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Himalayan Tsunami

Kirti Tamang, 5, was in her classroom in Betrawati on Wednesday morning when the flood arrived with a roar. She ran uphill as fast as she could with two classmates. Her uncle found her at night in a forest. She saw her mother and older sister being swept by the raging Trisuli. Her father is a migrant worker in Malaysia. She has not spoken since being found.

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Not if, but when next ?

No one could have predicted this disaster would happen when it did, but we all knew it would happen one day.

Editorial
Sonia Awale

As this paper goes to press on Thursday afternoon, the unimaginable scale of the Central Nepal flood catastrophe is becoming apparent. With every notice about a bank branch that lost all its staff, a police station without a single survivor, buses full of Janai Purnima pilgrims swept away, and phone calls to this office from Indian families asking to locate their loved ones – we have had to come to terms with the tragically high cost in human lives.

Not since the 2015 earthquake has Nepal seen a disaster of this magnitude. In terms of economic damage to infrastructure and property, it is the worst in this country's history. Remote sensing has enabled us to pinpoint the location of the avalanche on the north face of Langtang in Nepal that blocked the Lhende Khola which flows into the Trisuli in Nepal and which burst on Wednesday morning just before 9AM (page 3).

The debris flow at Timure on the border was nearly 80m high, and as the flood raced downstream it swept everything in its path. It spared nothing.

No one could have predicted this disaster would happen when it did. But anyone could have said it was bound to happen one day. In this paper, we ourselves have frequently reminded policy makers about the need to prepare for floods unleashed by extreme weather, glacial lake outburst floods, and transboundary climate calamities.



SUMAN NEPALI

We said that after the Barun Khola flood of 2017, after the Melamchi disaster of 2021, and after the Teesta flood in Sikkim that swept away a \$1 billion dam, we wrote in this space about lessons for Nepal's own hydroelectric plants on the Arun, Marsyangdi and Trisuli. And the Bhote Kosi flood on 8 July last year was another alarm bell.

NOT JUST TALK

Arguing that this is not a problem we created, that we need to be compensated for historical carbon emissions, is for speeches at UN climate summits. There is no money coming

for Loss and Damage. We are in this on our own, we have to craft our own strategy for survival.

This was not a 'natural' disaster. Nothing about it was natural – not the glacier melting due to greenhouse gas buildup due to fossil fuel burning, not the location of expensive hydropower plants on trans-Himalayan rivers, not designing highways to follow rivers, not the settlements that have grown around them, not the corruption and greed, not the poor governance.

Our ancestors knew not to live next to Himalayan rivers.

Nepal's townships used to be located along high ridgelines, and floodplains were only used to grow food or grind grain. Bridges were temporary, and designed to be rebuilt after monsoon floods washed them away.

Economic desperation, outmigration from rural areas and proximity to roads have pushed people to settle along river banks – despite full knowledge of the risks. Hazard mapping of settlements along river banks enforced by local governments could have saved many lives this week.

Early warning will be of no help if homes are located right next to rivers flowing

down from the world's youngest and most seismically-active mountain range, now feeling the full impact of the climate crisis.

We have repeated this ad nauseum after every disaster: let us not put all our eggs in one basket. Instead of taking huge loans to invest in cascades of expensive hydroelectric plants on trans-Himalayan rivers, Nepal should opt for smaller projects across the country and spread the risk.

In one fell swoop on Wednesday morning, Nepal lost 440MW from 12 hydroelectric plants – 10% of the country's total generation capacity. Transmission lines and substations located along the river corridor were destroyed.

A culture of fatalism can explain the lack of interest in preparedness for disaster that we know will happen, and with greater frequency in future. But that is no excuse. Even if previous governments ignored this, Nepal's new administration with its technocrats and PhDs must take measures to address seismic and climate co-hazards.

Winston Churchill once said, "Never let a good crisis go to waste." This disaster also offers the chance for Prime Minister Balendra Shah and his government to demonstrate a proactive approach in search, rescue, rehabilitation and a preparedness strategy for the future.

We should not need a disaster to remind us to be prepared. By then it is too late for many people, as it tragically was this week. We failed to learn our lessons once again. This period of national mourning calls for Nepalis to be united, to show the same spirit of compassion and generosity that we saw in 2015. 🇳🇵

Trending Online



Gorkhalis in Bangladesh
Rehnuma Shareen
A community of 30 families, descendants of Gurkha soldiers who fought for the British Empire, has called Bangladesh home for generations. Yet they have remained unrecognised and lost between borders and conflicts. Read story at www.nepalitimes.com

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Downstream from the Tibetan Plateau
Sushim Thapaliya
The problem is not just that Nepal is vulnerable to floods. It is that sometimes the floods in Nepal begin somewhere else. Preparing for them requires transboundary cooperation. Read analysis online and on page 10-11.

Most popular on X

Nepal and the new world disorder
Rajib Upadhaya
Excerpts from *Giants at the Gates: Nepal in a World of Reorder*, dives into ways in which the new Nepal leadership can navigate and survive in a multipolar world. Read selected sections on our website.

Most commented

A goodbye note to the people's poet
Pratibha Tuladhar
Poet Durgalal Shrestha passed away at the age of 93 on 16 August. He showed Newa-speaking people that it is possible to live with their language. Read Pratibha Tuladhar's heartfelt tribute to her guardian.

Most visited online page

Letters

NEPAL FLOOD
This disaster highlights the importance of understanding and dealing with trans-boundary disasters as well as loss and damage in climate negotiations ('Central Nepal flood, the day after', Kunda Dixit, www.nepalitimes.com).

Sharad Ghimire

- The power of nature is incredible ('The danger of living downstream from the Tibetan Plateau', Sushim Trhapaliya, page 10-11). There needs to be more co-ordination and communication which may help reduce the number of deaths in future.

Ann-Marie Dodson RN

- Major rivers of Nepal and North India originate from the Himalaya, and downstream countries proudly claim the flowing water

as their own. But I see blame shifting towards upstream sources for increased flow of water and resulting calamities. During my lifetime I have seen that flood plains are being taken over by settlements, especially in Nepal. This practice should be stopped immediately.

Rajendra P Singh

- Global warming, combined with trying to shape Himalayan rivers with concrete infrastructure causes fatal flooding, resulting in this type of Himalayan disaster. Nature has begun to hit back at us madly and more frequently.

Sibai Majumder

- Nepal must take weather and climate-related risks much more seriously ('Nepal must prepare for weather extremes', Ngamindra Dahal, nepalitimes.com). There are hundreds of glacial lakes and many unidentified or poorly monitored lakes across the Himalayan region.

The government should systematically identify, map, and monitor these lakes, especially during the monsoon season. Early-warning systems, regular satellite and field monitoring, and proper risk assessments are essential to prevent future disasters and protect communities, roads, bridges, and infrastructure downstream.

Norbu O Positive Dolpo

- People cannot be allowed to build houses along riverbanks.

Iyute Debby

- Nature doesn't care about political boundaries. India, Nepal, Bhutan and everyone else are adversely impacted by disasters like these. As such, educated people need to be making policy decisions. What we see across the region are greedy uneducated politicians making decisions.

Binit Datta

GEOPOLITICS
The reality is more complex than the yin-yang symbolism suggests. Nepal needs to move beyond its (understandable) obsession with India and China. There are other players of significance, both political and economic, as well as cultural ('Nepal and the New World Disorder', Rajib Upadhaya, #1325).

David Seddon

BANGLADESHI GORKHALIS
In the late 60s, when I was a student at Government Commerce College, Chittagong, there was a Nepali Gurkha caretaker, Ismail ('The Gorkhalis of Bangladesh', Rehnuma Shahreen). When the college shifted to Chittagong from Calcutta, he too, moved out of love for the institution. He died while working there.

Zafar Chowdhry

Online Package



MELTING MOUNTAINS

With the climate crisis, the snowline is rapidly receding up the mountains, and glaciers are losing ice at a faster rate than previously forecast. Watch video on YouTube.



LAKE RISK

This week's flood in Rasuwa is the most recent example that as Nepal's glacial lakes expand, there is a danger of them bursting due to water pressure, earthquakes and avalanches.

1,000 Words



A RIVER'S WRATH: The Trisuli River rips through Trisuli Bazar on Wednesday morning, sweeping away a 60-year old bridge built originally for one of Nepal's earliest hydropower projects. Although it is 80km downstream from the avalanche that triggered this flood, the debris flow was so destructive it killed hundreds of people, destroyed infrastructure and property. Nature seemed to be saying that it cannot take environmental abuse anymore. This video clip went global, showing the scale of the disaster in Nepal and warned about the perils of the climate crisis.

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GOOGLE EARTH / NEPALI TIMES

Post-mortem of a disaster

Kunda Dixit

At Langtang Lirung, which towers 7,245m and is located 45km north of Kathmandu, has a tragic history. A massive 7.8 magnitude earthquake in April 2015 triggered an avalanche on its south face, which buried the village of Langtang, killing 300 people. On Wednesday, there was a 4.4 magnitude earthquake near the border with China at 8:37AM. This time, it coincided a huge avalanche on the north face of Langtang. Langtang Lirung is wholly within Nepal, and the debris flow from the avalanche blocked the monsoon-swollen Lhende Khola that marks the border with China. The impounded lake burst, sending a wall of mud and boulders racing down the Trisuli River into Nepal. Experts analysed satellite images from Planet Labs and pinpointed the avalanche

location and flood. They are still divided about whether the earthquake caused the avalanche or the other way around. If the tremor was the trigger, it shook a mountain on which the snow and ice was already unstable due to global warming. This is the tail end of the monsoon and the slopes are heavy with snow. Moraines that used to be hardened by permafrost were saturated. This particular disaster originated on a glacier within Nepal, but it exposes the increasing long-term threat of glacial lake outburst floods, permafrost melting and moraine collapses causing transboundary disasters from the Tibetan Plateau (page 10-11). There have been a series of recent Himalayan tsunamis caused by a combination of these same factors: Chamoli 2021, Melamchi 2021, Sikkim 2023, Thame 2024, Bhote Kosi 2025, and now 2026. Last year's flood on 8 July killed 18 people on the same river. The bridge at the Nepal-China border, destroyed highway and hydropower plants and transmission lines that

had just been repaired were swept away again on Wednesday. Last year's flood originated in supraglacial ponds that coalesced and burst. There was some warning from the Chinese side, but this year there was no warning at all. The avalanche was much closer to the border and it was only a matter of minutes before the debris flow reached the Trisuli in Nepal. By Thursday afternoon, nearly 300 bodies had been recovered, but the total will go up to the hundreds. Overnight, human bodies, animal carcasses and debris were seen floating down the Narayani River, 200km downstream. This disaster will bring up the issue of Loss and Damage that Nepal has been raising in international climate negotiations regarding the economic impact of the climate crisis especially in vulnerable mountain countries. The cost of destroyed infrastructure and property will be in the billions of dollars. Six major hydropower plants, transmission

lines and electric substations on the Bhote Kosi and Trisuli were destroyed or damaged. Nepal's showcase 25 megawatt utility-scale solar array in Nuwakot was buried in sediment. At least a dozen bridges across the Bhote Kosi and Trisuli, some of them 70km downstream, were swept away, cutting off highways. The disaster hit Nepal nearly a year after the GenZ protests forced early elections, which Prime Minister Balendra Shah's RSP swept in a landslide victory. His government has been in power less than six months, and now faces the challenge of immediate search and rescue, and rehabilitation along the ravaged Trisuli Valley. Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle heads relief coordination, and he has experience with dealing with the aftermath of the 2015 earthquake. He will need to come up with a longer term strategy to deal with seismic and climate disasters that are almost certainly going to increase in future. 🇳🇵



PMO NEPAL

The art of the act of piety

The West needs to decolonise its history, the South has to value its heritage more

Shuvani Singh

- The West needs to decolonise and not find legal loopholes to keep stolen sacred objects in their museums
- Repatriation does not give an artefact value and dignity in a land that does not care about its heritage

These opposing views about the return of stolen antiquities dominated the discussion that kicked off the exhibition ‘What Empire Took, What Empire Left’ at Taragaon Next last week. The narrative around looted art has been shaped by the very museums that hold the looted objects. This exhibition flips that script, by listening to 11 artists and thinkers from South Asia who live the reality of those absences.

“It is a great opportunity to speak from within South Asia,” says the expo’s Mumbai-based curator Arshiya Mansoor. “Most of the time, international and Western museums tell our stories.”

Walking through the gallery, the viewer confronts not just stolen objects, but also the stolen context, identity, and heritage. The invisible thread that connects an artefact to its homeland and its people is what gives it meaning. When that thread is cut, the connection is also lost.

But in her opening remarks, Mansoor asked the hidden question behind restitution: “What can return restore?”

Nepali youth, for example, have grown up with empty shrines and missing sacred objects. Many are therefore oblivious to their stories and value. So, can repatriation restore an artefact’s meaning,



context, and dignity in a land that is forgetting its heritage? This exhibition, which is on till 31 October, seeks answers.

Roshan Mishra’s ‘Disappearing Devatas and Fading Faith’ deliberates on this directly. This etching on fibre glass and stone of Siva Parvati and Standing Buddha reminds the audience of two sacred idols that are no longer in Nepal: the Siva Parvati figure is currently in the British Museum and the Standing Buddha has not yet been found after being stolen.

“It is not just a physical loss,” says Mishra. “The relationship between the community and the Devi and Devata is lost.”

Cutting a people’s connection to their heritage is itself a triumph of colonialism. Western museums need to not only repatriate the stolen objects, but also

acknowledge the need to decolonise their minds, and the societies from where they were stolen need to value them again.

Temsuyanger Longkumer’s ‘Fake Totem No. 32’ is the replica of a boundary pillar between India and Burma which still separates the Naga people living on both sides. This piece transcends colonialism to address what it leaves behind: lines on the map that fracture and divide people, and the absence of belonging that repatriation alone cannot repair. Marium Ghani documents looted relics and artefacts from the Soviet occupation of her native Afghanistan in a series of prints. The images in ‘Limbo’ depict the pre-Islamic relics that were stolen from Kabul during the civil war. Though identified as stolen, these items cannot be returned because the international

community does not recognise the Taliban as a ‘legitimate authority’.

RETURNED, NOT RETURNED

The irony is that these stolen objects are denied return, while citizens of those same countries are refused protected status and deported back.

Shaurya Kumar’s hand-woven wool tapestry, laid out like a checkerboard mimics the game in Mahabharat in which Draupadi was publicly humiliated. He draws the connection between that indignity to the Princess and the exploitation of stolen artefacts in foreign lands through a dozen 3D-printed sculptures across the board.

Its title ‘It’s Mine; No It’s Mine; Now It’s Yours; No It’s Ours; Yes It’s Missing’ sounds like an argument, but reflects a geopolitical reality. From juvenile

possessiveness to shared claim, and finally to loss, the title mimics the constant struggle between ownership of artefacts as well as history. Kumar draws on his own experience of migration to ask, “How do you start to think about an object when it is not visible?” His digital photographs of a Yogini Temple in India – originally dedicated to 64 goddesses, out of which only 36 have been partially reconstructed – reflect the absence of a piece from its home.

Divya Mehra’s floor-to-ceiling photo mural of stolen South Asian artefacts, ‘Returnism’, takes its name from former British Prime Minister David Cameron’s blunt reply when asked about returning the Kohinoor diamond: “They’re not having it.” He dismissed the request as “returnism”.

The artefacts in the mural are not grand, they are simply inside a box, open for the viewers to watch. But this choice portrays a larger tragedy: the items are stripped of their context, meaning, identity. In doing so, Mehra rejects the performative display of these artefacts by Western museums.

She had helped repatriate the carving ‘Annapurna’ back to India in 2020 since being stolen in 1913 from Banaras. The mural is a counterpoint to that success. It depicts the artefacts that are yet to be returned, each one echoing Cameron’s refusal.

“Restitution cannot be treated as a museum generosity,” says curator Arshiya Mansoor. “It insists that the burden of proof lies not with the colonised nation that asks for its heritage back, but with institutions that keep it without consent.”

“This exhibition is not nostalgia. It challenges the next generation to understand that repair does not end with with an artifact being loaded onto a plane. It begins when the object comes home after decades and still finds belonging.”

What Empire Took, What Empire Left
Taragaon Next, Boudha
Until 31 October

BRIEFS

Kantipur ONE

The Kantipur Media Group (KMG) on Wednesday launched its much-anticipated shift to reader-revenue based strategy from the legacy advertising model. Under the new plan, the group has raised the price of its print editions, introducing digital subscription under which a print subscriber will have free access to an ad-free Kantipur One. The e-paper will also be downloadable on WhatsApp. Human narrated recordings of selected articles are also available. Readers abroad can buy digital access only subscriptions.

KMG Group Editorial Director Anup Kaphle wrote in a page 1 note: ‘We know this is a big shift, and Kantipur has never asked its readers before ... this is what allows us to invest in more reporters, more editors, more investigations and better journalism ...’

Ncell flood relief

Ncell Foundation has announced financial support of Rs10 million to the Prime Minister's Disaster Relief Fund for the rescue, relief, and rehabilitation of people affected by the flood in the Bhoté Kosi River in Rasuwa.



Ncell has also collaborated with Nepal Medicit Hospital under which Ncell customers with an active data pack of Rs299 or above will receive a free OPD doctor consultation at Nepal Medicit Hospital. Similarly, customers with an active pack of Rs99 to below Rs299 will receive a 20% discount on OPD doctor consultation charges.



Shree Kumari Chhen

Kumari Chhen and New Kumari Niwas in Patan, rebuilt with the help of the Indian government's post-earthquake reconstruction grant of Rs50 million, were inaugurated this week on 24 August.

Flame Awards

Nepal Distilleries Pvt. Ltd. (NDPL) secured four major honours at FLAME Awards Asia 2026. Mero Khukri and Nude's Just Be You managed to get two gold, one silver and a South Asia Grand Prix award.

NAIMA on Nepal flood

Nepal Automobile Importers and Manufacturers Association (NAIMA) has expressed concern and sadness following the recent flashfloods in the Bhotekosi River in Rasuwa while lauding authorities involved in rescue efforts.

Samsung new phones

Samsung has launched three new phones and two smart watches- Galaxy Z Fold8 Ultra, Fold8, Flip8, Watch Ultra2 and Watch9, and the company is offering 24 months EMI option starting at just Rs5,291. The Galaxy Z series is designed for ultra productivity, discovery and self-expression.

Birganj Customs

The Birganj Customs Office collected Rs 18.77 billion in revenue this July. The revised target was Rs20.58 billion, meaning the department managed to reach 91.24% of its target.

DDC to invest in Dolpo

DDC has signed an agreement with the Jagdulla Rural Municipality in Dolpo to establish a cheese plant. DDC will provide cheese making training, technical assistance and equipment as a part of the project.



Cosmetic imports rise

Nepal imported cosmetic products worth of Rs13 billion in the fiscal year 2025/26, a Rs2 billion rise from the previous fiscal year.



Vespa and Aprilia

Delta AutoCorp Pvt. Ltd., the official distributor of Vespa and Aprilia in Nepal, unveiled ‘The Saving Extravaganza’ exclusively for the NADA Auto Show 2026. Customers purchasing or booking a Vespa or Aprilia during the event can enjoy benefits worth up to Rs28,500.

Japanese encephalitis

A Japanese encephalitis outbreak in Jhapa has killed six out of ten affected people. The outbreak that started in July, has now pushed experts and health officials to consider an emergency vaccination drive in the district.

Cybercrime complaints

Nepal Police received a total of 20,526 cybercrime complaints in the fiscal year 2025/26. The growing number of cases has increased increased the challenge, requiring specialised skill and technology-driven approaches.



Škoda Kodiaq

Škoda Nepal through MAW Expanze Pvt. Ltd. introduced the New Generation Kodiaq at the NADA Auto Show 2026 at Bhrikutimandap. Raunak Agarwal, Executive Director of Škoda Nepal said: “With the New Kodiaq, we’re not just bringing a car to Nepal — we’re bringing an idea of what luxury should feel like when it’s honest, precise, and without excess. This is European luxury, exactly as it should be.”

Transmission lines

A total of 10 new transmission lines are expected to come under operation in the fiscal year 2026/27, including the 400KV Hetauda-Dhalkebar and new Butwal-Gorakhpur transmission lines.



The return of the Taleju necklace

Devendra Bhattarai
in Chicago

In the sanctum sanctorum of the Taleju Temple dedicated to the matron deity of the Malla kings in Kathmandu was a jewel-studded necklace. In 1970, during the height of the Panchayat regime, it was moved to the nearby Hanuman Dhoka Museum for safekeeping. Since the Royal Nepali Army guarded the museum, and it was thought the necklace and other sacred treasures would be safer there. They were not. In 1976, the necklace was stolen.

It surfaced nearly 45 years later at the Art Institute of Chicago in June 2021, where it was spotted by Nepali professor Sweta Gyanu Baniya who knelt in emotional supplication and posted the discovery on social media.

The gilt-silver necklace was embossed with semi-precious stones and inlaid with images of the eight astamatrika mother goddesses each slaying the buffalo demon. The necklace would have adorned the Taleju Bhawani when the shrine was opened to public worship only once in a year during Dasain.

An inscription on the necklace proves that it belonged to King Pratap Malla who ruled Kathmandu from 1641-74 CE, one hundred years before Kathmandu was conquered by Prithvi Narayan Shah.

The inscription says: 'Victory to the Mother-Goddess [Bhagavati devi Janani]. Hail! [This] is the necklace of the king of kings, lord of kings, lord of the poets, the victorious Pratapamalladeva (may it be) auspicious.'

"कन्या। श्री श्री श्री भगवती देवी जननी जयति:। स्वस्ति महाराजाधिराज श्री श्री राज राजेन्द्र कवीन्द्र जय प्रताप मल्ल देव स कथि जुरो शुभा।"

Last month during a visit to The Art Institute of Chicago, this correspondent looked for the famous necklace only to find that it had been withdrawn from display. The reason: the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has received additional evidence of its provenance from the Nepal government proving that it was stolen and sold to a collector.

Earlier this year, the ICE representative at the US Embassy in New Delhi Alka Saxena wrote to the Department of Archaeology (DoA) in Kathmandu asking for proof of country of origin before it was sold to the US, if Nepal's royal family at the time had authority to sell it, if not proof that it did not, and if there was evidence it was illegally sold to Bruce Miller Antiquities by the royal family.

The DoA sent back a diplomatically worded reply. What appears to have clinched proof of provenance besides the inscription on it was a 100-year-old listing in the Taleju inventory that noted (in translation): 'One gilded necklace with Rajendra Pratap Malla inscribed on it encrusted with pearls and statues of the astamatrika.'

'चाँदीका पातामा सुनका मलम्बा लाग्याको, पक्का मोतीको घेरा लाग्याको, अष्टमात्रिकाको

मूर्ति भयाको, लगनका भगवती देवी भयाको, स्वस्ती श्री राजेन्द्रप्रताप मल्ल भनिएको ठूलो कण्ठी एक...'

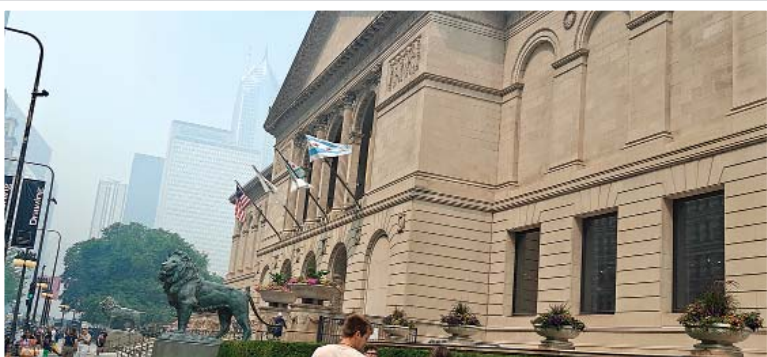
"After we sent all this translated proof that the necklace was indeed stolen, the Chicago museum has started the process of repatriating it and withdrawn it from display," says DoA chief Saubhagya Pradhananga. "The museum is working out the legalities, and it will be back in Nepal this year."

In June, Nepal's acting ambassador in Washington, Sharad Raj Aran met the executive chair of The Art Institute of Chicago Leslie Darling, and a representative of the Nepal Embassy visited the museum asking for the return of the necklace in writing, and it was agreed that immediate steps would be taken to send the necklace home.

ART VS DEVOTION

Most of the stolen artefacts from Kathmandu Valley at the Chicago Museum are from the James W and Marilyn Alsdorf collection. James died at age 76 in 1990 and Marilyn at 96 in 2019. A 13th century Chaturmukhi Shivalinga and a Nagraj Buddha from the Alsdorf collection were returned to Nepal five years ago.

When it was on display at the museum till earlier this year, the caption for the Taleju necklace mentioned that it was sold to the Alsdorf Collection by Bruce



Miller Antiquities of Sausalito in California before being presented to the institute in 2010.

"Greater global digital connectivity is helping us track down Nepal's stolen heritage items, and foreign museums have also started investigating the provenance of items in their possession," says the DoA's Pradhananga.

She adds that additional information has emerged about sacred items at the Asian art collection of the Musée Guimet in Paris, and the DoA is collecting proof of their provenance.

A Matrika Necklace from the reign of King Pratap Malla (1641-74 CE) similar to the one now being repatriated from Chicago was being auctioned at the Veilinghuis Loeckx in Gent in Belgium on 17 June last year for a minimum bidding price of €1,200.

But anti-trafficking activists objected and it was withdrawn. That necklace had also been stolen from a Kathmandu temple and sold to a collector in Amsterdam. Its whereabouts remains unknown.

The Alsdorfs bought many of the artefacts from middlemen who stole 14 of them from Nepal from as

far back as 1976. Some were used as decoration around their swimming pool before the couple donated the entire collection to the museum in 2010.

The effort to return the necklace and other artefacts to Nepal has stretched over five years. It seems that the DoA's reply to the four questions from the Department of Homeland Security included the clarification that the royal family did not have the jurisdiction to sell the item to a foreign party, which is why the American agencies started the repatriation process.

"We are now expecting the necklace to be returned in the next few months," Pradhananga told us. "We have proved the necklace's provenance beyond any doubt with the inventory documentation."

What has helped is that both the United States and Nepal are signatories of the UNESCO Treaty on the return of stolen antiquities to the country of origin.

This has facilitated the return of other objects from US museums like the 800-year-old Laxmi-Narayan which was stolen in 1984 from Patan and was being exhibited at the Dallas Art Museum. 🇳🇵

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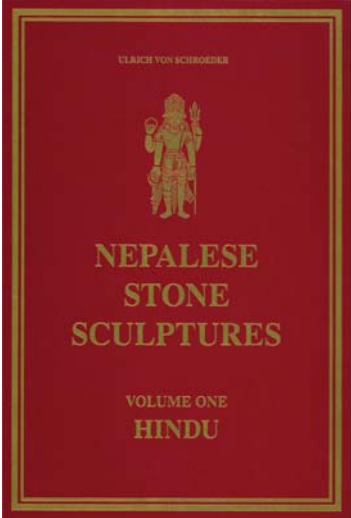
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Rescue Nepal's stolen artefacts from a



WHERE THEY BELONG: (top to bottom)
A picture of Shridhar Vishnu from Chyasalhiti lifted from the website of the auction house in Vienna. The gallery refers to the book Nepalese Stone Sculptures by Ulrich von Schroeder to describe the artefact. Schroeder himself refers to Bangdel's Stolen Images of Nepal in regards to the idol.

Kaasthamandap pictured here before the 2015 earthquake with a small portion of the panel missing. The total length of the panel in Vienna matches the size of the total length of the remaining panel pictured on this photo.

Matching the ninth century Boddhisatva Padmapani stolen from the Boudhanath Stupa with identifying marks and cuts.

140E. Viṣṇu Attended by Lakṣmī and Garuḍa Nepal (Licchavi Period) circa 9th Century
Stone. Size: 52 x 37 cm. Facing west. Viṣṇu stands in *samabhaṅga* on a pedestal decorated with floral scrolls. He holds perhaps a lotus seed in the lower right hand, a disc (*cakra*) in the upper right. The lower left hand holds a conch shell (*śaṅkha*), the upper left a club (*gadā*). Matching the Śrīdhara aspect of the *Caturvīṣṭimūrti*. Viṣṇu is flanked by Lakṣmī standing on a double lotus pedestal and Garuḍa standing on a rock-shaped pedestal. Fifth image from left in a total of six Viṣṇu steles installed on the eastern wall of the *Cyāsa Hiti* fountain. *Cyāsa Tole*. Patan (Kathmandu Valley). (Photo: Ulrich von Schroeder, 1976).
Literature
Bangdel, Lain S. 1989. *Stolen Images of Nepal*: 274–275, pl. 186: Vishnu with Lakshmi and Garuda. Chyasalhiti, Patan, 9th century. Stolen in the early 1980's.

Documentation
is not the
only proof of
provenance,
cultural memory
is too

Subham Manandhar
in Vienna

In Bengaluru last April, a 32-year-old passenger traveling from the UK arrived with a cargo consignment from Vienna.

Declared as ‘grey stone stele of Padmapani’, airport customs officials instantly suspected that its intricate craftsmanship must have significant cultural and historical importance.

Upon further investigation, it turned out to be a ninth century Boddhisatva Padmapani stolen from the Boudhanath Stupa in Kathmandu. The item was later confiscated after the Nepal government confirmed it as a stolen cultural artefact, which activists had previously intercepted at an auction gallery in Vienna.

Nepal’s Department of Archeology (DoA) was already gathering evidence of its trafficking to submit to the Viennese gallery in hopes of its voluntary return to Nepal. Versions of this deity are worshipped in Kathmandu Valley as Rato Machindranath.

In fact, the stele was just one of six artefacts, first flagged by the Lost Arts of Nepal page, that were set for auction in Vienna in 2025 despite substantial evidence, in books, archives and databases indicating that they had been stolen from their original shrines in Kathmandu Valley.



SHRIDHAR LAL MANANDHAR



auctioneers

In the two auctions last March and April, were an ornate 19th century repoussé of Chamunda in Lot 66 associated with the Balkumari Temple in Thimi that started at €500, and was ultimately sold for €2,016, while Lot 122 was an 18th century large wooden frieze from Kaasthamandap which was removed from auction after various groups sent photographic and historical evidence to the gallery.

Besides the Boddhisatva Padmapani (Lot 297) the April auction also included two other stone steles: a Shridhara Vishnu (Lot 29) from Chyasalhiti, and a Ganesh (Lot 31, relisted Lot 311 in April 2026) traced to the Bagh Bhairav temple in Kirtipur. This auction of the Handley collection also included a large wooden torana liked to Asan (Lot 302).

Activists with the Nepal Heritage Recovery Campaign were working closely with the Nepal Embassy in Vienna, and the DoA in Nepal. Among the six objects in this collection, some had previously been flagged at other auctions and subsequently vanished from the market until this particular auction.

The alarming number of items with evidence of trafficking is just a fraction of the objects traded at auctions, raising questions about how they were stolen and smuggled out of the country. The provenance for many of these objects describe that they were initially acquired by collectors during extensive travels in Asia.

Police reports of the thefts have not yet been found, since it was not a common practice for formal reporting of such losses. They were instead handled within communities or local institutions, and often, replicas were promptly installed for worship. This has sometimes led auctioneers to assume largely that the objects may have been voluntarily sold by their custodians.

Nepal’s Ancient Monument Preservation Act 1956 places strict restrictions on the export of archeological, historical and artistic objects more than 100 years old.

In the absence of a police report, it is the paper trail of export permits and approvals that can be followed to understand whether an object had been legally taken out of the country. Some argue that the burden of proof should fall on those claiming a legitimate provenance to produce the documentation showing that the object was indeed lawfully transferred and exported.

In the case of the Shridhar Vishnu the evidence is hard to dismiss. With the starting price at €7,500, the relief closely matches a Shridhar Vishnu from Chyasalhiti complex in Patan, documented as pl. 186 by art historian Lain Singh Bangdel in his book *Stolen Images of Nepal*. Despite submission of the evidence, the piece was sold for more than €9,000.

PROOF

In fact, the mutilated left hand of the central Vishnu figure and damage on the mace and on the hands of the smaller Garuda figure, and the matching height of 52cm reveal it to be 140E from the book *Nepalese Stone Sculptures* by Ulrich von Schroeder.

Screenshots posted on the gallery website details where in Chyasalhiti this relief was placed, with a dated in-situ photograph from 1976. Crucially, just below this text appears the citation Schroeder uses of Bangdel’s *Stolen Images of Nepal*, pl. 186, which legibly reads ‘Stolen in the early 1980s’.

Such records from historic books has, in other cases, been enough basis for many global repatriation processes. But this was not the case for the Vienna auction of the Kathmandu Valley items.

A different story is emerging around another of the six objects: an 18th century wooden panel associated to the Kaasthamandap, or Maru Sattal. Sources have offered to voluntarily repatriate this piece which was estimated to sell for €10,000. Measuring 3.6m, in-situ photos from the Huntington archives and authors like Mary Slusser show a close match with the intricately carved figures of Umamaheshvara, Bodhisattvas, Ganesha and other mythical creatures and devotees.

This panel was inherited by Peter Kienzle-Hardt from the collection of his adopted father, Dr Horst Kienzle. Provenance information mentions that it was acquired between 1950-1985 during his travels in Asia.

Kienzle-Hardt had earlier approached a museum in Vienna to sell a large Dipankar Buddha head in 2001. The curator discovered that it had been stolen from Nagbahal in Patan just a year before. It was subsequently repatriated to Patan where it appears annually during the Samyak Mahadan festival.

Kaasthamandap is Kathmandu’s oldest structure, with many historians crediting it as the origins of the city’s name. Beyond its religious significance, it historically served as a rest house for travellers and merchants, and is still used as a marketplace, and a stage for local music and dance, much like Vienna’s ornate Rathaus.

The frieze itself is an important component of the building, which collapsed in the 2015 earthquake and was rebuilt. Placed around

the temple, it depicts the story of the Buddha and is material evidence of how Nepali society transmitted oral stories and mythologies through generations.

It is encouraging that the gallery plans to return this panel to Nepal to be placed back on Kasthamandap together with a plaque documenting the repatriation.

There is much enthusiasm in the local community about welcoming the gods they remembered seeing as children, and a deeply emotional relationship people share with their heritage is evident. Repatriated gods are increasingly becoming reconsecrated in their original temples for active worship, reinvigorating Nepal’s intangible culture (see column, right).

This emotional dimension is impossible to capture through provenance and ownership documents alone. The gods connect Nepali communities to their history not just as works of art, but as objects of devotion cared for across generations.

The gods and temples are material inheritance left by ancestors who commissioned them to give thanks for good harvests or hopes of good fortune. This relationship is a part of daily life as locals walk to school, commute, buy vegetables, or shop.

The return of the panel opens the possibility of strengthening this relationship between people and their heritage. But it is also important to restore the other objects at the Viennese auction.

For those who have spent years tracing them through photographs, books and auction catalogs, the question rarely ends with ownership. For them, and for the communities who remember the objects, it is a question of where they belong. 🇳🇵



SUMAN NEPALI

Preserving the diversity of intangible heritage

Nepal’s new heritage Bill needs an inclusive board, not just statutory words



Stone and Song
Alisha Sijapati

On Yomari Punhi, Newa households follow age-old rituals, and families do not think of it as performing an intangible heritage to be preserved. It is their culture.

Rice flour is kneaded, the molasses is softened, and elders show children how to shape the dough. The filling may evolve, the shape may shift, but the practice continues because knowledge moves across generations. No government office is required to certify its meaning.

In July 2025, the Yomari dumpling was formally added to Nepal’s national intangible cultural heritage list, not by a federal ministry, but after Lalitpur Metropolitan City took the lead.

That distinction sits at the heart of the Intangible Cultural Property (Protection) Bill, 2081, passed by the National Assembly in May 2024 and now in its final stages of becoming a much overdue law. It forces the federal bureaucracy to recognise that heritage is not only what can be excavated, but what people know, practise, and transmit. To understand why this Bill is monumental yet flawed, one must look at how the modern state learned to govern culture.

The post-1951 state sought categories it could measure and control. Enacting the Ancient Monuments Preservation Act of 1956 and establishing the Department of Archaeology (DoA) were necessary steps to protect physical structures. But it created an unfortunate legal legacy: the state learned to protect stones, while overlooking songs. From 1960 to 1990, the Panchayat state enforced a singular national identity under a unitary policy under king and nation. Cultural diversity was subordinated to state uniformity, and it sidelined living traditions across generations.

This policy deliberately ignored Nepal’s rich pluralism across 142 caste and ethnic groups, 10 religions, and 124 mother tongues. Article 32(3) of the 2015 Constitution explicitly guarantees the fundamental right of every community to preserve,

promote, and protect its language, script, culture, cultural civilisation, and heritage.

To fulfil this constitutional mandate, the 2081 Bill must dismantle the legacy of Kathmandu-centric assimilation rather than collating central control under new statutory titles.

The delay in correcting this 70-year imbalance is glaring. When Nepal ratified the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2010, it pledged to give living traditions equal standing. Instead, for 16 years, that commitment sat untouched while physical monuments monopolised state budgets. The new Bill is long overdue, it is a much-delayed attempt to build the legal architecture to safeguard community practices.

To its credit, the Bill marks a genuine paradigm shift. For seven decades, the state recognised only what could be measured in stone. This law finally elevates oral traditions, living rituals, and inherited skills to that same statutory plane.

By codifying community-led inventories requiring Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) and recognising master practitioners as ‘Living Human Treasures’, the Bill arms communities with statutory power to assert agency over their memory.

Yet the Bill arrives half-furnished because its governance structure betrays these promises. First, the Recommendation Committee under Clause 5 strips communities of real authority. Stacked with central government officials and state academies, the Ministry’s Culture Division, the Language Commission, the Nepal Academy, and the National Archives: it guarantees no structural seat for a guthiyar, a municipal custodian, or an indigenous practitioner.

The state creates a system where communities supply knowledge, but central bureaucrats retain the master key. That is state-led extraction, not community safeguarding.

Second, the Bill ignores the financial engine of heritage by leaving Guthi Sansthan, the state corporation managing festival land endowments, completely outside the statutory framework. This creates a legislative absurdity where one ministry officially names a tradition while an entirely separate body controls the funds to run it.

Instead of absorbing the guthi network, the state ought to empower it using tax incentives,

property protections, matching grants, targeted capacity-building, and cultural philanthropy.

Third, relegating the Bill to the International Relations and Tourism Committee reveals Singha Durbar’s true priorities — cultural heritage is treated as a division of tourism rather than a distinct Constitutional domain. It traps living heritage inside a committee more equipped for economic returns rather than community rights.

Committee members have spent critical hours debating whether to use Abhautik (non-physical/intangible) Amurt (formless/intangible), or Maulik (indigenous/original) for the Bill’s name. Vocabulary squabbles will not pay musicians, protect sacred festival routes, or stop land endowments from being siphoned off.

PARALLEL TRACKS

The Bill’s core structural flaw lies in creating parallel administrative tracks for a single inheritance. To a federal ministry, physical monuments and living practices exist in separate legal silos. To a community, they are indivisible.

A stone temple cannot be separated from the rituals that give it life, nor can a festival survive without the sacred routes and land endowments that sustain it.

Rather than multiplying state bureaucracy, Nepal must establish a unified National Cultural Heritage Board: an autonomous body integrating archaeological preservation, guthi endowments, municipal leadership, and local custodians.

If aviation and tourism merit dedicated statutory boards under the same ministry, living heritage can no longer be managed as an administrative afterthought.

Yomari dumplings will survive as food adapts, travels, and reinvents itself across generations. But fragile oral chants, seasonal rituals, and specialised craftsmanship will not survive under top-down state control.

Passing this Bill is historic only because state neglect has been so prolonged. To move from symbolic gestures to genuine protection, Nepal must fix the law’s structural flaws: transfer decision-making authority to local custodians, integrate community land endowments, expand legal protections across every province, and build a single administrative home capable of holding both the stone and the song together. 🇳🇵

Alisha Sijapati is a writer and cultural heritage practitioner.



Events

South Asian heritage

Multiple artists showcase their work on manuscripts and art works that have been displaced from South Asia. Read review on page 4.
Until 31 October, Taragaon Next, Boudha

Experiment on Intimacy

Artist Emily Faltyn's artworks are reflects on Newar Buddhism, everyday rituals, devotion and relationship between people and sacred space.
Until 2 September, 11am- 5pm, Artudio Patan Wing, Nakabahal



Pangsom Waterfall Hike

Enjoy the refreshing trails along the Pangsom Waterfall.
29 August, Rs1100, 6:40am, Brikuti Mandap

Kathak Bhela

Join this kathak event where rhythm is something practiced and not only talked about. Open to kathak dancers and anyone interested in the dance form.
29 August, Rs200, 4pm-5:30pm, Nritya Aagan, Jhamsikhel



Le Sherpa Market

From fresh organic produce to European cheese and bakery items, Le Sherpa Farmers Market has it all. Drop in and shop with close ones.
Every Saturday, 8am-12:30pm, Le Sherpa, Maharajgunj

Myth and Memory

Bivas Rai's solo exhibition Myth and Memory is held in collaboration with the Australian Himalayan Foundation.
28 August - 20 September, 11am-5pm, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal



Music



Bhajan Saanjh

Celebrate an evening of spirituality and culture and sing along to some devotional music.
29 August, 7pm, Attic, Gyaneswor

Dance Party

Wear your favourite saree or kurtha, pair it with some sturdy sneakers, and hit the dance floor this weekend.
29 August, Rs2,500, 7pm onwards, Club Nova, Thamel



Hunterhood

The Hunterhood musical extravaganza features performances by notable artists including Adrian Pradhan collective, Rato Rani, Sacar, and others. Be prepared for a jam-packed evening.
12 September, Rs350, 2pm onwards, Brikuti Mandap

One of These Nights

Witness the timeless tunes of The Eagles being sung live. The event is with collaboration with Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory.
29 August, Rs800, 7:30pm onwards, Moksh, Jhamsikhel

Lama and the Band

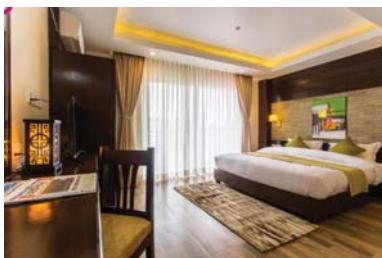
Lama and the Band are set for a special show. Join in with close ones.
28 August, Rs500, 6pm, The Village Cafe, Jhamsikhel



Getaway

Meghauli Serai

This luxurious safari lodge at the heart of Chitwan National Park overlooks the Rapti river, and not only offers scenic views but accommodation that integrates local culture and art.
Chitwan National Park, 9851218500



Bodhi Suites

Bodhi Suites Boutique Hotel is modern, classy and offers a wide variety of luxury amenities. The rooms are spacious and perfect to unwind after a long day of exploring Lakeside.
Lakeside (61) 467657 / 58

Balthali Village Resort

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



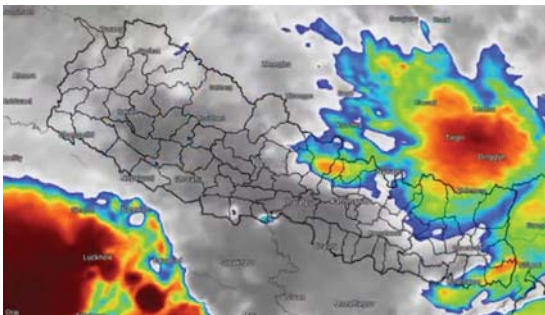
Hotel at the End of the Universe

In this quaint sanctuary, located in scenic Nagarkot, settle into one of the rustic cabins, eat local cuisine and marvel at snow-capped mountains.
Mahankal Mandir, Nagarkot (01) 6680109

Hattiban Resort

Hattiban Resort is the perfect place to getaway for the weekend. Grab breakfast from the hotel'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 9801309847

Weekend Weather



Climate Calamities

The catastrophic flash flood on the Bhoite Kosi on Wednesday morning seems to have been triggered by an avalanche on the North face of Langtang (Page 1). As this met image from windy.com from Wednesday morning shows, there was also a major weather system moving east to west north of central Nepal in Tibet. This is a lesson that the impact of the climate crisis is causing extreme weather across the Himalaya and glacial melting. We in Nepal might as well be prepared for it (Editorial).

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

Our Pick



The Earth descends into a new Ice Age as a sudden international storm breaks out. Jack Hall, a climatologist who had been warning officials of the storm but saw no response, must now make a perilous voyage to find his lost son, Sam. Twenty two years after its release, the film's climate surrealism is more relevant than ever before as it contemplates the consequences of inaction. Directed by Roland Emmerich and starring Dennis Quaid, Jake Gyllenhaal, and Emmy Rossum, the film is available to watch on Netflix.

MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



Dining



Alice Kathmandu

Indulge in a wide range of delicacies including Continental, Japanese, Chinese and Thakali. Their varieties of momo are a must try.
Gairidhara (01) 5357318

Evoke Café & Bistro

Pick a favourite from Evoke's expansive menu: pita bread, baguette and multigrain bread sandwich all served with homemade fries and salad on side.
Jhamsikhel (01) 5432021



Utpala Cafe

This monastery restaurant is perfect for anyone looking for healthy vegetarian options. With their scrumptious buffet lunch, fresh produce, and mouth-watering baked goods, this is one of the best eateries in Boudha.
Boudha, 9810700763 (Closed on Sundays)



K2 Terrace Café

Unwind with family, friends, and irresistible flavours of barbeque, refreshing beer, and live music. Buy one get one free offer on beer. Call for reservations
Every Friday, 6pm onwards, Baber Mahal Revisited, 9802343149

La Terrasse

La Terrasse blends authentic Italian cuisine with a café, bakery, bar, yoga studio, and boutique shops, all set within a garden space. A spot for soul-fulfilling food and relaxation under the warm winter sun.
Chundevis, 9802356136

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 नपराँ ।
- आफूले प्रवाह गरेका सन्देश वा सूचनाबाट समाजमा पर्नसक्ने नकारात्मक प्रभावको ख्याल गरौं ।
- आफ्नो सन्देशले कुनै व्यक्ति वा अन्य कुनै समुदायको आत्मसम्मानमा चोट नपुऱ्याऔं ।



नेपाल सरकार
विज्ञापन बोर्ड

The documentary Devi shown to MPs

Victims of sexual violence from Nepal’s long-forgotten conflict rue apathetic state response

Sudiksha Tuladhar

Devi Khadka joined the Maoist insurgency, hoping to raise her voice against patriarchy, misogyny and discrimination. She committed herself to fighting for women’s rights and gender equality. In 1997, during the beginning of the conflict, she was raped and tortured in police custody when she was only 17. Nearly 30 years later, the memory haunts her still. But time has not healed, and the trauma has lasted.

Subina Shrestha, a journalist and filmmaker, documented Khadka’s life and the ordeals she endured in her award-winning documentary ‘Devi’ released in 2024. In the film, Devi says on camera: ‘I fought back the best I could. I could count four people, after that, I don’t know.’

‘COLLATERAL DAMAGE’
This week, Shrestha screened her documentary in QFX Labim Mall for members of Parliament and the transitional justice community. “The screening was especially for MPs, many of whom are young and have little memory of the Maoist conflict,” Shrestha told us after the show. “They must know what wounds the movement has left us with and why it is important to address them urgently.” Many GenZ Nepalis born during and after the insurgency have little to no idea of the conflict or the atrocities. Older people find some of their experiences too traumatic to dwell on. Meanwhile, history textbooks in schools have



RAM BHANDARI

FROM MEMORY: RSP legislator Samikchya Baskota, Devi Khadka and director Subina Shrestha at the screening of the documentary Devi this week in Kathmandu.

airbrushed this important period. The invitation for the screening was sent to all MPs through WhatsApp, but only seven deemed the event important enough to attend. One of them was Tara Biswakarma of the governing Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP). She told us: “We are committed to working towards the welfare of society and the country. With multiple issues at hand, we are working in several sectors

simultaneously, including issues related to the Maoist conflict.” Devi Khadka mustered the courage over the past three decades and has continued to advocate for survivors of sexual violence and wartime rape. Her testimony is a reminder of the long struggle of survivors seeking recognition and justice. “There has been a significant difference in life before and after this documentary,” Khadka told us at the screening.

“I’m able to speak about sexual violence and rape more openly now because the documentary has reached a wider audience.” Khadka is married and has a teenage daughter. In the documentary, her daughter recalls Devi suffering severe headaches and being unable to get up because of the pain and mental pressure.



To cope with the trauma, Khadka sought counselling and met Jamuna Maharjan, who helped her process the aftermath. “Devi used to come for counselling regularly, but we lost contact for some years,” says Maharjan. “She contacted me again after she began speaking in public for a more recently.” Sexual violence often increases during conflict all over the world, when women’s bodies are used as weapons of war. For survivors, the trauma does not end when the conflict does. Many women who faced sexual violence during the insurgency have not spoken out for fear of stigma and social exclusion. Devi Khadka refused Shrestha’s request to make the film several times before finally being convinced about being interviewed on camera. “After what has happened to me, even standing and speaking in front of you is an achievement,” Khadka told this reporter. “Women

do not speak up because we fear how the family and society will react. We must guarantee that women can live a dignified life after speaking their truth.” Women continue to be collateral damage in someone else’s war and even in non-conflict situations. Many feel unsafe even in their homes, in public transport and in public spaces, underscoring the need for stronger protection mechanisms and accountability. The horrific rape and killing of three-year-old Garima Chaudhary in Bara this month has shocked the nation. Before that there were other high profile cases of sexual abuse and rape which have gone unpunished. These have intensified public outrage and renewed calls for stronger action against perpetrators of sexual violence, including increasing the punishment to castration or even the death penalty.

LEGACY OF WAR
More than 17,000 people were killed and some 1,400 remain officially unaccounted for even 20 years after the end of the conflict in 2006, and 30 years since it began in 1996. The Maoists came into mainstream politics after the ceasefire, but the truth and disappearance commissions are yet to deliver meaningful justice. More than 63,000 cases have been registered at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, put of which 314 pertain to sexual violence and rape. In August 2025, another 11,000 fresh cases were registered. Further delays risk deepening impunity and eroding survivors’ trust in the justice process. Rights organisations and the international community have repeatedly urged authorities to move the transitional justice process forward. Survivors like Khadka now say they want the truth and justice before it is too late. ■



SUBARU

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RSS

We are all downstream now

The water cycle is the planet's great equaliser. We have forgotten this. The flood is a brutal reminder.



Comment
Zakir Kibria

The news arrived the way water does: quietly at first, then in a roaring torrent.

It was 9AM, and I had just woken up, still groggy and reaching for my phone, when the first video appeared on my feed. Brown water where a street used to be. A bridge folding like paper. A bus swept sideways, its passengers' hands visible through windows that were frames of a nightmare.

And then, beneath the videos, the questions. Friends asking: Is this real? Is this AI? Our minds now un-believe the real.

Just weeks ago, I wrote about ice in this paper about the frozen, vertical world of Mt Everest, the Khumbu Icefall creaking blue and ancient in the thin air, the silence of snowfields stretching toward a sky that seemed to have forgotten the existence of noise.

Now the ice has written back. Not in the language of summits and flags, but in the language of melt, mud and gravity.

THE THIRD POLE

The Hindu Kush Himalaya is called the Third Pole because it holds the largest ice reserves outside the Arctic and Antarctic regions. Scientists tell us this frozen world is warming faster than the global average. Science is abstract. What happened in Nepal this week is not.

Imagine a single droplet of meltwater at the snout of a Himalayan glacier. It gathers with other droplets, pooling into a lake held back by nothing more than loose rock and ice, a moraine dam. The lake is turquoise and still. It is also a time bomb waiting for an earthquake, an avalanche, gravity or a sudden surge of melt on a hot day.

This is what hydrologists call a Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF). And they are happening with increasing frequency across Nepal. The river does not ask for a passport. It does not pause at borders. It flows from the Tibetan Plateau through Nepal's narrow gorges, into the Tarai and the Indian plains, spreading finally across the Bangladesh delta. It carries silt and sorrow and the strange democracy of water. Borders are drawn on land. Water has never respected them.

I am still staring at my phone. The footage is grainy. The water is the colour of churned earth. A

woman clings to a rope stretched across what was once a road. A child's shoe floats past, small and bright and devastating. I cannot hear the roar, but I can feel it. The sound of boulders colliding underwater. The sound of foundations giving way. The sound of a planet's circulatory system failing.

And beneath the footage, the questions continue. Is this real? Can AI do this? We have been taught that the unbelievable is probably fake. Deepfakes have colonised our skepticism. Generated images have eroded our trust in our own eyes. The mind's default is now suspicion, even when the body knows better. Even when the water is real, the mud is real, the bodies are real.

The tragedy is not just the flood. It is that we have lost the reflex of believing our own eyes. Nature, it turns out, is still capable of producing the unbelievable. The flood does not care if we believe in it. It rises regardless. It destroys regardless. It is real whether or not the video loads.

Nepalis in the Khumbu and Bangladeshis in Barisal watch the same waters rise. Between them: borders, languages, passports, politics. Above them: the same sky rivers. Below them: the same meltwater, seeking the same ocean.

We have spent centuries drawing lines on maps, building nations out of paper and pride. But the water cycle is the planet's great equaliser. Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, the world is one family. We have spent so long forgetting this. The flood is a brutal reminder.

How do I hold this grief? I am safe here, for now, in this moment, in this room. My feet are dry. My coffee is warm. The flood is elsewhere, reduced to pixels and captions and comments. I scroll. I pause. I scroll again.

This is the guilt of the witness. To see suffering through a glass rectangle, put it down and continue eating breakfast. There is no resolution to this. There is only presence. Only the difficult, necessary act of staying with what we have seen — of refusing to look away, even when looking feels unbearable.

A child in Bangladesh cups rainwater in her palms and drinks. A monk in Nepal watches the river turn brown and prays.

A glacier in Tibet drips, silently, into the dark. We are all downstream now. 🇳🇵

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PMO NEPAL

The danger of living below the Tibetan Plateau

The Bhote Kosi crosses the China border before it enters Nepal. Our preparedness should too.

Sushim Thapaliya

Nepal sits downstream from the Tibetan Plateau in China, and the country has a blind spot when it comes to disaster preparedness.

A disaster upstream becomes a disaster downstream, yet much of Nepal's flood preparedness begins once the two Bhote Kosis, Karnali or the Arun enter Nepal.

The Tibetan Plateau feeds some of Asia's major rivers, and its glaciers, glacial lakes, permafrost, and terrain are changing as the climate warms. For Nepal, what happens on the other side of the Himalaya can come down as a flood that kills people and destroys infrastructure.

Both Bhote Kosis start in Tibet, one crosses into Nepal at Kodari and the other into Rasuwa. In both cases, the steep rivers flow through

deep gorges and past settlements, hydropower projects, and roads that form the two main Nepal-China trade routes.

The problem is not just that Nepal is vulnerable to floods. It is that sometimes, the hazards that become floods in Nepal begin somewhere else as they did last year and again this year on the same river.

Preparing for them requires information, research, and communication that can cross the same border the river does. The Bhote Kosi floods have demonstrated this vulnerability in two consecutive monsoons.

On 8 July 2025, a sudden flood swept through the Bhote Kosi in Rasuwa. At least 18 people were killed, and the Friendship Bridge at Rasuwa Gadi was destroyed, hydropower projects, transmission lines, electricity substations, and the road between Nepal and China

were damaged.

Just as last year, Nepal's Department of Hydrology and Meteorology said this week that there had not been heavy rainfall on the Nepali side of the border. The Flood Forecasting Division only became aware of the flood when the water had reached Betrawati.

Nepal lacks a mechanism for receiving rainfall and flood-water data from the Chinese side. But once the floods last year and this week entered Nepal, authorities quickly sent out mass SMS alerts to people downstream in the Trisuli valley.

But an alert sent after a flood has already entered the country is not quite the same thing as an early-warning system. The 2025 flood had been triggered by a glacial lake outburst at the headwaters of the Lhunde River near the Nepal-China border. Satellite analysis identified the sudden drainage of a supraglacial lake in Tibet.

That finding should have changed

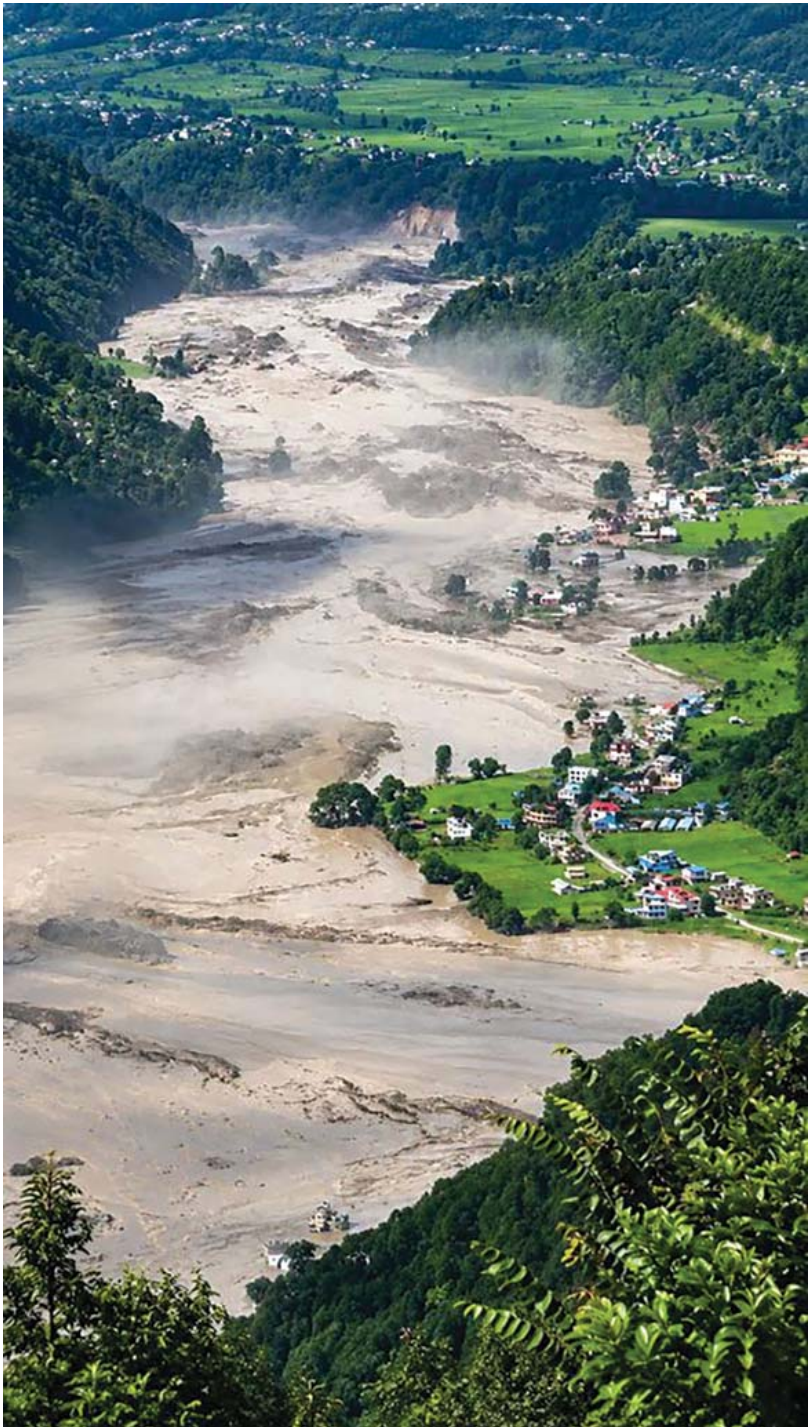


NEPALI ARMY

UPDATE

The scale of the disaster is so vast that local governments have been unable to give an estimate about the number of casualties. Entire neighbourhoods in Syaprubesi, Betrawati, Trisuli and other riverside towns have been wiped off the map. So far, the only figures are for bodies recovered, and that had exceeded 300 on Thursday. Hundreds are still missing, and tens of thousands have been made homeless. Prime Minister Balendra Shah made a brief helicopter visit to Trisuli, and Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle is leading the coordination of relief. The Trisuli flood hit at the beginning of the trekking season in Nepal, the peak season for tourism in Tibet and two days before the auspicious full moon day for pilgrimage. 28 August is auspicious for both Hindus, Buddhists and

those who follow the animist faith, and thousands had been on their way to Gosainkunda lake in Rasuwa. There were also Indian pilgrims on their way to Mansarovar in China, and they were entering through the checkpoint in Rasuwa-Kerung. In addition, there were hundreds of tourists visiting Tibet overland. The monsoon is the peak season for visiting the plateau which is in the rainshadow. Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) says 644 tourists who were in the area are out of contact. This does not mean that they were affected by the disaster, but simply may not have a mobile connection. It is not clear whether among them are tourists who have already entered China and are on their tours. Because social media platforms are not accessible in China, they may be out of contact. The NTB's list includes the following nationalities and their numbers: India: **178** | Nepali: **127** | United States: **65** | Ukraine: **53** | Malaysia: **51** | Australia: **35** | UK: **33** | Canada: **25** | Singapore: **9** | Russia: **8** | Germany: **8** | Latvia: **6** | South Africa: **6**



NEPAL POLICE

how Nepal thought about the Bhote Kosi. A destructive flood could originate beyond Nepal's monitoring systems, without the rainfall patterns Nepali forecasters would normally be watching for, and reach communities downstream with little time to react. ICIMOD's 2026 glacier assessment found that glacier ice loss across the Hindu Kush Himalaya has accelerated, with the rate of ice loss roughly doubling since 2000. Only seven of the 38 glaciers in its long-term monitoring dataset meet international benchmark standards, leaving large parts of the mountain cryosphere poorly observed. The risks are not just theoretical. A 2025 assessment of the Poiqu-Bhote Kosi and Gyirong-Trisuli transboundary basins identified 28 glacial lakes as highly susceptible to GLOFs (glacial lake

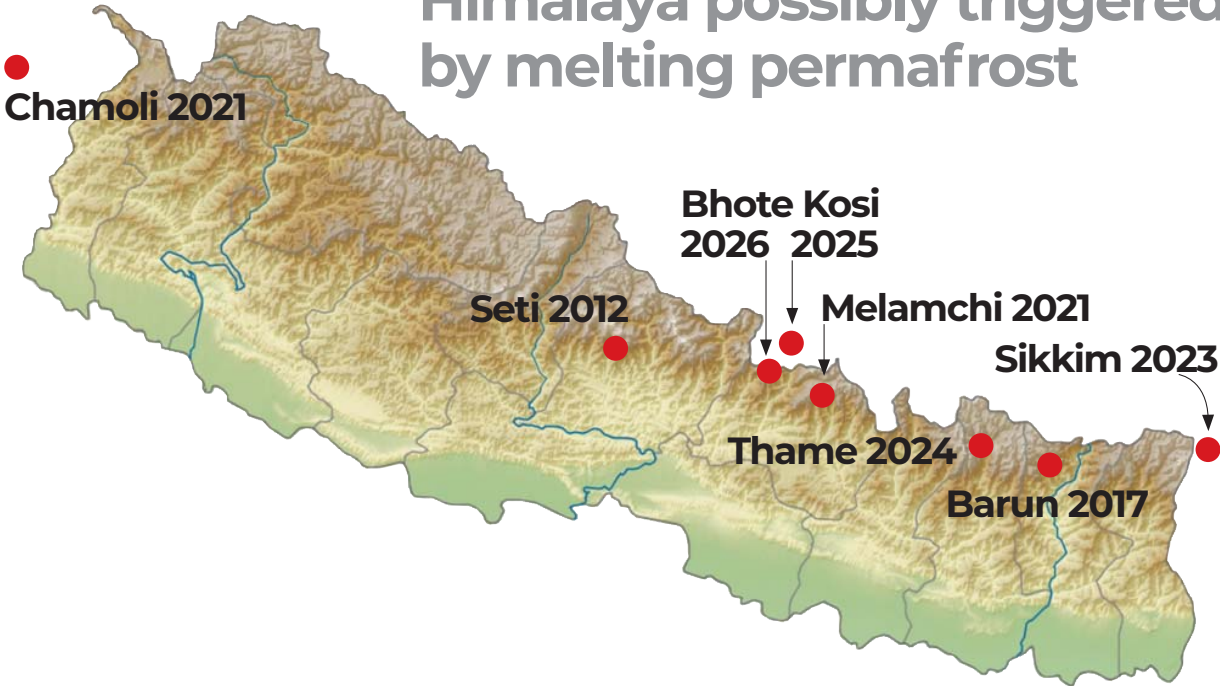
outburst floods). Under extreme scenarios, the researchers found that floods could threaten more than 3,000 buildings, around 50 bridges, nine hydropower sites, and roughly 50km of road. They recommended using the findings for joint disaster-risk reduction strategies between China and Nepal. A 2026 study of another glacial lake in southwestern Tibet found that its surface area had increased by 194% between 1975-2024. Modelling suggested that a potential landslide-induced GLOF could threaten buildings in both China and Nepal, prompting the researchers to call for early-warning systems and regional disaster-prevention frameworks. This complicates the idea that Nepal does not have enough information. There is satellite imagery, inventories of glacial lakes, and hydrological models. Researchers are even mapping

hazards across the border and identifying which infrastructure could be affected. What is less clear is how consistently that knowledge travels from research into the systems meant to keep people safe. Last year's flood made this institutional problem explicit. This week's even deadlier flood makes it even more glaring. **CROSS-BORDER COLLAB** For a transboundary river, cross-border communication is not a diplomatic convenience; it should be part of disaster preparedness. But Nepal is not completely in the dark about what happens upstream. On 13 August, a landslide near Nyalam in China blocked the flow on the East Bhote Kosi. When the river level fell ominously, Nepali authorities warned downstream residents to remain alert, while security personnel monitored the

river for a sudden surge. There had been no warning about the river blockage. Satellite images sourced from Planet Labs show a landslide or ice avalanche racing down to the Lhende River and blocking it. Planet Labs juxtaposed images of the Lhengde River below the landslide scar and the point where it enters Nepal directly downstream. An effective early-warning system is more than a message sent to a phone. The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) defines it as a chain connecting risk knowledge, monitoring and forecasting, communication, and preparedness to respond. Nepal's own disaster-management institutions recognise this distinction. The National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority (NDRRMA)'s 2024 report says Nepal is working on a multi-hazard early-warning system and impact-based action plans, while also acknowledging the need to strengthen coordination between government agencies, academic institutions, and other stakeholders. A 2024 study of communities in the Bhote Kosi / Sun Kosi and Trisuli basins found a high level of awareness of GLOF risk along the Bhote Kosi and recommended stronger early-warning systems, cross-border cooperation, public awareness, and resilient infrastructure. A Stimson Center assessment also notes that advances in remote sensing and earth observation make real-time monitoring of debris floods and extreme flow events technically feasible in Nepal. The question now is how do we connect all of this together. Nepal has demonstrated its ability to respond when disaster strikes. On Wednesday, the Nepal Army, Armed Police Force, and Nepal Police were immediately mobilised. Army and private helicopters flew medevac missions,

and warnings were issued downstream as floodwaters moved into the Trisuli system. But rescue is necessarily reactive. By the time helicopters are in the air, bridges may already have been washed away, roads blocked, and communities stranded. Preparedness asks what could have been done before that point. For the Bhote Kosi, that means reliable data-sharing with China, monitoring glacial lakes and unstable terrain, incorporating satellite and scientific research into government risk assessments, and establishing clear protocols for district authorities, hydropower operators, and communities when an upstream hazard is detected. It also means reconsidering how Nepal rebuilds after disasters. The Betrawati-Rasuwigadi corridor, damaged by last year's flood, has again suffered extensive damage, with roads and bridges washed away. Rebuilding the same infrastructure without incorporating new hazard information risks rebuilding the same vulnerability. Nepal cannot predict every flood. It cannot prevent glaciers from retreating or every landslide from occurring. But it can build a system in which an upstream disturbance triggers monitoring, information-sharing, risk assessment, and preparedness downstream. The 2025 flood showed what happens when information cannot cross the border quickly enough. The 26 August flood has shown, once again, how quickly a hazard originating beyond Nepal can become a national disaster. The question is no longer whether Nepal knows that the Bhote Kosi can flood. The question is whether Nepal will know soon enough to act the next time something changes upstream. A warning that arrives after the river has already crossed the border is not really an early warning. It is an alert asking people to brace for the wall of debris coming down the gorge. 🇳🇵

Recent events in the Himalaya possibly triggered by melting permafrost





Bringing ‘Silicon Peaks’ to Nepal

Nepal-born IT entrepreneur puts Kathmandu on the global digital services map

Dirgha Raj Upadhyay

Pukar C Hamal (pictured, right) looks out onto the Bay from large windows of his company’s headquarters on the 37th floor of the Salesforce Tower in San Fransisco, and considers how far he has come from his small village in distant Darchula district in Nepal.

At just 35, Hamal is the founder and CEO of SecurityPal, a \$110 million company specialising in cybersecurity and security assurance for multinationals in the US and around the world.

Hamal’s grandfather Ram Chandra was jailed during the absolute monarchy, and his father Harish came to Kathmandu, where in 1991 Pukar was born. His mother, Sunita, took him back to Darchula where he grew up.

Their village in Nepal’s most remote district had no electricity, and Hamal remembers doing his homework in the flickering light of a sooty kerosene lamp.

He was seven when the family moved to the US in 1998, and in the New York borough of Queens his father worked in restaurants.

“We lived in a damp basement with little natural light,” recalls Pukar. He excelled in school, and later at Stanford University and then at PwC had an economic liaison role related to Taiwan at the intersection of technology, business, and public policy.



He started specialising in cybersecurity and in 2016, joined friends to launch Teamable, a talent discovery platform that helped companies find candidates through networks using AI before it became widely available.

One day, the company was close to signing a major customer, but had to complete a 200-page security questionnaire. The team could not complete it on time, and the company lost a \$5 million deal.

It was a painful failure for Hamal, but also a turning point which planted the seed that would become SecurityPal.

“Companies trying to do business with large enterprises often face lengthy and complicated security reviews, compliance requirements and questionnaires, and SecurityPal solved that problem,” Hamal explains.

After spending two years in “stealth mode” quietly developing

the technology and business plan from an apartment in San Francisco, Hamal raised \$21 million in venture capital with a single 20-minute phone conversation with an investor.

Since then, SecurityPal has grown at an extraordinary pace, providing cybersecurity assistance to 1,000 clients, including some of the world’s best-known technology and Fortune 500 companies.

REMEMBERING NEPAL

Pukar Hamal feels a tug from his Nepali roots, and SecurityPal opened its Security Operations Command Center in Kathmandu, which he jointly inaugurated with US Ambassador Dean R Thompson.

The Kathmandu operation now employs 210 Nepalis who work with global companies and support their security requirements.

“We do not view Kathmandu as just an outsourcing destination,” says Hamal. “It can become a centre for technology entrepreneurship, not just a labour market.” Founded in Silicon Valley, SecurityPal is now scaling what Hamal calls “Silicon Peaks”. For him, it is a sense of responsibility to give back at least a little to the country of his birth and of his ancestors.

“Nepal is not our market, but we want to invest there to help build its technology ecosystem,” he says.

The 29 January 2025 issue of Forbes published a daily cover story featuring SecurityPal. Hamal is also a member of the

Forbes Business Council, where he regularly publishes articles.

Filling client questionnaires can take weeks in-house, but SecurityPal can help companies with compliance questions much faster by using AI to take care of repetitive questions, while people focus on issues that actually require human judgment.

Says Hamal: “AI isn’t perfect, and this is why we have purpose-built, trained experts to oversee it.”

SecurityPal manages assurance workflows connected for customers including OpenAI, Figma, MongoDB, Airtable, Snap Inc, Grammarly, and Monday.com.

Pukar Hamal thinks Nepal itself has not taken cybersecurity vulnerabilities as seriously as it should. “Instead of waiting for a cyberattack to happen and then reacting to it, it is essential to put strong security measures in place beforehand,” he says.

Size does not matter for countries adopting technology, more important are policies and implementation, he says. Nepal’s digital services sector is growing rapidly, particularly in software development and IT exports.

He thinks Nepal should look beyond its geographical size and make cybersecurity, AI, cloud computing, software and digital services exports a central part of its economic strategy.

“Silicon Valley is the capital of some of the world’s most influential technology companies,” Hamal says. “We are trying to bring a little of that to Nepal’s Silicon Peaks.” 🇳🇵

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