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Sarlahi farmers freed after 38 days in Indian jail

Arrest of Suresh Prasad and Nagendra Prasad Singh for ferrying farm fertiliser exposes supply lapses.

SHIVA PURI
DUMRA, INDIA, AUG 7

Two Nepali brothers who spent 38 days in an Indian jail after being arrested while carrying fertiliser home for their farm have been released on bail, bringing an end to a weeks-long legal ordeal that has drawn attention to Nepal's chronic fertiliser shortages.

Suresh Prasad Singh, 55, and his elder brother Nagendra Prasad Singh, 60, of ward 5 of Balara Municipality in Sarlahi district were freed on Friday, two days after an Indian court granted them bail. The brothers had crossed into the Indian border town of Sonbarsa on July 1 to buy fertiliser after failing to obtain it in Nepal during the peak paddy planting season.

Like many farmers across Nepal's southern plains, they had struggled to secure subsidised chemical fertiliser as the monsoon planting season got underway. With no fertiliser available locally and fearing their rice crop would fail, they decided to make the short trip across the border.

On their way back, carrying two sacks of urea and six sacks of diammonium phosphate (DAP) on bicycles, they were stopped by a joint team from India's Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) and the agriculture department.

Indian authorities accused them of illegally transporting fertiliser across the border and charged them with fertiliser smuggling.

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Nepal turns to insurance as losses grow from human-wildlife conflict

As human-wildlife conflict intensifies across the country's forest fringes, new policy aims to help families recover from deaths, injuries, and devastating economic losses.

FILE PHOTO: COURTESY OF RAMESH KUMAR THAPA

A herd of elephants pictured in Jhapa, where human-animal conflict is common.

BAALA SHAKYA
KATHMANDU, AUG 7

When Dhurbe, the notorious elephant, emerged from the forest in Jagatpur last month, few villagers could have predicted who would cross his path next. The adult male tusker charged into a settlement bordering Chitwan National Park and killed Ashika Bote and her young son, adding two more names to a grim record that stretches back more than a decade. According to wildlife officials, Dhurbe has been responsible for 25 human deaths since 2010, and is one of Nepal's deadliest wild animals. For Ashika's family, the loss reopened an old wound: Dhurbe had already claimed the lives of two relatives in Madi in 2012.

Their deaths have renewed attention to a growing crisis across Nepal's forest fringes. As wildlife populations recover and human settlements continue to expand along the edges of protected areas, encounters between people and wild animals are becoming more frequent—and often deadly.

The Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation recorded more than 9,900 cases of wildlife attacks on people in its 2024-25 annual report. Nineteen people were killed, 53 suffered serious injuries, and another 50 sustained minor injuries. Chitwan National Park, Nepal's flagship conservation area, has recorded more than 120 human deaths from wildlife attacks over the past decade.

In Bardiya district, wildlife killed 11 people between mid-July last year and June this year, nearly doubling the previous year's death toll. Leopards accounted for eight of those deaths, while tigers killed two people and an elephant killed another. Fifteen others were injured during the same period, after which a joint team from the Division Forest Office, Bardiya National Park, and the National Trust for Nature Conservation captured six leopards identified as posing repeated threats to nearby communities. Even so, residents in municipalities including Gulariya, Rajapur, Madhuwan, and Bardiya continue to report leopard incursions into settlements.

> **Insurance is only a part of the answer to human-wildlife conflict, experts say.**

Across Nepal, wild animals have killed 146 people over the past five years. Another 399 people suffered serious injuries and 251 sustained minor injuries. Elephants, rhinos, tigers, leopards, bears, wild dogs, and crocodiles have also destroyed homes, livestock sheds, standing crops, and caused heavy financial losses on households that depend on farming for their livelihoods. During the same period, the government spent nearly Rs586 million compensating victims of wildlife-related incidents.

For decades, Nepal's main response has been to compensate victims after attacks. Families could seek relief for deaths, injuries, damaged houses, livestock losses, and destroyed crops, but the process relied on official verification and government disbursement.

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Manpower agencies halt labour migration, with 15-point demand

Suspension will disrupt Nepalis' migration for jobs abroad, affect remittance inflows, key source for nation's economy.

HOM KARKI
KATHMANDU, AUG 7

The Nepal Association of Foreign Employment Agencies has halted the process for Nepalis' labour migration starting Friday, pressing the government to address its demands.

The 15-point charter seeks the withdrawal of disciplinary action against 771 manpower companies and the introduction of a scientific service fee structure, among other demands.

The association made the announcement after the 15-day ultimatum it had issued to the Ministry of Youth, Labour and Employment ended without the government addressing the concerns.

The Department of Foreign Employment had taken action against hundreds of recruitment agencies for allegedly charging workers fees beyond the government-set ceiling, sending workers to destination countries through Indian airports without approval, and failing to employ workers in destination countries according to contract agreements.

Association officials have warned that member agencies will not participate in the institutional labour approval process for sending workers abroad until their demands are addressed.

The decision to halt the deployment of migrant workers will affect hundreds of thousands of Nepali youths who rely on labour markets in the Gulf countries, Malaysia, and parts of Europe for employment opportunities and a better future.

The move will also affect remittance inflows, a major contributor to Nepal's economy, with annual receipts equivalent to around a third of the country's gross development product.

Dik Bahadur Khatri (Kumar), president of the association, said that although foreign employment has become one of the major pillars of Nepal's economy, the sector is facing a crisis due to policy inconsistencies, impractical regulations and a lack of timely reforms.

> **Number of Nepalis getting labour permits saw 19.7 percent annual drop last fiscal year.**

The number of workers receiving new labour approvals declined by 99,553 last fiscal year compared to the previous year, a drop of 19.7 percent.

"Since 1993-94, the foreign employment sector has brought in large amounts of remittances, helping keep the economy afloat. It has boosted foreign currency reserves and contributed to reducing the trade deficit. Around 64 percent of Nepali households are directly or indirectly linked to this sector," Khatri said.

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Living with leopards in the Himalayas

Conflicts with people are growing as expanded forest land and climate change push the creatures into human settlements. There are solutions to try.

SAUGAT BOLAKHE

This story was originally published by Knowable Magazine.

In the afternoon of February 22, 67-year-old Bulal Maharjan, a farmer living on the outskirts of Kathmandu, Nepal, was sitting on his porch chopping cauliflower leaves to feed his chickens. Hearing a loud thud as a parked motorcycle toppled, he turned and watched in horror as a leopard leapt away from the fallen vehicle and lunged at him, piercing its sharp canines into his forehead, its claws lacerating his hands.

Within seconds, neighbors swarmed in, and the leopard ran into a nearby house. They eventually trapped the animal inside. After nearly two hours of panic that saw two more people injured trying to control the distressed big cat, forest division officials managed to sedate it and bring the situation under control.

Maharjan still can't shake off memories of the attack. "For three days straight, I couldn't even sleep. Every time I began to doze, the scene of this attack would jolt me up!" he says. "I think we should just get rid of this animal. Period."

> Leopards prefer mid-hill conditions around 1,000 meters with mild climate and high rainfall.

Sentiments like Maharjan's are common across Nepal, where leopards have been responsible for significant loss of human life and livestock. Research shows that in the Himalayan nation from 2000 to 2020, conflicts between humans and four large mammals—elephants, rhinos, tigers and common leopards—claimed 887 human lives and led to the killing of 1,139 animals. Of these, common leopards—Panthera pardus—were the leading cause of human deaths at an average of 19 deaths per year, and the species most frequently killed.

To try to bring the conflict under control, Nepal and other countries with human-large predator conflicts are exploring a range of solutions.

Nepal has three ecological zones: lowland dominated by Bengal tigers, mountainous regions where snow leopards roam free, and the vast mid-hill ruled by common leopards as the top predator. While protected areas in the lowlands and mountains receive dedicated conservation funding for their charismatic predators, the mid-hills are largely managed as community forests.

The celebrated community forest program is a key reason for leopards' thriving in the mid-hills. In the early 1990s, amid worsening floods and landslides linked to forest degradation, King Birendra handed over management of large swaths of forest to local communities so that they would have stakes in conservation, and benefit from timber and fruit harvests. Today, almost 47 percent of land in Nepal is covered by forest patches. About a third of that area belongs to community forests, most of which are run by people living in the mid-hills. "But what the communities didn't realize was they also restored habitats so that the top carnivores could return," said Kedar Baral, a wildlife biologist for Nepal's Bagmati province.

In 2020, Baral's team conducted an analysis of leopard scat collected in the mid-hills that showed that 27 percent of the animals' diet consisted of domestic animals, while the wild ungulates that big cats typically prefer to hunt, like barking deer and wild boars, made up only 10 percent. In search of sprouting leaves, barking deer venture from the dense community forests to farmland, and "as the deer enter the farmlands, that's where the leopard follows," says Baral, bringing them into contact with domestic livestock.

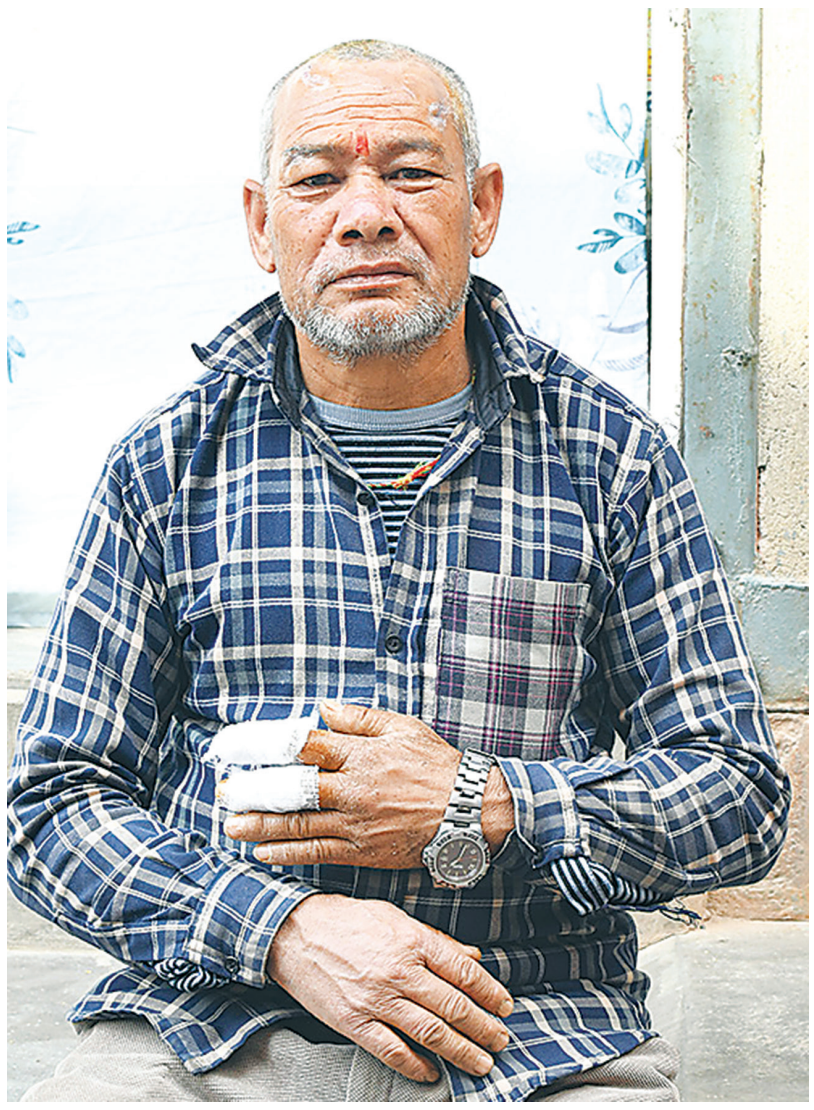

PHOTO: COURTESY OF ANJU DHAKAL

Bulal Maharjan, 67, narrowly escaped a harrowing encounter with a leopard outside his home on the outskirts of Kathmandu in February.

Nepal's hydropower and construction projects are also expanding into remote forested areas at higher elevations, disturbing habitat and bringing workers as well as a new hunting pressure against top predators, including common leopards, living there. (Common leopard pelts from illegal hunting rank among the top confiscated wildlife items in Nepal.) That forces the leopards and their prey to leave their territory, says Madhu Chetri, a wildlife ecologist at the National Trust for Nature Conservation.

Climate change might be influencing conflict patterns, too. While he was working as a district forest officer in Nepal's western mid-hills, Baral and his team were repeatedly called to respond to common leopard attacks on local communities.

Over time, he noticed a change in the pattern: Conflict incidents and human or livestock deaths were increasingly reported from higher-elevation settlements.

Reporting in 2023, Baral and colleagues investigated whether climate change was driving this shift. Using data from 343 sites across Nepal based on signs of leopard scat, animal tracks and kills, he modeled habitat preferences of leopards, considering factors such as temperature, rainfall and elevation. The results suggest that leopards prefer mid-hill conditions at around 1,000 meters with moderate temperatures and high rainfall. Warming climates are likely expanding the range of suitable habitat uphill, which could allow the leopard population to grow and, as a result, have a higher risk of conflict with humans.

Of course, it is a conservation success to be celebrated when numbers of threatened or endangered large carnivores increase—whether they be lynx, wolves, tigers or leopards—but it also presents new challenges, says Philip Nyhus, a conservation biologist at Colby College in Maine. Solutions to the problem have two parts, he adds: first, to keep wildlife separate from people and their livestock to prevent conflict to begin with, and second, to mitigate impacts when conflicts do occur.

"A lot of attention has been given to the second piece," he says. "What would be better is if we could prevent conflict from happening in the first place."

There are international examples to draw from. In the Argentinian Dry Chaco forest, for example, small households in woody areas have faced frequent attacks by pumas on sheep and goats. Sofia Nanni, a conservation biologist at the National Scientific and Technical Research Council of Argentina, worked with locals to come up with the idea of trying spiked leather collars on livestock, an approach that had proved successful in reducing leopard attacks on cows in countries like Iran.

"We found a local artisan who made collars for dogs and we asked him if he could make collars," Nanni says. Tracking collared goats and sheep for two years, her team found that the puma predation in uncollared animal groups was 10 times higher than that in collared groups. More importantly, they noticed a subtle shift in public attitude, too. Since the collars were introduced, locals were less interested in retaliating against pumas even if they had an eventual attack. "I think they started to feel more empowered because they felt that something else could be done to solve the problem," Nanni says.

Nanni says a studded collar approach can work in countries such as Nepal that are leading in big carnivore conservation. But she stresses that interventions should be chosen in collaboration with the affected locals. "It's really them who know what they can do and [who can understand] the cost effectiveness of the interventions. They also feel more attached to the project if they are part of it," she says. Although Nepal hasn't implemented studded collar projects, research suggests that predator-proof husbandry with improved fencing and safe corrals yield positive results.

Another important part of the solution is making relief funds widely accessible and simple to obtain: Research has shown that a quick and effective relief and compensation system can often curb human wildlife conflict, while slow, underfunded and inefficient relief programs can exacerbate conflict. Nepal's wildlife relief guidelines offer up to a million rupees for loss of a human life, Rs. 60,000 for high-value livestock, and Rs. 10,000 for sheep and goats. Yet the payouts depend on forest officers' assessments and are often lower.

"Locals won't pursue a relief payment of 5,000 rupees (about $33) for a predated goat if the process is cumbersome, takes months to prepare documents, and costs 3,000 rupees in the process. What's the point of it?" says Shashank Poudel, a human-wildlife conflict specialist working with WWF Nepal.

Several other strategies are successfully reducing leopard and other top predator conflicts globally. In Kenya, researchers have used low-cost, solar-powered, multicolored LED arrays that flash to mimic human presence and keep leopards far from farms. In India, where leopards frequently raise cubs in sugarcane fields, conservationists partner with farmers to adjust harvest schedules and track the animals, thus mitigating possible conflict between humans and protective leopard mothers. Elsewhere, AI-backed camera traps help hundreds of villages anticipate tiger movement and prevent human–wildlife conflict. And research from South Africa suggests that playback of human voices as acoustic deterrents might help to discourage predators.

Still, changing attitudes and implementing effective interventions, as well as better compensation, can take years, while frustration among affected communities continues to grow. Maharjan, who survived a leopard attack, is still waiting to receive relief for his medical bills.

Anju Dhakal assisted with the field reporting for this article.

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Sarlahi farmers finally home, but the fertiliser crisis remains

POST PHOTO: SHIVA PURI

Suresh Singh, 55, and his elder brother Nagendra Singh, 60, outside the Dumra jail in Sitamarhi, after their release on Friday.

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They were first taken to Sonbarsa police station before being transferred to Dumra Jail in Sitamarhi district, where they remained in custody for 38 days. For the two brothers, who had crossed the border simply to save their rice crop, the experience became one of the most traumatic episodes of their lives.

The ordeal of 38 days behind bars was visible on the brothers' faces after their release. "It was something I never imagined," Nagendra said. "I ended up in prison in another country. It was an extremely painful experience." He described the 38 days behind bars as feeling like "living through another lifetime."

On Wednesday, a single bench of Principal District and Sessions Judge, Akhilesh Kumar Jha, of the Dumra Civil Court in Sitamarhi district ordered the brothers' release on bail.

Although the court granted bail immediately, procedural formalities delayed their release.

The bail order was forwarded to Dumra Jail on Thursday after court officials completed the paperwork. The brothers signed the required documents inside the prison before being taken back to the court, where the bail process was formally completed.

Their lawyer, Sanjay Kumar Jha, said the brothers were released only after relatives pledged family land as bail bonds.

Under Indian law, local guarantors were required for bail.

Two Indian citizens, Tapeshwar Singh and Baleshwar Singh, both relatives of the family through marriage, stood surety for the brothers by mortgaging land worth 10,000 Indian rupees each.

The brothers must now appear before the Indian court every month until their case is resolved. Failure to attend could result in legal consequences for their guarantors, another lawyer representing them, Kiran Kumar Chaudhary, said.

Their arrest has highlighted a problem that returns almost every year in Nepal's southern border districts: chronic shortages of chemical fertiliser during the most critical stages of the farming season.

Unable to obtain fertiliser through official distribution channels, the brothers travelled across the border, hoping to secure enough supplies for their own fields. Instead, they found themselves facing criminal charges in a foreign country.

"A small effort to save my own crop turned into legal and psychological suffering," Suresh said.

Back home, the prolonged detention placed heavy emotional and financial strain on the family.

Suresh's son, Abhishek Singh, said the family had struggled in the absence of its two senior members.

"When the heads of the family are suddenly gone, it's impossible to describe what life becomes," he said. "My father and uncle have finally been released after a long wait. We have learned a painful lesson. Our ordeal should serve as a wake-up call for the Nepal government."

The family said they still have not been able to obtain fertiliser in Nepal.

Their release was delayed repeatedly because of the Indian court process.

Abhishek had filed a petition seeking an early hearing on July 24, but the hearing was postponed thrice after the chief judge went on leave.

The brothers finally secured bail on August 5 after lawyers Sanjay Kumar Jha and Kiran Chaudhary argued that they were ordinary Nepali farmers, not fertiliser smugglers.

Even after the bail order was issued, another obstacle emerged.

Indian law required local citizens to act as guarantors, leaving the family scrambling for someone eligible to meet the legal requirement. Their release became possible only after relatives living in India agreed to stand surety. Former lawmaker Dev Prasad Timilsina said the case has once again exposed the hardships routinely faced by farmers in Nepal's Madhesh Province and elsewhere in the country.

"Every year the government promises to support agriculture and subsidise fertiliser," he said. "Yet when farmers need fertiliser the most, during planting or weeding season, they cannot get it."

He said the brothers' release had brought relief to their family, but their ordeal reflected the reality faced by hundreds of thousands of Nepali farmers.

"So long as the state fails to establish a reliable system that provides farmers with seeds and fertiliser on time, more farmers trying simply to save their crops will continue to face unnecessary hardship and even criminal punishment along the border," Timilsina said.

Kantipur was the first to report on the arrest of the Singh brothers. Following the report, Foreign Minister Shisir Khanal took up the matter and began diplomatic coordination with the Indian government through Nepal's embassy in New Delhi. However, their release was delayed because of the court process. Khanal said the delay was due to legal procedures in India. Nepal faces severe shortages of chemical fertiliser almost every year during the peak farming season. Because the government has repeatedly failed to ensure adequate and timely supplies, farmers in border areas have been forced to depend on Indian markets to protect their livelihoods and crops.

Although many farmers cross the border only to buy small quantities of fertiliser for their own fields rather than for commercial purposes, Indian security agencies have taken a much stricter approach this year. Increased border surveillance and tougher enforcement have added to the difficulties faced by farmers in the region.

Farmers say the problem begins within the country, where local allocations are far below actual demand and distribution systems lack transparency, preventing fertiliser from reaching smallholders. Manoj Mehta, ward 5 chair of Balara Municipality, where the Singh brothers live, said the ward needs around 2,000 sacks of urea during the farming season but received only 40 sacks.

"How can we distribute such a small quantity among farmers? When there is no fertiliser available, farmers have no option but to cross the border," he said. "If they go to India, they are accused of smuggling. In Nepal, the fertiliser is unavailable. When will this problem facing farmers finally be solved?"

The Singh brothers are residents of his ward. For years, farmers living along the border have travelled to Indian markets early in the morning by bicycle or motorcycle to buy one or two sacks of fertiliser for personal agricultural use.

But recent restrictions by Indian security personnel have made that increasingly difficult, said Mohammad Asim, a farmer from Jingdawa in Paroha Municipality.

"In previous years, when farmers carried small quantities of fertiliser for household use, the Sashastra Seema Bal personnel would usually allow them through after brief questioning or with some flexibility," he said. "This year, the situation is completely different. They are now quick to label farmers as smugglers."

The arrest of the Singh brothers, who spent weeks in Sitamarhi jail after being caught carrying urea and DAP fertiliser intended for their own fields, has created fear among farmers living in Nepal's border districts.

Indian authorities say the crackdown is linked to restrictions on the export of subsidised fertiliser provided by the Indian government to its own farmers. Because such fertiliser cannot legally be taken out of India without permission, the SSB has been treating even small quantities carried by Nepali farmers as illegal exports, leading to arrests and criminal proceedings.

Under India's Fertiliser (Control) Order (FCO), introduced to regulate the price, quality and supply of fertiliser, agricultural fertilisers are classified as subsidised commodities distributed to farmers. The rules prohibit their export outside India without authorisation, particularly for commercial purposes.

Citing these regulations, Indian security officials have tightened controls along the Nepal border in recent years. Farmers say even a single sack of fertiliser is now being stopped from entering Nepal. The restrictions come at a critical time for Nepali farmers, as paddy transplantation has ended and fields require fertiliser application. Yet many farmers say they are still unable to obtain the supplies they need.

Recruitment fee dispute between government and agencies leaves thousands of foreign job aspirants in limbo

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"However, practical policies have never been introduced to properly manage it."

The agencies have called for amendments to the Foreign Employment Act, 2007, arguing that the government should introduce a transparent service fee structure based on the actual costs involved in recruiting workers. They said the current "free visa, free ticket" policy is impractical to implement and that the absence of a clear fee mechanism has encouraged informal transactions and complicated business operations.

Of the 406,404 Nepali workers who received new labour approvals and went abroad for employment last fiscal year, 268,990—or around 66 percent—processed through manpower companies.

Around 31.6 percent made individual arrangements, while only about 2 percent used government channels for migration.

The association has also demanded intervention to control airfares to labour destinations, prevent artificial shortages and simplify the verification of demand letters from new destination countries. It has called for improved access to labour markets in European countries, South Korea under the E-9 system, Japan through the Specified Skilled Worker programme, and better management of foreign employment opportunities for female domestic workers.

The group has sought worker-friendly labour agreements with destination countries, separate mechanisms to handle institutional and individual complaints, and full automation of demand letter verification, pre-labour approval and final labour approval processes.

> Recruitment agencies argue unclear fee rules make the free visa, free ticket policy impractical.

The agencies have also urged the government to use diplomatic channels to address what they described as monopolistic practices in worker recruitment in various countries. They have opposed requirements such as Saudi Arabia's Skill Verification Programme and biometric system, the UAE's police certificate verification process, and recruitment-related monopolies in Malaysia.

The association has demanded the appointment of labour attachés and labour counsellors in countries with more than 5,000 Nepali workers, a halt to issuing new manpower licences, and the issuance of new licences only when required based on clear standards.

It has also sought the return of interest earned on cash deposits maintained by foreign employment agencies, stricter action against illegal transactions and excessive interest lending, and access to collateral-free or subsidised loans for migrant workers through banks and financial institutions.

The ministry has urged recruitment agencies to follow established procedures.

"The ministry is working internally on determining the service fee. A draft amendment to the Foreign Employment Act has already been prepared to address issues requiring legal changes and has been sent for inter-ministerial consultations before finalisation," said Pitambar Ghimire, spokesperson for the ministry.

"We are committed to improving the labour sector."

If the suspension continues for an extended period, thousands of workers who have already received labour approvals and are preparing to leave for jobs abroad could be affected.

Stakeholders say any disruption in foreign employment could have wider economic consequences, as remittances remain a major source of foreign exchange for Nepal. Nepal received Rs2.12 trillion in remittances in the first 11 months of the last fiscal year, a 38.2 percent increase compared to the same period a year earlier, according to the Nepal Rastra Bank.

The Joint Trade Union Coordination Centre, the umbrella body of Nepal's trade unions, has opposed any service fee arrangement that increases the financial burden on workers.

"The government should not retreat from determining service fees because of the manpower agencies' protest. We do not accept a policy that places recruitment costs and service fees on workers," said Binod Shrestha, chairperson of the coordination centre.

"All costs related to worker recruitment should be borne by employers. If manpower companies stop sending workers, the government should explore alternatives, including using state mechanisms."

Shrestha said foreign employment that forces workers to take high-interest loans is unsustainable. "If workers have to carry a debt burden just to get employment and spend years repaying it, such employment cannot be considered beneficial," he said. "We need quality jobs, and the government should focus on creating such opportunities within Nepal."

Nepal government plans web portal for real-time official updates

The integrated platform will improve transparency and help curb misinformation, say PM's aides.

ANIL GIRI
KATHMANDU, AUG 7

The government is preparing to launch its first dedicated online platform to provide the public with real-time updates on government decisions, policy discussions and activities across ministries and other state agencies.

A team at the Prime Minister's Office is working to roll out the website "very soon," according to an aide to the prime minister.

The platform will carry live updates on cabinet decisions, bills under discussion, and developments in ministries, central entities, and other government offices.

Officials say the platform is aimed at improving public access to government information by providing instant updates on key decisions and activities as they unfold, a first-of-its-kind initiative for the federal government.

"The dedicated website will provide live updates from every ministry, including what ministers are doing, what decisions have been taken, and which bills are under discussion," the aide told the Post.

On Friday, the PM's team had demonstrated the template of the portal to the Minister for Information and Communications Technology Bikram Timilsina and updated him about its features and objectives.

To introduce the new system, a team at the Prime Minister's Office is integrating the websites of all ministries into a single system.

According to the aide, real-time information related to matters of public interest will be made available through the portal.

"Since fake news, misinformation, and disinformation are spreading rapidly, we have decided to introduce an integrated platform that provides verified information directly from the government," the aide said.

The primary objective of the platform is to enhance transparency by allowing citizens to follow government activities through a single portal. "It will help people know what various ministries are doing in real time," the aide said.

"At the same time, it will help counter fake news, misinformation, disinformation, and information disorder by providing accurate and official updates."

A member of the team developing the platform said the concept is inspired by the live news services offered by international media organisations such as the BBC and CNN.

"The idea is similar to the live update formats used by international media outlets," the team member said.

"We want to create a dedicated, integrated platform that continuously updates people about government activities."

Officials said the website will also include interactive features, allowing members of the public to submit comments and feedback.

"It will be an interactive website where people can send their feedback," the team member said. "For example, if a ministry is discussing a bill, interested individuals can submit their comments while the discussion is taking place because updates will be available on the website in real time."

However, the portal will not provide live updates on parliamentary proceedings or other activities outside the executive branch.

It will focus exclusively on the work of ministries and, possibly, their subordinate agencies.

Alongside the live updates platform, the Prime Minister's Office is also working to end the practice of vendor lock-in across government information technology systems.

According to the prime minister's aide, vendor lock-in has allowed a limited number of technology providers to dominate government IT infrastructure, forcing public agencies to rely on a single supplier for services and maintenance.

"We are going to dismantle the monopoly of individual vendors," the aide said.

Several government services, including the National Identity Card system, Nepal Telecommunications-related services, and other public digital platforms, have reportedly been affected by vendor lock-in, resulting in service disruptions and operational inefficiencies.

"We want government services to be free from vendor lock-in so that essential public services do not depend on a single vendor," the aide said.

The Prime Minister's Office is also reviewing technical problems affecting several public service delivery systems, including slow performance, repeated outages, and shortages of skilled technical personnel.

"We will undertake major technical reforms in government entities that provide public services but are struggling with vendor lock-in, technical shortcomings, and shortages of skilled manpower," the aide said.

"Our goal is to improve service delivery without relying excessively on external service providers."

POST PHOTO: DIPESH DARSHANDHARI

The funeral rites of renowned mountaineer Pur Bahadur Gurung (Yukta), who lost his life in an avalanche while attempting to climb the 8,047-metre Broad Peak in Pakistan on July 30, were performed at Swayambhunath in Kathmandu on Friday. His mortal remains were brought back to Kathmandu on Thursday evening via a Qatar Airways flight. Home Minister Sudan Gurung and Minister for Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation Khadak Poudel paid their respects by draping the national flag on the body while Nepali Congress President Gagan Thapa paid his tributes by placing the party flag over the body.

Maternity hospital turns the tide on newborn deaths

Additional doctors and nurses, better neonatal care, and wider use of mothers' milk helped reduce deaths from eight to 2.5 per 1,000 live births.

ARJUN POUDEL
KATHMANDU, AUG 7

Neonatal deaths at the Paropakar Maternity and Women's Hospital, Thapathali have fallen by more than two-thirds over the last five years, thanks to a series of measures the hospital has implemented to improve newborn care.

According to the hospital administration, neonatal deaths at the hospital stood at around eight per 1,000 live births five years ago. The number has now declined to around 2.5 percent.

"Due to various preventive measures taken by our hospital administration, we have been successful in reducing newborn deaths," said Dr Shree Prasad Adhikari, director of the hospital. "Our success shows that neonatal deaths can be reduced further and there is still room for improvement."

Neonatal means the first 28 days of a baby's life. More than 2,000 neonates are estimated to die every year in Nepal.

A recent Nepal Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey carried out by the National Statistics Office in partnership with UNICEF shows that neonatal deaths are still 17 per 1,000 live births.

According to data provided by the Health Information Management System under the Department of Health Services, 2,630 perinatal deaths were recorded in 130 hospitals of 57 districts in the fiscal year 2025-026.

Officials acknowledge that the actual number of perinatal and neonatal deaths could be much higher, as the data covers only hospitals with the Maternal and Perinatal Death Surveillance and Response programme.

Maternal and child health experts say multiple factors—infection, birth asphyxia, premature birth, hypothermia, low birth weight, poor maternal health during pregnancy, and inadequate postnatal care, and a shortage of trained human resources—are responsible for the country's high perinatal and neonatal deaths.

"We have taken various measures to reduce neonatal deaths in our hospital, including appointing additional doctors and nurses, introducing newborn screening and treatment, improving the management of birth asphyxia, hypothermia, strengthening infection control, and replacing formula milk with mother's milk," Adhikari said. "Eight deaths per 1,000 live births at the central hospital were alarming. We have reduced the number to 2.5, but even that is still high."

More than 24,000 women give birth at the Thapathali hospital every year.

Doctors said that, in the past, a nurse had to look after 10 sick newborns admitted to the neonatal intensive care unit. Now, one trained nurse looks after only three babies.

"In developed countries, one nurse provides care to one patient in intensive care, but we cannot afford that level of staffing," said Dr Sailendra Bir Karmacharya, a senior consultant paediatrician at the hospital.

"The number of trained doctors and nurses has increased in recent years, and this has helped prevent avoidable newborn deaths."

Previously, many newborns developed bloating and intestinal infections after being fed formula milk. But since the hospital established a human milk bank, such infections and related complications have declined markedly, Karmachary said.

The hospital has also improved hygiene standards and introduced a newborn screening programme, enabling healthcare providers to identify health risks early and begin treatment promptly.

Instead of formula milk, preterm and low-birth-weight babies are now fed their mothers' milk, which reduces the risk of infections and improves their chances of survival, according to Karmacharya.

One of the Sustainable Development Goals is to reduce neonatal mortality to 12 per 1,000 live births by 2030.

The SDGs, a follow-up on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), aim to end poverty, hunger, and all forms of inequality in the world by 2030.

POST FILE PHOTO

More than 24,000 women deliver babies at the Thapathali Maternity Hospital every year.

Nepal rolls out insurance against wildlife attacks

>> Continued from page 1

Last month, Nepal introduced a different approach.

Beginning July 17, non-life insurance companies licensed by the Nepal Insurance Authority began offering the country's first Wildlife Risk Insurance Policy.

Developed in response to requests from provincial and local governments, conservation authorities and communities living in wildlife-prone areas, the scheme is intended to complement the existing government relief system rather than replace it.

For an annual premium of Rs1,500, households can purchase protection against death, injury, and property losses caused by attacks by 18 species of wild animals, including elephants, tigers, rhinoceroses, leopards, bears, and crocodiles. Coverage includes up to Rs1 million for accidental death or permanent disability, Rs500,000 for temporary disability, Rs100,000 for treatment of serious injuries, and Rs20,000 for minor injuries. The policy also insures houses, livestock, and agricultural crops, while providing Rs50,000 within seven days to help families cover funeral expenses after a fatal attack.

The policy marks Nepal's first attempt to manage wildlife risk through insurance. Officials hope it will provide households with faster financial support after attacks while easing pressure on government compensation programmes. Whether it succeeds will depend not only on how widely communities adopt it, but also on whether it can reduce the economic insecurity that often follows living alongside wildlife.

Binod Kumar Pokharel, deputy director at the Nepal Insurance Authority, said the scheme was designed as a pilot and could be refined as insurers begin issuing policies and processing claims.

"This wildlife policy has been formulated on the request of provincial and local governments, especially Koshi Province, Mechi Municipality, and the Department of National Parks," Pokharel said.

Because Nepal had no previous wildlife insurance programme to use as a model, the insurance authority looked to existing insurance products when determining the Rs1,500 premium, he said. The coverage limits were also designed to ensure victims would receive at least as much support as they currently receive through government relief programmes.

"NIA has taken this product as a pilot product for this year and will revise it accordingly in the following year," he said. "The major expectation is that this policy will reduce the financial and administrative burden of the government in the days to come."

FILE PHOTO: COURTESY OF RAMESH KUMAR THAPA

A herd of elephants on the East-West Highway that crosses Bardiya National Park.

The insurance policy will operate alongside, rather than replace, the government's existing Wildlife Damage Relief Distribution Guidelines.

Under the current relief system, families of people killed by wildlife can receive up to Rs1 million from the government. Serious injuries are compensated up to Rs200,000, permanent disability up to Rs500,000, and minor injuries up to Rs20,000. Relief is also available for livestock, damaged houses, grain stores, and seasonal crops, although the payment ceilings are generally lower than the insurance coverage now being offered.

Relief payments, however, depend on official verification and government disbursement. Victims or their families must report incidents, obtain recommendations from local authorities, and submit supporting medical or veterinary records before claims are approved. While the revised 2080 (Bikram Sambat), Nepali year guidelines simplified the process by allowing applications to be filed at nearby forest offices, payments still depend on administrative procedures and the availability of government funds.

The insurance scheme is intended to provide an additional layer of financial protection.

Whether the policy will reduce conflict between people and wildlife, however, remains an open question.

Conservation scientists say the policy could ease some of the financial hardship that fuels resentment towards wildlife, but stress that compensation alone cannot prevent attacks or address the factors driving conflict.

Prakash Kumar Paudel, a conservation scientist who researches human-wildlife conflict, said the policy should be understood as one component of a much broader strategy for coexistence.

"Coexistence means both reducing people's exposure to wildlife and improving their resilience when conflict occurs," Paudel said. "Human-wildlife conflict involves social, economic, and ecological dynamics that are all interconnected. Insurance is one instrument that can reduce economic vulnerability by compensating for losses caused by wildlife."

He said insurance could help soften negative attitudes towards wildlife by reducing the financial shock experienced by affected households, particularly those that lose crops or livestock.

Paudel said the policy's comprehensive coverage and provision for faster payments were encouraging, but cautioned that its success would depend on implementation.

"If this policy is implemented alongside education, awareness programmes and other support systems, it can help reduce the negative perceptions that often arise after wildlife attacks," he said.

"But it does not directly address the underlying causes of conflict."

Babu Ram Lamichhane, a conservation biologist who has studied human-wildlife conflict in Nepal, said growing losses have eroded support for wildlife conservation in many buffer-zone communities.

"There is a growing concern from local communities regarding losses caused by wildlife," Lamichhane said. "Many people are increasingly becoming negative towards wildlife because of these losses. From a conservation perspective, this policy is an excellent initiative because it can reduce that financial burden and support coexistence."

Still, Lamichhane said it remains to be seen whether the programme will prove financially sustainable if claims become frequent in areas with high rates of human casualties.

"If the policy is widely accepted and adopted, it has the potential to address one of the biggest frustrations communities face, which is compensation for wildlife damage," he said.

"But we will only know how effective it is once we see how both communities and insurance companies respond in practice."

Both scientists emphasised that insurance should complement, not replace, efforts to prevent conflict in the first place.

"Insurance should never be treated as a complete solution to human-wildlife conflict," Paudel said.

"We also need stronger conflict-mitigation measures such as barriers, changes in cropping patterns, habitat improvement inside forests and protected areas, conservation awareness and behaviour change."

Lamichhane agreed, saying preventive measures should remain the priority.

"Reducing losses through prevention should always come first," he said. "Physical barriers, early warning systems, cultivation of crops that wildlife are less likely to eat, and awareness programmes all remain essential. Insurance and government relief are important because they help reduce resentment and the risk of retaliation against wildlife, but they cannot replace prevention."

The policy may also have implications beyond conservation.

Rakesh Gyawali, a sustainable finance professional, believes the policy expands the role insurance can play in Nepal's approach to climate and environmental risks.

Discussions about sustainable finance often centre on green investment, climate funds, and environmental, social, and governance standards, he said. Risk management receives much less attention, even though it influences whether households and businesses are willing to invest.

"By providing financial protection against wildlife-related losses, it has the potential to reduce uncertainty for people and businesses operating in wildlife-prone areas," Gyawali said.

"Insurance complements financing by helping strengthen resilience alongside investment and economic activity."

He said many households and small businesses in buffer-zone communities hesitate to invest in agriculture, agroforestry, ecotourism and other nature-based enterprises because a single wildlife attack can wipe out years of savings. Insurance cannot eliminate those risks, Gyawali said, but it can help families recover more quickly, protect productive assets, and continue their livelihoods after losses.

As Nepal grapples with growing human-wildlife conflict, the policy represents a shift in thinking—from simply compensating losses after tragedy to building the financial resilience of communities living alongside wildlife.

WORLD

Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Pakistan sign defence pact amid regional war

HAITHAM EL-TABEI/AFP
RIYADH, SAUDI ARABIA, AUG 7

Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Pakistan signed a joint defence agreement on Friday amid violence in the region from Houthi attacks and the US-Iran war.

Riyadh is looking to strengthen its security ties against the backdrop of war between the United States and Iran, which has drawn in surrounding nations and disrupted shipping through the Strait of Hormuz and Red Sea. The war has emboldened Iran and its Houthi allies in Yemen, both of which have attacked Saudi Arabia, while analysts say Washington is now seen as an increasingly unreliable partner.

In a joint statement published by the official Saudi press agency and Pakistan's foreign ministry, the three countries announced the signing of the "Mecca Joint Defence Agreement".

They declared a "shared commitment to further strengthening their collective security and to promoting peace, security and stability in the region and beyond".

The Pakistani foreign ministry said the pact meant an attack on any member would be regarded as an attack on all, adding it was "intended to strengthen collective deterrence".

Since the onset of the regional war, Saudi Arabia has grown closer to Turkey, Egypt and Pakistan, which have been pushing for mediation and a resolution to the conflict.

Umar Karim, an expert on Saudi foreign policy at the University of Birmingham, called the deal a "highly significant development".

The alignment "is clearly oriented towards Iran and meant to address Iran's new strategic approach which is geared towards dominance of the broader Gulf region".

The fact that Turkey and Pakistan border Iran means they could "exercise a different kind of leverage" on Tehran, he added.

'Layers of security'

A source close to the Saudi military and government told AFP before the signing that although the agreement had been under discussion for a long time, "the latest developments in the region expedite it".

Andreas Krieg of King's College London said the deal showed a clear desire to diversify alliances beyond the United States.

"Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Pakistan are not trying to replace the United States. They are building the capacity to protect their interests when Washington cannot or will not do so."

Riyadh, in particular, he said, "wants several layers of security rather than one American umbrella", after the shock of the Iran war. The deal will support Saudi Arabia's ambitions to become an organiser of regional security and diversify its defence umbrella, while Turkey and Pakistan gain political clout and access to potential Saudi investments, he said.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan met Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Mecca on Friday, the Turkish presidency said on X, sharing an image of the meeting.

Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and army chief Asim Munir also travelled to the Gulf kingdom for the signing.

"Although taking place against the backdrop of heightened tensions in the Gulf, the visit will carry significance beyond the immediate crisis and short-term considerations," Pakistani foreign ministry spokesman Tahir Andrabi said on Thursday.

The deal reflects closening ties between the three Muslim-majority nations. Saudi Arabia and Pakistan had already announced a mutual defence pact in 2025, a move that drew attention because Pakistan is the Muslim world's only nuclear-armed state. Pakistan has also sought to mediate efforts to end the US-Iran war, while Turkey has played a diplomatic role in negotiations aimed at ending the war in Gaza.

Renewed Houthi attacks

The deal also comes as a truce between Riyadh and the Houthi rebels in neighbouring Yemen has broken down, with the Houthis launching attacks on Saudi soil and declaring a maritime blockade against Saudi Arabia, which they have attempted to enforce by attacking Saudi tankers.

Thailand teen kills seven in home, school shooting

AFP/RSS

Family members of a school shooting victim mourn as bodies of the deceased are placed into ambulances at the school in Bang Kruai district, Nonthaburi province, north of the Thai capital Bangkok, on Friday.

MONTIRA RUNGJIRAJITTRANON/AFP
NONTHABURI, THAILAND, AUG 7

A 14-year-old boy in Thailand, described as "troubled" and "bullied" by a classmate, killed his grandparents before shooting dead five more people at a school on Friday, police said.

First he shot dead his two grandparents, using his grandfather's handgun, then went to a secondary school in Nonthaburi province, bordering Bangkok, and killed five school staff, national police said in a statement.

The 14-year-old perpetrator also died, the statement said, with a police official telling AFP he had killed himself. Officials earlier gave a higher toll of eight dead, which had included the suspect, and initially said students were among the victims.

Dozens of police and emergency responders gathered outside the cordoned-off Debsirin Nonthaburi School, AFP journalists saw, while parents waited to pick up their children and tearful students and staff comforted each other outside.

"I was afraid that I would die, and I was scared that I wouldn't be able to pursue my dreams," said Pawarisa Maylissa, a grade 12 student who hopes to attend medical school.

"I heard many gunshots very loudly because it seemed the suspect was on the floor directly above us," she told AFP.

Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul told reporters at the scene that "police interrogated his close friend who said the suspect had been under stress" related to his schooling.

"His actions also suggested that he had clearly planned" the assault, Anutin added. "The gun was a registered firearm and was kept at a house, but somehow he gained access to it."

The prime minister said more than 30 people were injured, with around nine in critical condition.

The shooter was identified by local media as a student of the school.

'Trained for a long time'

Purin Khumchoo, 17, said he was among the students who had nearly been shot.

"He was my junior, but I had a feeling that he was a troubled kid. My group of friends who knew him said he was interested in the FBI and guns, and that he was bullied by many other students," Purin told AFP outside his school.

"When I saw him aiming the gun at me, I thought he looked very professional, as if he had been trained for a long time."

Photos published by local media show the suspect wearing a purple school uniform and carrying a black cross-body bag, with several bullet casings visible on the ground.

Education Minister Prasert Jantararuangtong pledged to provide mental health assistance to students and ramp up security measures at educational institutions.

"We haven't checked whether students have brought weapons to school. Our level of security is not that tight," he told reporters at the school.

Thongchai Thanakat, a motorcycle-taxi driver who has worked in the area for 20 years, said he was waiting to pick up passengers outside the school when he heard more than 10 gunshots and saw a stream of students rushing out.

"Some of them weren't even wearing shoes," he told AFP.

Gun laws

Anutin earlier called the shooting "a terrible incident", posing the question: "How could this happen in our country?"

Thailand has one of the highest rates of gun ownership in the region, with around 10 million firearms estimated to be in circulation -- one for every seven inhabitants.

Past promises of tightening gun laws have not prevented repeated shootings.

Thai police shot and arrested a teenager who opened fire at a school in the south of the country in February, killing the principal and wounding two students.

The teen had stabbed a police officer with a knife, stole his pistol and then used the weapon in the shooting.

A local police chief said at the time that the suspect had been discharged from psychiatric hospitalisation.

In 2022, an ex-policeman armed with a gun and a knife stormed into a nursery in the country's north, killing 24 children and 12 adults in one of Thailand's deadliest massacres.

Meta ordered to pay $567 m in US over 'public nuisance' child harm

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
SAN FRANCISCO, AUG 7

A US state court has ordered Meta to pay $567 million and limit some features for children on its Facebook and Instagram platforms, saying the social media giant had created a "public nuisance" that endangered young users.

The ruling in New Mexico on Thursday adds to a previous fine of $375 million in the same case in March, when a jury found the social media giant liable for making youths vulnerable to predators on its platforms. While Meta said it would appeal, the decision sets a precedent at a time when dozens of other US states are pursuing lawsuits alleging harms to children and their mental health, including a major trial against Meta set to open in California next week.

"Today's decision is a victory for every parent who has worried about what social media is doing to their child and every child who deserves to grow up safer online," New Mexico Attorney General Raul Torrez said.

"This case has always been about protecting children, standing up for families, and making sure that one of the world's largest technology companies cannot profit from practices that endanger young people without consequence."

It was the first time a US court has found a social media firm guilty of creating a "public nuisance", amid thousands of lawsuits claiming Meta had put children at risk.

Around three-fourths of the $567 million payment ordered on Thursday will be earmarked for a mental health treatment fund, to be paid over five years. The remainder will be allocated to programs for "awareness and prevention" of potential dangers to youths and ensuring Meta implements the ordered changes.

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Young activists in the Maldives confront climate threats to their island nation

SOPHIA NASIF/AP
ADDU CITY, MALDIVES, JULY 7

A group of young people in the Maldives recently paddled kayaks to protest land reclamation work that was cutting through protected mangrove wetlands in a UNESCO biosphere reserve, even spray-painting "ECOCIDE" on a reclaimed patch.

The nonprofit Project ThimaaVeshi, which means "self and surroundings," is part of a new generation of activists in the Indian Ocean island nation tackling issues that are part of their daily lives: coastal erosion, plastic pollution and development-damaged ecosystems.

In Addu City in the south, the activists have focused on overdevelopment, documenting the impact on wetlands and reefs. In the capital, Male, others are tackling the plastic waste suffocating streets, hangout spots and swimming areas.

As they team up with surfers and others for cleanups, picking fishing lines out of coral reefs and piling up discarded water bottles, the groups educate youth on their right to a clean and healthy environment.

They are united in knowing that, unlike with previous generations, climate change and environmental damage are no longer a distant threat.

The Maldives has championed itself as a country fighting its vulnerability to climate change and sea level rise, but the government has said sacrifices must be made at times in favor of development, and the activists say protective measures are not happening fast enough. Experts have said the country south of India and Sri Lanka is expected to be around 80 percent uninhabitable within the next 50 years due to rising sea levels.

Youth push back against a sense of helplessness

"It was just us and a bunch of hopes and dreams," said a 21-year-old co-founder of Project ThimaaVeshi, Yameen Maumoon.

Maumoon along with Mishal Mushahid started their activism as student leaders working with the Addu City council. What started as a group of friends became a movement and a registered nonprofit after they graduated from high school.

In Male and neighboring Hulhumale, another youth group seeking formal registration, Ripple, started when friends noticed the trash building up in areas where they hung out. "One day when we were playing Minecraft, we were joking around, saying we should start making TikToks and we should start cleaning up," said a co-founder, Mariyam Maasha Waheed. What began as an informal cleanup grew after their TikTok videos gained traction.

The group now organises weekly cleanups and campaigns against plastic pollution, collaborating with others to recycle the plastic they collect.

Founders said they want environmental action to feel less intimidating and more communal.

A co-founder of the newest group seeking registration, Barnacles, Yania Hussain Ishan, became interested in environmental issues while preparing a presentation for school on protecting nature. The group focuses on climate education and youth leadership.

The constant talk on social media and elsewhere about a climate emergency has led to their generation's feeling of a lack of agency over it, Ishan said.

The groups have faced criticism over their youth

The age of the activists has drawn comments, even from government officials, that youth equates to naivety and ignorance. All three groups have been told their work is pointless, and that something as simple as a beach cleanup will not fix the overall challenges. Young people have too many emotions and can't be trusted with decision-making, the country's minister of climate change, Ali Shareef, last year told a public forum.

The activists said they know they cannot solve Maldives's problems alone. But they believe waiting for the bigger problems to be solved isn't an option. They want to shape a generation who understand their rights and pass the responsibility to future ones.

"We are deciding what kind of ancestors we will be," Ishan said.

"We are defending our home, our heritage and the right of every Maldivian child yet to be born to stand on these shores, look out at the sea and feel the same wonder and security that defines who we are."

AP/RSS

Buildings stand on Male, the capital city of the Maldives, on June 19.

Gaza beekeeper starts again on rooftop amid ruins of war

AFP/RSS

The sons of Ibrahim al-Dabba (unseen), head of the Beekeepers Cooperative in the Gaza Strip, tend to beehives with their father on the roof of a destroyed building in Gaza City's Tel al-Hawa neighbourhood, where the displaced family has taken refuge, on Wednesday.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
GAZA CITY, PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES, AUG 7

Perched on the edge of a rooftop high above Gaza City's bombed-out landscape, Ibrahim al-Dabba lovingly tends his community of bees, cultivating a rare source of hope among the ruins of the Israel-Hamas war.

Al-Dabba and his sons, donning protective netted hats and wielding metal bee smokers, gently inspect the neat rows of teeming hives.

As each frame of honeycomb is lifted out, hundreds of bees buzz lazily above the shattered urban neighbourhood—an incongruous setting for an apiary, but one the veteran beekeeper had little option but to choose.

Al-Dabba, who heads the Beekeepers Cooperative in the Gaza Strip, said the war which erupted in October 2023 obliterated the Palestinian territory's beekeeping culture.

"We had more than 40,000 beehives and more than 450 beekeepers" before the war, he told AFP from the rooftop in Gaza City's Tel al-Hawa neighbourhood.

"The situation was good, with more than 1,000 families making a living through the beekeeping sector," he added. "The war came and destroyed the beekeeping sector by more than 95 percent because most beekeepers were near the border areas," he explained.

Al-Dabba himself lost some 400 hives, which he had kept in agricultural lands east of Gaza City.

He had no choice but to relocate his remaining 35 or so hives to the roof of a residential building, but admitted the situation was far from ideal.

"Bees are supposed to be in a safe, suitable agricultural area, but today the bees are suffering just as we are," he said. Al-Dabba explained that he could not move his bees back to their previous home because it had been destroyed and the land was now under the control of the Israeli military.

"We cannot approach or enter," he said. "Just as we are displaced in the streets, the bees are also displaced on the rooftops."

The devastating war in Gaza was triggered by Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack on Israel, which resulted in the deaths of 1,221 people, according to an AFP tally based on official Israeli figures. Israel's retaliatory military campaign in Gaza has killed more than 73,300 people, according to the territory's health ministry, which operates under Hamas authority and whose figures are considered reliable by the United Nations.

Despite the ceasefire in effect since October, bloodshed has continued in the tiny territory, with the Israeli military continuing to target Palestinians they say are militants. Israel says it now controls more than 60 percent of the Gaza Strip, up from about half when the ceasefire took effect.

The humanitarian situation also remains dire, with hundreds of thousands of people living in tents and Israel tightly controlling the entry of all goods into the territory.

"We lack essential supplies because importing beekeeping equipment from the other side is not permitted," Al-Dabba told AFP, saying he had approached external organisations and ministries in Gaza and the occupied West Bank for help.

Despite the suffering and challenges of relocating his hives to an unfamiliar landscape, Al-Dabba said he found "hope after seeing the bees coexist and adapt".

FOREX

US Dollar	152.64
Euro	175.96
Pound Sterling	205.16
Swiss Franc	188.33
Australian Dollar	107.46
Canadian Dollar	108.88
Singapore Dollar	119.14
Japanese Yen (10)	9.64
Chinese Yuan	22.62
Saudi Arab Riyal	40.66
Qatari Riyal	41.89
Thai Bhat	4.62
UAE Dhiram	41.56
Malaysian Ringit	37.31
Korean Won (100)	10.78

Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

BULLION

PRICE PER TOLA

Fine Gold	Rs 296,900
Silver	Rs 4,580

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

BIZLINE

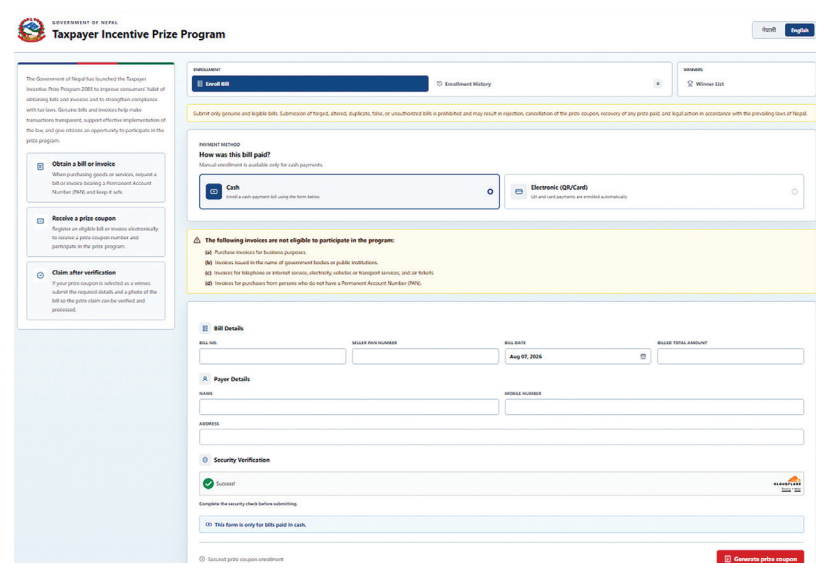
Oil extends gains and stocks mostly down on fresh Hormuz worries

HONG KONG: Oil prices extended gains and most stocks fell further on Friday amid fading optimism over a deal to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, as reports said Iran was planning to block US and Israeli ships from the waterway as part of a deal with Oman. Markets had enjoyed a healthy run-up at the start of the week as US President Donald Trump called off strikes on the Islamic republic and said an agreement was close, even though Tehran denied talks had taken place. At the same time Iran said it was close to a pact with Muscat on managing the key waterway but that the United States would need to end its own naval blockade of Iranian ports. Crude prices had begun edging up on Wednesday and rallied as much as four percent on Thursday as the Fars news agency said Iran would look to prevent US and Israeli vessels from using the strait in any deal with Oman. That dampened hopes for a full reopening of the waterway—through which about a fifth of global oil and LNG passes—and revived fears of a fresh spike in inflation and put interest rate hikes back in the picture. **(AFP)**

EXPLAINED

How Nepal's tax lottery works—and how a Rs250 purchase won Rs1 million

The government's new taxpayer incentive scheme is designed to encourage consumers to demand VAT receipts, promote digital payments and improve tax compliance by encouraging businesses to report sales more accurately.



RSS

Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle and officials announce the winners of the taxpayer incentive lottery scheme at the Ministry of Finance in Kathmandu on Friday. Photo to the right shows the webpage of the scheme's registration window.

YAGYA BANJADE
KATHMANDU, AUG 7

A consumer who spent just Rs250 at a grocery store in Kanchanpur has won the government's Rs1 million bumper prize under its new taxpayer incentive lottery scheme, with the first winners announced on Friday. The winner bought the goods from Shiva Krishna General Store in Punarbas Municipality, according to the Inland Revenue Department.

How does the lottery work?

The prize is part of a government programme designed to encourage consumers to ask for bills and promote transparent transactions. Under the scheme, anyone making a personal purchase of goods or services worth more than Rs100 in a single transaction is eligible to participate. This scheme excludes commercial purchases, transport fares, air tickets and transactions with vendors that do not issue PAN/VAT bills.

On Friday, 15 consumers won daily prizes of Rs100,000 each (Rs133,334 before tax), while one consumer was selected for the Rs1 million bumper prize (Rs750,000 after tax). The prize money will be subject to applicable taxes. The winners were selected from among 25.6 million electronic transactions and 7,077 cash transactions.

The winners were selected using the "cryptographically secure uniform random sampling without replacement" method. This ensures that every coupon has an equal chance of being selected, that the same coupon cannot be selected more than once in a single draw, and that the selection process remains completely fair and secure.

According to the Inland Revenue Department, there are over 7 million taxpayers in Nepal, most of them individuals holding personal Permanent Account Numbers (PAN). Similarly, there are around 193,724 business PAN holders, 338,316 businesses registered for Value Added Tax (VAT), and 121,682 excise duty licence holders.

Why has the government introduced the lottery?

The programme is intended to encourage consumers to ask for tax invoices whenever they purchase goods and services. By increasing consumer demand for tax invoices, the government hopes to discourage businesses from hiding sales and underreporting their income, thereby improving tax compliance.

Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle announced the taxpayer incentive programme in the federal budget for fiscal year 2026-27. The idea is to turn consumers into an additional layer of tax monitoring by giving them a financial incentive to insist on documented transactions. Winners will be selected through a computerised system in the presence of senior government officials, invited dignitaries and media representatives.

Keshav Raghuvanshi, information officer at the Inland Revenue Department, said the programme is designed to encourage consumers to ask for a VAT invoice, improve the recording of business transactions and strengthen tax compliance.

Who can participate in the lottery?

Consumers who purchase goods or services and make payments through digital channels such as QR are automatically entered into the scheme. However, winners must produce their receipt/tax invoice to claim the prize.

Consumers paying in cash can also participate, but they have to take a PAN or VAT invoice from the seller and upload it through the Inland Revenue Department's website. After uploading the tax invoice, they receive a prize coupon that makes them eligible for the lottery. The scheme covers purchases made between July 17 and July 31 for the first draw.

How are the winners selected?

The government will hold two prize draws each month. Winners will be announced on the 16th day of each Nepali month for purchases made from the first to the 15th day, and on the final day of the month for purchases made during the remaining days.

The 15 daily winners are selected separately from transactions made on each of the 15 days. The bumper prize, however, is drawn from all eligible consumers who made purchases during the first half of the Nepali month. The Inland Revenue Department is responsible for the technical arrangements for the lottery system.

What does the scheme mean for consumers and businesses?

For consumers, the scheme provides a chance to win cash simply by asking for proof of purchase and using formal payment channels. More importantly, the government expects the incentive will make consumers more likely to ask for VAT invoices. For businesses, greater demand for PAN and VAT invoices could make it harder to conceal sales and evade taxes. The government hopes that this consumer-driven pressure will encourage more transparent transactions and improve tax compliance.

How are winners notified?

The department will notify winners by SMS and email and publish their names on its official website and social media platforms.

Prize winners must submit their claims within 15 days of the announcement at the nearest Inland Revenue Office. They will be required to produce the original tax invoice, a citizenship certificate, national identity card, passport or driving licence, bank account details and a PAN card.

A 25 percent windfall tax will be deducted from the prize before payment, in accordance with Nepal's tax laws. The remaining amount will be deposited into the winner's bank account within 10 days after verification of the required documents.

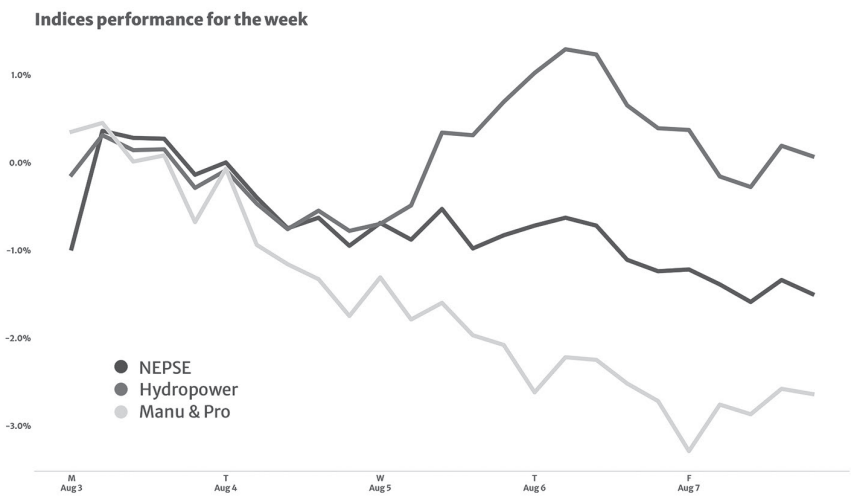
NEPSE This Week

2,650.09 ▼ -35.45 -1.32%

Turnover	Shares Traded	Gainers	Losers
Rs. 21.09 Billion	46.13 Million	51 Stocks	217 Stocks

Data provided by npstocks.com

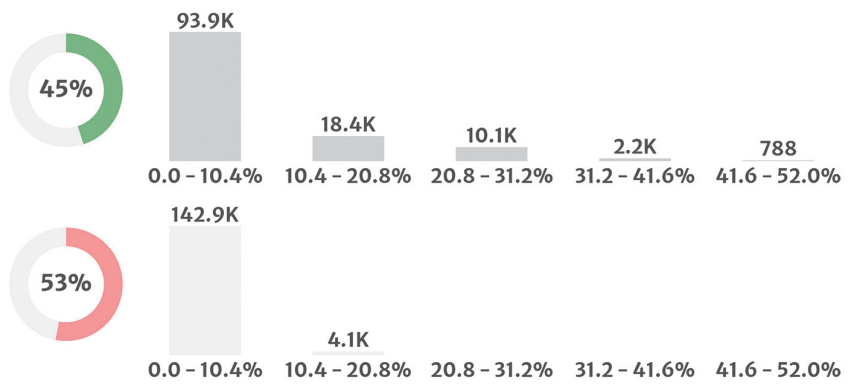
TRENDING STOCKS: KKHC, RIDI, ECL, JOSHI, CFCL, AKJCL



	At Close	% Chg	Volume (Rs.)	Advancers	Decliners	52wk High	52wk Low	YTD Chg
HydroPower	3,729.96	0.38%	10,266.9M	26	78	4,151.22	3,120.66	11.69%
Trading	3,387.90	0.25%	11.0M	2		4,373.13	3,188.66	-10.83%
Microfinance	4,562.77	-1.03%	641.1M	11	38	5,478.06	4,483.06	-7.35%
Hotels And Tourism	7,289.43	-1.09%	458.1M	3	5	8,570.32	5,775.66	4.87%
Non Life Insurance	10,607.18	-1.33%	187.0M	1	12	12,828.33	10,302.55	-3.53%
Development Bank	5,598.39	-1.37%	1,462.7M	2	14	6,533.59	5,166.72	1.95%
Investment	97.09	-1.37%	752.9M		7	115.30	94.07	-5.27%
Finance	2,398.02	-1.59%	1,108.9M		13	2,718.98	2,137.39	3.25%
Life Insurance	11,828.29	-1.78%	416.3M	1	13	13,998.19	11,670.25	-9.21%
Others	1,926.57	-2.03%	410.8M	1	7	2,822.31	1,866.70	-18.66%
Banking	1,460.63	-2.06%	2,904.1M		18	1,572.61	1,308.53	6.57%
Manu.& Pro.	10,394.12	-2.49%	2,468.5M	4	12	12,106.76	6,943.38	21.16%

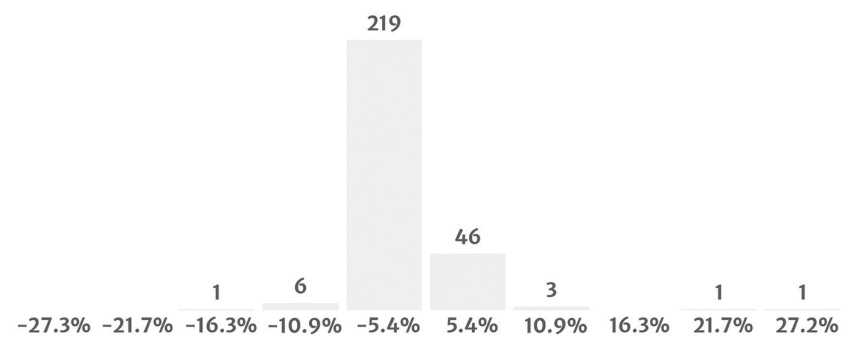
Trade distribution

Of all transactions in the week, 45% increased prices while 53% decreased prices. 142.9K transactions decreased prices between 0.0% and -10.4%



Price change distribution

Prices of 219 companies decreased between 0.0% and 5.4% this week.



Top gainers

	At Close (Rs.)	% Chg	52wk High (Rs.)
Everest Colour Limited	1,665.00	27.17%	1,980.00
Solu Hydropower Limited	688.00	17.83%	875.50
Khanikhola Hydropower Co.	323.00	10.84%	360.00
Aatmanirbhar Laghubitta	5,999.00	6.20%	7,560.00
Bottlers Nepal (Terai)	11,645.00	5.86%	12,780.00
Narayani Development Bank	825.40	5.12%	1,835.00
Upper Lohore Khola Hydropower	379.00	4.70%	599.00
Barahi Hydropower	497.00	3.54%	820.00
Sagarmatha Jalabidhyut	458.00	3.15%	618.00
Kutheli Bukhari Small Hydropower	980.00	2.51%	1,840.38

Top losers

	At Close (Rs.)	% Chg	52wk Low (Rs.)
Reliance Spinning Mills Limited	2,620.00	-12.64%	300.00
Samudayik Laghubitta	982.10	-9.48%	975.00
Bhagawati Hydropower	556.00	-6.55%	516.10
Salapa Bikas Bank Limited	979.00	-6.32%	300.00
Kalinchock Hydropower	816.00	-6.21%	300.00
Mathillo Mailun Khola Jalvidhyut	454.90	-6.01%	429.10
Him Star Urja Company	696.00	-5.95%	252.20
Bhujung Hydropower Limited	694.00	-5.10%	270.10
Ganapati Laghubitta	1,154.00	-5.02%	1,130.50
Om Megashree Pharmaceuticals	893.00	-5.00%	848.00

Top turnover

	Turnover (Rs.)	At Close (Rs.)	% Chg
Ridi Power	1,391.1M	375.00	1.35%
Solu Hydropower Limited	1,319.3M	688.00	17.83%
Khanikhola Hydropower Co.	1,024.1M	323.00	10.84%
Reliance Spinning Mills Limited	678.4M	2,620.00	-12.64%
Ankhu Khola Jalvidhyut Company	637.3M	362.10	-1.07%
National Hydro Power	577.1M	273.00	1.34%
Central Finance	555.7M	660.00	-0.30%
Everest Colour Limited	482.4M	1,665.00	27.17%
NRN Infrastructure and Dev.	474.1M	1,371.00	-3.45%
Siddhartha Bank	436.2M	410.00	-1.06%

Most active

	Stocks Traded	At Close (Rs.)	% Chg
Ridi Power	3.676M	375.00	1.35%
Khanikhola Hydropower Co.	3.254M	323.00	10.84%
National Hydro Power	2.062M	273.00	1.34%
Solu Hydropower Limited	2.024M	688.00	17.83%
Ankhu Khola Jalvidhyut Company	1.727M	362.10	-1.07%
Global Ime Bank	1.680M	251.00	-4.20%
Kumari Bank	1.490M	215.00	-4.44%
Siddhartha Bank	1.048M	410.00	-1.06%
Central Finance	0.827M	660.00	-0.30%
Sanima Bank	0.812M	370.00	-0.72%

CAN races against time and weather to remake Kirtipur pitches

While curators strip Kirtipur's clay to give pacers a fighting chance in the NPL before tight deadlines take over, Mulpani grounds have the luxury of time ahead of the U19 World Cup.

POST PHOTOS: HEMANTA SHRESTHA

(Left) A ground staff member manually sprigs local grass into damp clay as part of pitch renovation work at the Lower Mulpani Ground on Friday. Ground staff and curators work in tandem to level and sprig fresh turf on the main pitch block at the TU International Cricket Ground in Kirtipur on Friday.

BINOD PANDEY
KATHMANDU, AUG 7

Madhu Tamang dug his thumbs into the black clay, feeling for roots on the pitches at the Tribhuvan University International Cricket Ground in Kirtipur on Friday morning.

Around Tamang, ground staff stripped away topsoil—scraping the pitch down to its foundation to yank out dead vegetation before transplanting fresh local grass taken from inside the 30-yard circle.

"Ground staff have removed the ruined soil all the way down to the roots while preparing the new pitch, after which they started planting grass, which will be completed today," said Roshan Kumar Singh, vice president of the Cricket Association of Nepal (CAN) and tournament coordinator for the U19 World Cup preparations.

For two years, this strip of dirt has held a dirty secret in Nepali cricket.

When the previous season of the NPL kicked off, franchise scouts built rosters around pace because Kirtipur's pitches were laid with fresh green grass. Teams anticipated a permanent shift in surface behaviour—one that would offer genuine carry for pacers alongside traditional spin.

Early on, it delivered. Sudurpaschim Royals' Scott Kuggeleijn, Chitwan Rhinos' Sohail Tanvir and Rijan Dhakal, Janakpur Bolts' Kishor Mahato, and Kathmandu Gorkhas' Karan KC found immediate success.

But the seam movement was short-lived. Within a week, the grass withered, and the pitch reverted to its low, slow nature. Spinners like Janakpur's Lalit Narayan Rajbanshi, Karnali Yaks' Bipin Sharma, and Sudurpaschim's Saif Zaib dominated the remainder of the tournament.

While the TU Ground itself has gradually transformed into a modern international facility with grandstands and floodlights, the pitch characteristics have remained unchanged. Now, CAN is undertaking a major pitch overhaul across three venues ahead of the upcoming NPL third edition and the 16-nation ICC U19 Women's T20 World Cup—the largest cricket event Nepal has co-hosted with Bangladesh.

Grass laying at Kirtipur was completed on Friday, following earlier work at Upper Mulpani, while work at Lower Mulpani remains ongoing. In total, eight pitches are being constructed in Kirtipur, seven in Upper Mulpani, and six in Lower Mulpani.

"The crucial factor is how long the grass remains on the wicket. As long as the grass stays, the pitch remains good. Once it dies off, the surface turns flat," Singh explained. "If grass roots penetrate four inches deep, they bind the soil together, allowing the wicket to set properly."

Achieving that four-inch depth typically requires four months. However, curators have barely two and a half months before the NPL returns after Dashain. Furthermore, as the month of Bhadra begins, root growth naturally slows.

"Given the tight timeframe, the chances of roots reaching the full four inches are slim," Singh admitted. "Had we used Bermuda grass, the wicket would have lasted for years, but we simply did not have the lead time. Still, we are confident it will perform well."

CAN is also leaning on the weather. Because deep moisture encourages root penetration, a prolonged monsoon could work in their favour despite the delayed start.

"If the monsoon stretches out, it will actually help," Singh noted. "We expect grass to hold on the wicket for about two weeks into the NPL. After that, based on past behaviour, the pitch will likely turn flat again."

The entire pitch renovation across Kirtipur and Mulpani is estimated at Rs7 to 8 million—excluding major infrastructure—funded upfront by CAN and subject to reimbursement by the ICC.

While TU Ground will be the primary host for the NPL, all three venues will serve the U19 World Cup, with Lower Mulpani accommodating 5,000 fans and Upper Mulpani adding a 2,000-seat temporary stand. Curators Prafulla Pradhan and Bangladesh's Mohammad Abdul Al Mamun are overseeing operations at Mulpani.

"Once the playing surfaces are finalised, full facility upgrades will commence at Kirtipur—including renovated dressing rooms, ice baths, dining halls, VIP boxes, numbered seating, and streamlined entry gates," Singh said. "Security remains a top priority, and comprehensive protocols will be locked in once ICC representatives arrive."

For CAN and its groundskeepers, the coming weeks will reveal whether time and weather are on their side—or if Kirtipur's turf will once again have the final say.

Trump celebrates US Winter Olympians and Paralympians at the White House

WILL WEISSERT/AP
WASHINGTON, AUG 7

President Donald Trump hosted on Thursday dozens of Winter Olympians and Paralympians for a reception honouring their accomplishments in the Milano Cortina games earlier this year.

Nearly half of the Team USA athletes who competed in Italy came to the East Room reception, according to the White House, along with coaches, staff, and other representatives.

Among those attending was speedskater Jordan Stolz, whom Trump said was the single most-decorated American Olympian of the 2026 Games while marvelling at his "very strong legs." Stolz, during a rally with the president in Wisconsin earlier this summer, briefly placed a gold medal around Trump's neck.

"Today, we're truly honoured to welcome to the White House perhaps the greatest group of Winter Olympians in American history," Trump said, as athletes in USA windbreakers filled rows of risers behind him.

They gave Trump a Team USA jacket and sneakers, and the president promised to hand out special coins and invited attendees to a post-event tour of the Oval Office.

Three hundred US athletes participated in this year's Winter Olympics and Paralympics, winning 57 medals in total. Thursday's event was originally scheduled to be held in the stone patio area that Trump had built near the Rose Garden, but was moved indoors as heavy evening rains fell.

"These men and women sacrificed years of their lives and countless early mornings to be the best in the world," Trump said.

Then, apparently recalling himself as a one-time athlete, the president added, "That's right. I guess you get up early in the morning, don't you? I remember those days. But I didn't do it as well as you. Not quite."

Trump also asked who was already training for the next Olympics and most the athletes raised their hands. He noted that the 2034 Winter Olympics will be held in Salt Lake City and that Los Angeles is hosting the 2028 Summer Games.

The Olympic gold medal-winning US men's hockey team visited Trump at the White House in February and later received about a two-minute bipartisan standing ovation during his State of the Union address that night. Members of the gold-medal-winning US women's hockey team declined an invitation to attend the speech, citing previously scheduled academic and personal commitments.

Trump said at the time that the women's hockey team would be honoured at a later date, and two of its members, Abbey Murphy and Joy Dunne, attended Thursday's celebration and got shout-outs from Trump. He also spoke at length about the men's team, even though its members didn't make a return to the White House trip. In a video posted earlier Thursday on social media, ice dancers Emilea Zingas and Vadym Kolesnik indicated that they did not want to come to the White House.

Trump stayed mostly focused on the Olympics and not politics in his remarks, though he told those assembled, "We've done a lot to help save women's sports," drawing only a muted reaction from some athletes. At his "Make America Great Again" rallies, Trump often gets cheers for declaring his opposition to transgender rights. Trump also said Thursday that we're "saving college sports" and called on Congress to pass legislation overhauling the way such sports are governed, promising to sign it.

"We're doing everything we can to protect the cherished sporting traditions that have long been part of our nation from the beginning," the president said.

PHOTO: AP/RSS

President Donald Trump during a reception honouring Winter Olympians and Paralympians for their accomplishments in the Milano Cortina games earlier this year in the East Room of the White House on Thursday.

HOROSCOPE

ARIES (March 21-April 19)
Listen to your heart upon awakening to ensure messages from the universe or within are fully received. Indulge childlike whimsy and try to make the world seem new. +

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)
A restful and deeply restorative energy washes over you early this morning, dearest Taurus. Be mindful of how your mind and effort are put to use, taking care to prioritise activities or indulgences that go beyond the surface.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21)
You may feel called to spread joy, creatively collaborate, or share knowledge. Allow yourself to shine, and the people around you might start to see you in a new light.

CANCER (June 22-July 22)
Take your time getting up once dawn breaks, moving slowly in an attempt to bring ethereal details into the material realms. Allow yourself to hide away from the outside world and explore the universe within.

LEO (July 23-August 22)
There's a vast world filled with interesting people for you to explore, darling lion. Though your unique style might not be everyone's cup of tea, you'll attract like-minded allies who will provide the acceptance you crave.

VIRGO (August 23-September 22)
Thoughts and emotions you've been blocking find a way to the surface, dearest Virgo. Take time to sort through your psyche upon awakening. You'll quickly discover that your resilience outweighs any challenges that lie ahead.

LIBRA (September 23-October 22)
Be with the people who make you sparkle, sweet Libra. Large gatherings will be highly invigorating, and you'll easily find your place amongst like-minded individuals.

SCORPIO (October 23-November 21)
A sharpened third eye helps you see each situation from a higher perspective, especially when long-term goals, sacrifice, and commitment are explored. These vibes are perfect for vetting romantic or business partners.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21)
Allow yourself to be fueled by loving relationships, spiritual development, and grand adventures. Romance will be on your mind as this energy unfolds, inspiring you to search for a mate if you don't already have one.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19)
Seek empowerment in small increments, dear Capricorn. Focus on what can be eliminated from your life to make space for improvement.

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)
Work on building relationships with people who bring out your most creative and authentic self, dear Aquarius. Be mindful of the influence you have over loved ones, especially when it comes to siblings or younger peers.

PISCES (February 19-March 20)
Allow yourself to stay under the covers a bit longer than usual, countering this leisure with soft stretches and a healthy brunch once you've awakened.

ASTROLOGY.COM

CROSSWORD

ACROSS
1 "Mamma Mia" group
5 Ocean liners
10 Pops
14 Invent
15 Mixer for gin
16 Currier and —
17 Lose feathers
18 Poetic Muse
19 Electrical unit
20 Tangled
22 Express a belief
24 Make healthy
25 Baseball's — Musial
26 Strike
28 Light musical drama
32 Shielded from the sun
33 Unsullied
34 Lubricate
35 "The — in the Hat"
36 Rotten
37 Scot's cap
38 Raw material
39 Stringed instrument
41 Documents
44 End point
46 Beast of burden
47 Aide (Abbr.)
48 Sports group
49 Slapping sound
51 Certain musician
55 Person
56 Range in South America
59 Case
60 Duration
61 Racket
62 Uncommon
63 Louver
64 Suit material
65 Winter ride

DOWN
1 Peak
2 Benefit
3 Bank note
4 Heartburn remedy
5 Directed
6 Army
7 Buy a pig — — poke
8 Orchestra's place
9 Skateboard cousin
10 Heavenly
11 Cosmetics brand
12 Remove
13 Defunct airliner
21 Small and attractive
23 Reduce
25 Tater
26 Portion
27 Alma —
28 Fall birthstones
29 Tribal emblem
30 Glittering headband
31 Charity
32 Go — -free
36 Boxing match
39 Word on a credit card
40 Moment
41 Gratified
42 Of a wing
43 Coddles
45 Wooden hammer
48 The ones here
49 Dirty
50 Big cat
52 Romance lang.
53 Certain
54 Even
55 Rds.
57 "— you see it ..."
58 Expire

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED

F	A	M	E	■	B	A	S	T	E	■	■	T	S	P
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T	E	L	L	O	F	F	■	E	N	R	A	G	E	D
■	■	■	A	B	E	T	S	■	I	A	N	■	■	■
P	E	R	I	O	D	■	L	A	N	G	U	A	G	E
A	L	E	N	E	■	G	A	N	G	■	T	R	A	D
L	O	B	■	■	H	I	N	T	S	■	■	R	U	G
E	P	E	E	■	E	S	T	E	■	G	R	A	Z	E
D	E	L	I	C	A	T	E	■	S	L	A	Y	E	D
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A	L	P	H	O	R	N	■	J	A	B	B	E	R	S
L	O	O	T	■	O	I	L	E	R	■	L	A	I	C
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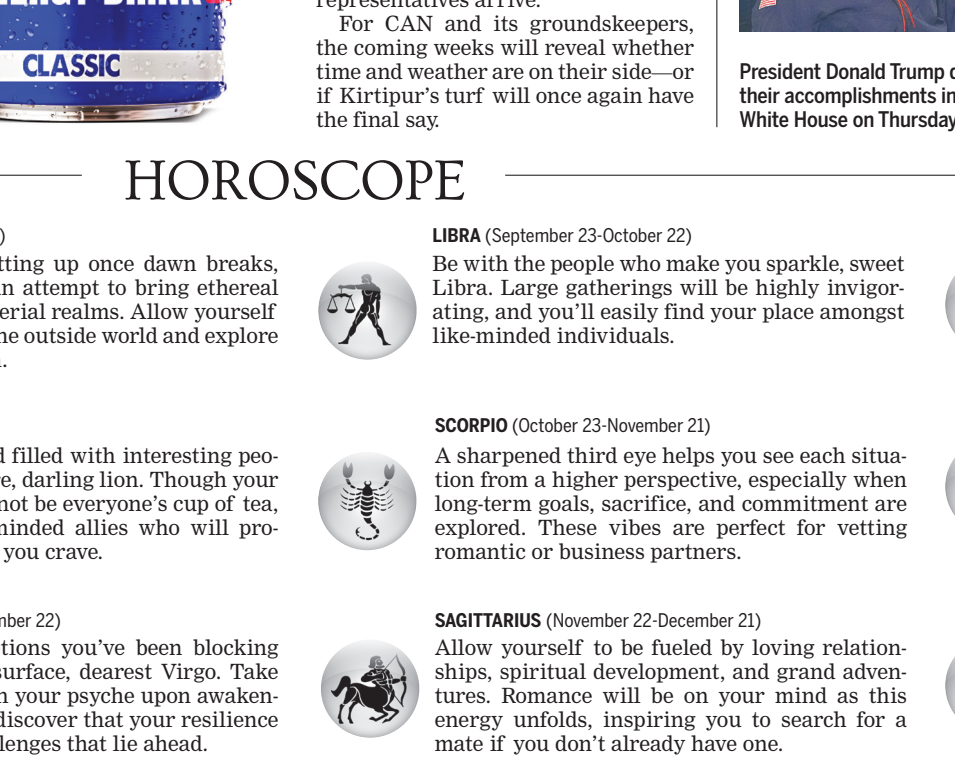

SUDOKU

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7	3	8	4	1	5	9	2	6
4	6	9	8	2	7	5	3	1
5	7	1	9	3	4	6	8	2
3	8	2	5	6	1	4	9	7
6	4	7	1	8	3	2	5	9
8	1	3	2	5	9	7	6	4
2	9	5	7	4	6	8	1	3

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YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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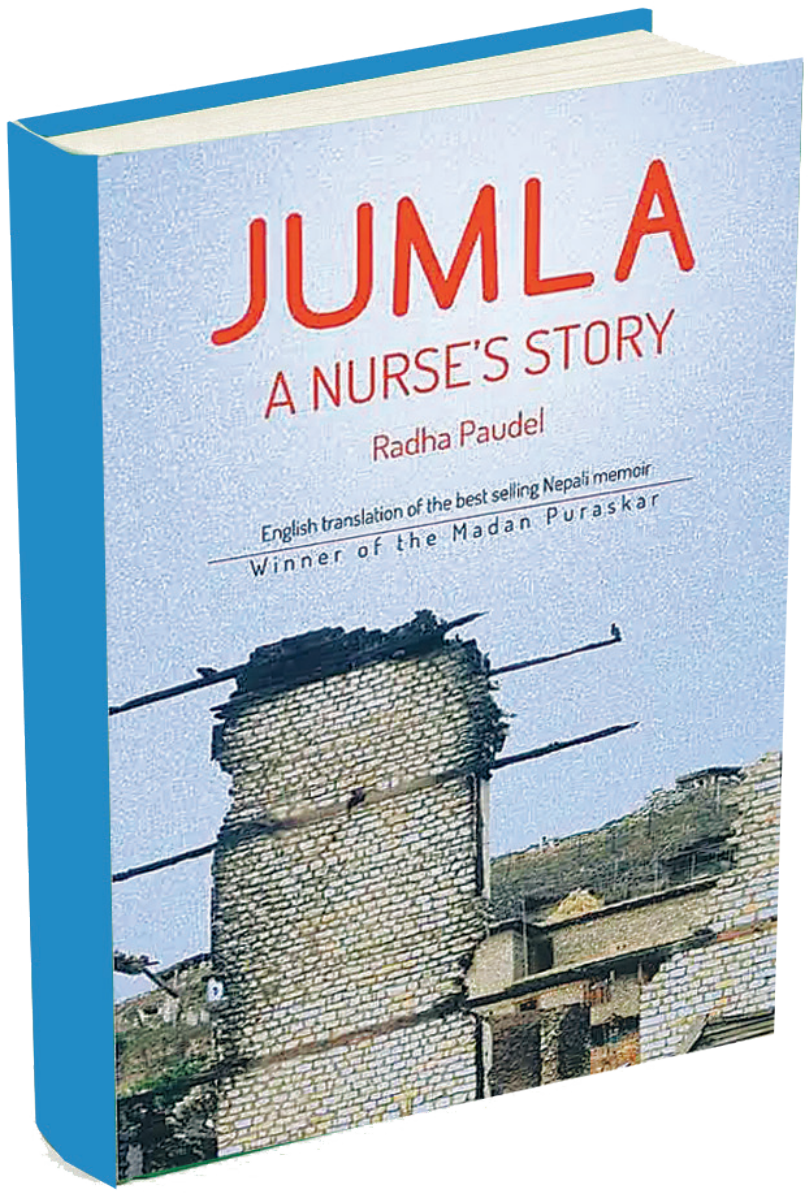
DIFFICULTY RATING: ★☆☆☆☆



Jumla: A Nurse's Story
Author: Radha Paudel
Year: 2013 (in Nepali); English translation in 2017
Publisher: Nepalaya

Staying when leaving is easier

'Jumla: A Nurse's Story' gains new relevance in an era of mass migration, reminding readers that some callings lie where the need is greatest.

RIVASH RIJAL
KATHMANDU

Radha Paudel's Madan Puraskar-winning 'Attack on Khalanga' has been out for 13 years now. The English translation itself, 'Jumla: A Nurse's Story', is coming up on a decade of being on the shelves.

The book recounts Paudel's experiences leading up to, during and after the Maoist attack on Khalanga, Jumla's district headquarters. It is a record of the poverty- and misery-filled lives of the everyday people of Jumla. There are striking examples of this misery in the book. For example, in one part, Paudel offers a bar of soap to a lady washing herself by the river. The lady begins to bleed from her hands after she uses the soap, her skin not used to it.

The book is also about the Nepali Civil War. Paudel shares such extensive details of the Maoist attack on Khalanga that one can picture what it might have been like.

But along with these two popular ideas about what the story is about, there is another increasingly relevant one—that of migration in the author's case, but also generally of immigration.

It is through listening to her father's stories of Jumla when she was a child that Paudel grows curious about the place. He often used to tell her, she writes, that she should return to Jumla as an adult to do what she can to help the people of the district. Paudel herself grew up in poverty, but whenever she brought it up as a child, her father used to tell her that they may be poor, but poorer still were the people of Jumla.

The author does well for herself. After completing an undergraduate nursing degree, she goes on to get her master's in public health. And when all of her friends from nursing school move to the cities and sometimes abroad, like to the United Kingdom, Paudel moves to Jumla.

She recalls with much disdain how her friends who have moved to the UK would call her up and tell her to join them. They would tell her about all the facilities and opportunities awaiting her there, only if she would move. Multiple times in the book, Paudel shares the sentiment that there is no lack of nurses in the UK; if she does not go, someone else definitely will.

BOOK REVIEW

Her retelling of the death of a pregnant woman in her arms is jarring.

Where there is a lack is in Jumla, and there, no one is willing to go. This is her reason for going. Jumla needs her; the United Kingdom does not.

At times, it feels to Paudel that not going to Jumla would almost be immoral. It would be a betrayal of the people there, for whom her services could be and are the difference between life and death. Her retelling of the death of a pregnant woman in her arms, just days after her arrival in Jumla, is a particularly jarring one.

The question then asked of the reader is what their duty is and to whom their duty is. As someone with the ability to help, to not help is simply wrong action—the way Paudel sees it.

In the middle of a civil war, with increasing Maoist activity around Jumla, Paudel's friends, her siblings, her mother and even her father, who had sown the seed of Jumla in her mind, all plead with her not to go. When the Maoist attack on Khalanga does come, and Paudel's employers come to airlift her out of the district. She leaves, but as she does, she laments for the Jumlis who have no safe place to which to flee.

Paudel comes back to Khalanga four weeks after the attack. When writing her book in 2013, she was still actively working for the betterment of the people of Jumla. She wins awards and recognition for her work; she manages to raise tens of lakhs and help thousands of families.

It is difficult not to feel hypocritical or greedy when reading 'Jumla: A Nurse's Story'. Here is a woman of such drive and education and courage, someone who could create a comfortable life for herself no matter where she went and what she did.

But she chooses to live with the poor and the downtrodden, to eat and sleep and live like them and with them, even when she could very well end up dead. Throughout my read of the book, I was in awe of Paudel's sheer selflessness and sense of duty. It very rarely felt like she did anything for herself.

She has unshakeable resolve and an ability to work through the darkness of doubt and uncertainty. And in the wake of life's rat race, in the race to secure your passport and then your acceptance to a foreign university, then your visa and finally your ticket away from Nepal, Paudel's book is a discomforting yet necessary read that asks the reader to think about what they should do with their lives and why.

EVENTS

Shrawan Sangam

PHOTO: COURTESY OF UTPALA/FACEBOOK

Aavya Luxe Events is hosting a gathering of yoga, wellness and devotion at Utpala Café, featuring morning yoga, shopping stalls, high tea and networking, and an evening of bhajans.

When: August 9
Where: Utpala Café, Bauddha
Time: 7:00 am to 8:00 pm
Entry: Rs899 to Rs2,499

Finish That Thing

Sattya Media Arts Collective is opening its space for creatives to sit down together and finish their pending creative projects.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF SATTYA/FACEBOOK

When: August 8
Where: Sattya Media Arts Collective, Lalitpur
Time: 2:00 pm to 5:00 pm
Entry: Rs100

Folklore Zine Workshop

PHOTO: COURTESY OF WINSTON'S SPEAKEASY/FACEBOOK

Winston's Speakeasy is hosting a zine-making workshop centred on storytelling, weaving together myths and tales from local communities through art.
When: August 8
Where: Winston's Speakeasy, Sanepa
Time: 1:00 pm to 2:30 pm
Entry: Rs250

Doll Making Workshop

PHOTO: COURTESY OF PULUKISI/FACEBOOK

Baakhan Nyane Waa and Pulukisi Restaurant present a doll-making workshop tied to the upcoming Gathamuga festival, where participants can craft their own doll while learning about the stories and rituals behind the Newa festival.

When: August 8
Where: Pulukisi Restaurant, Lal Colony Marg
Time: 2:00 pm to 5:00 pm
Entry: Rs500 (includes materials and light refreshments)

European Union Youth Fest

The European Union Youth Fest returns with a full day of AI workshops, innovation showcases, hackathons, mentoring sessions and information on global education opportunities for young people.

When: August 12
Where: The Malla Hotel, Kathmandu
Time: 10:00 am to 4:30 pm
Entry: Free

Film Literacy Campaign

Oscar International College is hosting a free filmmaking workshop for recent +2 graduates, covering screenwriting, filmmaking fundamentals, acting basics and a film screening with a Q&A session.

When: August 9
Where: Oscar International College, Sukedhara
Time: 11:00 am to 4:00 pm
Entry: Free

Anushruti by Anushilan

'Anushruti' is a Kathak dance production by Anushilan, featuring live music, storytelling and classical dance performances presented by the institute's second-semester students.

When: August 8
Where: Rastriya Nachghar, Jamal
Time: 5:30 pm onwards
Entry: Rs500 to Rs 1,000

Messy Creativity

NovaNest is hosting 'Messy Creativity', a hands-on workshop where children can build, sculpt, draw and explore through playful art activities before taking home their own creations.

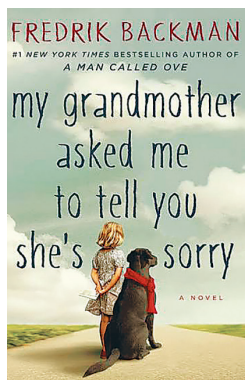
When: August 8
Where: Winston's Speakeasy, Sanepa
Time: 2:00 pm
Entry: Rs350

PHOTO: COURTESY OF OSCAR/FACEBOOK

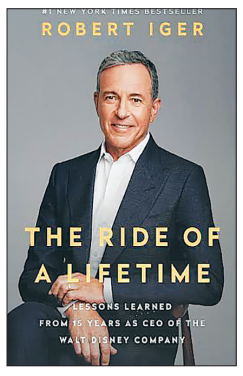
BEST-SELLERS | NEW RELEASES

Fiction

1. My Grandmother Asked Me to Tell You She's Sorry by Fredrik Backman
2. Not Quite Dead Yet by Holly Jackson
3. Great Big Beautiful Life by Emily Henry
4. The Girl on the Train by Paula Hawkins
5. The Guest List by Lucy Foley

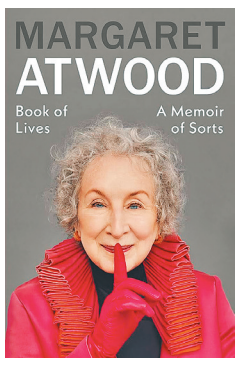


Non-Fiction



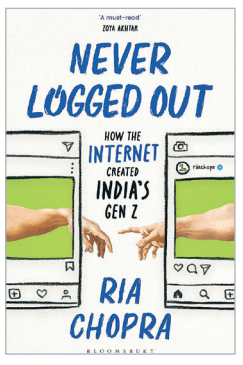
1. The Ride of a Lifetime by Robert Iger
2. Mein Kampf by Adolf Hitler
3. The Four by Scott Galloway
4. Clean & Green by Nancy Birtwhistle
5. The Basic Laws of Human Stupidity by Carlo M Cipolla

Source: Ekta Books



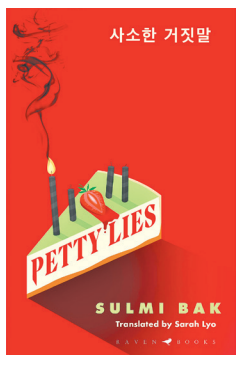
Book of Lives
Author: Margaret Atwood
Price: Rs3,198
Publication: Penguin Books

Few writers have chronicled the human condition with the wit, acuity and imagination of Margaret Atwood, and "Book of Lives" offers an intimate glimpse into the experiences that shaped one of literature's most formidable voices. Part memoir, part literary reflection, the book traces Atwood's journey from an unconventional childhood in the Canadian wilderness to international acclaim, weaving together personal anecdotes, creative milestones and encounters with history. Rich in candour and intellectual elegance, it explores the interplay between memory, identity and artistic ambition while revealing the inspirations behind her enduring body of work.



Never Logged Out
Author: Ria Chopra
Price: Rs798
Publication: Bloomsbury

In 'Never Logged Out', published under Bloomsbury, Ria Chopra offers a perceptive and deeply relatable portrait of India's Gen Z, examining the digital world that has shaped its ambitions, relationships, identities and anxieties. Through eight incisive essays, she blends personal anecdotes with astute cultural commentary. Rather than romanticising or condemning life online, Ria Chopra presents a nuanced meditation on how technology quietly moulds memory, privacy and selfhood. Witty, reflective and intellectually engaging, 'Never Logged Out' captures the zeitgeist of a generation raised with the internet as both companion and habitat.

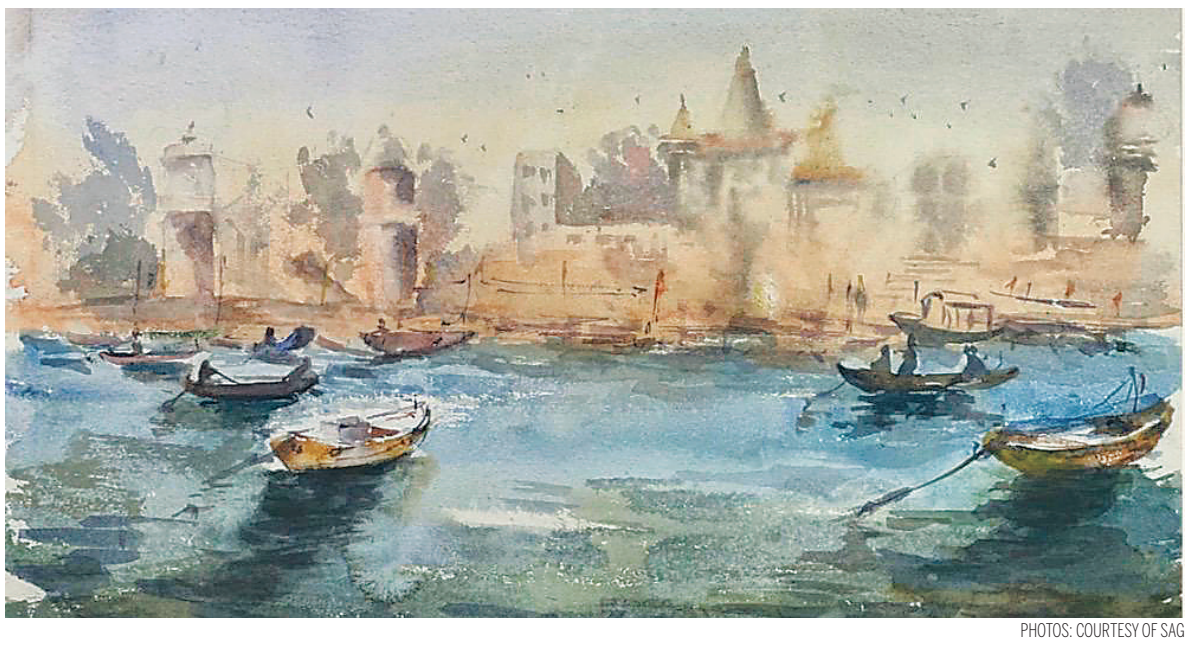


Petty Lies
Author: Sulmi Bak
Price: Rs638
Publication: Raven Books

A single act of deception can unravel a lifetime of secrets. "Petty Lies" is a gripping psychological thriller that delves into the sinister depths of vengeance, family, and hidden truths. The story follows Mira, a young tutor who enters the home of the wealthy Moon family with a concealed motive: to seek revenge for the devastating loss of her own family. As she becomes entangled with the family's troubled dynamics, Mira discovers that the reality she believed in is far more complicated than it appears. The novel examines guilt and the boundaries between justice and cruelty.

Seeing Banaras through different eyes

From cremation ghats and Ganga Aarti to architecture and portraiture, Lalitkala Campus artists transform a shared study trip into distinct visual narratives.



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF SAG

KIAN LEE MITTY

'HOMAGE TO BANARAS', running at the Kathmandu Art Gallery from July 19 to August 8, brings together close to twenty emerging Nepali artists from Lalitkala Campus, each of whom travelled to Varanasi, the sacred sister city of Kathmandu, on the same educational visit and returned with a different city entirely.

Walking through the Kathmandu Art Gallery's rooms, the show reads less like a single-artist thesis and more like a chorus: portraits, ghats, boats, cremation grounds, and flame, all rendered by hands that had never touched Varanasi before and were changed by it anyway.

The gallery has arranged the work loosely by artist, where one gets to experience the works of students and alumni of Lalitkala and how they interact with each other when remembering their time in Varanasi.

To understand why so many artists converge on the same city with such different results, it helps to understand what Varanasi actually is. Sitting on the banks of the Ganges in northern India, Varanasi, also known as Kashi and Benares, is considered one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world and one of the holiest sites in Hinduism. Pilgrims travel there to bathe in the river, believing its waters purify the soul, and many Hindus consider it auspicious to die and be cremated there, since doing so is believed to grant liberation from the cycle of rebirth. That belief is made physically visible at Manikarnika Ghat, where funeral pyres burn without pause, day and night, in full public view.

A few steps away, daily life carries on around them: vendors, boatmen, worshippers, and tourists occupying the same narrow lanes and stone steps. Nowhere else does a city hold devotion and mortality this close together, in the open, as a matter of routine rather than an event.

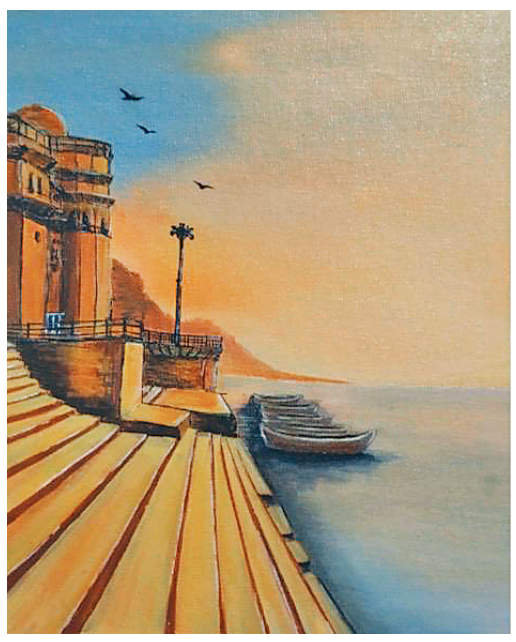
That collision between the sacred and the ordinary is exactly what pulls the Lalitkala Campus artists towards Varanasi, and it's what the Kathmandu Art Gallery's exhibition design leans into. Arjun Basnet's work grew directly out of witnessing that collision at Manikarnika Ghat, where the continuous coexistence of cremation rituals and everyday life led him towards reflections on mortality and the fragile nature of existence.

Rather than depicting death itself, his pieces, including "Galactic Serenity-Souls" and the dry-point work "Witness to Ash I", use circular forms to represent imagined souls drifting through an infinite universe, carrying traces of memory beyond the physical body. He's careful to frame these forms as metaphors rather than literal depictions of an afterlife, images meant to invite contemplation of transformation and impermanence rather than illustrate them directly. Placed near the gallery's entrance, Basnet's work sets the emotional register for much of what follows.

Fire recurs across the show in a gentler form as well, in the nightly ritual of the Ganga Aarti, the fire ceremony performed on the ghats as an offering to the river. Bipran Chettri's "Ganga Aarati" traces back to witnessing the ceremony during a college study tour, an experience he describes as leaving a lasting impression through its rhythm, light, and devotion, and one that deepened his interest in symbolism and narrative.

Kajal Yadav arrives at the same ritual from a different angle: her paintings "Eternal Flame of Banaras" and "Breath of the Sacred" try to capture the glowing flame and rising smoke of the Aarti as an expression of what she calls the eternal flow of the Ganga. Hung together on the same gallery wall, Chettri's and Yadav's paintings let the Kathmandu Art Gallery stage a small conversation between two artists who never planned to be in dialogue, both reaching for the same flame from different distances.

Mukti Chalise, working in transparent watercolour washes of his own, produced 'The Ganges' and 'Assi Ghat' out of a broader interest in architecture, light, and atmosphere, moving beyond literal representation to capture what he calls the essence of a place. Pratibha Tiwari takes the river's traffic as her subject instead: her piece 'Eyes adrift' uses eye-shaped boats as silent observers drifting through the water, witnessing rituals, grief, prayer, and cremation without judgment, each boat's eye painted a different colour to suggest that the city remains the same while every person who visits carries away a different Banaras.



HOMAGE TO BANARAS
Where: Kathmandu Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited, Kathmandu
Time: 11:00 am to 5:00 pm
Entry: Free

The gallery has given 'Eyes adrift' its own sightline down the length of the room, letting its long, narrow canvas mimic the river it depicts.

Not every artist in the show is drawn to ritual or water. Some found their Varanasi in its architecture and its people instead, and the Kathmandu Art Gallery has grouped this work in a quieter side room. Henjilee Limbu, whose practice spans painting, writing, and music, found the city itself felt like a temple to her, not only in its ghats and shrines but in its withered architecture, narrow lanes, and forgotten windows, works she titled 'Where the city watches' as a way of recognising holiness in the ordinary.

Tshring Tamang, whose practice centres on portraiture as a way of studying human emotion and identity, found in Varanasi's crowds and constant movement an unexpected sense of stillness, a discovery that reshaped how she understands both life and art, expressed in pieces like 'Shanti' and 'Tyag'.

Prativa Khadka turned instead toward the city's tradition of handmade crafts, captivated by its vibrant culture and history, producing 'Treasure I hold' and 'Katha' as reflections on the relationship between personal memory and cultural craftsmanship.

Perhaps the most literal engagement with the city's material comes from Aayush Sunar, a sculpture student whose piece 'Living and —' attempts to hold Banaras in clay itself: the ghats, the crowds, the horizon of the Ganga stretching further than the eye can follow.

In his own description, the work's form is restless, cutting in multiple directions and never settling into one, a shape he calls complex and unresolved, always mid-sentence. Below that restless form, the sculpture continues downward as its own distorted, dissolving reflection, an attempt to convey that what remains after complexity ends isn't peace, but only the echo of what was restless, disappearing into the shape of what we were. Given its scale and physical weight, the gallery has placed "Living and —" at the centre of its own room, the one sculptural anchor in a show otherwise built from paintings and works on paper.

That range, from fire and water to clay and portraiture, is really the story 'HOMAGE TO BANARAS' tells about contemporary art's relationship to an ancient city, and it's a story the Kathmandu Art Gallery is well positioned to host. Varanasi has stood largely unchanged in its essential rituals for thousands of years: the same river, the same ghats, the same cremation fires burning continuously regardless of who is watching. What changes is the vocabulary each new generation brings to describe it.

A city whose meaning has traditionally been carried through oral tradition, temple architecture, and unbroken ritual practice is now being filtered through watercolour washes, fibre-resin casting, dry-point printmaking, and mixed media collage, media largely unavailable to the pilgrims and priests who shaped the city's original meaning.

Mitty is majoring in art history and minoring in finance at Princeton University and is an intern at the Siddhartha Art Gallery.

A conversation in colour

At The Kalā Salon, Sagar Manandhar's newest body of abstract paintings is a conversation where colour, texture and rhythm become languages of their own.

SHRINKHALA CHAND THAKURI
KATHMANDU

Some exhibitions ask viewers to search for meaning. Others ask them to surrender to feeling first. Sagar Manandhar's latest exhibition 'Dialogue and Perception (Sambad ra Dristikon)' belongs firmly to the latter.

Stepping into the Kala Salon, what strikes first is not the subject matter but the remarkable harmony of colour. Every painting appears to revolve around a dominant hue, allowing secondary colours to grow organically around it. The canvases are saturated with vivid blues, oranges, yellows and purples, yet they never descend into visual noise. Instead, the colours settle into an unexpected balance, creating works that feel energetic without becoming chaotic.

The exhibition is unmistakably abstract, but abstraction here never feels directionless. Strong geometric forms anchor each composition while carefully maintained lines provide structure beneath the apparent spontaneity. There is discipline behind every gesture. Thin borders often frame the compositions, suggesting restraint, yet somewhere within each work a section seems determined to escape those boundaries, pushing outward as though the painting itself refuses confinement.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE KALA SALON

Walking through the exhibit, one begins to recognise a distinct visual language. Certain rhythmic squiggles recur throughout the paintings, resembling sound frequencies frozen into colour. They weave across the canvas like vibrations made visible, hinting that the artist experiences the world less through objects than through resonance. Even the sequencing of the paintings within the gallery feels intentional, almost as if viewers are moving through different movements of a musical composition.

It is difficult to mistake these paintings for anyone else's. Despite experimenting with new techniques and materials, Manandhar has developed a recognisable signature. His brushwork, layered acrylic lines and rhythmic mark-making create a consistency that ties the exhibition together while still allowing individual works to explore different emotional territories.

Texture plays an equally important role. Paint bubbles emerge from the surface, thick acrylic ridges catch the light, while scratched lines and raised forms introduce a physicality that photographs cannot fully capture. In many works, the surface itself becomes part of the narrative. The acrylic seems alive, refusing to remain a passive medium.

Manandhar reinforces this relationship with material through his process. Rather than treating paint as something secondary to the final image, he describes acrylic as carrying emotion in itself. He speaks less about controlling an outcome than about trusting the process, allowing meanings to reveal themselves as he works. His abstraction is therefore not an attempt to conceal meaning but to discover it.

That philosophy becomes evident throughout the exhibition. These paintings do not feel planned in the conventional sense. Instead, they resemble emotional snapshots—moments where feeling has been translated into colour before language has the chance to intervene. There is something strangely nostalgic about them. Although entirely abstract, many of the works evoke the sensation of childhood, when the world seemed impossibly bright and uncomplicated. They feel less like representations of memory than the emotions memory leaves behind.

His understanding of colour further distinguishes the exhibition. Manandhar repeatedly places complementary colours alongside one another—blue against orange, yellow against purple—allowing contrasts to generate unexpected harmony. Colours that conventionally appear incompatible somehow coexist effortlessly under his hand. Small droplets of paint occasionally interrupt otherwise cohesive surfaces, momentarily pulling attention away from the composition before eventually folding back into it. Even these interruptions seem deliberate, preventing the eye from settling too comfortably.

Gradients soften transitions between otherwise bold passages, while the combination of acrylic paint and marker creates subtle shifts in texture and line quality. One senses an artist continually testing what his chosen medium is capable of.

Perhaps the exhibition's most compelling idea lies in Manandhar's relationship with sound. He speaks of having a special connection with auditory experience, something that manifests visually through repeated rhythmic forms and textured surfaces. Different scratches and lines remind him of different sounds produced by various materials. His experiments extend beyond canvas altogether.

Recent works include acrylic sheets that are allowed to dry into independent surfaces, as well as glass engravings that resonate like singing bowls when struck. These material explorations challenge the expectation that painting must remain confined to stretched canvas.

Interestingly, Manandhar says he sees paintings through palettes rather than individual colours. Rather than asking what blue or red symbolises, he considers what an entire palette feels like. This perspective explains one of the exhibition's most intriguing inversions. While red is traditionally associated with anger, passion or heat, Manandhar instinctively reaches for blue. Likewise, sadness or emotional heaviness often emerges through reds instead of blues. The emotional vocabulary is deliberately reversed, forcing viewers to question their own assumptions about colour symbolism.

His influences also reveal themselves subtly. Manandhar credits his father, veteran artist Kiran Manandhar, as his greatest inspiration, particularly admiring his discipline and enduring creative energy. He also speaks of his appreciation for Buddha Nepali's illusionistic abstraction. Yet despite these influences, the work never feels derivative. It remains distinctly his own.

The exhibition is not without moments of unevenness. Some experiments, particularly the detached acrylic surfaces, still feel exploratory rather than fully resolved. Similarly, a handful of colour droplets appear visually disconnected from the surrounding compositions, momentarily interrupting rather than enriching the rhythm.

Yet these minor imperfections seem inseparable from the exhibition's central philosophy of experimentation. Manandhar is clearly less interested in polished certainty than in discovering what paint can become.

There is a temptation when viewing abstract art to search immediately for familiar forms—a landscape, a face or a tree. Manandhar acknowledges this instinct himself, observing that people naturally cling to what they already recognise. His paintings gently resist that impulse. Instead of offering identifiable subjects, they invite viewers to experience movement, rhythm, texture and colour before interpretation.

By the end of the exhibition, the paintings begin to feel less like images than recordings. They capture fleeting emotional frequencies that exist somewhere between sound, colour and memory.

'Dialogue and Perception' is an apt title because neither exists independently in Manandhar's work. The conversation begins with paint and canvas, but it doesn't end there. It continues between colour and sound, artist and viewer, certainty and imagination. His paintings ask for neither agreement nor interpretation. They ask only that we look– and perhaps, if we stay long enough, learn to listen.

POST PHOTOS: SHRINKHALA CHAND THAKURI

Dialogue And Perception (Sambad ra Dristikon)
Where: The Kala Salon, Thamel
Time: 11:00 am to 8:00 pm
Entry: Free

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