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ANUP TAMU









SAFE & HAPPY DASAIN

Nepali Times wishes readers and partners a safe and happy Dasain. Let us bring out the best in us as Nepalis to be kind, compassionate, and to help each other this festival season. The Nepali Times editorial team is taking a Dasain break, so there will be no print edition on 23 October. The next hardcopy issue will be on Friday, 30 October. But readers can follow daily online coverage throughout the holidays on www.nepalitimes.com



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Portrait of a world on fire

Nepal must not follow the global trend of democratic backsliding.

Editorial

Shristi Karki



Nepal's 2015 Constitution envisioned the devolution of political power from Kathmandu to the grassroots. Eleven years since its promulgation, however, Nepal is more centrally governed than ever.

Since 2015, Nepal has been ruled by elected leaders who loathed the idea of decentralisation. Federalism was just a slogan, and they never gave local governments the chance to work, ensuring that provinces were their proxies.

Alas, the new post-youth protest government, despite promises of reform, has not done much better.

This week, Chief Ministers of six provinces met in Biratnagar to issue the Kosi Declaration-2026 and pressure the federal government to devolve political power to their provinces, following other similar gatherings in previous years.

Political power used to be concentrated in Kathmandu, then after 1990 it was in Singha Darbar. Now it is in the inner circle of the PMO. This is not surprising, since Prime Minister Balendra Shah and his RSP never had much love lost for federalism.

After the Trisuli Valley flood, local governments despite being first responders had to take a back seat to the dominance of federal agencies. Relief funneled through a single door system initially delayed aid where it was needed most.

Local elections are approaching, and that may force the RSP to at least show more interest in provinces and municpalities that know their local terrain best.

Nepal should not be following the global trend towards democratic backsliding. The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance's (International IDEA) 2026 Global State of Democracy report published last month concluded that for the 11th consecutive year, more countries declined in democratic performance than advanced.

The state of democracy was measured across four categories: representation, rights, rule of law, and participation. Nepal ranked 63rd in representation, 68th in rights, 77th in rule of law, and 51st in participation.

That is not too bad. But IDEA notes that the new RSP leadership has the potential to make for a more responsive legislative system.

For Nepal, the report offers a silver lining, noting 'limited' democratic advances in the aftermath of last year's youth protests, and a state of 'resilience, recovery, and even nascent transformation', cautioning that institutional gains from protest driven transitions often take several years to materialise.

AGE OF GLOBAL CONFLICTS

This State of Democracy report focuses primarily on democracy in an age of global conflict. In 2025, researchers at the Uppsala Conflict Data Program recorded 65 active state-based conflicts worldwide, including eight direct interstate conflicts, the highest number recorded since the World War II.

Historical global alliances have frayed across the Global North, faith in multilateral institutions has declined. The ability of the UN in stopping conflicts has been thwarted because of the veto power of the Big Five. The institutions built to maintain international security and foster global cooperation themselves face a democratic deficit.

The report presents a special case study of the US, outlining the steady decline of a country that presented itself as the beacon of democracy and freedom, even while the effect of its wars reverberated across the globe.

Nepal may not play a direct role in these global conflicts, but Nepalis do pay, increasingly often with their lives and livelihoods. Nepal is also the biggest contributor to the UN's peacekeeping force.

The IDEA report concludes that world governments should make democracy building a core pillar of their national security strategies. This includes deployment of funds and resources to regions at risk.

For the Global North, this means looking inwards and confronting its own democratic crises if it is to lecture to the rest of the world what democracies are supposed to look like. Nepal should also not expect much moral and economic support for its democracy and development from them.

Our aim should be to strengthen governance, rule of law, service-delivery, education, to create jobs and the right conditions to make people want to stay and work in Nepal. This becomes even more urgent in a year which has seen a series of wars abroad and disasters at home.

As the Global North confronts its own demons, Nepal has its work cut out to make its democracy deliver devolution and development so its youth do not have to leave home in such great numbers.



The Global State of Democracy 2026
Democracy in an Age of Conflict
by International IDEA
2026, 199 pages

Trending Online



Another big Himalayan flood

by Kunda Dixit

As Nepal tries to cope with the catastrophe in the Trisuli Valley six weeks ago, another massive debris flow devastated the adjacent Budi Gandaki Valley this week. This is another urgent warning that mountain collapses will be more frequent. Also on page 4.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Breathing should not be killing us

by Sonia Awale

The season of floods and landslides will soon be replaced by winter air pollution that will make breathing hazardous. Both Nepal's government and public tend to take each disaster as it comes, we need to prepare to be prepared. Read the editorial at nepalitimes.com

Most popular on X



Not a 'Himalayan Tsunami'

by Arup Rajouria

The Bhote Kosi-Trisuli disaster was not a 'Himalayan tsunami', but a mountain collapse. That may sound like a bureaucratic distinction, but it is the difference between understanding what happened and getting the next response to it seriously wrong. Read analysis on our website.

Most commented

Transportation system ahead of its time

by Dan Edwards

An exploration of whether the failure of the Kathmandu-Bhaktapur trolley bus could have been avoided and if the government could achieve its ambitious plans to build an extensive trolley bus network in Nepal. More details online.

Most visited online page

Letters

NAMING DISASTER

It would be fair to say that a tsunami is a sudden and overwhelming action, while a flood is a build up over time ('Stop calling the Nepal flood a 'Himalayan Tsunami'', Arup Rajouria, nepalitimes.com). It's more like those closest to the start of the action faced a devastating tsunami of material, which is why buildings were overwhelmed, while those further down river, faced flooding. Whatever we call it, it was a disaster all round.

Dennis Dowling

■ Another flood happened on Sunday. Early warning systems must be in place next to rivers.

Annalien Barendrecht

■ Preparedness should have started with listening to scientists half a century back.

Ian Champ

■ A completely new terminology needs to be found.

Janine Burger

■ What is happening to our Himalaya? Climate action is being ignored. We need climate justice now.

Chanda Rana

RECOVERY

It would be great if new and safer housing could be built in Rasuwa without completely losing Tamang architectural character ('Earthquake rebuilding to flood recovery', Sara Shneiderman and Amy Leigh Johnson, #1332).

Jenny Te Whata

■ A system wide rethink is a must. Compensation for the employers who suffered due to infrastructural damage too.

Tom van Groeningen

■ Transforming this crisis into an opportunity for climate-resilient school infrastructure is the only way to secure a safe future for our children ('The cruel math of the aftermath of Nepal's flood', Krishna Malla, #1331).

Bari Khan

AIR POLLUTION

When governments knows the cause of this significant hazard ('Breathing should not be killing us', Sonia Awale, #1332), when the source is known and when there are alternative methods to either reduce or at least minimise the deaths, then surely they are commiting crimes against humanity.

Ian Wall

■ Powerful Editorial. The finger is pointed directly at politcal dysfunction as a cause. We cannot be blaming climate chnage and transborder pollution only. What have we done in Kathmandu to minimise vehciular emissions and open garbage burning in winter? And thank you for highlighting the invisible pollution from motorcycles.

Dev Narayan

■ We already had an answer to air pollution in Kathmandu 50 years ago with the trolley bus service ('A transportation system ahead of its time', Dan Edwards, #1332). If only Nepal's leaders had the foresight to expand this service we could all breathe easier.

Jan Petersen

DEITIES OF NEPAL

We so enjoyed the exhibition, and took the children too ('Of myth and memory, Alfa M Shakya', nepalitimes.com).

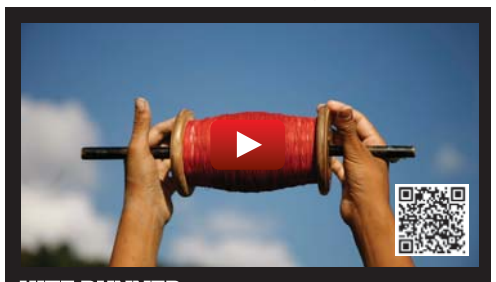
Mariah Cuch

Online Package



HISTORY OF NEPAL'S TROLLEY BUSES

Electric public transport arrived in Kathmandu 50 years ago, but was allowed to rust away. Watch slideshow on YouTube of pictures that document the decline of the Nepal's trolley buses.



KITE RUNNER

As Kathmandu gets ready for another kite-flying season this Dasain, watch how families confined to their homes took to roof terraces to fly kites during the Covid-19 lockdowns. Subscribe for multimedia content.

1,000 Words

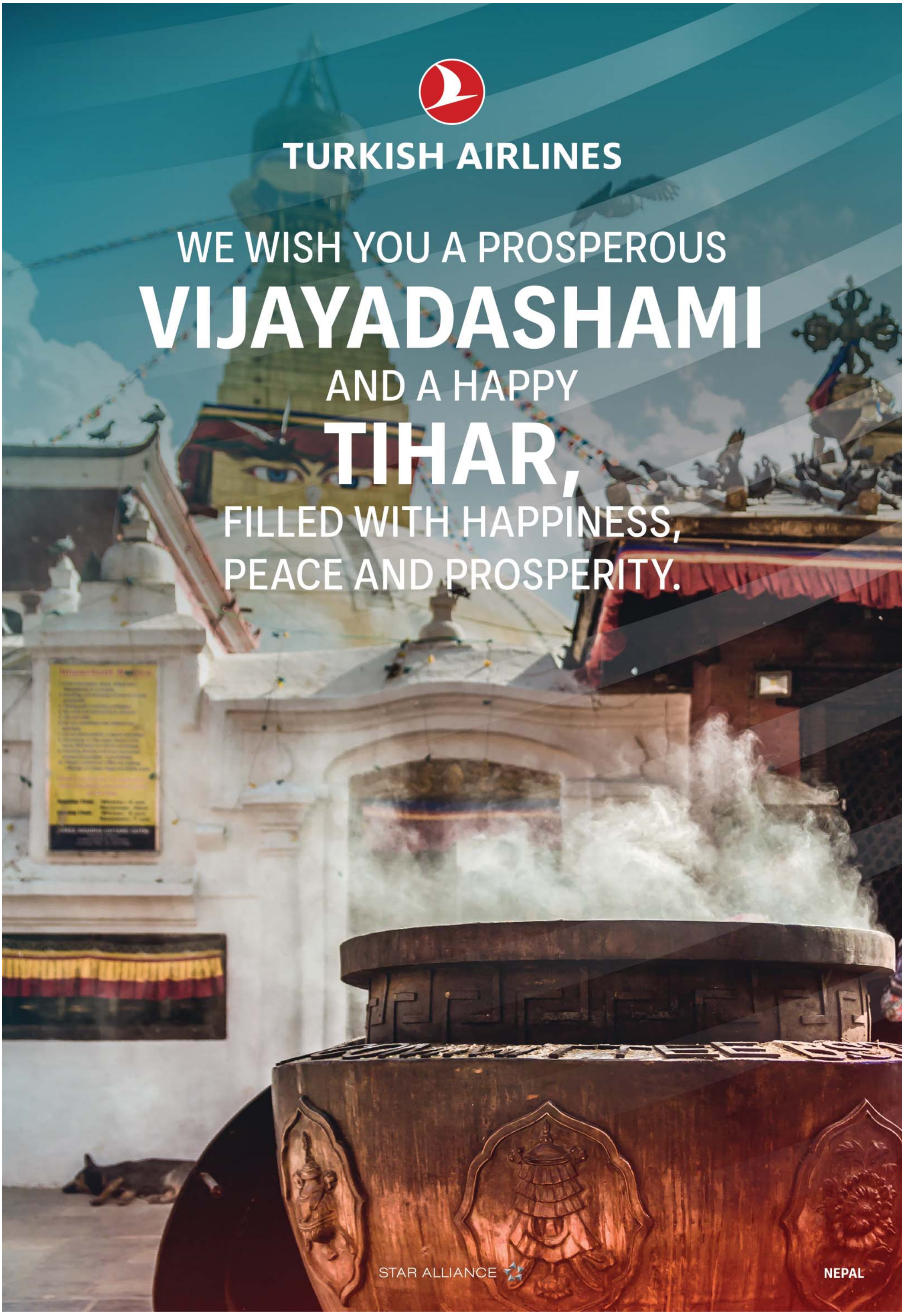


S. JAISHANKAR / X

MEETING BY CHANCE: Home Minister Sudan Gurung ran into Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar at New Delhi Airport on Tuesday. "Nice to meet Home Minister Sudhan Gurung of Nepal," wrote Jaishankar on social media. Gurung was in India representing Nepal at the BIMSTEC Senior Official's Meeting.

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NEPAL

Another big Himalayan flood

The Budi Gandaki flood on 11 October was yet another warning that mountain collapses will be more frequent

Kunda Dixit

Even as Nepal tries to cope with the enormous flood catastrophe on the Trisuli Valley six weeks ago, another massive debris flow devastated the adjacent Budi Gandaki Valley in the early hours of 11 October.

Phone alerts from the residents of Tsum Valley upstream, from the government's disaster prevention agency, and the river flow suddenly stopping gave people enough time to heed the warning and climb slopes for safety. Memory of the Trisuli flood convinced many to take the alerts seriously.

About 10 yak and sheep herders in Tsum Valley are missing, while highway and trail bridges as well as sections of the Manaslu circuit were swept away.

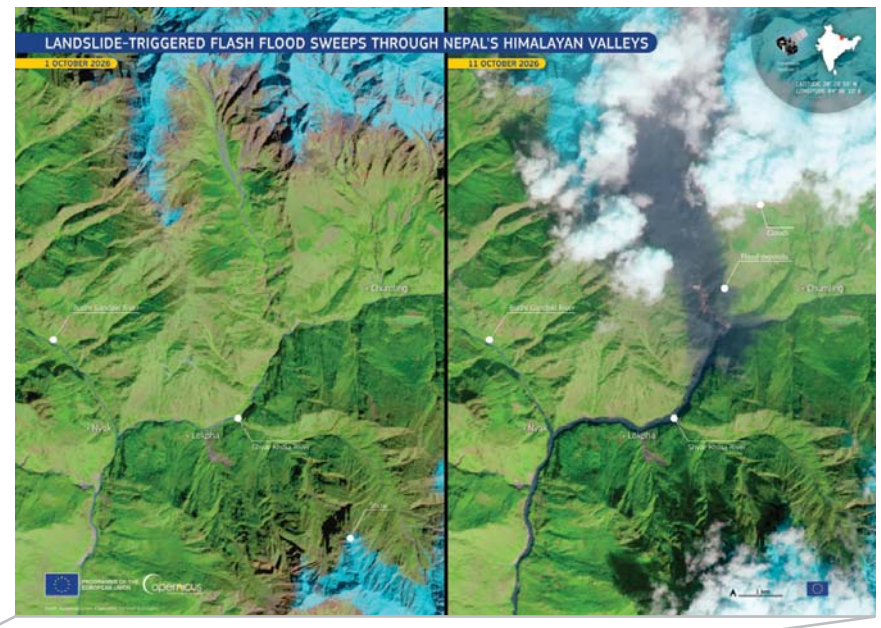
"Coming so soon after the Guirong-Rasuwa disaster of 26 August, Sunday's event is another reminder of how exposed mountain communities and river corridors remain to sudden, cascading disasters," said Pema Gyamtsho, Director General of ICIMOD.

There had been no heavy precipitation in the catchment area, but there had been recent blizzards that deposited more than 3m of snow. Heavy snow deposition, global warming, and the long-term effect of the 2015 earthquake, which was epicentered only 10km to the southwest, may have led to a rock face or glacier collapse on the east face of Mt Chamar (7,165m), a part of the Sringi Himal massif.

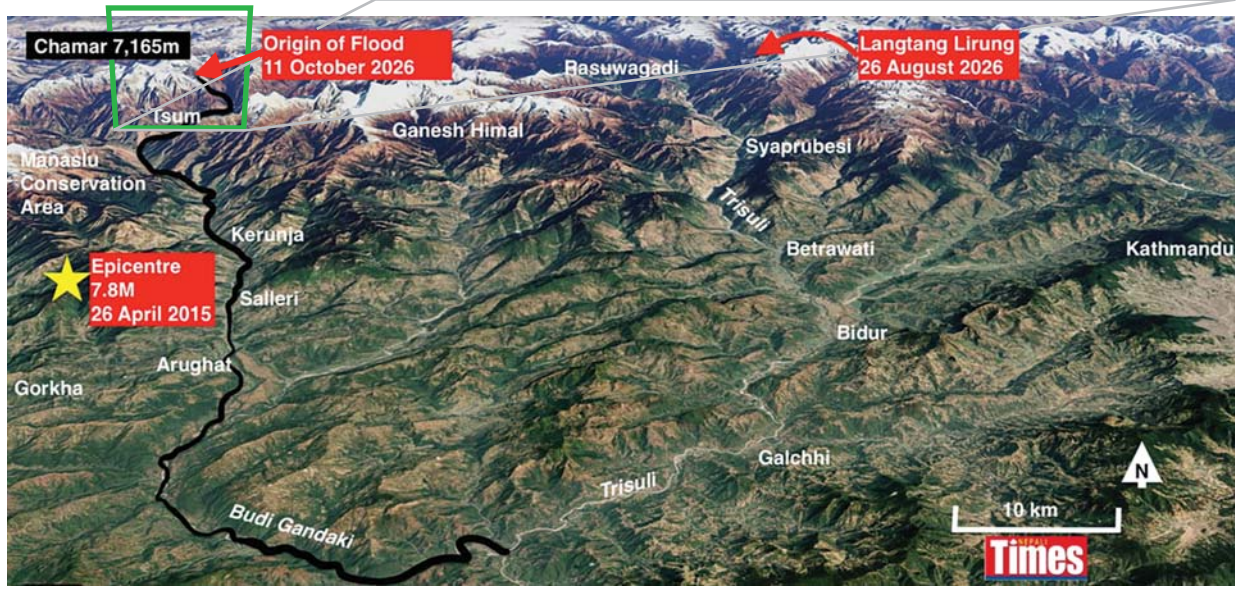
The debris flow rushed down the Ungilung Khola to reach Dumje where it blocked the Syar Khola that drains the north face of Ganesh Himal in the Tsum Valley.

The Syar joins the Budi Gandaki which had seen a smaller glacial lake outburst in April 2024.





COPERNICUS



SIMILAR DISASTERS

There is scouring and dark scars on the sides of the Budi Gandaki gorge, indicating that the original ice-rock collapse unleashed the first flood, then dammed the Syar River which subsequently burst on early Saturday morning.

The lower human casualty compared to Trisuli is that the hyper-concentrated slurry flood moved down the Budi Gandaki at a lower velocity. Even so, the flow of thick black mud had enough momentum to roll down boulders that swept away highway bridges.

"While response efforts must remain the immediate priority, understanding what triggered this flood will be critical for reducing future risks and strengthening resilience," Gyamtsho added.

A cantilever path above Yaru that was built after the 2015 earthquake destroyed the trail, was also taken away. Two hydroelectric plants sustained damage.

A massive 270m-high dam with a reservoir to generate 1,200MW of electricity is planned near the point where the Budi Gandaki meets the Trisuli River at Benighat. The sediment load of this flood would have partially filled the lake if the reservoir had already been built.

The Sringi Himal massif rises nearly 5,500m from the valley floor at the confluence of the Syar and Budi Gandaki gorges which is at only 2,000m elevation.

Sunday morning's flood has also exposed a gap in the government's Flood Forecasting Division alert system. There are no functioning remote sensing equipment in the upper reaches of most rivers below glaciers and glacial lakes, and by the time flood detectors downstream sound the alarm it is usually too late.

"Current analysis points to the possible failure of a temporary landslide blockage that released a heavily sediment-laden flood downstream," said climate risk analyst Qianggong Zhang at ICIMOD. "Events like this demonstrate why monitoring and evaluating unstable slopes and river systems together is essential in steep mountain catchments."

The Tsum Valley is one of the sacred valleys long the Himalaya called 'beyul' — remote sites of exceptional natural beauty where monks and others seeking refuge from persecution used to live in for safety. It is clear from recent disasters that beyuls are not the safe havens they once were.

BRIEFS

9 million on Turkish

Turkish Airlines carried 9 million passengers in September with a total load factor of 86.8%. The total number of passengers increased by 5.2% to 73 million



compared to the same period of 2025. The carrier has one of the largest fleets in the world with 567 aircraft serving 53 domestic and 303 international destinations in 132 countries, including six flights a week between Istanbul and Kathmandu.

Nepal-China trade

Trade between Nepal and China is yet to restart since the 26 August flood. All three border points -- Rasuwagadi, Tatopani and Korala remain disrupted in a major blow ahead of the festive season. Traffic through Mustang is expected to open this weekend after repairs to a damaged bridge in Baglung.

Alaska Award

Nepali mountaineer Jagan Nath Timilsina has been awarded the 2026 NOLS Alaska Merit Award, making him the only awardee from Nepal. This award recognises instructors for their performance and contribution to the NOLS Alaska community.

BYD service centers

Cimex Inc, the authorised distributor of BYD vehicles in Nepal, has opened two new service centres, one in Bhaktapur and another in Dallu. The additional service centres are expected to enhance customer experience and accessibility across Nepal.

Visa woes

The Nepal Association of Tour and Travel Agents (NATTA) has warned it will stop selling Thailand to Nepali tourists during Dasain due to tightened visa rules. Travellers applying for a Thai visa must pay for hotels and tickets beforehand, leaving travel agents vulnerable to losses if the visas are declined. Martin Lama, manager at Thai International for 30 years in Kathmandu was denied a visa. The UAE has also tightened procedures for Nepali visitors affecting outbound holiday traffic.



Samsung + Ncell

Samsung Nepal is collaborating with Ncell to introduce a Dasain festive offer for customers on selected products. Ncell customers can enjoy an additional discount of up to 12% on top of Samsung's ongoing festive offers, bringing the total benefits up to 31% on eligible products. Ncell customers can avail the offer based on their Ncell pack spending and check for discounts to purchase their desired products from Samsung.

Himalaya Airlines

Himalaya Airlines has cancelled its Kathmandu- Dammam, Saudi Arabia flight following deadly Houthi missile attacks on Saudi airports.



Himalayan Hideaway

Himalayan Hideaway Resort Pokhara, The Centara Collection, was recognised as the Best New Hotel/Resort 2026 at the South Asian Travel Awards held in the Maldives. The hotel has been in operation since February 2026.

Manaslu treks

The Budi Gandaki flood has damaged trail sections and bridges on the Manaslu circuit, cutting off inflow of trekkers during the peak autumn season for Larke Pass and Tsum Valley trails. About 120 stranded trekkers and their guides were evacuated by Nepali Army helicopters. Many hikers have chosen alternative routes like Everest and Annapurna.

Betrawati bridge

The Nepali Army has installed a Bailey bridge for vital connection between Nuwakot and Rasuwa over the Phalaku River at Betrawati. With a load capacity of 40 tons, the structure reconnects transportation to Dhunche, which was cut off after the 26 August flood.

TikTok Masterclass

TikTok organised a masterclass on journalism and digital storytelling in partnership with the Central Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at Tribhuvan University this week. Students, digital creators, journalists and industry experts gathered to learn about digital storytelling.

Sugarcane subsidy

The Ministry of Agriculture, Forest, and Environment approved subsidy grants more than Rs1.5 billion for sugarcane farmers across the country. The disbursement framework was endorsed by Minister Gita Chaudhary.

Pokhara airport

Pokhara International Airport has banned the use of drones, hot-air balloons, laser lights and flying kites in surrounding airspace and approach zones to ensure flight safety.



Tea testing lab

National Tea and Coffee Development Board regional office and the Food Technology and Quality Control Division Office in Bhadrapur in collaboration with the Jhapa District Administration is planning to open a tea testing laboratory to streamline product quality and preserve the identity of Nepali tea.

Anticipating the Robert Powell Painting Retrospective

Catalogue of the talented painter who spent 30 years in Nepal ahead of an exhibition of his works



Australian artist Robert Powell left a prodigious body of work across Asia that spanned Swat Valley to Angkor Wat, but it is the paintings he made while living in Nepal over 30 years that stand out.

An architect by training, the paintings show meticulous draughtsmanship and careful rendering of the colour, texture and form of Nepal's living spaces. Powell is said to have counted every brick on the façade of the Kutu Math in Bhaktapur, or the stones in the foundations of Lo Manthang chortens (right) before painting them.

The paintings have an almost photographic accuracy, which is why it is surprising to learn that most of his paintings were not done in situ, but back in the studio based on pencil sketches, photographs and notes he took of the site.

Powell's prints were sold in limited edition, and many of the originals are with collectors all over the world. Now, Sophia L Pandé of The Kalā Salon in Kathmandu is curating a retrospective in 2027.

Originally planned for the Kathmandu Triennale in 2020, which had to be postponed because of Covid and Powell's passing, the much-delayed exhibition will celebrate a talented artist who passionately loved Nepal.

But Powell rarely painted people, focusing instead on structures people built to understand them better. In that sense, his paintings represent a visual melding of architecture and anthropology. They tell stories of traditional buildings and landscapes weathered by rain, wind and time, documenting with even greater accuracy and depth than photographs.



MEMORY OF ART: Robert Powell in his studio in Koh Samui (left). And a painting from Mustang that shows his meticulous style (above).

TESTIMONIALS

Ahead of the retrospective, Pandé has come out with Robert Powell Catalogue, 2026, Verisimilitude & Imagination: A Lifetime of Paintings and Drawings. Calling it a catalogue is perhaps an understatement, since the harcover book is a collection of tributes by people who knew Powell well (Niels Gutschow, Niranjan Kunwar, Sangeeta Thapa, Lisa Choegyal, and his wife Lieve Aerts) as well as a 'magnum opus' by artist-architect Ross Feller.

Feller spent a week in Koh Samui in Powell's studio just before he died in 2020, and later had access to dozens of his spiral bound sketchbooks covering 40 years. Feller analyses the pencil sketches, side notes to self, and delves deep into Powell's mind, peeling away the artist's technique, style, thought process and even philosophy.

Besides the artistic realism in most of his paintings, Powell also produced imaginary images of built spaces, landscapes, vegetation and terrain. As Pandé writes in the catalogue, he took 'aspects and designs, objects and patterns and outlines of things he had seen that fascinated him, recording them in his journals and then painstakingly reworking them into iterations that are surreal and dreamlike, sometimes floating in space'.

Pandé argues that Powell's works represent authenticity, not orientalism because 'he does not burnish or ornament, he documents what he observes'. They can be painted goats, details of the wall at Pashupati (left), bicycles stacked with red radish, a brick kiln in Bhaktapur, or the blood-red cliffs of Drakmar.

There are even paintings of paintings, like the room in Kutu Math which was part of a series commissioned by his Austrian architect friend Götz Hagmüller who lived in that 280-year-old restored courtyard in Bhaktapur.

The Robert Powell Painting Retrospective promises to be a landmark event, the most important since his Earth Door, Sky Door, Paintings of Mustang show in 1999 at the Sackler Gallery of the Smithsonian in Washington DC.

Kunda Dixit



Verisimilitude & Imagination: A Lifetime of Paintings and Drawings
Robert Powell at The Kala Salon
Edited by Sophis L Pande
The Kala Salon Foundation, 2026
ISBN: 978-9905-008-32-8



A flood of blood on

The battles of the Gorkha-China War of 1792 were fought along a river ravaged by this year's flood

Kunda Dixit



The heavy loss of life in the Trisuli Valley catastrophe of 26 August resulted from it being Nepal's trade, tourism and energy corridor. What is less well known is the river's strategic importance dating back to the Gorkha-China War of 1791-92.

Thousands of Gorkhali, Chinese and Tibetan soldiers spilled their blood 234 years ago along the Bhote Kosi-Trisuli in fierce battles at Kerung, Rasuwagadi, Timure, Syapru, Dhaibung, Ramche, Dhunche, and Betrawati. Most of these towns are now buried under deep mud and debris.

Rasuwagadi was the scene of battles in 1791-92, and also where Jang Bahadur Rana established a fort as the staging post for Nepal's second invasion of Tibet in 1855. These battlefields were all swept away by the debris flow, 100m high in places. The temple and cremation site of Nepal's founding king, Prithvi Narayan Shah, at Devighat was also buried.

Such was the force of the mudflow that the huge half-submerged boulder at Betrawati (which was itself possibly brought down by a previous flood) tumbled 12km downstream. This rock used to be worshipped by pilgrims, and nearby was where the Betrawati Treaty that ended the war in 1792 is said to have been signed.

Betrawati itself was where Gorkhalis fought rearguard action, facing the advancing army of Chinese Emperor Qianlong led by the Manchu general Fuk'anggan. Hundreds were killed on both sides as the Chinese tried to cross a bridge over the Trisuli to Nuwakot, and were cut down by Gorkhali khukris and bullets.

Chinese troops are said to have 'fallen off the bridge like goat droppings'. When they could not find stones and logs, they used the corpses of their comrades as a trench barricade. It was hot, had been raining for 10 days, and more Chinese and Tibetans may have died of dysentery and malaria than were killed in action.

Details like these come thick and fast in the scrupulously researched new book, Who Won the Sino-Nepalese War of 1791-1792? A Study in Transcultural Complexity by professor Axel Michaels at the Südasien-Institut at Universität Heidelberg, and his research associate Xu Yunheng.

The two pored over rare and never before examined archival records in Kathmandu, Lhasa, Beijing, and translated them into English, sifting through propaganda, half-truths and exaggerations contained in letters by field commanders, instructions sent from capitals and biographies.

ADULTERATION

The 1791-1792 war came soon after Prithvi Narayan Shah's conquest of Kathmandu Valley, and was waged by his second son Bahadur Shah who was regent during the reign of nine-year-old Rana Bahadur Shah. In his Dibyopadesh, Prithvi Narayan advised his descendants to 'maintain a treaty of friendship with the Emperor of China and keep also a treaty of friendship with the Emperor of the southern seas'.

His sons did not follow this advice. The Shah dynasty inherited already strained relations between Kathmandu Valley's Malla kings and Tibet's theocracy. Knowing how important trans-Himalayan trade was, Prithvi Narayan Shah captured Nuwakot in 1744, and cut off the Trisuli transit route to Tibet.

After the Shah conquest,

Restoring the heritage of the

Monuments and traditions have been documented, now they need protection



Stone and Song
Alisha Sijapati

Heritage expert Rajan Khatiwoda in a recent report in this paper, described how families along the Trisuli asked whether an effigy woven from sacred grass could be used in funeral rites when the bodies of their loved ones could not be recovered.

That detail captures what disasters take beyond buildings. When a temple, shrine, or cremation site disappears, so do places where people have worshipped, mourned, and gathered for generations. Rebuilding a structure may be possible, recovering the knowledge attached to it is another matter.

The Nepal Heritage Documentation Project (NHDP) of Heidelberg University has been listing monuments and living traditions across Nepal for the past eight years. Along the Trisuli corridor it recorded more than 80 temples, shrines, and cremation sites, 21 of them completely destroyed by the flood in August. Nationwide, there were 2,000 monuments. This first of its kind inventory can support research, conservation, and the identification of objects recovered after disasters.

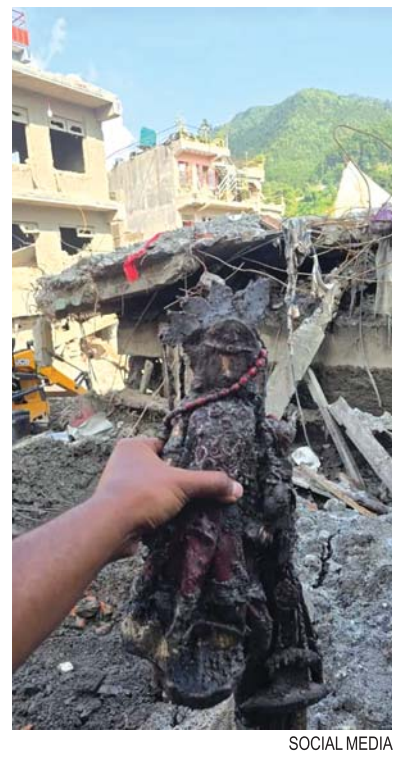
NHDP has now winded up. The project had a timeline, but heritage does not. The records remain, and the responsibility now falls to the state — the Department of Archaeology (DoA) cannot carry it alone.

TRISULI CORRIDOR

Rasuwa and Nuwakot form part of a historic corridor connecting Tibet with India through Kathmandu. Trade brought people and ideas through, while Hindu, Buddhist, shamanic, and folk traditions shaped its religious landscape. The temples here are not just old buildings, their histories are intertwined with rivers, routes, communities, and rituals.

At Devighat, the annual Bhairavi Jatra procession travels from Nuwakot to worship Jalapa Devi at the confluence of the Trisuli and Tadi. Its significance lies in the destination and in the people who take part, the route they follow, and the ritual that brings them together. A photograph can record a shrine, but cannot convey what makes that journey meaningful.

The flood damage was a different challenge from the 2015 earthquake which destroyed



SOCIAL MEDIA

monuments while leaving it on its original site. The flood swept away entire temple complexes, displaced people who maintained it, and altered the riverbank. The physical and social landscape changed at once.

Engineers may identify a safer place to rebuild, but safety alone cannot determine whether a new location holds the same meaning for those who worship there. Some families may want to rebuild in the same area, others may prefer to resettle elsewhere. People may disagree about whether a temple should be rebuilt, relocated, or left alone while more urgent needs are addressed.

Nor is there necessarily one community view. A temple may be associated with a particular clan, maintained by a guthi, and used by a wider group of worshippers. Families, caste groups, religious practitioners, and

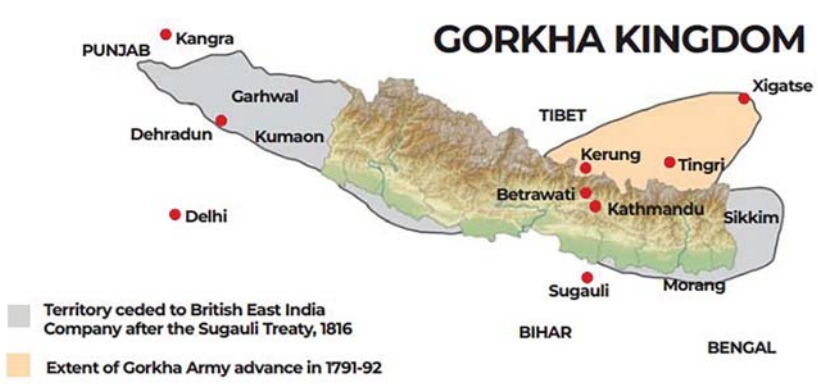
the Trisuli



SUMAN NEPALI







BATTLE SCARS: A later painting at the Chhauni Museum depicting the Battle of Betrawati in 1792 (left), and the same site after the 26 August flood swept away the town.

A Chinese mural showing the Battle of Syaphru, as the Chinese Emperor's army advanced down the Trisuli Valley in 1791.

relations with Tibet deteriorated over suspicions about adulteration – of the salt the Tibetans were selling in Nepal, and the coins Nepalis were minting for Tibet.

'Within a span of just 25 years, from 1791 to 1816, the small country of Nepal … challenged two of the world's largest powers: China with Tibet and British India,' write the authors in the introduction.

When Bahadur Shah launched his blitzkrieg into Tibet in 1791, reaching as far as Shigatse and plundering the Tashi Lunpo Monastery, his Army was fighting on multiple fronts: the two pronged offensive against Tibet from Kerung and Tingri, on the western front in Kumaon and Garhwal, and against Sikkim in the east.

When the Chinese emperor sent in his Army from Chengdu to help the Tibetans, Nepal's king dispatched letters to his generals in Kumaon asking them to return and defend Kathmandu from the approaching Chinese. But by the time the letters reached them, the war was over.

The Gorkhalis did not expect the Chinese to come to the aid of the Tibetans, and seem to have underestimated the affinity Emperor Qianlong had for the Gelugpa Yellow Hat sect of Tashi Lunpo, and his willingness to repel 'anti-Buddhist invaders'.

Documents Michaels and Yunheng unearthed also show that the Tibetans were not happy about the Chinese presence, but were desperate to stop the Gorkhali advance towards Lhasa.

After 1792, a weakened Tibet relied even more on China's security umbrella. And with the Chinese Army at the gates, Kathmandu did not want a prolonged war that could pull the British into the fray.

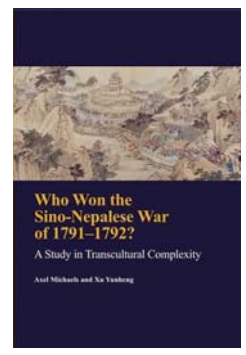
The Sino-Gorkha war ended in a stalemate, and both sides needed a truce. But both also wanted a face-saving victory.

The Chinese suffered heavy casualties, desertions, disease, and wanted to retreat back up to the Plateau before snow blocked the passes. The Gorkhalis were overextended on other fronts, and did not want to risk the Chinese marching into Kathmandu.

So, neither side lost and both sides won. Axel Michaels says this was possible because of translation semantics between the words 'truce' and 'surrender', and in the differing interpretations of the exchange of gifts following the war. The Chinese called them 'tributes' to the Emperor, while the Nepalis used the term 'saugat' (gift).

The phrase 'transcultural complexity' in the title of this book refers to the inadequacy of the concepts of 'sovereignty', 'independence', 'tributary state' because they oversimplify perspectives in analysing historical events like the Gorkha-China War.

The authors conclude that the conflict had valuable lessons for all: 'China realised the formidable strategic barrier posed by the Himalayas; Tibet suffered great losses and recognised its far-reaching dependence on China; Nepal understood the need to halt its expansionist ambitions; and the British India realised the futility of attempting to conquer Nepal.'



Who Won the Sino-Nepalese War of 1791-1792?
A Study in Transcultural Complexity
by Axel Michaels and Xu Yunheng
Heidelberger Akademie Der Wissenschaften
Vajra Books, Kathmandu 2026
498 pages Rs 5,000

Trisuli Valley

local custodians may have different relationships with the same site. Community participation raises its own question: who speaks for a community, and whose wishes count when people disagree?

Rituals can help people process trauma by providing familiar structures when ordinary life has been disrupted. But rituals depend on people and places too. When their setting disappears, practices may have to change.

NHDP's conclusion raises a practical question: what happens when a time-bound project ends but the need for its work continues?

Nepal still lacks a comprehensive national inventory that can be reliably updated and used for conservation. The DoA operates the Cultural Heritage Information Management System (CHIMS), an online database intended to provide public access to information on monuments, interventions, documentation, and research. NHDP's datasets are meant to be mirrored there.

Rajan Khatiwoda says technical problems and bureaucratic obstacles have prevented planned updates. CHIMS is no longer functioning as intended, and parts of the inventory remain incomplete. The DoA could clarify the system's status, if datasets have been integrated, and how the inventory will be maintained going forward.

Submitted records include photographs, architectural details, maps, drawings, and information about religious practices and custodianship. This may help the Nuwakot Museum and the DoA match recovered objects to their original sites such as this idol of Karunamaya from Machhindranath temple in Trishuli bazar (pictured) swept by the 26 August floods. But transferring records is not the same as securing their future.

Documents must be catalogued, checked, cross-referenced, and kept accessible. A scanned document is of limited use if nobody can identify it, understand its context, or locate it when needed. This less visible work of data curation is what keeps years of fieldwork from becoming an archive in name only.

Director General Suresh Saras Shrestha has tried to address the problems with CHIMS, but bureaucratic hurdles remain. One official's commitment may not be enough, the issue is whether the institution can sustain work beyond individual appointments and projects.

The DoA has a central responsibility for heritage protection, but it need not carry out every aspect of documentation itself. NHDP has established methods, collected extensive data, and trained researchers. The department could build on this work by engaging a wider range of specialists to manage, verify, and expand the inventory.

The department could benefit from strengthening what Khatiwoda described as "social engineering" — building relationships, bringing people together, and creating conditions for people outside the institution to contribute. Qualified professionals should have fair opportunities to contribute, with transparent processes for submitting findings, cross-referencing records, and correcting mistakes.

Heritage conservation in Nepal has been shaped partly by Western theories and methods. These have contributed valuable tools, but cannot automatically determine how Nepal's heritage should be understood or preserved. We need approaches grounded in its own histories, social relationships, and ways of transmitting knowledge, while remaining open to learning and debate.

This does not mean accepting every tradition uncritically. Cultural practices in Nepal continue to carry caste and gender inequalities, and communities may disagree about what they want to preserve or change. Documentation should make these histories and debates visible, not freeze culture into an authorised version of the past. At the same time, researchers, practitioners, and communities should be able to examine, challenge, correct, and enrich existing records. NHDP's legacy will depend on whether Nepal maintains those records, develops a functioning national inventory, and puts the expertise built through the project to use.

Documentation cannot decide whether a displaced family in Trisuli returns, whether a shrine is rebuilt, or how a ritual changes after its original setting is lost. Those decisions belong to the people who will live with the consequences. Reliable records can, however, help them understand what stood before and what was connected to it.

The families asking Khatiwoda about honouring relatives missing now for nearly two months points to a purpose of preservation beyond saving buildings. People hold on to meaning when the familiar world around them has been taken away.

The river has taken temples, shrines, and parts of the landscape along the Trisuli Valley. NHDP has recorded what it could. The next step belongs to the state, to guard that work and keep it alive by sharing the knowledge and the responsibility. A national heritage cannot be safeguarded by gatekeeping. It requires institutions willing to work together before the next disaster, not after it.

Alisha Sijapati is a writer and cultural heritage practitioner.

JAZZMANDU 2026

The annual musical extravaganza returns at multiple venues for its 22nd edition this festive season

The annual Surya Nepal Jazzmandu is returning to Nepal's capital for its 22nd edition between two major festivals Dasain and Tihar between 29 October – 4 November.

Eleven musicians and bands will be performing, including musicians from the United States, Brazil, Switzerland, France, Australia, Singapore, and Nepal.

"Every year is unique but this year's main attraction is that various musicians from around the world are coming together, especially Tito Puente Jr, son of Tito Puente, the pioneer of Latin jazz," says Navin Chettri, founder of the festival and member of Cadenza Collective (see below).

Jazz Upstairs Bar's Chhedup Bomzan and Cadenza's drummer and singer Chettri started the concerts for the first time in 2002 and it has been held almost every year since.

"The seed of the festival was planted in Australia when we were invited to a Jazz festival over there," recalls Chettri. "The whole idea was to bring the live jazz scene in Kathmandu, so that people can share the energy of musicians around the world."



Tito Puente Jr

Tito Puente Jr continues the legacy of his jazz legend father Tito Puente. In just five short years, he has already become an audience favourite and has performed in 300 concerts around the world.

Puente has been featured in several major American television networks, and his 2004 album In My Father's Shoes was adapted into a BET Jazz television special. His latest album, Got Mambo?, features both traditional rhythms and audacious new approaches that establishes his own distinct jazz voice.

Tito Puente Jr – Timbale and vocals | **Zach Fawcett** – Trumpet
Pravin Chettri – Alto saxophone | **Inap Raj Shretha** – Tenor saxophone
Nick Aggs – Baritone saxophone | **Manon Mullener** – Piano
Samir Chettri – Bass | **Navin Chettri** – Percussion
Alex Brindell – Percussion | **Philippe Ciminato** – Percussion



Manon Mullener

Manon Mullener started playing piano at the age of four. At seventeen, her love of jazz, especially Afro-Cuban music, took her to Havana for creative training. Mullener has since toured and played widely in Europe, Latin America, and the West Asia. She is regarded as a rising talent of European jazz and was given the Swiss Jazz Award in 2026.

Her first album, Reflejos (2019) was recorded in collaboration with Peruvian pianist César Correa and Zurich-based percussionist David Stauffacher. Inspired by people she met during her tours, STORIES (2024) was recorded in New York, and it received praise from the European press.

She is an awardee of the Spirale Prize and got a top spot in the 2022 SOFIA (Support of Female Improvising Artists) international competition.

Manon Mullener – Piano | **Lucien Mullener** – Drums | **Rodrigo Aravena** – Bass



Gandharva

Historically, the Gandharva troubadours are regarded as the link between heaven and earth, minstrels who mediate between mortals and the gods. They used to earn a living by playing music traveling from village to village. The lyrics carried news of current affairs to the public before radio, television and the internet. They were also known as Walking Newspapers.



Cadenza Collective

Cadenza Collective is one of the most distinctive and eclectic bands to come out from Kathmandu. It has revitalised Nepal's improvised music scene, performed internationally, and collaborated with a diverse range of Western and traditional Nepali musicians.

"This festival gives us a chance for us band members to be together, as we all live in different countries," says Chettri. "We are excited to share the energy and music as in all these 23 years," says drummer and composer Navin Chettri

The band has released seven original albums, with its latest singles, The Mountain Tickled My Feet and Selo Groove, scheduled for release in 2026.

Navin Chettri – Vocals and drums | **Rajat Rai** – Guitar
Inap Raj Shrestha – Tenor Sax | **Pravin Chhetri** – Alto Sax
Samir Chettri – Bass | **Zach Fawcett** – Trumpet (guest artist)



Kanta dAb dAb

Kanta dAb dAb combines sitar, bass, and percussion to fuse ethnic, traditional, Nepali classical, and various Western musical influences, resulting in a vibrant, soulful, cross-genre sound that remains distinctly Nepali and modern. They reinterpret Nepal's traditional and folk music within a contemporary framework, believing that the country's musical heritage inspires musicians and scholars alike. Kanta dAb dAb also co-founded Echoes In The Valley, Nepal's only free folk and indigenous music festival.

The band is also inspired by the diverse experiences of its three members who have been leading figures in Nepal's music scene for over twenty years. Riju Tuladhar, Sunit Kansakar, and Nikhil Tuladhar, each having mastered their respective instrument, are regarded as veteran musicians.

Nikhil Tuladhar – Drums | **Sunit Kansakar** – Sitar | **Rizu Tuladhar** – Bass



Cesar Haas

Brazilian guitarist, composer, instructor, an director of the WSU Brazilian Jazz Fest, C Haas received his Doctor of Musical Arts fron the Eastman School of Music and is currently assistant professor of jazz and classical guita Washington State University. He has perform Brazil and the United States with acclaimed a including Ken Peplowski, Scotty Barnhart, Bo Militello among others.

Haas' works were featured on Nelson Fari renowned Um Café Lá em Casa series and he recorded soundtrack for the documentary Do Araguaia. He has collaborated with trombonis Dave Glenn (from legendary Gerry Mulligan b band) presenting original music that blends Brazilian traditions with contemporary jazz.

Cesar Haas – Guitar | **Pravin Chettri** – Ba
Navin Chettri – Drums





Kevin Saura Group

Kevin Saura is a French guitarist and composer based in Nice. Before studying at CNRR with Philippe Petit, Fréderic Luzignant, Jean-Paul Ceccareli, and Robert Persi, he taught himself music at the tender age of eight. He later formed Shaky Things as a trio in 2016 and toured multiple countries around the world including France, Italy, Spain, Belgium among others.

The Kevin Saura Group's philosophy combines jazz lineage with contemporary funk grooves, free jazz freedom, blues-rock hues, and melodic lines from West Coast jazz and bebop. Their music exhibits maturity in the composition of the pieces while maintaining the vibrant intensity of live performance. Each instrument finds its place owing to the core group's passionate close-knit musicians.

Kevin Saura – Guitar | **Roman Dauneau** – Bass
Félix Joveniaux – Drums | **Philippe Ciminato** – Percussion



ALL THAT JAZZ IN NEPAL

Meet Cadenza and Navin Chhetri who introduced The Mandu to jazz, blending it with local instruments

Smaranika Shakya

Jazz was a strange, foreign musical genre in Nepal before Cadenza came along nearly 30 years ago. But this pioneering Nepali jazz-fusion band did not build its following overnight.

Navin Chhetri, drummer and lead singer of Cadenza (pictured above, second from left) began jamming with bandmates every Saturday when the Jazz Upstairs Bar opened in Thamel in 1998.

"Cadenza was a hungry band, and we were always looking for new ways to zhuzh up our style," Chhetri told Nepali Times. "Quickly, we became fascinated with musical improvisation."

A cadenza is an improvisatory passage in Western classical music, and improvisation has always been the core technique of the band, hence its name. "Rock music was our favourite. We loved jamming to rock bands like Thin Lizzy and the Allman Brothers," Chhetri recalls.

In the early years, Cadenza drew inspiration from bands like Spin Doctors and Jamiroquai. The band experimented with reggae, then rock and funk, and ultimately jazz.

It was quite a gamble. They were playing live to a Nepali audience not familiar with the jazz territory. Would live improvisation work? "But the audience soon became intrigued even though they did not understand it initially," he says. "Jazz is lively, and the energy of the music is contagious. People would give us cassettes of John Coltrane or Billie Holiday and tell us that our music reminded them of these artists. So really, it was the audience that introduced us to this unique jazz-funk sound that we are known for."

As long lines of eager fans started filling the Jazz Upstairs bar, Cadenza expanded to doing live performances every Wednesday and Saturday. Chhetri says even after all these years, the bar feels like home.

Many listeners may notice that Cadenza's music has a one-of-a-kind signature style due to genre fusion. Jazz instruments like saxophone, guitar, drums, and Afro-funk grooves with traditional Nepali folk rhythms and classical sounds such as damphu rhythms, Tamang selo, and bamboo flute.

MELTING POT

"Music is a language, once you understand the rules, you can write any story," explains Chhetri. "Jazz is a melting pot for music and has always welcomed fusion, so blending Afrobeat and jazz with Nepali folk and Eastern classical didn't feel unnatural or difficult. It felt authentic."

As band members changed, collaborative projects expanded, and international musicians joined the fusion work. So, the name evolved into the present Cadenza Collective. Its performance at the Palmer Street Jazz Festival in Australia in 2001 was a milestone. Navin Chettri was inspired by it, and teamed up with Chhedup Bomzan of Jazz Upstairs Bar to establish Jazzmandu in 2002. It is now an annual musical festival that is celebrated with high regard (left).

"The long-lasting partnership and trust we received from Nepali Times and The Himalayan Times since the very first jazz festival, and Surya Nepal's collaboration, made the festival possible. Jazzmandu couldn't have grown to such a large scale without that support," Chettri says.

Kathmandu's live music landscape has come a long way. People were not used to paying to enter the bar, but Cadenza's early collaborator Susan Sellers gave guests the choice to pay on the way out. Most did.

"I am very happy to see that musical literacy has made major strides in Nepal. I would even go so far as to say that the present is the golden time of music in Nepal," Chhetri says.

Cadenza is performing its popular album 'Back to the Roots' at The Garden Project on Friday 24 October, and will also play in the upcoming Jazzmandu Festival.

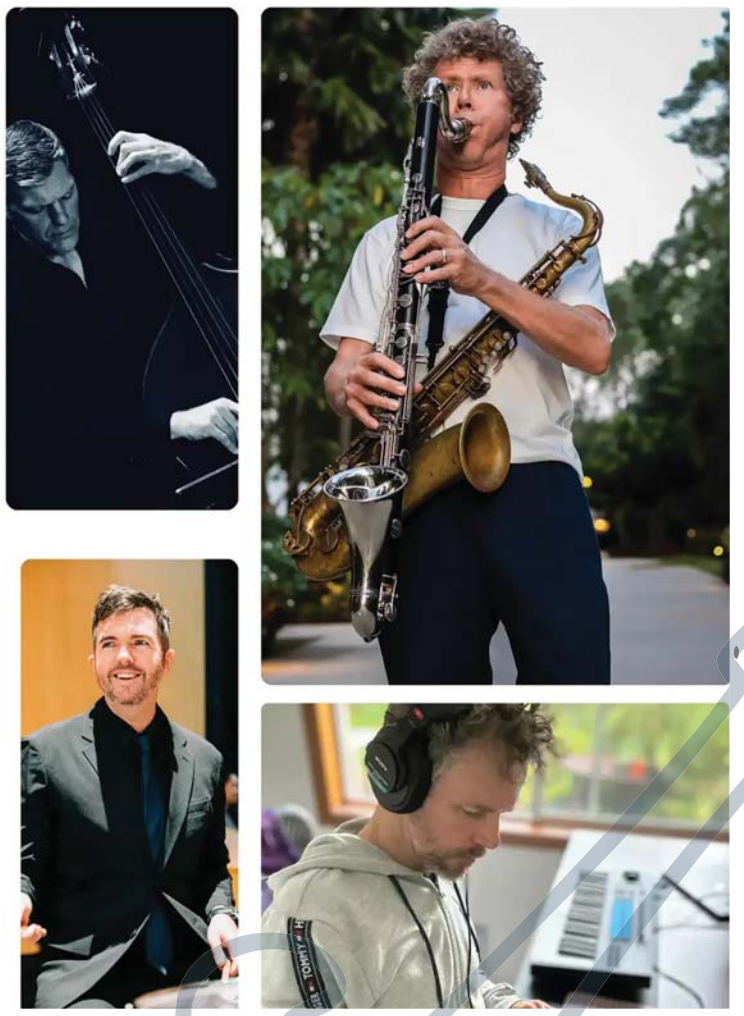
Back To the Roots
The Garden Project
Friday, 24 October



Milan & Milesh Duo

Milan Tandukar got his Master's degree from Pragya Sangeet Samithi in Allahabad with the likes of Mohan Prasad Joshi, Pandit Kumar Lal Shrestha and Pandit Prem Chandra Ojhaya adding to his knowledge of the violin. He has worked as an artist in Radio Nepal and Nepal Television, and is the winner of multiple awards including Kalanidhi Music Award (Gold Metal).

Milesh Tandukar is the founder president of Pundit Satya Narayan Chaudhary Memorial Academy and has a master's degree in tabala from Prayag Sangeet Samiti in Allahabad. A versatile musician, he can play a wide range of instruments including Dhime, Khin, Nagada, Bango, Dhol among others. He has toured around the globe and worked in albums Musical Journey to Shindhuli Gadhi & Voiceles voice and Trinetra.



Nick Aggs Quartet

Nick Aggs collaborated with Australian fusion band Afro Dizzi Act for his debut performance in Kathmandu in 2002. This year, he is returning for the 8th time with a new quartet. Aggs successfully built his career as a performer, composer and a bandleader with performances at various festivals throughout Asia, Middle East and Australia.

Ant Aggs, his brother and a fellow founding member of Afro Dizzi Act, Mike Hicks, Nick's long-time musical partner from his years in Shanghai, and Alex Brindell, a Singapore-based drummer and regular collaborator is joining him for this edition. The quartet's music spans from deep grooves, lyrical improvisation that blends contemporary jazz, funk and global influences.

Nick Aggs – Saxophone | **Ant Aggs** – Keys
Alex Brindell – Drums | **Mike Hicks** – Bass



Hot Club of Patan

From Patan is a group of musicians who are inclined to tunes from the 1930s and 40s with jazz stylings of the duo Stephane Grappelli and Django Reinhardt. The band incorporates a multitude of rhythmical styles including swing, bossa and valse, improvising their tunes.

In addition, the band also interprets classic Nepali pop songs from Narayan Gopal and other musical legends from the 60s and 70s and puts in their own spin, gaining them popularity among the Nepali audience.

Chakra – Guitar | **Rigzin – Guitar**
Sovan – Guitar | **Kunzanne** – Vocal
Riken – Double bass



Eastern Classical Musicians

Eastern Classical Musicians is made up of musicians like Jonisha Poudel, an accomplished exponent of khayal. Poudel is pursuing her PhD at Rabindra Bharati University in Kolkata, studying khayal and thumri under Maestro Debapriya Adhikary. She is an awardee of the Yuva Pratibha Samman in 2019 and has sung for Nepali films as well. She has also performed in different platforms along with a solo concert at the National Cultural Academy.

Santosh Bhakta Shrestha has dedicated himself to the ishraj for two and a half decades. A pupil of Mohan Joshi, Shrestha has mastered the instrument, and performed in many countries and contributed to multiple recordings.

Having collaborated with national and international artists, Roshan Putwar is a musician and researcher of Eastern classical and Nepali traditional music. Putwar represented Nepal at the South Asian Residency 2017 and has performed in more than a thousand stages across multiple countries.

Jonisha Poudel–Vocals | **Santosh Bhakt**–Ishraj | **Roshan Putwar**–Bamboo flute

Events



Fulpati
Fulpati is the seventh day of Dasain, devoted to Kalratri, the seventh form of Goddess Durga. A ritual will be carried out in Tundikhel followed by a military parade.
17 October, Tundikhel

Maha Ashtami
The eighth day of Dasain celebrates Goddess Kali. Newa communities also mark Khadga Puja to worship their weapons.
18 October, Basantapur Durbar Square

Maha Nawami
Hanuman Dhoka's Taleju Mandir is open to the public only on the ninth day of Dasain. Devotees worship Bishwakarma, the divine architect and craftsman, and offerings are made to vehicles, machines, and tools for safety and well-being.
20 October, Taleju mandir, Hanuman Dhoka



Bijaya Dashami
The tenth day of Dasain is the main event that celebrates the victory of goddess Durga over the demon Mahisasur, and Lord Ram over the demon Ravan. On this day, people receive tika, jamara and dakshina from their elders.
21 October



Changa Chet
Be part of the storied tradition of kite-flying this Dasain at the third edition of Changa Chet. Create memories this festive season.
17 October, 12pm, Swayambhu Stupa, Swayambhu

Sip and Paint
Plan to paint your woes away with good food and company. All painting materials will be provided and along with a drink of your choice.
Every Saturday and Sunday, 10am-4pm, Rs1,500, Rider Ranch Restaurant, Bhaisepati



Saturday Run
Join this 5.5km run to kickstart the weekend. There will be medals and giveaways for those participating.
17 October, 6 am, Narayan Chaur, Naxal

Heritage Walk
Discover the rich history and architecture of Patan at this heritage walk led by Ashish Mishra.
17 October, Rs500, 3pm, Patan Darbar Square, Patan

Music

JAZZMANDU
Jazz for the next generation
Thursday, 29 October
11am-1pm (Closed invitation)
St Xavier's School, Jawalakhel

Groovin' at Upstairs
Thursday, 29 October
7pm-9pm, gates open at 6:30pm
Rs1,500 (Door sales only)
Jazz Upstairs, Lazimpat

Valley Jams
Friday, 30 October
7pm-9pm
Rs1,000
Simultaneously at: Jazz Upstairs, Lazimpat/ Electric Pagoda, Thamel / Hard Rock Cafe, Darbar Marg/ Eden, Sanepa

Jazz Bazaar
Saturday, 31 October
3pm-9pm, gates open at 2:30pm, close at 7pm
Rs1,600
Gokarna Forest Resort
Free shuttle bus to Gokarna available

Red Hot Latin Jazz
Monday, 2 November
7pm-9pm (gates open at 6:30pm, close at 8pm)
Rs2,000
Kathmandu Mariott Hotel, Naxal

Jazz at Patan
Tuesday, 3 November
7-9pm, (gates open at 6:30pm, close at 8pm, to be seated by 6:45pm)
Rs2,500
Yalamaya Kendra, Patan Dhoka

Free Jazzmandu Workshops
Tuesday, 3 November
Alliance Francaise, Jhamsikhel / Kathmandu University, Tripureswor



Jazzmandu Finale
Wednesday, 4 November
5:30pm onwards (gates open at 5pm, close at 8pm)
Rs1,800
The Malla Hotel, Lekhnath, Marg, Lainchaur

Getaway



Tiger Tops Karnali
An area of abundant wildlife, a visit to Tiger Tops Karnali Lodge is an opportunity to reconnect with nature. Enjoy the ongoing local resident offer with access to the swimming pool, birdwatching and village walks.
Bardia, 9851217265

Heritage Hotel Suites
Discover your sense of wonder amidst the oasis that brings alive 5000-year-old cultural history. Enjoy the dimension of comfort, style and adventure under the magical Himalayas.
Heritage Street, Lakeside, Pokhara (61) 462125



Club Himalaya
The hotel is a blend of natural and modern services. The accommodation is comfortable, cosy and the food is delicious. The famous sunrise and sunset can be viewed from the private balcony of each room.
Nagarkot (01) 6680080 / 6680083

Bandipur Kaushi Inn
A small, rustic place to stay in the idyllic village of Bandipur, replete with cultural diversity and traditional architecture.
Bandipur, Tanahu (065) 520083

Green Valley Resort
Located 5.5km away from Budhanilkantha Temple, the resort is a perfect getaway for those who live in the city. The first ray of sun warms up autumn's cool breeze, making way for a perfect stroll around the Tamang Valley.
Shivapuri National Park (01) 5248092 / 9851351881

Dining

Bricks Café
A multi cuisine restaurant in the heart of Kathmandu offering flavourful dishes in a pleasant surrounding. Their lasagna is a must-try.
Kupondole (01) 5181156

Jimbu Thakali
Not in the mood to cook? Head over to Jimbu and enjoy a healthy, tasty and traditional Thakali meal.
Tangal (01) 4537674



Erma Restaurant
Erma Restaurant offers an upscale fine dining experience with chef-curated continental dishes. With a farm-to-table approach and an assortment of wines, Erma turns every meal into an experience.
Hotel Shambala, Chakrapath (01) 4650351

The Belgian Waffle
Want something to satisfy your sweet tooth? Treat your taste buds with a wide range of waffle sundaes and Waff-wiches.
Darbar Marg, 9849636013



La Casita
With a direct view of Boudhanath Stupa, La Casita is the ideal place for taking pictures and eating tacos, burgers and tapas. The restaurant is closed on Saturdays.
Boudha (01) 4915645

Weekend Weather



FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
25° 13°	25° 13°	25° 13°	25° 11°	26° 12°

Dasain Weather
After that wet spell that lasted till early October, the monsoon has finally pulled out from eastern Nepal. It will be sunny and bright going into Dasain next week, with some convective buildup over the mountains and breezy afternoons in Kathmandu perfect for kite-flying (page 11). Heavy snowfall two weeks ago is still sitting on the mountains, so trekkers should be alert to flash-flood warnings. The Manaslu Circuit is off this season, although it is possible to go to Langtang, and the trails to ABC and EBC are fully open. This is likely to continue.



Our Pick

Imtiaz Ali and Divya Johry's Indian crime drama series She follows Bhumika Pardeshi, a police constable in Mumbai who struggles with low self-esteem in her personal and professional life. Treated by superiors and peers as someone who is meek, Bhumi goes home everyday to more hardship: a sick mother, an alcoholic husband, and unpaid bills that keep piling up. But when she is unexpectedly chosen to go undercover as a sex worker to expose a drug trafficking ring and capture the cartel's dangerous leader, Bhumi's life takes a more empowered meaning. Stars Aaditi Pohankar, Vijay Varma and Kishore. Available on Netflix.

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

KITE GIRLS

Making kite-flying (and fighting) an inclusive part of Nepal's intangible heritage this Dasain

Smaranika Shakya

With Dasain right around the corner, we are already hearing cries of "Chet!" from rooftops as swooping kite fights engage in full-scale war over Kathmandu's skies.

Until recently, interest in kite flying among youth was declining as they spent more time on screens. It took the Covid-19 lockdown with social distancing for kites to soar again. This year, kites have taken to the skies even earlier, taking advantage of fresh afternoon breezes.

"Parents may not yet imagine that one day their children may ask, 'What is a kite?'" says Nirmal Man Tuladhar, an academic and a kite aficionado.

Tuladhar lists four social beliefs that uphold Nepal's kite-flying culture: kite-flying sends a message to Indra, the god of rain, requesting him to turn the monsoon off as the rice fields have enough water. Kites bring prosperity to the family, it is a symbolic way of reaching and honouring dead ancestors, and it guides recently released souls to heaven.

"I don't think kite flying as a culture is disappearing in Nepal. People will always return to it," says Priya Joshi, who began hosting annual kite-fighting get-togethers exclusively for women.

Maker Keti's All Girls Changa Party has been happening annually for ten years and is taking place this year too on 17 October.

"Social media has really helped bring people who share the same love for kite-fighting together. It is very important for the older generation to pass along the culture to younger ones," she adds.

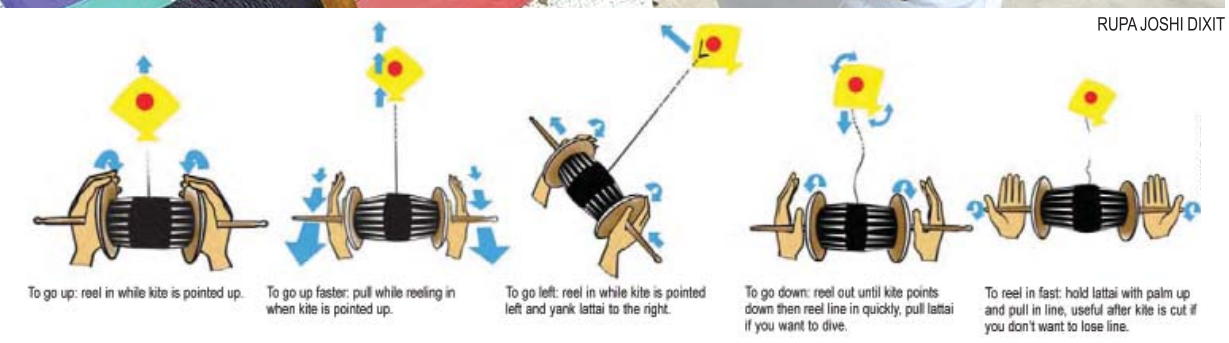
Joshi notes that the number of women who fly kites is still low since young girls aren't encouraged to take it up as boys are. Many girls simply watch their brothers and fathers enjoy kite flying even if they want to be a part of it.

"I love the feeling of the wind pushing against the kite as it sails. It's a different kind of feeling of freedom, and I wanted more women to share the same joy I experience," says Joshi, whose love for kites came from her father who spent Dasain on the roof taking on neighbourhood kites to fight.

Usual kite-fighting events are not usually a friendly space for newbies, especially women. "I wanted to create a space where no one is belittling another for their lack of experience, and it is just pure fun," says Joshi, who uses kite-fighting as a tool to subtly empower women.



RUPA JOSHI DIXIT



"Many refuse at first, out of fear of public embarrassment. But when they build up their confidence and try it, they realise it's not that difficult. Ultimately, as they fly their kites, they have the time of their lives and seeing that is the best feeling."

Along with women, young boys and girls aged 7 or less are also invited to the All Girls Changa Party.

KITECNIC

Kite-flying is an art. A kite stays aloft because wind pushes against its angled surface to create an upward force called lift, which overcomes gravity. Acting parallel to the wind is drag, a resistant force on the kite. When the four forces of lift, drag, gravity, and tension (from the string) cancel each other out, they are in equilibrium, and the kite sails.

While Western kite-fliers are content with watching their kites serenely glide through the sky, the Nepali style is especially aggressive. Nepalis don't just fly kites, they make the kites kill enemy kites, and have lots of fun doing it.

It all starts on the home's rooftop, waiting for the perfect breeze. The 'lattai' unspools quickly as the kite is released. Pulling makes the kite soar vertically, letting out the string gives it horizontal distance. When the kite points in a desired direction, pulling the lattai makes it move that way.

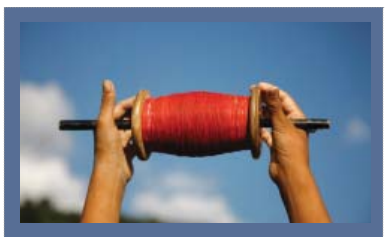
The lines of a fighter kite have to be specially armoured with majha, a sharp, abrasive substance made with ground glass applied with starch, making the string act like a saw to cut clean through the lines of other kites. When a kite line is cut, the victors triumphantly shout "Chet!" while the vanquished have to reel in what is left of their line. The ultimate goal is to be the last kite flying in the sky.

Flying kites has always been a socially and culturally significant part of Nepali culture during Dasain, and it is important that this intangible heritage is preserved.

Says Joshi: "I hope that more children and women get excited about kite-flying. You don't have to be the best. Giving yourself some grace, learning, and having fun is all that matters."



SUMAN NEPALI



Kite glossary
Majha: line armour
Mandali: stone on string used to prey on low-fliers
Kakaa: string at point where it is tied to kite
Phuin: show-off kite aerobatics
Tthini: launching kite by co-pilot
Lappa: stall
Hi-chait: cut kite
Gwankh: paperweight to give kite lateral balance
Ghumaure: kite that tumbles when reeled out
Tiktike: sluggish side-by-side movement of kite
Chakchake: kite with attention deficit disorder
Tauke: kite with pattern on top quadrant
Babache: kite with bottom half of a different colour
Dariwal: kite with symmetrical pattern on bottom left and right
Dharke: kite with stripes
Puchhare: kite with tail
Lattai: thread reel

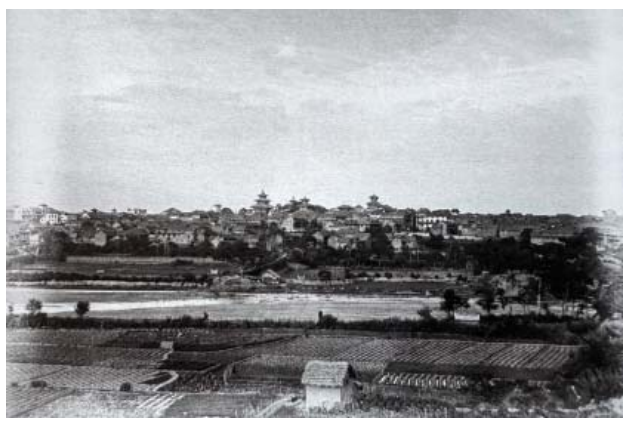


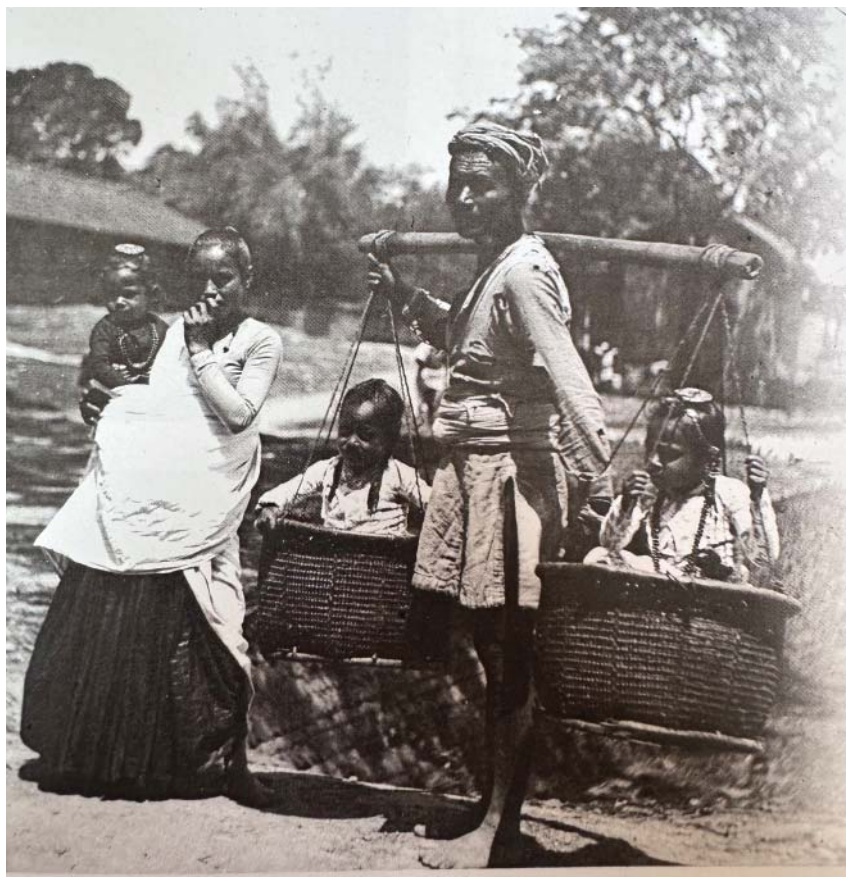












Nepal 160 years ago

The recent discovery of glass plate negatives from the 1890s throw light into Kathmandu's forgotten past

Rajeev Ranjan Singh

Oral history, art, stone inscriptions and the written word have helped us understand the Nepali world and its history. But it was the advent of photography that dramatically changed the way we can visualise memory.

Soon after the invention of daguerrotype and photography, cameras arrived in Nepal via British India. Photographs taken by Clarence Comyn Taylor in 1863 were discovered by J P Losty in 1992, and were possibly the earliest pictures ever taken of Nepalis.

Soon, there were scholars and photographers like Samuel Bourne, George Ramsay, Henry Ballantine, Theodore Julius Hoffmann, Cecil Bendall, John Claude White and others who took portraits and pictorialised Nepal's landscape.

Nepali photographers like Dirghaman Chitrakar and his son Ganeshman Chitrakar also emerged, their negatives and prints processed at the Bourne & Shepherd and Johnston & Hoffmann studios in Calcutta.

Photography was more a profession than a hobby, and those who could afford equipment would have access to the country and the powers that be — hence the pictures of the Rana royal family, their palaces, hunting expeditions, and heritage.

Photographs of ordinary people tended to be either because some of were also researchers, or out of curiosity for exotica.

In 1888 Joseph Gaye was hired by Prime Minister Bir Shumsher Rana to train his Army's band. Besides being a musician, Gaye was also into photography and a treasure trove of his archival images were recently discovered by his Canadian great-granddaughter and published in the book, the Photography of Joseph Gaye: Nepal, India and Burma 1888-1899.

No one had heard of Gaye before his glass negatives and prints were found in an attic in Canada. He was born in 1852 in Kent and joined the British Army's Rifle Brigade, and in 1873 he was deployed to the Northwest Frontier Province bordering Afghanistan, where he also served as a bandmaster.



SNAPSHOTS OF HISTORY

Bir Shumsher invited him to Nepal to train the Army's marching band, and during the four years he spent in Kathmandu with his wife Mary Elizabeth Short, he was a prolific photographer. The images he took are now a valuable anthropological, historical and architectural documentation of Old Nepal. Gaye went back to England and died in 1926.

He started taking pictures as soon as he embarked on the journey from Sugauli to cross over into Nepal and walk all the way across Bhimphedi, Chitlang and into Kathmandu Valley.

The originals of the photographs he took are now at the British Library in London, and their digital copies in the Madan Puraskar Library in Patan. Gaye seems to have been especially interested in taking posed portraits of ordinary Nepalis — more out of interest rather than any academic research.

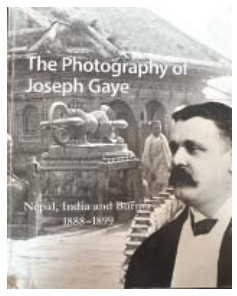
Among his photos are Newar farmers working their fields along the Bagmati, floodplains now densely urbanised. There are pictures of the crowds at Asan market, even prisoners lounging about inside a jail in Kathmandu and a group of leprosy patients posing for a group portrait.

The limited edition book provides new insight into life in Kathmandu 160 years ago, and is a valuable pictorial record of what people looked like and wore, where they worked, and how their neighbourhoods looked.

Joseph Gaye's great-granddaughter Mary Margaret Gaye contacted Nepali historian Pratyoush Onta who helped with the text and captions in the book. However, Joseph Gaye's journal, if any, have not been located.

Of the 211 prints the book, 91 are made from glass plate negatives, five are cellulose acetate negatives, 83 are lantern slides and 32 are from albumin prints. Of archival value are also photographs of the members of the Nepali Army's band with their instruments.

Rajeev Ranjan Singh is Researcher at Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya, Patan Dhoka. More photographs on nepalitimes.com



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The content-ification of disaster

‘We’re so cooked’ is a fatalistic influencer meme that means the outcome is already decided

Nobel Rimal in Nuwakot



A dark, viscous trench of sludge is where our street used to be in Devighat. An elderly woman in a red sari paces a second-floor balcony with its concrete balustrade missing.

Laundry hangs from exposed rebars of a half-collapsed building. Men are having lunch on a crumbling ledge below an uprooted tree lodged in the floor above them.

These scenes were different from the visual grammar through which I had seen the disaster of my ancestral home online, in which the destruction arrived as a reel.

The Nepali psyche is drowning in 15-second floods of hopelessness. Local heartbreak becomes repeatable content, circulated through systems that measure our attention more readily than they understand our grief. Synthetic sympathy, political performance, and a vocabulary announces that the future is already finished.

One of the viral videos was of the Trisuli bridge being swept away. Next to it stood my grandfather’s metal workshop, where he spent years making grills and teaching people to weld. I learnt it was gone through that reel.

It stripped away memory, physical presence and emotion from the space. The small rectangle in my hand suddenly held more than the comment section could explain about the flood.

This is the intimacy of mediated witnessing – encountering an event through a representation while feeling implicated in its consequences. Mud has no smell on a screen. Yet a familiar location can make the image feel almost tactile.

The viewer personally affected by the disaster knows where that road led, whose business occupied that building, and which part of the landscape should still be there.

A thumb can pause the water, enlarge the damage, replay the collapse. You can comment, share it on Instagram story and describe how maddening it is, while blaming climate injustice.

These gestures offer false control over the representation, exposing our inability to intervene in what has happened.

A viral meme describes climate change as a series of disasters watched through phones, with the footage coming closer and closer until you become the person filming. Environmental catastrophe moves from a news location to our own community. Understanding the multidimensional nature of environmental catastrophe requires more than its most dramatic seconds captured through a phone.

As a child I used to run along Devighat’s steep streets, buying chatpatey from a vendor and finding friends to play chungi with next to the pipal tree and chautara.

Returning after the flood, none of those landmarks remained. My memory supplied roads that the landscape could no longer confirm. Augmented reality provided remembrances of the uphill run, the cart, the platform, the windows.

Environmental philosopher Glenn Albrecht’s concept of ‘solastalgia’ gives language to this distress: the pain of an environment changing around people who remain connected to it, undermining familiarity and security associated with home. A person can remain at home, and still feel homesick.

For those returning to a transformed hometown, the concept also illuminates the distance between geographical arrival and emotional recognition. You can reach the location, and still feel that you have failed to arrive.

The phone allows a place to become unfamiliar even before we physically return. It delivers the rupture, leaving memory to reconstruct what has disappeared outside the frame.

This helps explain the urge to keep watching. A viewer may replay a flood clip to identify a building, locate a relative’s street or understand whether a route remains usable. Repetition is an attempt to regain orientation, and can continue long after the footage has stopped revealing anything new.

What does it mean to inhabit a media environment where searching for evidence of your own loss becomes a signal to deliver more destruction? Where the time spent trying to understand a ruined neighbourhood is processed alongside the time spent watching a cute cat video, yet another advertisement for Xtreme energy drink or an argument between jholey and ghantey.

We have to make sense of a disaster amidst all this noise, where an intimate act of recognition and solidarity becomes another algorithmic spectacle.

TikTok’s account of its recommendation system identifies watch time, viewing completion and other interactions among the signals used to rank content. Concern, disbelief and fascination can all involve sustained attention. A platform can therefore register a video as ‘virally compelling’ when a viewer is trying to comprehend the destruction of home.

This is the content-ification of disaster: the conversion of a situated event into units that can circulate, compete for attention and acquire value through engagement. The place has a history, the clip has a duration.

The impulse is a guilty pleasure, an uncomfortable compulsiveness. But a return to the screen can begin in care, fear or the hope that the next video will clarify what happened. Eventually, watching and rewatching can become the most readily available response to the distress that watching produces.

‘WE’RE SO COOKED’

This repeated, difficult-to-stop consumption of negative information is called doomscrolling. A 2024 study involving 800 university students in Iran and the United States found an association between doomscrolling and existential anxiety. The survey design cannot establish causation, and its findings cannot simply be transferred to Nepali audiences, but it offers a useful starting point to examine how information-seeking becomes entangled with a diminished sense of possibility.

In the fatalistic sense familiar from livestreams, memes and influencer culture, the phrase ‘We’re so cooked’ announces that the outcome has already been decided. Its humour makes helplessness socially shareable. It allows people to acknowledge danger without having to articulate a response.

Applied to a devastated community, the phrase makes a claim far larger than the available evidence. A place has suffered terrible devastation, and a hopeless zoomer and detached doomer’s interpretation extends that destruction indefinitely into the future.

Then there is NGOmaxxing, where clips are farmed by relief groups to raise funds. The form of the clip encourages this extension. A bridge falls. The video ends. The bridge falls again.

Clearing debris, finding temporary premises, replacing equipment and reopening a business have a different rhythm. They unfold over time, through negotiations and unremarkable days of work. A feed dominated by instant of collapse can leave the slower history of recovery outside its account of the disaster.

The future then feels stolen twice: first through material destruction caused by climate collapse, and again through a representation that makes survival difficult to imagine.



One Nepal flood relief agency poster online is an AI-generated image of a generic Himalayan settlement beside a coffee-coloured river. The debris looks arranged, and the village uses a vaguely pan-Asian visual vocabulary. A Nepal flag supplies national identity, although its proportions and celestial symbols were distorted.

AI CATASTROPHE

This visualisation locates the disaster inside an imagined Nepal, carrying almost none of the specificity of the place being mourned. There is no recognisable Nuwakot or Rasuwa in it, no way to connect the composition to a street, a household or a person -- a synthetic image for ready-made fundraising.

‘Pray for Nepal’ is another caption for the AI-generated image. This outsources the act of looking. Actual devastation is messy, uneven and difficult to compose. Its details refuse to behave

Children of lesser gods

Pasang, Buddha Maya, Phool Tara and hundreds of others have already endured so much in their young lives



Suburban Tales
Pratibha Tuladhar

Pasang Tamang has the kind of smile that stays. If he smiled in a roomful of people, it would be the warmest spot in that room. Seated on a bench in the sign language classroom watching deaf tv, Pasang turns away from the screen and smiles.

After being rescued from Rasuwa in the 26 August flood, he was brought to Bhairabi Secondary School in Bidur where he has been living since. The 13-year-old is among 17,000 children impacted by the flood.

Without parents, Pasang was being brought up by his uncle and aunt. When the disaster struck, their house in Syaule quickly disappeared and his relatives went missing, snatching away the only feeling of home he had ever known.

Pasang was brought to the school with 38 other children, and over the weeks, the children were identified by their families and taken to new temporary homes. But no one showed up for Pasang.

“He wept the day the last rescued child left. No one came to get him and we later found out his relatives had died in the flood,” says Rajendra Shrestha, who has been teaching sign language at the school.

The power goes off and so does the tv Pasang has been watching. He gestures at Rajendra Sir and gets up to bring out a folder of drawings. It is a collection of his and that of his friend Roshini, another child displaced by the flood. One of the images shows four friends who lost their homes, seated together.

Pasang’s drawings are eclectic. There are those of the village landscape that have changed since the flood, but there is also one of Indra Jatra, of reindeer and one of Naruto.

In another drawing, he is outside his home in Rasuwa, filling a water bottle, while the elders appear busy in the front yard. A village home in the shadow of the mountains, not far from a raging river.

PAST LIFE

When the school assembly begins, the teachers ask him if he wants to go join the rest, but he signs to say he would rather stay indoors. With everyone from his past life gone, living in a shelter in a new school, Rajendra Sir is the only real way he can communicate with the world.



symbolically: laundry on rebar, lunch beneath a tree lodged inside a building, somebody arranging the small remainder of an ordinary life.

A generated image can remove that friction of having to actually witness a disaster. It can make ruins look complete, balanced and available for circulation. The people whose experience should anchor the image become unnecessary to its production. We have content-ified raising awareness for real disasters with imagined ones generated by AI data centres.

There is a material contradiction here too. The International Energy Agency estimated that electricity use by data centres produced around 180 million tonnes of indirect carbon dioxide emissions in 2024. Servers require power, and electricity generation can produce emissions. The supposedly frictionless image belongs to a system embedded in the same material world it depicts.

An industry with an environmental footprint is supplying synthetic expressions of grief about environmental destruction. Digital compassion arrives without material consequences in an endless contest conducted through machines for attention, likes, shares, comments, market position, and for authority over the future.

A disaster becomes footage. The footage becomes a signal. The signal becomes another recommendation. The damaged place continues outside the loop.

That is also why physical witnessing mattered. I went to Nuwakot because the phone had shown me what happened. Once there, the disaster exceeded the content through which I had encountered it.

Designer Michael Bojkowski's project The Catastrophic Image & The Skin of Your Eye, developed after experiencing Australia's fire season, describes this impulse -- seeking evidence he could see, and looking becomes a physical encounter with a world capable of altering the observer.

It also offers a way to understand why recording a disaster can matter to those experiencing it. A person holding a camera may be making evidence, preserving a disappearing landscape or trying to comprehend what stands before them. The resulting footage enters platforms that turn disaster into spectacle. Its origin can still lie in an urgent need to establish reality.

No single motive can be assigned to everyone filming, and physical presence may not automatically confer understanding. But the act of witnessing can itself become a relationship with a place, with obligations that last beyond recording it.

In Parul Sehgal's profile of Jenny Offill, the novelist discusses normalcy bias through her research into disaster psychology: the difficulty of recognising an unprecedented situation when familiar experience supplies the mind's expectations.

"I have not experienced this," Offill says, describing that internal resistance. "I do not think I am experiencing this now."

Her example involves people straightening their desks during emergencies. In Devighat, familiar routines persisted among shattered balconies and thick mud on third floor terraces.

Weeks after a flood, hunger continues. Clothes need drying. The remnants of a home still require attention. This unsettles the media's preferred division between catastrophe and its aftermath. The disaster remains present, while ordinary life resumes inside it. That coexistence is difficult to capture in a clip built around a single spectacular moment of a bridge collapsing.

'HERO IMAGE'

It is also vulnerable to political simplification, and gets entangled in partisan narratives. A complex crisis becomes material for familiar political conflict.

A disaster does not happen in an empty information environment, it arrives among existing loyalties, grievances and incentives. The question of what happened can quickly become a competition over whose interpretation wins.

In Nepal, that competition includes the search for a defining 'hero image'. A minister carrying an oxygen cylinder, a relief package being handed out, volunteers wearing branded jackets.

Such images can document useful activity, but also encourage a much larger inference: that visibility establishes competence, presence establishes responsibility, and the person most prominently photographed is the person on whom recovery depends.

A visit by a politician cannot establish cynical intent, but it does invite scrutiny of how the event is presented and whether attention follows through to the people receiving assistance. However, treating every public image as a stunt would flatten these differences as thoroughly as treating every appearance as proof of service.

Michel Foucault's concept of biopolitics helps extend the question beyond the photograph. A person can be highly visible in flood footage while remaining difficult to locate within a relief system. The public may know the image of their destroyed house and still have little idea whether they have shelter, whether their loss has been recorded or whether assistance has reached them.



This is where the governance question belongs within the media argument. The Finance Ministry's flood-update portal publishes donations, balances and information about transfers and initiatives.

The next standard of visibility should connect assessed needs to assistance delivered. Trained field enumerators could help establish who needs what, while public reporting could show allocation and delivery without exposing sensitive household details.

Yet information alone will not resolve the deeper paralysis. We also need ways of imagining a future that can survive contact with the evidence.

The useful framework in Jenny Offill's work is her attention to catastrophe as something already entangled with ordinary obligations.

Planetary danger exists alongside relatives who need care, errands that remain unfinished and bodies that continue to require food and rest. Dread has to coexist with the next necessary action.

Her work also asks how the circle of domestic care can expand, so that intense concern reserved for those closest to us can become a basis for obligations towards others. That expansion gives climate grief somewhere to go.

For disaster coverage, this suggests a different discipline of attention. Follow the family after the dramatic photograph. Return to the business after the floodwater recedes. Record the unresolved need with the same seriousness given to the moment of destruction. Empower survivors to become content creators themselves to document rehabilitation.

The neglected subjects of recovery deserve narrative weight: replacement tools, temporary rooms, reopened routes, the labour required to make an ordinary day possible again.

SPREADING HOPE

This also changes what it means to imagine hope. A hopeful account can retain uncertainty, anger and incomplete recovery. It can show attempts whose success remains undecided. Its value lies partly in keeping those attempts available to public thought.

My grandfather gave me a small example of this. After I returned, he asked whether I "had fun" and "saw things". The wording sat strangely beside the doom I had witnessed. He had lost a life's work in his metal workshop, yet he was already thinking about what might still be possible.

Orphaned young, he had learnt to build a life from limited resources. He worked with metal, taught others to weld, worked on the Trisuli hydropower project and wrote for the local newspaper. None of that gives me access to the full extent of his grief. His manner may conceal feelings he chooses to keep private.

What I can describe is the proposal he has made: using family property to build small shops where displaced businesses can reopen. His plan gives the future a shape. Land. Materials. A place to work. A livelihood that can resume.

Such boomer hope is in sharp contrast to the 'We're so cooked' doomer shorthand vocabulary. Local effort needs resources and institutions capable of supporting it. Communities cannot be expected to compensate indefinitely for inadequate public action.

Hope becomes politically useful when it generates demands as well as gestures of care: demands for accountable relief, safer reconstruction and a meaningful say in what recovery should look like.

The same principle applies to witnessing. People who cannot travel to Nuwakot can still sustain a relationship with what they see. They can check before sharing, listen to those affected, support verified local needs and remain interested after the story stops trending on the feed.

The phone that delivers despair can also carry those connections. Its role is shaped partly by the practices and institutions built around it.

Accepting 'We're so cooked' as a complete account of the future makes those choices disappear, and turns a warning into a verdict. It allows responsibility to dissolve into a general atmosphere of inevitability, convenient for institutions whose decisions still matter.

We can ignore the synthetic image that asks us to mourn an AI-generated Nepal. We can refuse the political photograph that demands gratitude before accounting for delivery. We can block a media rhythm in which the collapse is endlessly replayed.

That refusal needs somewhere to lead: towards people, towards sustained attention, towards the difficult and unfinished work of making a place habitable again.

The men eating lunch in Devighat cannot carry the burden of proving either humanity's denial or its resilience. They are people living inside the consequences of a disaster. Their lives continue beyond the uses to which an image of them might be put.

A future worth imagining would allow that meal to be eaten in a safe building. It would offer space to a displaced shopkeeper, workers to recover their tools, a child to find a route home from school again.

The bridge keeps falling whenever the clip restarts. Our responsibility is to make the reopening as imaginable, and as worthy of sustained attention, as the collapse.

Nobel Rimal is a researcher of digital culture and political communication.





On 12 October, over a month after the flood, a relative traced Pasang to the school and took him home for the holidays. For many other children like him, there is no going home, some are still living in holding centres.

Many have been transferred to other schools in the region, based on where their families are sheltering.

At Bhimsen Secondary School in Batar, Buddha Maya Tamang stands quietly in a corner. Her family, originally from Rasuwa, lived in Betrawati where Buddha Maya and her sister went to school.

They had a home with a farm now lost to the flood. Her sister was inside the house when the flood surged past.

Buddha Maya is also new to her school with 30 other transferred students, displaced children from Trisuli and Betrawati. Most are from low-income and Dalit families. During her lunch break, Buddha Maya comes and sits next to me quietly. She does not smile, and does not go to get lunch.

"She used to be a bubbly child, but has changed completely since the flood," says school assistant Sabitri Magar who has known Buddha Maya since she was in KG.

Sabitri's family home in Katichap had to be evacuated after a landslide, but she cannot go to her new home near the river. "It's like we are being stalked by disasters," she says.

Sabitri and her colleagues who worked in Betrawati's government school have been transferred to the school in Batar after the flood. She and her four children rent a room, but the price has doubled. In some places in Nuwakot, people continue to live in tents, but will have to find warmer accommodation as winter sets in.

"HURRY UP"

"People have received enough dry food and clothes and that is not even the need anymore," says Bhawani Panta, school teacher. "What people need is money to buy medicines and other essentials. Most of all, they need homes and those in authority need to hurry up."

While they wait, people are so desperate, they have started cleaning up their old homes to see if they can move back in, even though their homes are not safe. Distribution of relief has not always been fair because of language, reach, access to authority and inability to work the system.

Like all government schools, Bhimsen also provides free lunch to students up to Grade 5 -- little bowls of noodles appear in trays and the children sit down on the porch to eat.

One of the children who has just finished eating comes up to me and says, "Ma bahini." I'm a sister. Her hair has been shorn off and she wears green sequined sandals. Her name is Phool Tara, and she is four.

Phool Tara holds my hand, lingers, and says her favourite book is Mero Sero Phero. "It has stories and drawings and I love stories."

"What about you," I ask Buddha Maya.

She pauses a long time and then answers, "I used to like the thought of becoming a teacher, but right now, I don't know." I say I look forward to hearing she has become a teacher someday. She almost smiles.

Suburban Tales is a regular column in Nepali Times based on real people in Pratibha's life.

www.nepalitimes.com

Everything you need to know about Newar rituals

A clinical snapshot of Newar votive offerings and sarifices, and how they have changed with the times

Sonia Awale

Who would have thought that votive offerings, sacrifices and feasts would be the subject of a sociological study? But that is exactly what German heritage conservationist and architect Niels Gutschow has done.

Gifts Offerings Sacrifices: The Art and Practice of Ritual Offerings of the Newars in Nepal is a detailed but clinical documentation of rituals that expounds on their cultural and religious significance.

The book starts by defining the terms 'gift', 'offering' and 'sacrifice', and how they differ. A gift is given voluntarily, without a payment in return. An offering is a form of worship. Sacrifice which we now associate with animal sacrifice originally meant to make something holy.

There is also the term 'दान', a donation given to those in distress without expecting anything in return. I have a quibble here: is it really selfless when the very act of dana is to cultivate punya, merit? How about donations for disaster survivors, where the donor posts pictures offering a cheque to the Finance Minister? Can corporate social responsibility be considered a दान?

Gutschow notes that the details in the book are based on 'repeated observations or even



participation', and should not be taken as the be all and end all about Newar offerings and sacrifices.

Rituals which involve purifying families polluted by death for example used to be an obligation, but are now shunned by parapriests or purity specialists. There is a larger socio-political context behind this denial rooted in casteism and untouchability, we learn.

INTANGIBLE HERITAGE

The introduction has an elaborate list of the ingredients in Newar offerings that include edibles, liquids, unhusked rice, tashi or citron which signifies both fertility and longevity, spices, sweets, buffalo meat, and more. This is all intangible heritage.

The book is divided into three parts – urban rituals, life cycle rituals, and domestic rituals. Urban rituals include the Biska chariot festival, Yenyapunhi, Indra Jatra and Saparu in Kathmandu. The Dasain chapter should have a trigger alert for images of ritual sacrifices, as well as their religious justification. An entire chapter is dedicated to Buddhist rituals, which in contrast, renounce animal sacrifice.

Life cycle rituals include first rice feeding, the Ihi initiation for girls, Kyatapuja for boys, the Barha seclusion of the maiden, and finally, Ihipa marriage. There is a lot Newars like me did not know about the socio-cultural significance of many of these practices.

But perhaps the book's most fascinating part is the explanation for why the betel nut is so essential. A plant native to the Philippines is indispensable in Newar life and death rituals. 'The bride dissociates herself from her natal home by offering ten betel nuts and a pouch with five betel nuts to her parents, to relatives, and symbolically even to those absent.'

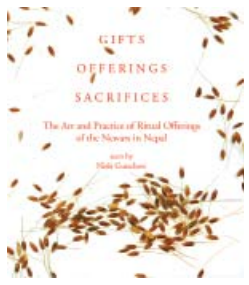
'...Three days after the marriage the matchmaker hands five betel nuts to the newly wed husband, for him to pass to all members of his wife's family to confirm his obligations as a wife-taker.'

Obligations as a wife-take means supporting his wife's family in case of death where she is obliged to act as the unpolluted daughter and perform subsequent death rituals.

There is also a short chapter on the rare celebration of someone reaching 100 years. Gutschow attends the centenary ceremony of Chalmaya Shakya in Bhaktapur where 'she enters a large, painted water pot, marked with a triangle and a dot in the centre. The pot represents a source of all reality, the divine or cosmic womb from which everything is born. Leaving the receptacle or womb stands for the celebrant's ritual rebirth...'

Swonti and Yomaripunhi are also featured as well as significances of second and fourth birthdays. A person celebrating their birthday should stay home on that day to avoid 'unfortunate occurrences, such as crossing a body of water'. That was new to me.

Other tomes go into much more detail about Newar festivals, but this is a compact and exquisitely produced book that tells you everything you were never told about why we have all those gifts, offerings and sacrifices in our community.



Gifts Offerings Sacrifices: The Art and Practice of Ritual Offerings of the Newars in Nepal
seen by Neils Gutschow
Saraf Foundation for Himalayan Traditions and Culture, 2026



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