmosphere, tempting sizzlers and quick service.
Durbar Marg, 01-5343610

सामाजिक सञ्जाल प्रयोगमा सचेतता अपनाऔं

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



नेपाल सरकार
विज्ञापन बोर्ड

LOCALISING NEPAL’S PEDAGOGY

Gurukul and Buddhist education philosophies add value to academic, emotional, ethical capabilities of learners

Helen Eikeland

The academic priorities to further one’s education and economic advantages are pushing the young generation of Nepal’s to seek opportunities abroad.

More than ever, in the context of diaspora and globalisation, education in Nepal needs a local foundational connection to culture, context and life in the country itself. Education that focuses on local perspectives on life and work enhances a sense of belonging also for those leaving Nepal and hopefully will have a pull factor for returning.

A child’s education includes more than academic priorities. Education includes a wide range of social, emotional and ethical capabilities. Culture constructs our very conceptions of knowledge, ourselves and our identity and participating in it makes possible learning, remembering, speaking and imagining.

In a cultural approach to education the teachers,



NT ARCHIVE

communities and learners’ culture, worldviews and value systems are connected to classroom activities. Impulses from the Gurukul and Buddhist pedagogies add value to the academic, social, emotional, ethical and practical capabilities of learners that embrace a wider perspective on education and might also contradict the test-oriented approaches.

In classroom activities, the task is to accomplish a culturally supportive school environment. By connecting lessons to students’ lives, by contextualising curriculum to their home environment creates a stronger sense of belonging and identity.

Classroom activities are thus connected to peoples’ visions of life and work to strengthen identity and

local experience as a foundation for teaching and learning.

DEFICIENCY APPROACH

Within teacher education programs, reports and educational research in Nepal, there has been a tendency to take a ‘deficiency approach’ where the point of convergence has been to explore where the failure of education and school reforms might lie.

In much of teacher education and research on education in Nepal, teachers and the communities’ culture and worldviews are seen as barriers to development, rather than identifying and acknowledging their desire to contribute to education and students’ learning. This has created a classroom discourse that the teachers’, communities’, and

learners’ inherited values have not been worth pursuing.

Nepal’s cosmologies and cultural heritage in education underpin people’s visions of life and work and contribute to the construction of faith systems. These faith systems provide people with a basis for looking at their life and work that might contradict but also contribute and add value to concepts of ‘modern’ education.

The aim of unfolding local perspectives in education is to explore emancipatory ideas in Nepal’s pedagogies that are rooted in local inherent values. This gives space for negotiating imported pedagogies not imposing them.

This suggests that policy makers look seriously at local context and local pedagogies when designing curricular and educational reforms. These perspectives highlight the urgency and value of incorporating aspects of local cultural context whilst being alert to global educational trends and forces.

Policy makers might be reminded of the advantages of having an appreciation of cultural values and norms and of embracing local cultural perspectives in the drive to strengthen critical thinking, integrity, and an ownership of the process and outcomes of education.

In research on education the question is ultimately about who controls the data and about disentangling power relations. Two ways to do research seem apparent: one where the effects of reforms are documented and accountability strategies are enforced, the other approach is to look at the culture, worldview and intentions of teachers, communities and learners.

Most commonly, a business as usual approach to both the curriculum and the syllabus means the design and delivery of teacher education content and pedagogy occurs regardless of the students’ life experiences and

culture. These activities are, more or less, considered the activity of university teachers in coordination with national regulations and, in turn, isolated from the life world of students.

An alternative pedagogical approach toward teacher training would accentuate and stress the importance of keeping at its centre the culture and context of teachers and students. This entails the historical, cultural, social, and political environments as well as the participants’ personal experiences and lived life.

The critical point here is that the experiences connected to pedagogical issues emerge from the students’ own life and cultural context which then contribute to pedagogical insight. This generates the possibility of connecting ownership to pedagogical insight and classroom teaching.

A shift in pedagogy has major implications for life in the classroom. The former focus on the administrative framework and teaching methods put less emphasis on the context and the relevance and importance of student-teachers’ experiences and culture.

This shift demands a different orientation in classroom teaching giving greater emphasis to creating reciprocal and dynamic relations between classrooms, culture and context. To produce viable and confident teachers in a rapidly changing society with its multicultural classroom teaching requires a sense of belonging, integrity and critical thinking. 🇳🇵



Helen Eikeland is Associate Professor at the University in Agder in Norway and spent most of her childhood and professional life in Nepal, completing her research on the Life World of Nepalese Teachers, Ideals, Beliefs and Agency for her PhD research.

LAND CRUISER 250

CREATE MEMORIES THAT LAST

Move your world

Reviving the purity and popularity of p

Shuvani Singh

More than 1,300 years ago a unique devotional art form evolved in Kathmandu Valley's unique Hindu-Buddhist civilisation.

Called paubha, the scrolls were painted with natural pigments on white cloth, with intricate portrayals of Hindu and Buddhist deities, rendered with precise iconometry as recorded in traditional texts. When Princess Bhrikuti was married to Tibet's King Songtsen Gampo, she is said to have taken along paubha scrolls, and the thangka style evolved from them into purely Buddhist scrolls.

Even while tourism has prompted galleries across the Himalaya to mass produce thangka, there is a movement in Kathmandu to preserve the paubha's original motifs and styles so its sacred aspects are not corrupted.

Foremost among those practicing paubha in its traditional form is Nepal's most celebrated artist Lok Chitrakar. He explains, "Kathmandu Valley's paubha takes a more syncretic approach by depicting both Buddhist and Hindu iconography, while thangka mostly portray Buddhist deities and are traditionally painted by monks."

Paubha art holds a sacred purpose for the artist who paints it. The action itself is a form of devotion, where the artist attains a meditative state. Artists like Chitrakar infuse culture, knowledge, worship, and dharma in every stroke of the brush for months, sometimes even years, it takes to complete a single piece.

While each artist uniquely paints deities and the stories behind them based on personal interpretations and experiences,



PHOTOS: SUMAN NEPALI

they all share the understanding that the paubha is not simply a portrait of the divine, but rather a form of worship and prayer.

"Paubha is a reflection of inner karuna (compassion)," says Chitrakar while applying meticulous brush strokes to a paubha he has been working on for

more than a decade. "The art itself is a form of prayer."

Across town at the Siddhartha Art Gallery, there is an ongoing exhibition of paubha scrolls by Shankha Narayan Shrestha and Shankar Kumar Joshi, who tell traditional tales of goddesses and gods in a visual style that must

have been much powerful centuries ago when there was no mass media and the Internet.

"Paubha can be regarded as both art and a religious art form. Over centuries, it has continued to enrich the local art scene in Kathmandu," says Sangita Thapa who curated the exhibition at Siddhartha Art Gallery.

The exhibition titled 'Traditional Paubha Paintings' will run till mid-August, and the gallery at Baber Mahal Revisited is no ordinary show, the paubha give in an ambience of a shrine where visitors become pilgrims.

Skillfully crafted images of the divine imbue viewers with a

Turning body painting into art

Student explores the unique red pigment style associated with life and death rituals

Sudiksha Tuladhar

As a young girl growing up in a Newa household, Shreya Bajracharya was always drawn to the vibrant red colour painted on the toes and fingers of family members during important life and death rituals.

Over time, that curiosity grew into desire to explore its possibilities beyond ritual use. Now 22, the art student has turned it into a medium for contemporary fabric art.

Locally known as ala, it is a red pigment made after mixing red powder with water, which when applied on the skin and nails leaves lasting red stain. Red is an auspicious colour, and ala is applied to women's hands and feet during rituals such as ihi, gufa and weddings.

Ala is also used during mourning rituals. A traditional manicurist and pedicurist known as a nauni clips the nails of family members and applies ala to their hands and feet as part of a purification practice. Ala is also believed to have antiseptic properties.

Because the colour red is central to many Newar rituals and traditions, Bajracharya says she was always attracted to red visuals. She especially looked forward to



wearing ala on special occasions.

This cultural familiarity came together with early interest in making things by hand. She says, "Art and craft have been a part of me since childhood. Seeing my mother doing crochet work inspired me to take up art."

The artist since age 10 has been performing Charya Nritya, a

dance form that originated in the Buddhist Newar community of Kathmandu. Traditionally practiced by Bajracharya priests, the form includes devotional songs and mudra that help dancers embody various deities.

Bajracharya had always toyed with the idea of melding this traditional dance with her art,

and it was during the pandemic that she finally found the space to give that idea shape. She enrolled for a Bachelors in fine arts and began developing paintings that connected movement, ritual and memory.

"Whenever I imagined Charya Nritya in a physical form, it appeared red to me. That is when

I decided to incorporate the dance into my art," says Bajracharya. "I also wanted people to know about Charya Nritya."

MELDING DANCE WITH ART

Bajracharya has practiced Charya Nritya since grade 7, making it a part of her life for nearly 10 years. She also performs the dance form at events and special occasions when invited.

While exploring her skills during a course assignment that allowed students to work with any medium or art form, she decided to use ala in her artwork. She began painting Charya Nritya mudras with ala on plain white fabric.

"I always wanted my creations to be transparent and flowy, not rigid. And the format fit perfectly," says Bajracharya.

A final-year fine arts student at Kathmandu University, Bajracharya is majoring in studio arts. She also has a group exhibition coming up later this month, where she will also exhibit works that do not use ala.

Either in dance or art, her speciality is human figures and movement, while she continues to explore and experiment with this one-of-a-kind contemporary art form.

"Ala has become a part of my identity," she says. "It is an art form that I will continue working with and exploring in the future." 🇳🇵



paubha

The sacred artform has been passed down to a younger generation of Nepali painters



SHANKHA NARAYAN SHRESTHA



SACRED SCROLLING: Lok Chitrakar applies brush strokes on a pauba he has been working on for the last ten years (left, far right). Shankha Narayan Shrestha and Shankhar Kumar Joshi (above, right) at their on-going exhibition at Siddhartha Art Gallery this week.



powerful feeling that transcends artistic appreciation and becomes spiritual inspiration. The paubha titled Simha Sartha Bahu recounts a popular Newa folktale in bright colours, the fierce goddess Ugratara claims victory in striking vermilion, and Ganesh's aura is decorated with intricate red and orange spirals, a trademark Nepali style. The deities portrayed also indicate the unique harmony between the Hindu and Buddhist faiths in Kathmandu Valley.

PAUBHA AS MEDITATION "It's like meditation. We lose track of time while working on them," says one of the artists, Shankha Narayan Shrestha, 51. Shankar Kumar Joshi, 58, puts it even more

precisely: "The brain, eyes, hands, and heart all need to be in the same place. Unity of mind and body is essential to paubha paintings." The process can be exacting. Artists first choose a theme, or deity, for the painting and then conduct research on it through primary texts in Sanskrit so nothing is lost in translation. After preparing the canvas, artists draw the symbols, attributes, and objects each deity holds. Lok Chitrakar says that the iconography is the *atma*, or soul, of the paubha. Colours are made naturally from crushed stones, plant dyes, and powdered metal, a method Chitrakar hopes will not be replaced by synthetic material. Every line and curve of the painting is governed

by iconometric rules recorded in traditional texts. While there are subtle characteristics of the artwork which are unique to each artist, they do not deviate from the basic rules. Doing so risks misrepresenting the deity and the teachings, and the painting loses the essence which makes it a genuine paubha. Sundar Sikhwal, a paubha teacher, remembers a time when learning the paubha craft was vastly different from today: "It was much more difficult because we could hardly get any references ... it is much easier now because of all the online resources." While earlier generations of paubha students relied on their guru and a handful of scrolls, today's paubha painters can just scroll the

net on their phones. But access alone does not guarantee cultural preservation. Sinkhwal has noticed a shift in the temperament of today's youth who are attracted to paubha more out of fleeting curiosity than pure passion. "People don't have as much patience these days," he says. Chitrakar echoes this concern, noting that interest in preserving the genre in its purest form may be threatened by shorter attention spans and instant gratification among digital natives immersed in pop culture and the online universe. Although worrying, Sinkhwal also sees hope. Students at the gallery this week at Sinkhwal's paubha lessons included a modern artist, an architect, a surgeon – all professionals and not idle hobbyists. They all choose to spend their free time learning a rigorous and demanding spiritual discipline, because it connects them to their culture, their country. "Art keeps looking for new avenues," Chitrakar notes. "The topic needs to be understood, but Nepali people have also started collecting and learning more about their culture." As Nepalis rediscover cultural and artistic heritage, and collectors invest in traditional works, the significance of paubha is enhanced and its preservation is on firmer ground. For Shankar Kumar Joshi working on a paubha shrinks time, and does not feel the hours tick by. In an era demanding speediness, and abundance over authenticity, paubha offers a chance to rediscover a slower pace of life. Uncertainty that comes with globalisation hits smaller countries harder, but as the revival of the purity and popularity of paubha paintings prove, the historic artform has been passed down to younger generation of Nepali artists. 

Traditional Paubha Paintings
Siddhartha Art Gallery
Baber Mahal Revisited
11am-5pm, 12-5pm (Saturdays)
Till 15 August

Blending faith and fashion

This monsoon, mehendi artists move from Kathmandu's streets to TikTok clips

Green is the colour of the Nepali month of Shrawan. It is the middle of the monsoon, and the countryside is emerald green, the air is clean and there are sacred festivals every other day. How appropriate, then, that green is the colour of this auspicious month. Women wear green bangles, don green sari and throng the temples. For one, according to Hindu mythology, it is said that the gods and demons churned the cosmic ocean, yielding the elixir of life as well as a deadly poison. Lord Shiva then took it upon himself to save the universe – he swallowed the poison and his throat turned blue. Goddess Parvati fasted during Shrawan, praying for Shiva as her husband. And that is the tradition observed to this day as women fast every Monday this month for a happy conjugal life. During the month, they also decorate their hands with intricate designs made from mehendi, a special plant that leaves a temporary dye on the skin -- blending devotion, beauty and cultural identity. But the tradition of mehendi, the way it is made, applied, promoted and practiced, is changing with time. "Women wear mehendi on their hands as a sign of good fortune, and to celebrate the auspicious state of their marriage," explains Jhunu



PRASANNA BIJUKCHHE

Shah, a mehendi artist. Women, whether fasting or not, decorate their hands with mehendi for the occasion with designs ranging from mandala and flowers to vines and names of loved ones. Mehendi, also known as henna, goes with the scientific name *Lawsonia inermis*, and is a perennial shrub native to Africa, Australia and Asia. While the word 'henna' has Arabic origin, with the plant known as 'Hina' in Arabic, the

word 'mehendi' originates from the Sanskrit word 'mendhika,' meaning a plant that releases a red stain. The plant contains a dye that leaves a temporary reddish-orange hue. Henna has its history in ancient Egypt, with pharaohs and even Cleopatra using it on their skin. It was used in mummification rituals in Egypt and also to heal wounds as a natural antiseptic. As times changed, women increasingly applied henna for special occasions

including weddings, festivals and other rituals. The application method has also kept pace: from directly smearing it on the skin to mehendi cones, wooden stamps, stencils and stickers. Until recently, mehendi had to be applied by an artist, now there are DIY kits. Wooden stamps in particular are popular -- it is simply dipped in colour and then applied on the skin with designs of one's choice. Shah, however, frowns on this practice and uses homemade mehendi for customers as it has minimal side effects. **SAFE PRACTICES** Pure mehendi is usually safe to apply but can cause mild allergies such as skin dryness, staining, or temporary hair brittleness when applied as a hair dye. But chemical additives in the commercial

market have caused severe allergic reactions including burns and permanent scarring. Ingesting mehendi is highly toxic and can cause kidney damage. "Not many people come to apply mehendi these days," Shah laments. "Earlier, people flocked to apply mehendi on their hands in Shrawan or during weddings, that is not the case anymore." Indeed, Kathmandu streets used to be lined with mehendi artists during this month until recently, equipped with hundreds of henna cones and designs. But stricter rule enforcements against street vendors from the Municipality forced artists to shift to other mediums -- including now on social media, especially TikTok. Amita Baniya, a popular celebrity mehendi artist, used to have a street stall. Now she has opened a TikTok account where she promotes her mehendi art and has 15,000 followers. The platform has allowed her to also gain foreign customers. One of her videos, showing her applying mehendi on a foreigner, has over 4 million views. As mehendi artists move with the times, artists also charge more. Customised bridal work can cost upwards of Rs40,000 in the premium market. Self-applied, or wooden stamps and stickers with moon and flower design are much cheaper.  **Sudiksha Tuladhar**



Home is where the art is

Russian artist in Kathmandu explores what remains when a traveller leaves a house behind

Kian Lee Mitty

Home is a structure most people stop noticing once they are inside it. They take it for granted. It becomes background, the shell that holds a life rather than the life itself.

Russian artist and designer Liudmila Rozvodovskaya hoped to change that with her 'Paper House: Creation' exhibition at the Siddhartha Art Gallery in Kathmandu during July. This was the second chapter of 'Expedition Routes', her three-part project.

The trilogy's opening exhibition at the Patan Museum was 'Lokta: the Core Material' inspired by the Heart Sutra, which follows the practice that form is emptiness and emptiness is form. This second stage used paper, clay, light, and ritual pigment to ask what a house becomes once the resident is gone.

Rozvodovskaya's work insists on reversing that inattention. She treats home not as a fixed object, but as a mechanism for something that keeps moving after the building itself has stopped changing. The walls of a house are no more permanent than the body is for the soul. Both are temporary vessels, filled and forever changing.

Rozvodovskaya was an interior designer for 20 years, studying in Altai and earning a Master's in Art History at the Repin Academy of Arts in Saint Petersburg. She then completed a hospitality design



program in Milan before founding Enter-ra Design Studio in 2009, working on private apartments, offices, and public interiors.

She has now moved from interior decoration to immersive installation, including curatorial work in Saint Petersburg and a solo show, 'Support', at the PRO.SEC. CO Creativo art gallery.

Living at the Aurovalley Ashram in Pondicherry led her to light sculpture. From India she came to Kathmandu and decided to stay, experimenting with lokta, Nepal's handmade paper from the bark of the daphne bush that grows

high in the Himalaya. She washed the paper, dried it, and worked pigment into its pulp. Rozvodovskaya was convinced that the material held memory: whatever is added to it during production stays part of its body rather than sitting on its surface. Her exhibition at the 18th century Patan Museum paired the papermaking process with the five traditional elements: earth, water, air, fire, and sky.

The Siddhartha Art Gallery show extended that research into a series of distinct collections, each tied to a specific place, workshop, or encounter from her time in Nepal. Starting in the early hours of dusk, the lighting of the space became integral to the experience as a whole.

At the centre of the exhibition stood 'Ghost House', five canvases built from antique wooden frames once used for casting lokta



paper by hand. The series was inspired by a night in Panauti, where Rozvodovskaya stayed in a restored Newari homestay only to learn that locals avoided the house believing it was haunted.

Architectural sketches of the town's empty houses were later transferred onto the paper-casting frames used for shaping, holding, and drying wet pulp into customised 3D impressions lit from behind so that the drawn structure appears to glow from within.

The fibrous, translucent quality of lokta is treated as the argument of the piece rather than a decorative choice. That idea sits close to the Heart Sutra's teaching that form and emptiness are not opposites. A teaching of Nagarjuna's philosophy, which the exhibition explicitly draws on, developed at length.

In Rozvodovskaya's frames, the wood keeps its shape while the paper stretched across it stays almost weightless, so the object holds both halves of that teaching

at once: a structure that is fully there and, held up to the light, barely there at all.

BHAKTAPUR

'Peacock' was made experimentally at a Bhaktapur paper factory, and mixes raw lokta pulp with sindur pigment, marigold petals, ritual threads, and Nepali tea. The finished sheets carry a physical record of the pujas and communal tea-drinking they reference.

Two smaller series, 'Topview' and 'Pottery Square' came out of time spent at a family ceramics workshop in Bhaktapur run by potter Durga Prasad Prajapati. Top view translates Rozvodovskaya's own sketches of tiered temple roofs, and Pottery Square scales similar architectural forms down into smaller, more playful volumes. 'Void' consists of plain white canvases stripped of added material, presented as a counterpoint: elements applied to the other works are treated as decoration in the same way Rozvodovskaya suggests everything built in a life, including a sense of self, ultimately is.

'Paper House: Creation' left its viewers exactly where Rozvodovskaya says she wants them: standing inside this fragile structure, aware that the walls around them were never meant to last and that what they feel while standing there, in this gallery, is the only part of the experience built to stay.

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