



Distant neighbors



New Delhi's relationships with Kathmandu and Dhaka are pivotal for India's national security, economic growth, regional connectivity, and stability. In 2024, a student-led uprising in Bangladesh ousted pro-Indian Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina from power. Since then, relations between New Delhi and Dhaka have grown strained. While observers initially expected ties to improve following the general elections, a recovery has yet to materialize. Nepal experienced a similar political shift in 2025, prompting New Delhi to rush to turn the new domestic scenario to its advantage. Foreign policy analysts are now closely watching the emerging trends across the New Delhi-Kathmandu and New Delhi-Dhaka axes.

For the past few months, speculation has grown around the much-anticipated visits of Nepal Prime Minister Balendra Shah and Bangladesh Prime Minister Tarique Rahman to New Delhi. India's Ministry of External Affairs at South Block reiterates almost weekly that invitations have been extended to both leaders. However, both Dhaka and Kathmandu have experienced more than a simple change of government—they have undergone complete regime changes. Both nations are now led by younger faces who lean more toward the West than toward India.

Prime Minister Shah has expressed unwillingness to visit India immediately, adhering to his self-imposed policy of avoiding foreign travel during his first year in office. He met with the Indian Ambassador in Kathmandu only after four months in power. Nevertheless, a recent meeting between Shah and the Indian Army Chief helped establish a connection at the top political level. After Shah declined to visit India immediately upon taking office, New Delhi extended an official invitation to the Chairman of the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP).

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Rahman is delaying his trip to India due to domestic political pressures and delicate issues surrounding Sheikh Hasina, who currently resides in India under political asylum. Because New Delhi views both neighboring nations as indispensable partners, Indian political leadership remains eager to engage with both prime ministers despite these lingering differences.

Compared to Dhaka, India's relationship with Nepal remains relatively stable, even if not at its peak.

continued on pg. 2



A medium dressed as a demon Lakhey performs a fire ritual during a festival in Lalitpur | Abhishek Maharjan

Hindu Republic!

Various Hindu groups are attempting to launch a broader movement starting from the Tarai-Madhes region, and parties that lost the March 5 elections are likely to fuel such initiatives

KAMAL D BHATTARAI | Jerusalem

The political climate in Nepal is gradually becoming favorable to reviving the Hindu state, if not the monarchy. Now, except for a few fringe communist parties, almost no one opposes this idea. Following last year's GenZ movement, more political parties and leaders are leaning toward the concept of a Hindu nation.

For a long time, a strong voice inside the Nepali Congress (NC) favored a Hindu state, though its leadership remained adherent to secularism. However, the political leaders who promulgated the 2015 constitution are no longer as committed to secularism as they once were.

Consider the recent statement from Sher Bahadur Deuba, in which he identified himself as a Hindu. Shortly after, his faction issued a statement declaring that they would work to establish Nepal's identity as a Hindu nation. Except for Pushpa Kamal Dahal, no key leaders objected to his statement—not even NC President Gagan Kumar Thapa or CPN-UML Chairperson KP



Sharma Oli. These key developments clearly illustrate the gaining ground for a Hindu state.

Prime Minister Balendra Shah cannot go against the constitution, but he is in favor of a Hindu nation. Additionally, Shah prefers to move toward a directly elected prime minister through a constitutional amendment, and his entire team favors a Hindu Republic. Similarly, the Rastriya

Swatantra Party (RSP) does not oppose the idea of a Hindu state. Because RSP lacks a rigid stance on the basic fundamentals of the constitution, the party could easily support the move. However, Rabi Lamichhane's exact position on this issue remains unknown.

Since last year's GenZ movement, the Nepali Army (NA) has emerged as a major political stakeholder

continued on pg. 2

SPECIAL READ TODAY



Dhananjay Shah
Digital Nepal: On or off the track?

pg. 6



NATIONAL
THE FEAR
OF HUMANS

pg. 2



COVER STORY
NEPALI CAREGIVERS
IN ISRAEL

pg. 4-5



INTERVIEW
SMALLER COUNTRIES
ARE VULNERABLE

pg. 7

ApEx BUREAU | Kathmandu

The internal strife tearing through Nepal's traditional political establishment reflects a systemic crisis of institutional decay, driven by severe generational fractures, autocratic leadership models, and strategic power struggles. Across the main parties, internal consensus has largely broken down, leaving traditional organizations vulnerable to fracturing and opening a political vacuum at every level of government.

The downfall of old guards

In the Nepali Congress, the rift between Gagan Kumar Thapa and Sher Bahadur Deuba demonstrates how generational friction and shifting ideological postures threaten party unity. Following contested internal dynamics, the Deuba-led faction's national convention move to revive a Hindu state identity highlights an opportunistic conservative pivot intended to counter Thapa's reformist mandate. By constantly turning to court petitions to validate or block convention calendars, both hardline factions have outsourced



organizational legitimacy to the judiciary, paralyzing internal mediation.

Similarly, the CPN-UML demonstrates the limits of centralized control. Party President KP Sharma Oli's fierce suppression of dissent and threats of disciplinary action against internal critics have intensified resistance rather than quelling it. The emerging signature campaign aimed at challenging Oli's presidency threatens to trigger an outright party split, severely compromising UML's organizational base.

continued on pg. 2

The fear of humans— man versus the wild

Established in 1976, Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve, a floodplain of the Sapta Koshi River, comprises 175 square km of grasslands and wetlands and spans Sunsari, Saptari, and Udaypur districts

RAVI M SINGH

The survival of humans and animals has always stayed intertwined. That's the scenario handed down to us for generations—for ages. As time passed, the world turned overcrowded, both for Homo sapiens and the denizens of the wild.

The wildlife had to bear the brunt to an extreme extent, though. The so-called civilized bipeds encroached upon their habitat. They usurped what was theirs and made them defenseless and vulnerable—even endangered. Several species, to say the least, became extinct in the bargain.

Insecurity and fear

In the early ages, humans were in a constant state of insecurity and fear of wild animals. With the inroads of civilization, the human-animal-relation situation took a dramatic shift, though. Today, wild animals seem more afraid of humans. The predators, too, appear to dread the earthlings and shun proximity to them.

Startling news hit the press when the University of Oxford's Wildlife Conservation Research Unit reported to Discovery News that fear of humans among wildlife had become an alarming issue in the Makgadikgadi Pans National Park in Botswana, Africa. It further stated that the fearless "Kings of the jungle," the lions in the park, lived in a 'landscape of fear' because of threats posed by human intervention.

That made a lasting impression on the new offspring of the lion family, through their mother and other pride members, and they learned to fear humans as they grew up, the wildlife scientists reported.

The anecdote

The 'fear of humans' phenomenon among the animals from the wild somehow seemed to connect with a hilarious anecdote I am going to relate here, which took place several years ago when four of my friends from Dharan, East Nepal, went fishing. The quartet, excited as they were, as usual, seemed to make a fuss over their fishing tackle and gear—what to pack up and what to forget.

The next day, they started early. They caught a bus for West Kusaha, Chatar, where the Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve is situated. After acquiring a fishing permit for the day, the foursome



headed for the river bank.

Established in 1976, Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve, a floodplain of the Sapta Koshi River, comprises 175 square km of grasslands and wetlands and spans Sunsari, Saptari, and Udaypur districts. The government designated the reserve as a Ramsar Site in 1987.

Without losing a moment, the gang spread out and started casting their spoons from the river bank. The Sapta Koshi, Nepal's largest river system, stretched out in all its glory. Their main quarry for that morning was the Golden Mahseer (Tor putitora), and if that failed, they would not mind settling for a Goonch (catfish) or two—if luck favored them at all.

Spoon fishing

Spoons are lures used for fishing worldwide and in Nepal, too—a favorite of the Dharan anglers. Easy to use: all you've got to do is cast your spoon, wait a few seconds for your metal bait to reach the bottom, then retrieve. The idea is to dupe the fish with the spoon, which spins on its way back when the line is drawn in, mimicking a small live fish. The resident fish take them for real and go for a bite—and get hooked.

Not lucky all the time

For two hours at a stretch, the fishers followed a routine cast-and-retrieve

Water buffaloes are large, powerful animals weighing close to 1,000 kg. Koshi Tappu is renowned for them

like the rhythmic ticking of a clock. They worked the river up and down several times—a tiring job indeed. No catches, not even a feeble bite, came their way, though. That's what it's like with fishing—you are not always lucky.

The March morning sun was up, and the anglers felt the heat permeating with each passing minute. The midday heat in Terai in March can turn sizzling. The group decided it was time to take a short break and gathered on a small knoll close to a stretch of elephant grass that colonized the river sandbanks in patches.

"Hey guys, I've to evacuate my bowels," said one friend and headed for the nearest patch of tall grass. The rest of the group started unpacking their lunches. Hardly had they finished eating when a figure broke cover from the dense grasses and dashed towards the seated group, yelling at the top of his voice. He was none other than their pal. He bounded towards his friends with fright written all over his face as if there was no tomorrow for him.

The group seated on the knoll watched dumbstruck; they witnessed not one but two bizarre scenes happening in the same breath. The moment their friend bolted, in a blink of an eye, a large black Arna, a wild water buffalo (Bubalus arnee) carrying a pair of formidable-looking horns, crashed through the tall grasses. It galloped like lightning, in clear sight, in the opposite direction, crossed a small clearing, and disappeared into a pocket of tall grasses.

Water buffaloes are large, powerful animals weighing close to 1,000 kg. Koshi Tappu is renowned for them. They are categorized as endangered on the IUCN Red List. Within seconds, it re-entered another dense patch of tall grass and disappeared. The angler-group observed the poor animal looked equally frightened as their mate, if not more.

Frightened buffalo

The group bent double, slapped their thighs, and shrieked with laughter. They watched their shell-shocked panting friend holding his still unfastened and unzipped pants. It took him some time before he could regain his breath and recount what had happened.

"I squatted facing the thickset grasses towards the river," he began. "Moments later, a rustling sounded. It stopped unawares, though. But a few

seconds later, I heard it again. It felt as if something was coming my way. At first, I thought you guys were up to your little pranks again, like always."

"There it stood, barely 5 ft. away, his large bulging eyes boring balefully into mine. Time froze. I almost fainted. Suddenly, the buffalo gave a loud grunt and a snort. The next thing I knew, I was going hell for leather, yelling at the top of my voice. The rest, you guys saw," he finished with a gasp.

The Asiatic wild water buffaloes can be very dangerous. Cases of Arna attacks in Koshi Tappu areas are commonplace and frequently reported by park officials. Such incidents occur when villagers go to the riverbanks to collect fodder, dead logs, and wood debris.

Koshi Tappu has the world's second-largest population of Arnas, amongst India, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Thailand. My friend had a close call—scared out of his wits. But by the looks of things, it appeared the other way round to me as I wrapped up the 'man versus the wild' story. To recapitulate, it seemed he gave the poor buffalo the fright of his life—instead.

At the end of the day: "Wild Animals Fear Human Voices More Than a Lion's Growl," writes Amy Jones for a website called Species Unite ■

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Distant...

Although high-level executive visits have been absent, the two countries continue to hold regular bilateral mechanism meetings. Growing Chinese influence in Kathmandu remains a primary concern for New Delhi. However, engagement between Kathmandu and Beijing has been minimal under the new administration—a positive sign for India.

Indian geopolitical analysts view the situation in Bangladesh as vastly different from that of Nepal. They point out that the new regime in Dhaka is simultaneously warming ties with both the West and China. During the Bangladeshi Prime Minister's visit to Beijing in June, the two nations signed 13 agreements.

New Delhi remains keen on direct,



high-level talks with the leaders of both Nepal and Bangladesh. Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Dinesh Trivedi noted that outstanding issues can only be resolved through direct dialogue, emphasizing that the Bangladeshi Prime Minister should visit India as soon as possible to build mutual trust. India has also invited Bangladesh's Prime Minister to the upcoming BRICS summit next month, though his attendance remains uncertain.

New Delhi firmly maintains that if the leaders sit down together, they can create an environment of trust necessary to address and resolve all pending bilateral matters. It remains unclear about the future trajectory of India's relationship with two countries.

Hindu...

Inherently, the NA remains a traditional Hindu institution that has never fully embraced secularism in practice; thus, it is likely to support any broad Hindu movement.

Meanwhile, CPN-UML Chairman Oli has gradually inclined toward a Hindu nation—especially after last year's GenZ protests—believing that the primary external backers of secular forces have lost their influence in power. Pushpa Kamal Dahal may personally oppose a Hindu state, but he is unlikely to resist if other major political parties reach a consensus.

At the societal level, numerous local organizations have been laying the groundwork for a Hindu state over the past few years. Various Hindu groups are attempting to launch a broader movement starting from the Tarai-Madhes region, and parties that lost the March 5 elections are likely to fuel such initiatives. The political parties that originally promulgated the 2015 constitution with a secular identity are currently out of power.

However, any attempt to

drop federalism alongside secularism could face stiff opposition from Madhes-based political parties, groups from the eastern hills, and minority religious organizations.

Amending the constitution to establish a Hindu state requires a two-thirds majority in Parliament, which is achievable if RSP agrees. Nevertheless, such a shift could unleash a new round of domestic conflict, and Nepal's international development partners—many of whom back secularism—might strongly oppose it. Consequently, attempting to turn Nepal into a Hindu Republic remains a risky move that could trigger fresh political instability.

Over the past few years, India's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) have actively encouraged Nepal's political leaders to revive the Hindu state. During the constitutional drafting process in 2015, Nepal's top political leaders had reportedly assured the Indian leadership that they would safeguard the country's Hindu identity.

The downfall...

In contrast, while Pushpa Kamal Dahal's Nepali Communist Party appears comparatively intact, the broader landscape shows traditional communist formations struggling

with ideological coherence and cadre retention.

This pervasive institutional breakdown weakens traditional political parties at provincial and local government levels. As factional battles dissipate political capital, these legacy parties

risk losing their historical dominance over local and provincial administration. If forced to enter elections while divided, the primary beneficiary of this fragmented landscape is the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP)—even as RSP navigates its own internal strains.



Bank profits up 32 percent despite sluggish interest income

Total net profit across the sector expanded by Rs 16.97bn during the fiscal year. Out of the 20 commercial banks, 15 reported positive growth in net earnings, while five recorded contractions or losses

ApEx BUREAU | Kathmandu

Commercial banks recorded a significant jump in net profit for the fiscal year 2025/26, driven primarily by lower impairment charges. A study of provisional financial statements published by 20 Class A banks shows their combined net profit reached Rs 69.78bn in the last fiscal year. This represents a 32.3 percent increase compared to Rs 52.81bn in 2024/25. Bankers have attributed high profit growth to a reduction in loss provisioning due to strong loan recoveries in the fourth quarter. The healthy surge in net profit comes amid subdued private sector credit demand and deteriorating asset quality.

Operating performance

Total net profit across the sector expanded by Rs 16.97bn during the fiscal year. Out of the 20 commercial banks, 15 reported positive growth in net earnings, while five recorded contractions or losses. Nabil Bank Ltd led the industry with a net profit of Rs 7.90bn in net profit, up 33.45 percent year-on-year. Kumari Bank Ltd (307.73 percent) and Global IME Bank Ltd (22.67 percent) followed with net profits of Rs 7.38bn and Rs 6.22bn, respectively.

Kumari Bank Ltd posted the highest net profit growth of 307.73 percent. The bank's net profit increased from Rs 1.81bn in 2024/25 to Rs 7.38bn in 2025/26, largely due to heavy provisioning reversals in the review year. On the other hand, Prabhu Bank Ltd registered a net loss of Rs 240m in 2025/26. The bank had posted a net profit of Rs 870m in 2024/25. It was the only commercial bank in the country to fall in the red.

Agriculture Development Bank Ltd



and Nepal Investment Mega Bank Ltd experienced profit declines of 29.49 percent and 36.72 percent, respectively. NIC Asia Bank Ltd, which reported a net loss of Rs 3.87bn in 2024/25, managed a slight turnaround to post a modest net profit of Rs 180m.

Net interest income

Net interest income, the core revenue stream for commercial banks, saw a modest growth of 1.29 percent during the review year. The combined net interest income of 20 commercial banks reached Rs 192.28bn in 2025/26 compared to Rs 189.84bn in 2024/25. Nabil Bank generated the highest net interest income at Rs 17bn, followed closely by Global IME Bank (Rs 16.20bn), Nepal Investment Mega Bank (Rs 12.98bn), Kumari Bank (Rs 12.01bn), and Rastriya Banijya Bank Ltd (Rs 11.96bn).

Net interest income, the core revenue stream for commercial banks, saw a modest growth of 1.29 percent

The slow net interest income growth is largely due to a steady decline in lending rates in recent years. Banks have failed to fully leverage lower funding costs to expand their net interest margins due to low credit demand from the private sector.

Despite the sharp rise in net profits, average non-performing loan (NPL) ratio of commercial banks rose by 83 basis points to 5.43 percent in 2025/26 from 4.60 percent in 2024/25. Bankers have attributed the rise in NPL levels to the expiry of regulatory forbearance

and debt restructuring facilities provided by the Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB). Loans that failed to resume regular debt servicing migrated into higher risk classifications with the end of the moratorium period.

Everest Bank reported the lowest NPL ratio of 0.49 percent in 2025/26, followed by Standard Chartered Bank Nepal at 2.03 percent and Sanima Bank Ltd at 2.87 percent. On the other hand, Prabhu Bank had the highest NPL ratio at 15.55 percent, up from 7.01 percent a year earlier. NIC Asia Bank (9.26 percent), Nepal Investment Mega Bank (8.66 percent), Himalayan Bank Ltd. (7.96 percent), and Kumari Bank (7.46 percent) also reported elevated non-performing assets during the review period.

Rising NPL ratios amid declining provision expenses suggest that while recent cash recoveries relieved imme-

diate accounting pressures for banks, legacy stressed assets continue to weigh on their balance sheets.

Out of 20 commercial banks, 16 recorded positive distributable profits for 2025/26, up from 13 banks in the prior year. Everest Bank boasts the highest dividend capacity at 38.32 percent, with a distributable profit of Rs 5.25bn. Siddhartha Bank Ltd (26.15 percent), Sanima Bank (20.85 percent), Nabil Bank (19.10 percent) and Standard Chartered Bank (19.04 percent) also have strong payout capacities. On the other hand, four commercial banks reported negative distributable profits. NIC Asia Bank has the highest negative distributable profit of Rs 14.86bn, followed by Himalayan Bank (Rs -9.84bn), Prabhu Bank (Rs -6.31bn) and Nepal Investment Mega Bank (Rs -5.08bn).

These four institutions will be unable to distribute dividends to shareholders 2025/26, as they must channel earnings toward covering deficit reserves and non-performing asset coverage.

While lower impairment charges boosted net profit of Class 'A' banks during the review period, the systemic increase in non-performing loans to 5.43 percent means more borrowers are falling behind on their payments. The economic slowdown has dampened credit absorption capacity of the private sector which has left banks with excess liquidity despite historic low lending rates.

With improved Tier 1 capital ratios (9.90 percent) and lower lending costs, banks still have the balance sheet capacity to fund infrastructure, business expansion and private investment. However, sustainable performance will depend on prudent credit underwriting, strong recovery strategies for legacy NPLs, and a revival in domestic economic activity ■

A Nepali perspective on transit and trade

It is important to begin by acknowledging what has gone well, because it has gone well, and because acknowledging it honestly is the foundation on which any further request should rest

RAJAN SHARMA

In coming weeks, officials from Nepal and India will once again sit across the table to take stock of the transit and trade arrangements that quietly underpin our two economies. The 2023 revision of the Treaty of Trade and Transit renewed the framework that has governed our commercial relationship since 1960, and the Nov 2025 Letter of Exchange opened rail cargo movement through Jogbani-Biratnagar and Nautanwa—a step that culminated, this July, in the first commercial freight train between our two countries.

For a landlocked country whose entire external trade depends on India and Indian infrastructure, this is not a small thing. It reflects a considered, positive choice by India to expand multimodal access for its neighbor, and Nepal should say so plainly and often, including at the negotiating table itself. That said, our shared experience also teaches us that infrastructure, however welcome, does not by itself guarantee continuity. Transit between our countries has, at times in the past,



been affected by broader shifts in the political relationship—most notably 1989 and 2015 border blockades—and those episodes left an institutional memory that still shapes how each new negotiation is approached.

Both sides would benefit from treaty language that formally separates the day-to-day movement of goods

from the broader ups and downs of bilateral relations. A standing commitment that transit continues uninterrupted, regardless of the political environment, would be of great value to traders on both sides of the border, and it is squarely in India's own commercial interest as well, since Indian ports, railways and trans-

porters also depend on predictable Nepal-bound volumes.

Nepal's request for special consideration is not made in isolation; it draws on principles India has itself endorsed, including the freedom-of-transit provisions of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. We would respectfully ask that this recognition be reflected more explicitly in treaty language—through waived or reduced transit fees, priority processing lanes, and other forms of non-reciprocal facilitation appropriate to a Least Developed, landlocked country. It is evident that Bangladesh and Bhutan face comparable circumstances, and Nepal would welcome the opportunity to raise transit facilitation within SAARC and BBIN forums as a matter of regional connectivity rather than a bilateral concession extracted from India alone.

Nepal should address India's legitimate security concerns—the risk of smuggling, dual-use goods, and third-country transshipment through Nepal is real, and Nepal has every interest in being seen as a reliable, transparent partner on these questions. At the same time, Nepali traders sometimes

experience security-related inspection as slower and less predictable than the underlying risk would seem to warrant, and we would welcome a joint effort to make that process more transparent for everyone.

A joint risk-management framework—built around pre-arrival manifest sharing, mutual recognition of Authorised Economic Operator status, and scanner-based rather than physical inspection wherever possible—could serve both goals at once. The World Customs Organization's SAFE Framework, with its green/amber/red channel approach based on a trader's compliance history, is a proven international model that neither side would need to invent from scratch, and Nepal would be glad to work with India in adapting it to our shared border.

The Nov 2025 Letter of Exchange represented genuine progress toward strengthening multimodal connectivity between the ports of Kolkata and Visakhapatnam and Nepal's customs yards, and we would encourage both sides to treat full implementation—not merely announcement—as the shared benchmark of success.



Nepali caregivers in Israel

Since the government-to-government agreement came into effect, over 3,400 Nepalis have moved to Israel for work. The initial group of 1,345 Nepali auxiliary workers served as the foundation for the current recruitment scheme

KAMAL D BHATTARAI | Tel Aviv

Saroj Shrestha set up a small business in his hometown of Bhaktapur, in Nepal's central region, in 2019. While his business was gradually picking up, the global Covid-19 outbreak severely battered it. Seeking new opportunities, he began exploring job prospects abroad. Through friends and media channels, he learned about caregiver positions in Israel. Having completed vocational nursing training, he also possessed sound communication skills.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in 2020 between Nepal and Israel paved the way for Nepali migrant workers to secure caregiving jobs in Israel. Under this agreement, the first protocol for 'Caregiving in Geriatric Institutions' was established, linking the Department of Foreign Employment (DOFE) with Israel's Population and Immigration Authority (PIBA).

This protocol regulates the arrival and employment arrangements of thousands of Nepali workers, many of whom now work in Israel. On 30 Sept 2020, following extensive discussions, the work agreement between Nepal and Israel was formally signed in Jerusalem. Like hundreds of other Nepalis, Shrestha was selected through a lottery system. Ultimately, he secured employment at a private company that is one of the major elderly-care providers operating in Israel.

In his initial days, Shrestha faced

difficulties due to his limited command of the Hebrew language, despite being fluent in English. Through patience and gradual effort, he began learning Hebrew, which progressively made his duties easier. Today, he is fully adjusted to his role. When asked about the primary challenge facing Nepali caregivers, he repeatedly emphasizes 'patience', noting that exercising the highest level of patience is the only way to handle demanding situations.

During a meeting with a visiting Nepali media delegation at his center, Shrestha shared: "Now, I make good money—around ten times better than normal work in Nepal." Like millions of youth back home, Shrestha holds high hopes for the new administration led by Balendra Shah, suggesting that the government focus on rooting out three decades of prevailing corruption.

Similarly, Bunu Khadka was working office jobs in Kathmandu when her mother informed her about job opportunities in Israel. Like Shrestha, Khadka initially faced adaptation challenges, but she is now completely satisfied with her job and income. Under current regulations, Nepali caregivers are allowed to work in Israel for a maximum of five years. Reflecting on her early transition, Khadka recalled that adapting to a completely new system, technology, and environment was daunting at first, though it has now become routine.

With her contract expiring in



a few months, Khadka hopes to extend her stay by several years. "Now, I have become proficient in the job and fluent in Hebrew and English. If my job duration is extended, it would help stabilize my economic condition," she explained. She remains concerned about finding sustainable employment back in Nepal, noting that her savings will not last indefinitely.

Khadka requested journalists and the Nepal government to advocate for contract extensions. Over the past four years, she and her colleagues have built a strong reputation as dedicated caregivers, earning praise from their employers. Their duties involve caring for elderly individuals suffering from complex conditions such as dementia and Parkinson's disease—a physically and emotionally demanding responsibility.

Fourteen Nepali workers are currently employed at this particular elderly care center, which was established in 1996. When offering advice to prospective workers, both Shrestha and Khadka emphasize language proficiency while highlighting the attractive compensation. Nepali workers are also impressed by the grievance mechanisms set up by Israel, noting that any instance of discrimination can be reported directly to PIBA, which actively addresses their concerns.

At home, the government led by the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) has pledged to create local jobs to discourage foreign employment. However, workers at the center

advise that because the pay and working conditions in Israel are exceptionally good, the government should continue encouraging workers to apply. The center's CEO echoed this sentiment, praising Nepali employees as disciplined and hard-working.

Nepali caregivers receive comprehensive medical facilities, including health insurance. They earn approximately Rs 300,000 per month, with opportunities to earn more through overtime—which many prefer over spending their free time in their apartments.

Nepali workers are impressed by the grievance mechanisms set up by Israel

Nepali workers generally travel to Israel after completing nursing training accredited by the CTEVT

Sharing their experiences regarding security and the regional conflict, workers noted that while the situation was frightening initially, it has become manageable over time. When security threats or missile alerts arise, they receive advance notifications on their phones and proceed immediately to reinforce safe rooms. They believe Israel is safe and that the situation on the ground differs from how it is often portrayed in international media. While the onset of the Iran-Israel conflict initially caused deep concern, they no longer feel afraid.

Nepali workers generally travel to Israel after completing nursing training accredited by the Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT). Shrestha and Khadka were part of the initial batches deployed after the bilateral agreement was signed. Khadka added: "We want to extend our contracts for another five years. While we obviously miss our families in Nepal, we do not yet have a concrete plan for what to do after returning home."

Since the government-to-government agreement came into effect, over 3,400 Nepalis have moved to Israel for work. The initial group of 1,345 Nepali auxiliary workers served as the foundation for the current recruitment scheme. In Aug 2024, an additional 2,112 candidates were selected through a transparent lottery process for phased deployment. By 2026, the program expanded further: Israel opened applications for another 2,300 caregiver positions, with 1,115 candidates meeting eligibility requirements to enter the selection process.

For Shrestha, however, broader statistics and bilateral agreements remain secondary to his daily reality. At the start, overcoming the language barrier was his greatest challenge. Although comfortable in English, learning Hebrew was essential, as caring for the elderly requires continuous communication, patience, and empathy. Through persistence and everyday interactions, he mastered the language. Despite the demanding nature of the job, Shrestha maintains that the experience has transformed his economic prospects. As he summarized to the media delegation, the earning potential remains a life-changing opportunity for many Nepali youths ■

Archival insights

The 1923 treaty is Nepal's Westphalian moment

Sovereignty is both an internal fact, built and rebuilt across generations, and an external status that must be continually asserted, codified, and defended through diplomacy

TIKA P DHAKAL

In 1984, anthropologist Richard Burghart tried to answer a grand question: how did Nepal come to think of itself as a nation-state at all. Writing in the *Journal of Asian Studies*, Burghart demonstrated in his essay 'Formation of the Concept of Nation-state in Nepal' that Nepal's at the turn of the nineteenth century had no single notion equivalent to it. They held three separate ideas of political community instead, including the king's possessions, a realm defined by ritual authority, and a country defined by ancestral claim. Each category rested on a different kind of legitimacy, and none was quite what the world outside Nepal would recognize as statehood.

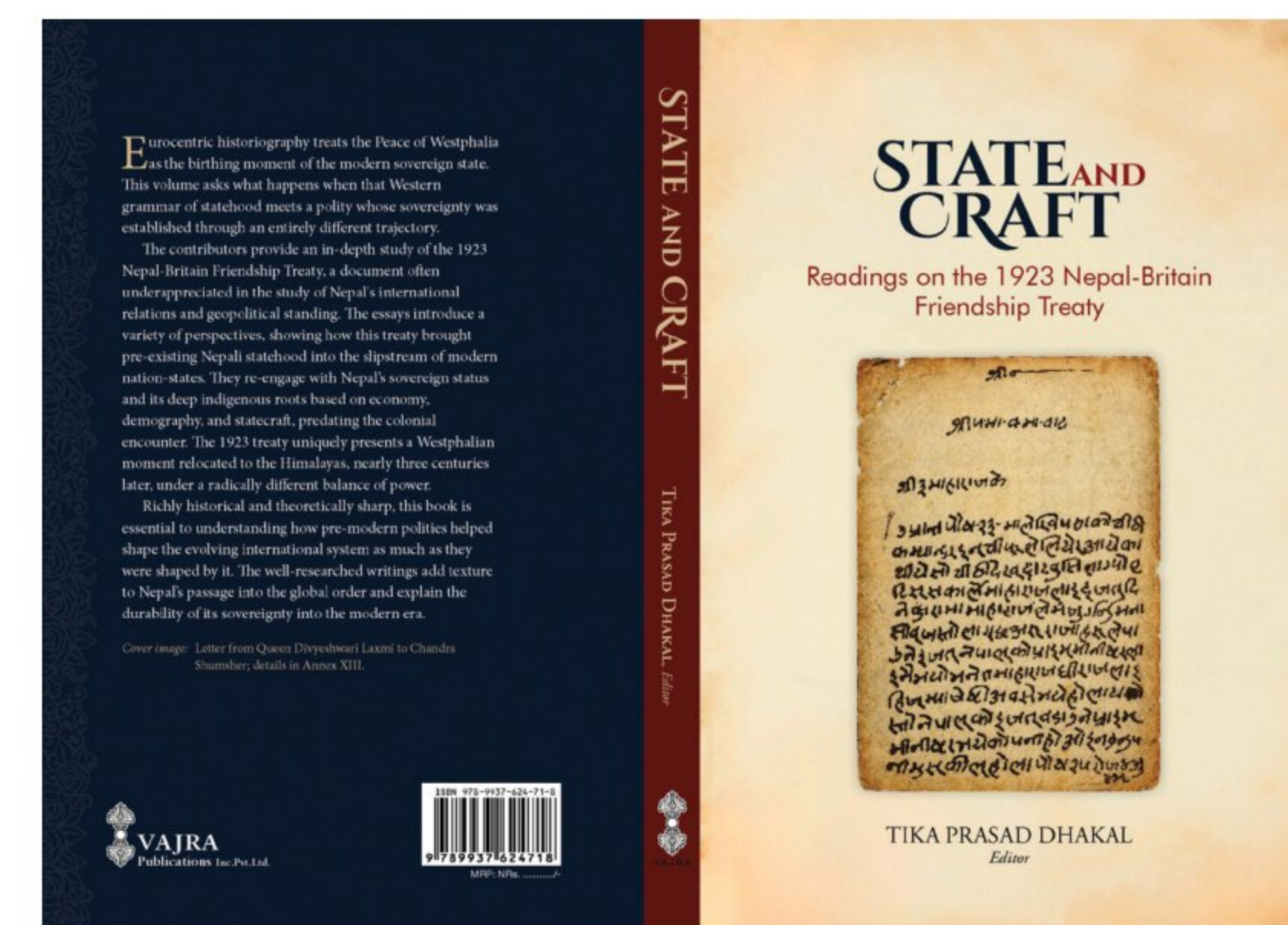
What forced them together, Burghart argued, was contact with a much stronger neighbor. Once the East India Company controlled the Ganga plains, the Nepali government had to describe itself in terms that neighbors would recognize. It spent the next century and a half reworking property, ritual authority, and ancestral country into something closer to a modern nation-state. Burghart deserves credit for showing that Nepali statehood was not simply borrowed from Europe or imposed by Britain, but assembled out of Nepal's own political vocabulary.

Burghart's essay, however, does not explain where the external idea of a nation-state came from, which was the very standard against which Nepal's own categories were being measured and revised. That story starts earlier, at the Peace of Westphalia in 1648.

There is general unanimity in modern political theory about Westphalia having shaped the modern concept of the sovereign nation-state. Westphalia did not invent domestic political authority, as states had governed themselves for millennia before it. What it did was reorganize world politics around mutual, formal recognition among sovereign entities. The core idea was that a state's standing depends not only on what it controls at home, but on whether other states agree to treat it as an equal under law.

Putting Burghart and Westphalia side by side, Nepal's history comes into sharper focus. Burghart describes the internal work, where an old vocabulary of kingship, ritual, and lineage was slowly reshaped into something that could function as a nation-state. Westphalia describes the external standard, using recognition, treaty, and law as the language in which that nation-state has to be legible to others. Nepal did the first kind of work across a century and a half. It completed the second kind of work, being formally recognized in that language by the single dominant power of the era, in the Treaty of Friendship signed in 1923 with the United Kingdom.

Sovereignty is not just a domestic fact. It is relational. A state cannot declare itself sovereign in isolation. Other states must recognize its status, and international law must codify it. Treaties are where that recognition becomes materi-



al, where an internally reworked concept of statehood turns into external legal fact.

A treaty's final text is almost always flat, bureaucratic, and restrained. Once ratified, these documents disappear into state archives and academic footnotes, read mainly by specialists. That quiet exit leads many historians to treat treaties as isolated events, viewing them as brief flashes of diplomacy unworthy of sustained attention. This misses how political order actually endures. Certain treaties keep shaping nations long after they leave the news, with their influence persisting inside institutions, diplomatic habits, and national self-perception.

There is general unanimity in modern political theory about Westphalia having shaped the modern concept of the sovereign nation-state

None of this makes the treaty a mere relic of British imperial administration in South Asia

The legacy of the 1923 treaty has resurfaced at several turning points in Nepal's modern history. Its structure can be traced in the 1950 Nepal-India Treaty of Peace and Friendship, fittingly close to the far end of the very 150-year arc Burghart describes. The 1923 treaty was also the first formal instrument that engaged Nepal with the League of Nations, laying the groundwork for Nepal's admission to the United Nations in 1955. The treaty stands as a legally binding record of Nepal's sovereign standing in the international system, not a symbolic or ceremonial gesture.

None of this makes the treaty a mere relic of British imperial administration in South Asia. It remains a reference point for understanding Nepal's place in the world, which is reason enough to call its signing Nepal's 'Westphalian moment'. That is not a claim of historical

equivalence with 1648, because that was an event of far greater scale that ended decades of continental war. Their comparability is marked by the moment when a state's sovereignty becomes legible through external recognition, international law, and formal diplomatic lexicon.

The 1923 treaty did not invent Nepal's independence. Instead, it formalized, in the expression of international law, a nationhood Nepal had spent over a century building for itself.

Much has changed since Burghart wrote in 1984, let alone since 1923. The monarchy was abolished in 2008, and the state is now a secular federal republic. The categories of proprietary, ritual, and ancestral authority that Burghart traced no longer organize Nepali political life the way they once did. But at the moment the 1923 treaty was signed, they still did, which is exactly why Burghart's framework, and not only Westphalia's, belongs at the start of this story.

A century later, the structural questions the treaty raises still matter for small and middle powers. How do states win real recognition inside asymmetrical relationships? How is sovereignty asserted and defended when power is unevenly distributed across a system that is non-hierarchical? Nepal is again navigating a complicated landscape, positioned between two much larger neighbors amid shifting global alignments. The lessons of 1923 and of Burghart's account of what preceded it still apply.

Sovereignty is both an internal fact, built and rebuilt across generations, and an external status that must be continually asserted, codified, and defended through diplomacy. Small states are not condemned to the margins of history. When they master both kinds of work, reshaping their own political vocabulary while speaking the language of international law, they secure a lasting place in the international order. The book annexes important historical documents.

State and Craft: Readings on the 1923 Nepal-Britain Friendship Treaty, edited by Tika P Dhakal will be released on Aug 26. It features contributions from Dhakal, scholars Alaka Atreya Chudal, John Whelp-ton, Mohan Mainali, Shubanga Pandey, and Hem Sagar Baral, along with British Ambassador Rob Fenn and former Foreign Secretary Bharat Raj Paudyal

Algorithm and regime change

For a nation like Nepal, navigating the precarious space between regional giants, sovereignty is being challenged by 'Cartographic Soft Power'



DEVENDRA
GAUTAM

In the quiet sanctuary of a library seated amidst an urban sprawl in Kathmandu, one of the few corners where this observer can choose to stay offline, the world feels governed by the slow, deliberate weight of history that mostly lives and breathes in books that need some serious dusting. Step outside in 2026, and you face a chaotic collision of shifting borders and invisible codes as data centres of giants with economies richer than most of the third world hum 24/7, running the whole world at a dizzying pace. Over my recent marathon conversation with AI, a singular, chilling pattern has emerged: a global migration of agency from the human spirit to the algorithmic ledger. As an observer of geopolitical and social affairs, one realizes that the struggle for sovereignty is no longer just a matter of 'boots on the ground', but of bits in the cloud—the kind that does not bring rain.

To understand the crisis of the present, we must look to the dawn of creation. Rather than a scientific event, the Big Bang was the starting point of a thermodynamic journey toward entropy—a measure of molecular disorder, randomness or unavailability of energy to do useful work within a system—and eventual Heat Death (or the Big Freeze), a leading cosmological theory for the end of the universe, where it reaches a state of maximum entropy. In this infinite, cooling universe, the human brain remains a high-energy, logic-defying anomaly and even an 'ordinary' brain understands what catastrophic results the unavailability of energy brings.

A highly complex, 1.4 kg organ containing 100bn neurons (approx) and composed of roughly 73 percent water, it has cerebrum (intelligence and voluntary action), cerebellum (coordination and balance), and brainstem (automatic functions), apart from myelin, grey matter and white matter. Apparently, the brain is a grave matter, not just a grey matter as this "20-watt miracle", considered the most powerful, complex machine (and the most energy-efficient natural 'machine', perhaps) manages complex nuances of life with less energy than a dim lightbulb.

In contrast, the Artificial Intelligence systems we are building to 'assist' us consume the energy of entire cities, raising enduring questions about its viability in a world already grappling with disastrous consequences of climate change and global warming. This efficiency gap suggests that human consciousness is the universe's most vital export—a rare pocket of order in a sea of chaos. Yet, we are currently trading this miracle for the megawatt-hungry convenience of the machine. As we offload our judgment to these models, we risk a 'Cognitive Dependency' that could eventually lead to the atrophy of the very intuition and wisdom that allowed us to survive the past 10,000 years against all odds, even as giants such as dinosaurs and woolly mammoth vanished from the face of the earth, once and for all.

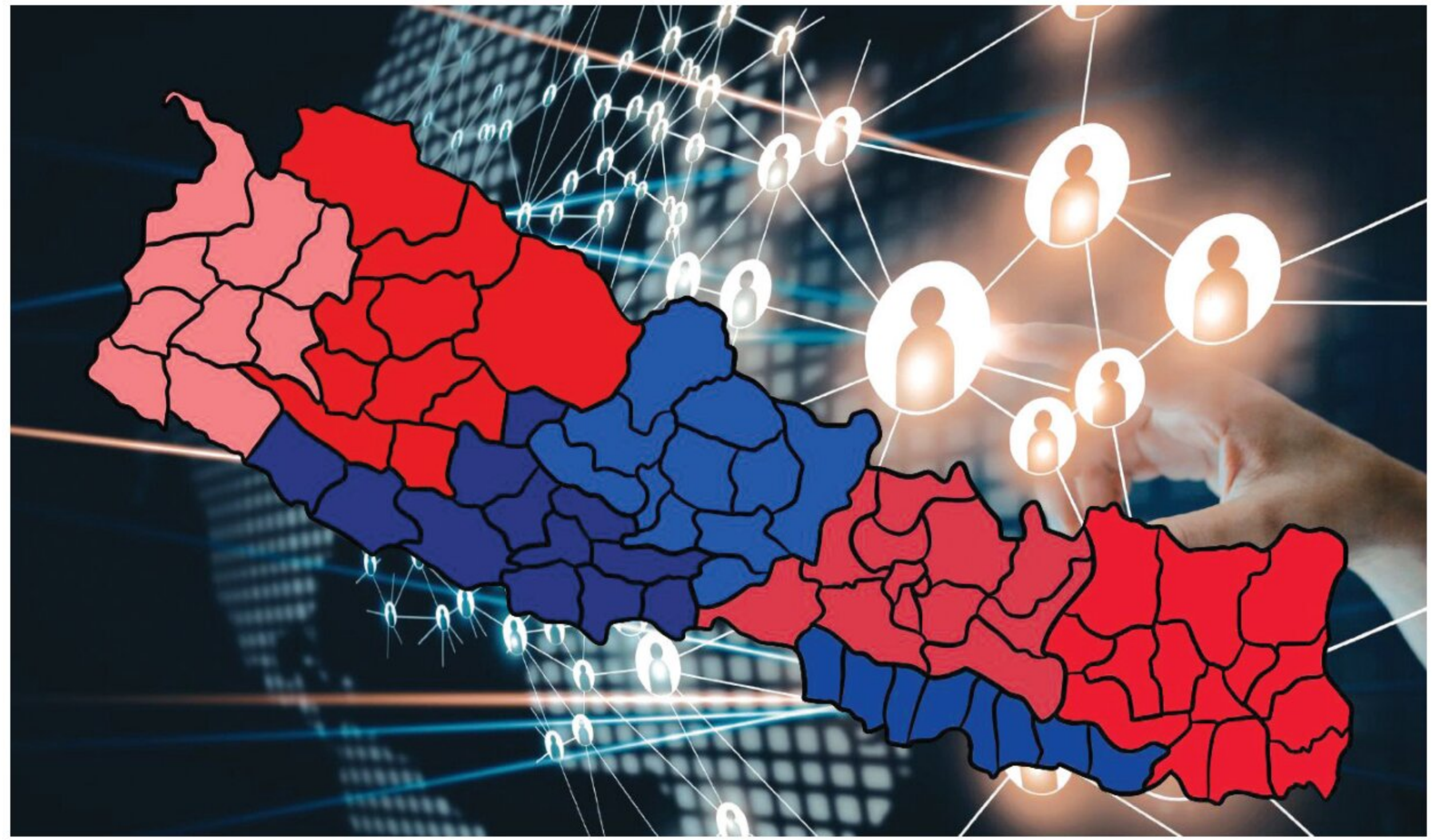
The transition from cosmic order to digital chaos is most visible in what we might term the World Disorder. We are witnessing a 'clash of timelines' where the slow, deliberate pace of international law is losing ground to the instantaneous execution of code. In our context, nowhere is this more dangerous than in the Google Map controversy.

For a nation like Nepal, navigating the precarious space between regional giants, sovereignty is being challenged by 'Cartographic Soft Power'. When a global tech giant renders a border based on data density or 'localized neutrality' rather than historical treaties like the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship and other government documents such as tax payments made, it creates a digital truth that overrides physical reality. If a security officer at a remote border post trusts the 'map in his pocket' over the parchment in the national archives, the code has effectively annexed the territory. This is 'Annexation by Algorithm'—a world where might is right for Google, and where the digital generation may slowly lose the ability to distinguish between a pixel and a pillar.

Regime change

The events of 8-9 Sept 2025, in Nepal serve as a textbook case of how algorithm-fed movements can dismantle established regimes with a speed that traditional diplomacy or political parties cannot match. Other textbook cases preceding our own are:

Bangladesh (2024): A rapid, student-led uprising, also predominantly organized by GenZ, forced the resignation and fleeing of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. The movement utilized social media to circumvent state media control and coordinate mass protests after a quota reform protest escalated.



Digital Nepal

On or off the track?

The Covid-19 had adverse impacts on economy but on the contrary, it opened the doors to virtual communication and made an urgent call for digital services in the virtual world

Nepal has envisioned Digital Nepal. This dream is to ensure good governance by developing knowledge, skills and capabilities related to information technology through electronic service delivery to the Nepalese citizens in line with the global advancements. Digital Nepal constitutes the three national goals: One, accessible modern infrastructure and intensive connectivity. Two, high and sustainable production and productivity. Three, good governance. The core objective is to ensure a multi-dimensional transformation of the economy. The expected outcome will be easy and simple public service delivery through maximum use of digital technology.

In this direction, Nepal has fulfilled the major activities such as building nationwide optical fibre network under information highway, connecting, and operating the main equipment of 4G LTE, bringing mobile device management system and national e-payment gateway into operation, and now exploring the feasibility of use of digital signature in government service delivery and rendering public services electronically. The twin challenges ahead are to launch and operate the Sagarmatha Satellite and to launch the 5G mobile network. The ever-widening digital divide has posed another challenge. The ICT advancements dwell on the digital infrastructure and technology which further need expansion and development in a federal governance system.

The fourteenth plan of Nepal did more than expected: The target was to reach 65 percent of the Nepali population with access to internet service but it achieved 65.9 percent. The fifteenth plan has a periodic target to access 80 percent of the Nepalis with internet by the end of fiscal year 2023-2024 and a long term vision to broaden the access of internet to every Nepali citizen by FY 2043-2044.

The Covid-19 had adverse impacts on Nepal's economy but on the contrary, it opened the doors to virtual communication and made an urgent call for digital services in the virtual world. For now, the expansion and management of information technology infrastructure remains challenging. Nepal needs to develop innovation, talent, skills, and entrepreneurship through a multilateral partnership by maintaining the interconnectivity between the various information systems of the government in service delivery through digital infrastructure development.

Many developing countries are reeling under extreme poverty

and the lives of people have not improved significantly over the years. Among many reasons, one substantial reason is widespread corruption. The nations are in the clutches of corruption and that ultimately leads to the vicious circle of poverty. The traditional style of governance, manual systems, unethical behaviors of public servants, bribery, embezzlement, government procurement systems, bureaucratic delays, and red tape have contributed to corruption reaching the peak. South Asia is marred by the cancer of corruption. In particular, Nepal is one of the notorious countries in the world list of corruption.

Under such circumstances, e-government or e-governance or the Information and communication technologies (ICTs) play a big role in ensuring good governance in general and transparency in particular. E-Government is an innovative approach that many world governments are increasingly adopting in order to work more effectively, share information and deliver better services to the public. e-government is essentially more about the process of government reform and resulting benefits than about the application of specific technological solutions or services. Many scholars have agreed with this definition: E-government means the use of technology to enhance access to and delivery of government services in order to benefit citizens, business partners, and employees.

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have emerged as innovative approaches with mammoth potential to make people's lives better at large and, particularly, the people in the margin and the people in developing countries. Use of ICTs can enhance business, support education and healthcare systems and also improve the governance and government system both at local and national level in the development endeavor. Today we cannot imagine a world without a computer or a smartphone or the Internet. ICTs have an impact and presence in cars, phones, aircrafts, banks, schools, etc. The innovative domain called Internet of Things (IoT) is on the go and on the rise. Technology-mediated applications are increasingly gaining popularity and have become a part and parcel of our daily lives.

ICTs contribute to the overall development in multiple ways: e-Government for anti-corruption, attainment of Sustainable Development Goals, citizens' trust, fast public service delivery and so on.

E-government and transparency has a very intimate nexus and are complementary to one another.



Dhananjay
Shah

● **E-government and transparency has a very intimate nexus and are complementary to one another**



Full Article
here

Transparency is the soul of good governance. It refers to the state of openness, accountability and visibility. Its domain has stretched its arms with the wave of right to information. Clearly the prominence of transparency as an administrative norm is very critical. Democratic, accountable and legitimate government depends largely on how transparent the government is. Transparency is best ensured by the tools of ICTs.

A good e-government strategy can contribute to building a more efficient, accountable and transparent government. If inclusive in nature, e-government applications can rebuild citizen trust in government, promote economic growth by improving interface with business, and empower citizens to participate in the broader advancement of good governance. While e-government is not a panacea for the complex and deep-rooted problems of corruption, it cannot be ignored that ICTs possess the ability to contribute effectively towards any anti-corruption efforts. E-government's potential to increase transparency and combat corruption in government administration is gaining popularity in communities of e-government practitioners and researchers.

It is noteworthy of the immense role of ICTs and the world governments need to make use of the full potential of ICTs for the timely achievement of the SDGs. In fact, ICTs have enormous potential to deliver dramatic results in education, health and socio-economic growth. It is critically important to reach a consensus on the need for a new set of connectivity targets to help governments more effectively harness broadband networks and services to drive progress towards the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. In Nepal's context, the rapid advancement pace in ICT development and promotion is doing good compared to other sectors but needs to be done better. One major bottleneck is lack of strong political commitment for the full utilization of ICTs and its implementation. Where is the ICT agenda which is the mother of all agendas? The political leadership does not seem vehemently carrying the agenda of ICTs as a driver of socio-economic transformation of Nepal. Our leaders must realize the growing importance of ICTs or the Internet or social media or the e-world. People today actively participate in the interactions in the digital world ■

The author is a postgraduate from Kyung Hee University, South Korea and currently working at Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security

In this power-driven world, smaller countries are vulnerable

Marc Saxer is a political analyst and strategist with two decades of experience in Asia, advising governments, industry, and civil society. Kamal Dev Bhattarai of ApEx talked with him about his new book, recent geopolitical situation, among other topics. Excerpts:

Tell us briefly about your new book.

Well, the title, which is probably curious—"The Wolf World"—is a quote by Thomas Hobbes. He was writing his famous book in the 17th century at the height of the English Civil War, and he describes a world where he says, "Where the law of jungle rules, and man is a wolf to man," right? So that's what 'Wolf World' means.

The analogy is that I believe after the collapse of Pax Americana, we are living in a world of disorder. We're living in a world where rules are broken, where great powers are actually ridiculing rules, human rights, and international law, and it is an increasingly dangerous world.

This is not just me saying this; there's empirical evidence for this. The Peace Research Institute of Oslo has measured that in the year 2025, there have been more violent conflicts and interstate wars than at any time since World War II. So that means we see an escalation of conflict and war around the world, and that is a clear indicator that the old order has collapsed, and a new non-order has evolved. I'm sure we're going to talk more about what that means, but that's what the title is from. And maybe one sentence more: I think I'm describing this dangerous world, but the book is about how you navigate it and how you could possibly overcome it.

How should small countries like Nepal navigate the challenges of the new scenario that you have presented in your book?

In this lawless world, this power-centered, power-driven world, smaller countries are vulnerable. They are vulnerable to coercion; they're vulnerable, of course, to be sucked into conflicts that they're not having part of. So navigating this war means understanding how it operates. You have to clearly understand how it operates; you have to understand what kind of vulnerabilities are created.

It is very difficult to withstand coercion by great powers to choose sides. Nepal is situated between China and India. Nepal is also situated in the global power competition between the US and China. So being forced to choose one side over the other is, of course, a painful experience that you would like to avoid.

Recognize structural trends: As quoted by the former Prime Minister of Singapore, who said: "No one wants to choose sides, but the structural trends may force us to do so against our best interests." Understanding what the structural trends are is very important. The most important one is technology, in a time and age where the US and China and their allies are spending trillions and trillions of dollars to advocate artificial intelligence, quantum computing, semiconductors. They are basically telling you that if you are in the AI world of the other one—this is what the Americans call Pax Silica—if you're playing with the Chinese, you cannot play with us. And the Chinese are saying if you're playing with the Americans, you cannot play with us. So that means you are forced, maybe, to choose sides.

The same thing has happened when it comes to weapons. You cannot just buy weapons wherever you want; you will have to show some alignment. Eventually, the same thing can happen to investment and infrastructure, and in financial markets. So that means, while hedging and balancing is, for a small country, the best option, there are limitations to how much hedging and balancing is actually possible. I think that understanding these vulnerabilities, these limitations, is very, very important, especially for smaller countries.

To say that you are a buffer country also means that you are accepting a world order which is defined by great powers and their spheres of influence

Nepal has traditionally tried to maintain strategic autonomy between India and China. As US-China rivalry intensifies and India-China competition deepens, is Nepal's traditional policy of balancing still sustainable? Or, will Kathmandu eventually be forced to make hard strategic choices?

Well, part of what I already said is that there are limitations to balancing, but there's also domestic experience. I think that there's two things that need to be considered. One is landlocked status. Nepal is a landlocked country, so you don't have that many options. Looking at other landlocked countries like Mongolia would be a good idea. Mongolia only has two neighbors as well, and their policy is called the 'Third Neighbor Policy', right? It does not change the situation that they only have two borders, but it gives them some more options and therefore more room for maneuver. So hence, this is maybe an idea.

Another is domestic consensus. Experience shows that while in a democracy, conflict, competition, and debate is healthy, some sort of a minimal consensus over the foreign policy posture is helpful. Because if there is no consensus, and one side wants to lean to this side and the other to the other, this invites external meddling into your domestic politics. So, one way to isolate you against this kind of external meddling is some sort of minimal consensus over the fundamentals.

You rightly pointed out that now it has been very difficult for Nepal to make decisions on AI, telecommunications, and other information technologies. For example, the US is coming up with Starlink, AI technologies, all those

things, and the US is saying that you cannot collaborate with China if you collaborate with us. How should Nepal handle this situation?

Well, I mean, you cannot escape the fact that you're a small, landlocked country. What I said is you can try to navigate this chessboard as well as you can: be very aware of your vulnerabilities, be very realistic and sober. I think that's the first thing. Otherwise, I have to repeat what I already said.

There is an ongoing debate in Nepal over whether Nepal should be understood primarily as a buffer state between India and China or as a dynamic bridge connecting the two. How would you assess this debate?

Well, both ideas are actually a variation of saying that you try to have a neutral stance. I think the overall implication is much bigger than Nepal. To say that you are a buffer country also means that you are accepting a world order which is defined by great powers and their spheres of influence. Sphere of influence meaning that a great power has the ability and the right to interfere within the internal affairs of their neighbors. This is what you call a neo-imperial order, and this is certainly something that some great powers are pursuing. But there's obviously another position that says this is not good for small countries. Small countries should retain Westphalian principles: sovereignty, non-interference, territorial integrity, and hence you need to actually reject these kinds of notions. So, I think there's much bigger considerations than just the immediate thing. At the end of the day, you will not be able to influence what world order emerges. You can only navigate the one that is emerging.

Nepal has long aspired to move beyond being seen as a buffer between India and China and instead emerge as a vibrant bridge between them. How realistic is this vision? Can Nepal genuinely sustain a bridging role between two major powers with different strategic interests, and what would it take for Nepal to make this vision a reality?

I don't see why not, to be honest. I don't think that they are mutually exclusive. At the end of the day, like I said, a smaller country like Nepal will have to navigate the chessboard that it's given. So that means the relationship between the two giants, India and China, is not something you can influence. If China and India ramp up their rivalry, this will be difficult for Nepal to navigate because that means you'll be pulled to one side. If they, as of now, seem to actually try to tone down competition and find some new avenues to cooperate, this of course broadens your room for maneuver and allows you to become a bridge.

The US, China, and India are all pursuing competing strategic and economic interests in South Asia. Does Nepal risk becoming an arena for the great power competition rather than an actor with its own agency?

Okay, now we have to be a little bit precise. I do believe that the geopolitical chessboard of the 21st century is defined by

three primary theaters. Geopolitical competition is global—it's happening everywhere: Latin America, Africa, the Pacific, and the Arctic. But there are primary theaters where the interests of great powers are so involved that they actually commit fully their resources. These three primary theaters are where American hegemony is challenged; they are Europe (Russia), Middle East (Iran) and East Asia (China).

You can see that in these wars that are happening in Ukraine and in the Middle East, you have great power involvement, and there is a willingness to escalate. Whereas if you see that in other parts of the world, such as South Asia, which is a secondary theater, there is of course some involvement of great powers, but for instance, if you have a war between India and Pakistan, it does not escalate to a regional or global war—it is localized. If you look at, let's say, the war between Thailand and Cambodia, it does not escalate into a regional war—it stays localized. These two conflicts are important, but they are secondary to the primary.

If you're in a primary theater, this will invite external great powers to actually get involved. So, I think overall this is very good news for Nepal because I do believe that this part of the world is not a primary theater. Being a primary theater is a very dangerous thing, and I think that gives you a little bit more breathing room.

What are your suggestions for our new Prime Minister, the new government? How should it handle its foreign and international relations?

I think for me, the most important thing is to understand that in this 'Wolf World', all the things become intertwined. In the olden days, foreign policy was made by foreign policymakers. Now, basically, foreign policy has to do with your position in the global supply chains, with your ability to secure critical minerals and secure energy. You are basically being pushed into military alliances or not, to stay neutral.

So all of this is connected—security and economy is connected in geoeconomics. So, I think a comprehensive, holistic policy approach is the only way to go. It needs to be understood that everything is connected to everything: infrastructure investment and your geopolitical posture is connected; your ability to move up the value chains and attract investment in certain industries is connected to your geopolitical posture. So, I think the most important thing is to understand that all of these sectors that used to be separate are now one and the same thing.

In Nepal, over the past few years, I see a lot of debate where one section of the foreign policy watchers are saying that it is time for Nepal to move away from the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), whereas another group is saying that we should stick to it. What is your take on it?

There's no more thing such as non-alignment in the 21st century. The reason is that the ability to secure the things that you need as a country are no longer entirely freely available on the market. If you want to access critical minerals, you cannot just buy it on the market. If you want to access oil and gas, you cannot just buy it on the market. If you want to procure weapons, you cannot just buy it on the market. If you want to access top technology, you cannot just buy it on the market. So that means some sort of alignment is needed in order for you to access all the things that you need. So, I think the 21st-century equivalent of the idea of non-alignment is probably multi-alignment or strategic autonomy.



Laufey's 'third space' explodes

Each year, the Grammy-winning singer curates itineraries for different locations across the globe for her listeners to follow

MARIA SHERMAN | New York

It was 2023 when Laufey, the Icelandic singer-songwriter known for her neoclassical jazz-pop, decided to create a global fan event. Her second album, "Bewitched," was soon to be released and she wanted to do something big to celebrate it. But more than that, she says, she "wanted to find a way to get my fans out of their homes, and to really follow an itinerary of my perfect idea of a day and have the music from 'Bewitched' follow it."

And thus, "A Very Laufey Day" was born. Each year, the Grammy-winning singer curates itineraries for different locations across the globe for her listeners to follow. It's "anywhere I have been and loved," she says. It allows them to live what she refers to as "a perfect day," but also to connect with their community offline and in person. And as she approaches its fourth edition, it has only grown larger.

"It became much bigger than I anticipated, really," she says. She sought to inspire her audience to find "third space



es," and explore some of her favorite locales: museums, bookstores, cafes, concerts and the like, and foster community in the process. And each year, it has only grown bigger, with fans dressing up in their favorite Laufey-themed vintage fashions to celebrate the unofficial holiday. And Aug 23 will mark the fourth annual "A Very Laufey Day." "It is a fun puzzle every year," she says.

'A Very Laufey Day' 2026

This year, "A Very Laufey Day" will include experiences in 75 cities across 25 countries, centering on the theme of "A Celebration of the Arts."

Those include performances spanning symphony orchestras, ballet, jazz, opera and theater as well as events with libraries, bookstores, coffee shops, yogurt/ice cream shops and more. Her concert film "A Night at the Symphony: Hollywood Bowl" will be screened at select theaters. And she's partnered with many museums around the world,

including New York City's Guggenheim, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, London's Tate Modern and National Gallery, Chile's Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Seoul's Daelim Museum and more. At some participating businesses, fans will be able to acquire limited edition merchandise and Laufey-themed specialty drinks.

"This year it was really about focusing on the arts and culture and finding ways to bring this barrier of entry down between my audience—which is mostly GenZ and GenA—and these kinds of so-called high cultural experiences," she says. "Whether it's going to see an orchestra show ... museums or galleries, we really want to find ways to connect with those institutions."

Some of these spaces can be intimidating for younger fans, and Laufey says this year was all about making these rooms, some of her favorites, inviting to her audience.

AP



'Road to Everest' unveils official trailer

ApEx BUREAU | Kathmandu

The official trailer of 'Road to Everest', a documentary centered on the courage, mystery, challenges and impact of climate change surrounding Sagarmatha, has been released. The trailer offers a compelling glimpse into an extraordinary journey from sea level to the summit of the world's highest mountain, capturing human courage, struggle and determination along the way.

Produced with an entirely Nepali technical team, the documentary contains no artificial or computer-generated visuals, according to the production team. 'Road to Everest' is claimed to be the first Sagarmatha documentary to document a complete real-life journey from sea level to the summit using entirely authentic footage.

The documentary is the result of more than two years of research, filming and production. The story has been written by journalist Santosh Acharya and Nirmal Shrestha. Featuring the voice of renowned broadcaster Bhusan Dahal, the documentary has been produced in both Nepali and English. At the heart of the documentary is the inspiring journey of Raj Gurung, a man in his fifties who challenges age, time, and his own limitations to pursue his dream of climbing Sagarmatha. According to the production team, his journey goes beyond mountaineering, becoming a story of dreams, struggle, self-belief, and the human determination to turn the seemingly impossible into reality.

Directed by Nirmal Shrestha, 'Road to Everest' goes beyond showcasing the grandeur of Sagarmatha. It explores the risks and challenges of high-altitude mountaineering, the tireless contribution of the Sherpa community, human courage, and the rapidly changing Himalayan environment under the impact of climate change. The documentary seeks to portray Sagarmatha not merely as a mountain, but as a symbol of courage, perseverance, determination and human potential.

The documentary features renowned mountaineers Phurba Tenzing Sherpa and Nima Gyalzen Sherpa. Phurba has successfully summited Sagarmatha 18 times, while Nima has successfully climbed Sagarmatha 10 times and completed all 14 of the world's 8,000-meter peaks. Vinod Gurung, Suraj Gurung and Nirmal Shrestha also appear as fellow travelers and important figures throughout the journey.

Sequel to 'Oonko Sweater' announced

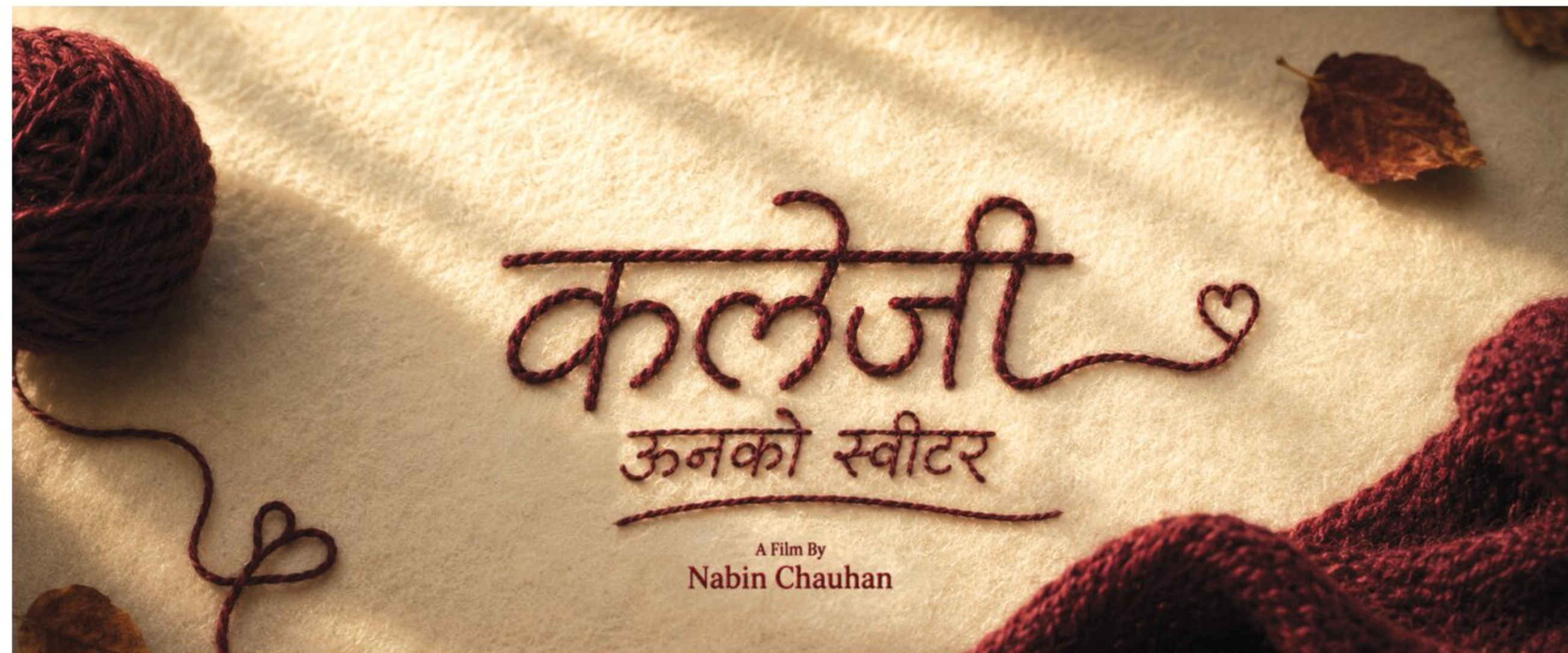
A notable addition to the cast is acclaimed Indian actor and writer Piyush Mishra

ApEx BUREAU | Kathmandu

The makers of the 2025 blockbuster Nepali film 'Oonko Sweater' have officially announced its sequel, titled 'Kaleji-Oonko Sweater', during the third Infra International Nepali Film Award event held in Kathmandu. Directed by Nabin Chauhan, the sequel is scheduled to begin filming after the upcoming Dashain festival, with a global theatrical release targeted for 2027.

The upcoming film will continue the romantic narrative of the characters Dharanidhar and Phool, with the story set to pick up from Sikkim. Lead actors Bipin Karki and Miruna Magar reprise their roles, alongside Alex Paras and Pariksha Limbu.

A notable addition to the cast is acclaimed Indian actor and writer Piyush Mishra, who has joined the project following a careful review of the script and the original film. The pro-



duction will also feature collaborative technical support from both Nepal and India.

The original film, 'Oonko Sweater', achieved significant commercial

success in 2025, grossing 120m at the domestic box office and an additional INRs 15m during its 50-day theatrical run in India. Furthermore, the critically acclaimed film has garnered a total of

19 awards across various domestic and international film festivals, including honors at the National Film Awards and the recent Infra International Nepali Film Awards.