



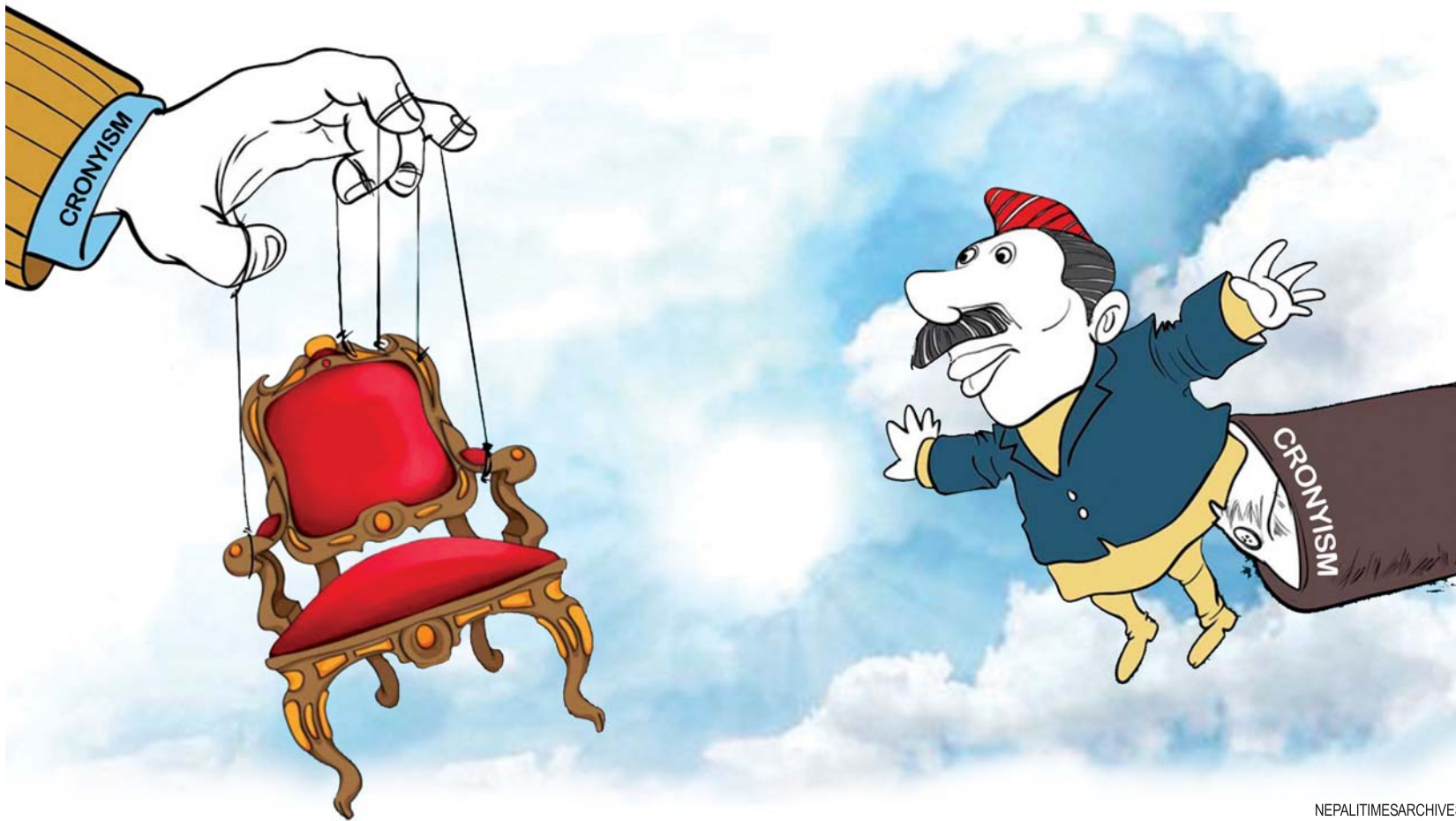
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The business of politics



NEPALITIMESARCHIVES

● **Shekhar Kharel**

The cause of prolonged political paralysis in Nepal is cronyism, and the only way to uproot it is by tackling its source: MP-buying by big business.

The criminalisation of politics and the politicisation of crime is now the business of politics. Lawbreakers become lawmakers. Gangsters become ministers. The short-cut to becoming a legislator and minister without even standing for elections is to buy one's way to the top.

Political integrity has become an oxymoron. No matter how popular or honest politicians may be, they cannot win elections without financial backing. And the cash comes from businesses seeking a healthy return on investment.

There are two ways to seek ROI from politics. Firstly, by offering a straightforward donation (a bribe in polite parlance) to a politician standing for elections and demanding a pound of flesh later. The second is to offer an even heftier

'campaign contribution' to directly become a nominated MP from that party without ever contesting an election.

The constitutional provision to ensure proportional representation for marginalised communities has become the backdoor for tycoons to enter the House chambers.

Education entrepreneur Umesh Shrestha was one of Sher Bahadur Deuba's first ministerial appointments after assuming office two weeks ago, and one he took without consulting his party or coalition members.

Shrestha is a self-made but wealthy man, and has announced he will not take a salary as minister. Unlike underfed politicians, he may be less tempted by petty payoffs. However, appointing someone who is setting up a chain of private hospitals to the Health Ministry is akin to putting a fox in charge of the chicken coop.

The prime minister has not been able to give a clear rationale for this conflict of interest, and after widespread criticism of the move, said rather ambiguously: "It won't

happen again."

This week, the new businessman-turned-state minister allowed the private sector to import Covid-19 vaccines. How does this make sense when G2G agreements are in place, COVAX doses are in the pipeline, and if private importers will compete with the government for vaccines from the same global supply chain?

We can give Shrestha the benefit of doubt, and argue that the boy who came from Bhojpur to Kathmandu in his flip-flops to build a business empire, may be better at managing healthcare delivery than clueless and corrupt politicians.

In fact, if there is blame to be placed on anyone, it should be on an expensive system that allows greedy political actors to elevate their cronies to important positions in government.

Cronyism was also in full display in the Gandaki Province drama last month: Dobate Biswakarma was all set to become the only Dalit minister in the

provincial government, but was suddenly supplanted by Bindu Thapa, a Deuba loyalist rewarded for party funds.

When Nepal's development is driven by contractors, it is no surprise that politics is also contracted out. For politicians, 'prosperity' is measured by highways, bridges, view towers and not by quality schools, accessible health care and meaningful jobs for young Nepalis.

An investigation in this paper after the 2017 elections showed that up to 40% of elected local government representatives were contractors renting out their own excavators and tipper trucks to themselves.

The way to address this rot is to stop allowing Nepal's richest businessmen from using the quota for indigenous and ethnic minorities to become unelected ministers. The ballot box is not a cash box, and for Nepal's equitable progress, the next election must stop votes being bought with notes.

A hotter Himalaya
EDITORIAL
PAGE 2

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A hotter Himalaya

Scientists are loath to link individual weather events with climate change. But there is a growing consensus among climate researchers that warmer ocean and atmospheric temperatures have intensified storms.

Every year for the past few years, the planet has broken its own temperature records. There are, as we speak, continental scale wildfires sweeping across Siberia, North America, Turkey and record floods recently ravaged parts of Europe.

In Nepal, too, prolonged winter drought unleashed widespread wildfires. When the rains arrived, they struck with unusual ferocity in the Himalayan rain shadow.

Manang saw fires burn continuously for



NDRRMA

three months this winter. Monsoon cloudbursts then hit slopes recently scorched, reducing the soil's absorptive capacity. The runoff fed into the Marsyangdi system, washing away settlements and infrastructure.

In Sindhupalchok, the destabilising effect of the 2015 earthquake, the wildfires combined with record-breaking precipitation turned the watershed into mud paste.

The latest aerial clips of the upper Melamchi valley show a massive collapse of glacio-fluvial and lake deposits by extremely heavy precipitation on 15-16 June. Nepal now has a National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority (NDRRMA) to carry out hazard mapping, recommend settlement zoning, infrastructure planning and provide early warning. But a nationwide warning of 'heavier than usual precipitation' that it issued in June was of little use — more accurate, localised forecasting is needed.

Himalayan disasters pre-date the climate crisis, and they are all interrelated. Earthquakes unleash landslides that block rivers, which burst, releasing catastrophic floods. Avalanches bulldoze glaciers into populated valleys. The danger of these calamities are now compounded by the climate crisis and unwise human intervention.

The Melamchi flood has added more uncertainty to the project that was supposed to start supplying drinking water this year to Kathmandu Valley through a 26.5km tunnel.

Although the tunnel itself appears to have been saved, the headwork structures are under metres of mud and the access roads have been washed away.

The fragile slopes upstream are still crumbling into the river, and this week's heavy rains unleashed more floods adding to the damage from June. The project that has already cost \$700 million is sure to cost even more, and will be delayed further.

There was also major damage in June in a dozen hydropower projects in Lamjung and Kaski. The 465MW Upper Tama Kosi project was saved only because a landslide dammed river in China in June did not burst. If it had, a project that will generate one-third of Nepal's electricity demand would have been destroyed even before its inauguration.

The good news is that the news could have been much worse. The bad news is that these geo-ecological dangers in Nepal are sure to get worse because of climate change and poorly engineered road-building, rampant river mining, haphazard quarrying, etc.

Last month, a report by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) being prepared for the Climate Summit in Glasgow in

November was leaked to the press. It forecast that there will be an increased impact of the climate crisis on melting ice and extreme weather as well as on biodiversity loss, unsurvivable heat waves and ecosystem collapse.

The 2015 Paris Agreement suggested that global average temperatures have to be limited to only 1.5 Celsius above pre-industrial levels in the next 30 years by reducing carbon emissions. It is already at 1.2 Celsius, and on track to exceed 2 Celsius by 2050.

Scientists say the Himalaya will warm up to 0.3-0.7 Celsius faster than the global average. This will mean that at present rates of atmospheric heating, our mountains will be losing up to two-thirds of their ice during this century. The climate emergency will add to all the other problems we in Nepal already face. It calls for strategic long-term planning to adapt to the socio-economic and environmental implications of a hotter Himalaya. Nepal's international partners have pledged \$7.4 billion for a Green Recovery project to build back greener after the pandemic. Nepal needs to switch to clean transport not just to do our bit to reduce emissions, but also to reduce the growing petroleum import bill and save the economy.

There is no time to waste debating whether this year's floods were caused by climate change or not. Leave that to the scientists. Let us plan as if it is climate-related, act accordingly, and be prepared for the frightening consequences of a Himalayan meltdown.

Leave it to scientists to debate if wildfires and floods are climate related. Nepal must plan as if they are.

ONLINE PACKAGES



After the devastating floods in June, Sindhupalchok's Melamchi Valley was once again hit by another flood this week. At least 60 more buildings have been swept away. Join Helambu Mayor Nima Galgen Sherpa and watch dramatic aerial footage by NDRRMA of the debris field in Bhemthang that is being washed down by rains.

GONE GONE GONE

Same oh, same oh as always with government mismanagement ('2AM is too late', Editorial, #1072). Common knowledge that never seems to reach or evoke response from the responsible actors.

Paul Vande Moortel

- I live in (and hope for) a country where the best time to queue up for a card I am legally entitled to was yesterday.

Aashish Mishra

- This is how you, honorable Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, handle the pandemic ('Nepalis queuing up all night for proof of job', Upasana Khadka, #1072). Have serious discussion on this issue rather than which party gets the ministry.

Bishwas Ojha

- The Nepal government does not know how to leverage technology.

GeoHubNepal

SHRINKING PHEWA

All the hotels on the Lakeside front had their own electric water pumps at the edge of the lake, with pipes going back to the hotel's holding tanks ('Pokhara's shrinking Phewa lake', Krishnamani Baral, nepalitimes.com). Hotel's laundry was washed in the lake. The municipality wasn't that interested then, as there was nothing in it for them. The Phewa Lake has been milked dry. On a positive note, check out Begnas Lake to see how it could've been done.

Marc McConnell

- I love Phewa Lake and I am shocked by the look of it now.

Jennifer van der Helm

- It's not difficult to clean a lake and keep it that way. It should be in the interest of the locals so that tourists visit it more often.

Giancarlo Cattaneo

NEPAL'S CHANGING DIET

Rate of Nepalis having high blood pressure is due to sodium packed instant noodles, Coca Cola, so called 'Real' juice, momos filled with animal fat, fast food, etc ('Why do so many Nepalis have high blood pressure?', Sonia Awale, #1072).

Tseten Norkey

- What was wrong with the excellent protein in chickpeas, beans and lentils ('Meat, money and the middle class', Ramesh Kumar, nepalitimes.com)? Obesity and heart disease will follow whilst the few get rich.

Fionna Heiton

SARBOTTAM STOCK ROW

This is business as usual ('Insider trading taints Nepal capital market', Ramesh Kumar, nepalitimes.com). There will be a few outraged voices and promises of an enquiry, a phone call will be made and the story will disappear. None of the perpetrators will be arrested, face trial or go to prison. Remember the Helicopter Mafia scandal?

Alex Ferguson

- This is beyond acceptable and equivalent to a crime. Now I strongly doubt that the share distribution process is transparent.

Chhunku Ukyab

TIGER CONSERVATION

Conservation is clearly successful - the problem is that reserves are too small (Nepal's tiger conservation too successful?, Tufan Neupane, nepalitimes.com).

David Seddon

- As a Nepali, I never thought I would live to see a day where we are too successful at something.

Bidur Giri

FARMERS AND CLIMATE

I wonder what government initiatives will be led by villagers from this region to try to prevent drought and destruction of crops leading to villagers' hunger and starvation ('First drought, then downpour', Smita Magar, nepalitimes.com). Can the research that has been done in the Tarai be applicable to those hilly regions?

Jen Rankin

EDUCATION FOR ALL

The VSO/ENGAGE support for the girls with hearing impairment during bridge course and then to mainstream education is important to improve learning opportunities of highly marginalised out of school girls (OOSM) and girls with disability and is highly appreciated ('Sisterhoods empowering education in Nepal', nepalitimes.com).

Shyam Mandal

THE ASS

We common Nepalis are very serious about democracy, but our leaders loathe it and always try to usurp power ('Hi-level political Mechanisation', The Ass, #1072).

Lal Bahadur

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING

Nepal's uneven Covid-19 deaths

by Ramesh Kumar

Low vaccine coverage coupled with inadequate health and transport infrastructure is fueling the disparate Covid-19 deaths in rural Nepal. Worse still, actual figures could be more than three times higher than official records. Get the low-down on nepalitimes.com.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Nepalis queuing up all night for proof of job

by Upasana Khadka

Nepalis seeking foreign employment this week queued up to 28 hours just to get a proof of vaccination. But vaccine certificates are just rubber stamped letters, and will not be acceptable because they do not have QR codes. Full story on the Nepali Times website.

Most popular on Twitter



2AM is too late

Editorial

You know things are not all right and the government has failed its citizenry when a migrant realises that 2AM is too late to stand in line to obtain a simple piece of paper. It is a damning indictment of the state's apathy towards those at its mercy. Go online to read feedback.

Most commented

Coping with patriarchy

by Bhumi Ghimire

In this most read article of the week, the author chronicles four generations of neglect and suffering that the women in her family suffered at the hands of a patriarchal state. Tragically, women today continue to receive the same archaic treatment of yesteryear.

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
The heads of the Nepal Stock Exchange and Securities Board of Nepal as well as brokers & industrialists have been found to have profited from insider training and conflict of interest, eroding the public's trust in the country's stock market. @Raw_Ku reports:



Baburam Bhattarai @brb1954
This is a universal feature of crony capitalism (with some Nepali characteristics). That is what I had sensed way back in 2008 when I was the Finance Minister and had advised not to make the capital market a gambling den. It was misquoted and a hue and cry raised. Let history judge!



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
#editorial The lines at Teku this week showed appalling indifference towards those at the mercy of the state.



Airline Guy @GuyAirline
Must do better. The treatment of our own Nepali migrant workers is shameful. The same people who through their blood, sweat, tears and often lives are keeping our nation's economy afloat.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
What are the advantages for Nepali freelancers working for international teams from #Nepal? Read @Saniasan's latest column to find out.



Kul Chandra Gautam @KulCGautam
Given Nepali migrant workers' proven tenacity to work in the toughest jobs in hardship environs abroad, let's encourage our talented youth to work as "digital migrants" & compete in the global marketplace without leaving home. Let GoN & the private sector facilitate such work.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
In #Nepal, close to one-third of the adult population has some form of #hypertension, but in urban centres the figure is as high as 40%, with 25% in rural areas suffering from it. @SoniaAwale reports:



Rita Thapa @bheribas
#NepaliTimes Thus, refrain from these risks i.e consumption of tobacco products, alcohol, junk food-drinks, physical inactivity & mental tension. As BTMF original published research has shown that reduction of these deadly risks is possible!



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Nepal's uneven Covid-19 deaths. More people are dying in remote villages due to limited health care, lack of testing and inequitable #vaccination. Ramesh Kumar reports:



Hemraj Khatriwada @HemrajKhatriwad8
The country is still paying the price of Oli's failures and mismanagement in tackling #Covid situation. Hope the new PM will take the imperative steps and take out Nepal from this quagmire

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Full circle

It's ironic how some things have not changed in the past two decades including inequitable development, poor governance, corruption and lack of accountability, yet political alliances keep changing even as the players and the inner workings remain the same.

20 years ago this week, newly appointed prime minister SherBahadurDeuba had a tall order:

Restore peace. At the height of the insurgency, he had a temporary ceasefire with the Maoists but Deuba and Pushpa Kamal Dahal were clearly at the opposite ends of the spectrum.

Today, they are part of the coalition government that toppled former PM KP Oli, which only goes on to confirm that there are no permanent friends or foes in politics.

Excerpts of the page 1 report from issue #54 3-9 August 2001:

Sher Bahadur Deuba spent his first week at Singha Durbar talking about talks, but he is not talking about what he has been talking about. He briefed King Gyanendra on Wednesday evening, he had a marathon meeting with the opposition UML's Madhav Kumar Nepal, and met almost every opposition leader worth a seat in parliament.

The prime minister's mission is peace, but thus far he seems to be going it alone. He made the rounds of politicians without aides. The



topmost bureaucracy is still clueless about what is going on, and until Thursday the prime minister had not even appointed an adviser. Perhaps Deuba knows something we don't, and is simply keeping his cards close to the chest for the moment. Perhaps he is coordinating his activities closely with Narayanhiti. Perhaps he has a plan.

It is important to look beyond the initial contact that resulted in the ceasefire. Is Deuba not talking because he realises how distant peace really is? As prime minister he represents the state, not the person who could take easy potshots at Girija Prasad Koirala from the sidelines. Sooner or later, he will have to tell us how far apart he and Chairman Prachanda stand on core issues:

- Prachanda wants a new constitution, Deuba wants to keep the present one.
- Prachanda wants an interim government, Deuba can't do that under the existing constitution.
- Prachanda wants a Peoples' Republic of Nepal, Deuba is for a constitutional monarchy.

The prime minister finds himself squeezed between Prachanda, the new king, monarchists, leftists of different shades, centrists and rightists. The army's loyalty is no longer the wildcard—it has shown that it stands steadfastly behind the palace. The only thing Deuba can do is waffle. At a public meeting on Wednesday, Deuba did say that the constitution and constitutional monarchy were inviolate. However, he added: "Prachanda keeps his convictions, I keep mine and we will work together."

From archives material of *Nepali Times* of the past 20 years, site search: www.nepalitimes.com

Times

Publisher and Editor: Kunda Dixit

Audience Engagement: Sahina Shrestha, Associate Editor: Sonia Awale, Layout: Kiran Maharjan

Published by Himalmedia Pvt Ltd | Patan Dhoka, Lalitpur | GPO Box 7251 Kathmandu

editors@nepalitimes.com | www.nepalitimes.com | www.himalmedia.com | Tel: 01-5005601-08 Fax: +977-1-5005518

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Nepal needs to plan for plenty and scarcity of water

Nepal has abundant water resources as well as disasters caused by water, case in point the repeat flooding in Melamchi on 2 August following the flash floods back in June.

But climate change, pollution, and lack of infrastructure restrict water access in Nepal. Madhav Belbase, retired Secretary of the Ministry of Water Supply, who pioneered inter-basin water transfer and was involved with the Melamchi Project, speaks about water resource management in Nepal.

Excerpts from interview:



Nepali Times: Drawing on your vast experience in the water management sector, how do you think water is seen in Nepal?

Madhav Belbase: There is a popular misconception among many Nepali people that Nepal is the second most water-rich country in the world. This is added to a narrative that if you have a resource in abundance, you do not need to manage it. But it's not true.

Discourses on water management in Nepal are dominated by hydropower production and often neglect the other uses of water. Water management lacks integration. Rivers in Nepal are often diverted at multiple points along their stretches, affecting the other existing and potential uses of water.

What is the long-term viability of the Melamchi Water Supply Project considering the growing stress on freshwater supplies?

Climate change is already impacting rainfall patterns in Nepal. We used to have downpours in January and February, but now winter rainfall is becoming increasingly precarious. Even in the monsoon, rainfall patterns have completely changed. The intensity of precipitation is rising, which creates larger runoffs and landslides, and lower infiltration. At the same time, heavy downpours in the winter months seem to be disappearing, impacting on the distribution of water. Although the total amount of rain has not changed a lot, when we need water, we don't have it. When the rain does come, we seem to be getting too much of it.

The Melamchi Water Supply Project is meant to be a long-term solution to address water shortage in the Kathmandu Valley. However, the Melamchi river itself is snow-fed and may get less water due to climate change. But we can safeguard ourselves from the worst-case scenario through the development of water storage projects within or just outside the valley. Water storage projects and inter-basin water transfer projects can balance water availability. This can be done by transferring water from surfeit to deficit basins. Water storage can either be done through constructing large-scale reservoirs and dams, or small-scale ponds and household level reservoirs and even rainwater harvesting. Dams are critical for the long-term sustainability of water management and irrigation in Nepal.

Was the flood on the Melamchi in June anticipated as a once-in-100 years type event?

Yes, the headworks of the Melamchi project were designed with 100-year floods in mind. To ensure adequate protection, the project includes energy dissipation devices and safety mechanisms. The structures have been constructed to minimise abrasion due to flowing debris and bed loads. They are designed to withstand the worst possible events with a 100 year return period. However, an event can occur which is even more intense.

What are Nepal's opportunities and challenges for transboundary water cooperation with other riparian countries?



The muddy waters of the Indrawati bringing down the Melamchi flood at left merging with the Bhoti Kosi at Dolalghat on Monday.

RSS

About 40% of the annual flow and 70% of dry season flows of the Ganges in India originate from Nepal's rivers. The Ganges basin is home to about 500 million people, which can in itself explain the importance of Nepal's rivers for people living in northern India. Floods during the monsoon and a lack of adequate water for agriculture in the dry season are the two major issues there. Obviously, the construction of storage projects in Nepal's territory to regulate river flow could solve both problems in India to a great extent. If reservoirs are to be built in Nepal, the pricing of the impounded water must be judicially determined for win-win cooperation between the two countries.

China upstream also shares our rivers. Nepal's main concern with Chinese water relations is the sharing of flood and rainfall data. Because precipitation and weather events in China affect Nepal's rivers downstream, better cooperation is needed to properly manage transboundary water risks.

Last month, China sent a warning that the Tama Kosi river was dammed due to a large landslide, upstream from the 465MW

Upper Tama Kosi project. What are your thoughts on a single hydropower project having such a large proportion of the national hydropower generation?

Firstly, given the geology and steep slopes of the mountain as well as intense rainfall that occurs in Nepal, the structures we build on the rivers are always vulnerable. It is often difficult to predict the worst-case scenario flood. There are computer models to estimate near to actual situations, however, how accurately we provide the input data largely determines how closely we can predict the flows. Due to climate change, this type of prediction has become more and more difficult. The Tama Kosi headworks are designed to weather a flood with a 1,000 year return period, including a glacial lake outburst flood, meaning the headworks are designed to withstand a flood so intense it is only predicted to occur once every 1,000 years. This level of risk planning is common practice, and would normally be safe for the typical worst-case conditions.

Secondly, Nepal's per capita electricity consumption is very low, about 300 kWh. As the country progresses, the per capita consumption grows, and you need

to produce more electricity. In such a situation, a 456 MW project like Tama Kosi is not actually that big, and we will have similar projects distributed all over the country. However, for the present condition of the country, when a single project generates about one-third of electricity, there is always the risk of electricity shortages due to an unprecedented natural disaster in the Tama Kosi basin.

What do you see as the most important issue that needs to be tackled when it comes to water management in Nepal?

Water is a finite resource, and there is increasing stress on water resources. Our attitudes of abundance and overuse are risky, and we must uphold a sustainable limit to water uses to protect this precious resource for future generations. Nepal also needs to explore the possibilities of reusing and recycling water to achieve an optimum sustainable level of consumption. Pollution of our available freshwater resources is another major issue that must be understood and addressed at the individual level.

Experts from longer interview with the Geopolitics and Ecology of Himalayan Water.

prabhu BANK



Buddha Air Pokhara-Nepalgunj

Buddha Air has commenced Pokhara-Nepalgunj flights from 1 August on Sundays, Wednesdays and Fridays and the number of flights will be increased as per the demand. The flight will take off from Pokhara at 9:10 AM and return from Nepalgunj at 10AM.

Sanima Bank KIOCH Aid

Sanima Bank is providing Rs10 million to Kathmandu Institute of Child Health (KIOCH), which under the leadership of surgeon Bhagwan Koirala is building multi-specialty pediatric hospitals throughout Nepal.

Sarbottam scandal under probe

Following a Himalmedia investigation, Prem Kumar Rai, head of the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) has launched a probe into Nepal Securities Board chair Bishma Raj Dhungana.

Dhungana along with Nepal Stock Exchange (Nepse) CEO Chandra Singh Saud were allegedly involved in insider trading Sarbottam Cement shares IPO. The Finance Ministry has also asked for documentation on the dealings but is yet to hear back from both accused.

Heifer Agri Support

Heifer International Nepal, working for the sustainable development of small farming, has collaborated with women cooperatives and established 28 Agri Transport vehicles to be managed by them across the country.



Nexon loan

Customers buying Tata's new Nexon EV priced at Rs3.6 million can now get subsidised loans from NMB Bank. Loans will be available at a 0% premium with the bank's base rate interest, and NMB can provide up to 80% financing within 24 working hours. Nexon recently launched three models: XM, XZ Plus and XZ Plus Lux.



Marasini in MoF

Madhu Kumar Marasini has been appointed the new secretary of the Ministry of Finance. He was previously the Auditor-General and has considerable experience in budgeting, project planning and foreign assistance coordination.

IME Pay-Greenway for Cycle Travel

IME Digital Solution Limited's 'IME Pay' and Cycle City Network Nepal (Greenway) are collaborating to promote cycling with a campaign where participants will receive Rs3 for each kilometer cycled via IME Pay.

SITA

She was more than a child helper turned child bride

She towered over me like a lone poplar tree. She was four years older than I was at the time she came to live with us. Sita was the eldest of her siblings and her father had sent her to Kathmandu so she could contribute to the family income.



SUBURBAN TALES
Pratibha Tuladhar

Ten-year-old Sita's job was to babysit for one of our relatives—two babies watching one another. When a bunch of grapes disappeared, the employers decided to dismiss the babysitter. Sita was just being a child picking and popping into her mouth something she liked the taste of, but she was supposed to be an 'employee' and expected to behave like an adult.

Her father insisted that she stay in Kathmandu, and so the child remained, moving from one home to another, as employers tired of her antics. One of them had to yank her off the balcony railing, after which, she was sent to ours.

When I asked my mother recently why she had accepted a child as helper, she said it was because she knew that she would be sent somewhere else if not to ours, and that she thought a house with two girls would be safer for her.

Sita showed up one afternoon on the motorbike of her former employer at our home on the outskirts of Kathmandu. She was carrying a small bag of clothes. She was wearing a *kurta* with traces of lint—something I had seen my relative wear before, now altered to fit a 14-year-old.

I had met Sita before when I had visited my relatives, a radiant face resting on tall, lean limbs. Her eyes were light brown and her hair the same colour, resting in an array of curls over her forehead and her temples. She did not look much different when she arrived at ours. And neither did she look nervous for someone coming to live in a new place.

My mother and *Nini* got busy after her arrival, making arrangements for a bedding of a single mattress, a pillow and a blanket. She would sleep in my room, on the floor. I couldn't understand the arrangement, but I got used to it.

She folded her bedding every morning, arranging it under my bookshelf which hung on the wall. If sometimes she saw me sitting on it with a book between my fingers, she would tell me to get off in fluent Newa: "*Maicha! Ana makhu.*"

Sita made our home hers, quickly. She was expected to bring my sister and me to the bus stop everyday and help *Mam* run errands. But *Mam* complained that "the child" delayed her. Clearly, she also made her laugh.

Mam, with wisps of grey sticking over her head would sit under a tree in the afternoons, smoking her *beedi*. On a hot day, she would fall asleep under the tree, and Sita would get to work, poking her ear with a leaf. Furious, *Mam* would clench her hand into a fist and threaten to hit Sita. "This girl has too much energy. *Utauli,*

chakchaki!"

And as if to prove the point, Sita made sure to punctuate our days with events. One morning, as we waited for our school bus to arrive, Sita pointed at the pipal tree and said, "Nests!" And before we knew, she was climbing the tree.

"Sita *Didi!*" we yelled from below, as she scrambled up like she knew the tree branch by branch. When we got into the school bus, I craned my neck to watch her from the window as the bus raced off with us inside. My heart pounding, I caught a glimpse of her stretching one arm to grab the nest.

When we stepped off at the bus stand that afternoon, *Mam* was waiting for us. Sita had been grounded. Upon entering my room, I saw two weaver birds' nests. One was over a foot long, the other one was smaller. Sita had nailed them to two corners of our room. I dumped my bag on the floor to touch them.

"I saw you read about them in your *science* book," she beamed. My science book had a chapter on different kinds of bird nests, one of them had been the weaver bird's nest.

A couple of weeks later, Sita was allowed to go to the bus stand again. As we waited under the pipal tree, my sister wept. She hadn't finished her homework. Sita pulled out her notebook and hurriedly wrote her homework for her. "There, your teacher won't scold you now." She whacked my sister's head, "*Badmass!*"

Coming home from school was also coming home to Sita's radiant face. One time, she greeted us with bruises all over her limbs, spiky branches strewn over the front porch. She had climbed a thorny tree to gather firewood for Shivaratri, bringing down fresh branches that would not burn.

When my mother exclaimed how terrified she had been that she might fall, Sita reminded her that she had "conquered" a pipal tree. I did not understand my mother's patience with her.

One afternoon, Sita locked herself in the kitchen for hours. When she unlocked the door, she had made *aloo achar*. She said it was her "especial" for us, the first time she had cooked. The potatoes were raw and I told her the *achar* was horrible. But my mother ate it, smiling as she did.

When Sita turned 15, her father showed up. *Mam* found her hiding at the *dhunge dhara* by the hillside. It was time for her to go home. When we returned from school her bedclothes still sat under my bookshelf but the lightness of her presence was missing. It angered me that no one had told me she was leaving, but no one tells a child such things.

Sita had been "given away in marriage" after she went back home, we heard. A decade later Sita visited my mother in our home in Maharajganj, when she brought a relative to the Teaching Hospital.

"She leaned against the wall the entire time we talked. She was wearing a red cotton *sari* and had grown much taller and fuller. But she looked tired," my mother recalls.

We haven't heard from her since, but my mother likes to punctuate our kitchen conversations with Sita anecdotes. 📺

Suburban Tales is a monthly column in *Nepali Times* based on real people (with some names changed) in Pratibha's life.

Kathmandu's 'flash flood'

There is nothing sudden about the floods in Kathmandu Valley, and they will get worse

● Tom Robertson

Kathmandu Valley's geography gives it several strategic advantages. It is too high for malaria, but too low for much snow and ice. That, and its location between north Indian population centres and the high Himalayan passes, positioned it perfectly as a historic entrepôt.

But the Valley also suffers from earthquakes and flooding. The floods hit almost every year during the monsoon, and used to bring soil-restoring silt to the farms, but more recently have delivered mostly damage and devastation.

Because the floods appear quickly — some rivers quadruple in size in just a few hours — we call them 'flash floods'. We tend to blame nature and monsoon downpours for them, and indeed the Valley has experienced such floods for generations.

And yet, many of today's flash floods have human origins. The haphazard development of the Valley, and not just the floodplains, have created conditions that make the floods both more common, and more consequential.

So, although we call the Valley's yearly inundations 'flash' floods because the rivers rise suddenly, actually the causes have been brewing for the last several decades, at least since the Valley's growth has exploded.

"The pace of change since the mid-1980s, has been fast, anarchic and misgoverned," says water expert and author of the book *Prakop* explaining Nepal's disasters, Ajaya Dixit. "Urban expansion has taken place at the cost of hydrological integrity, which makes things worse when intense rainfall occurs."

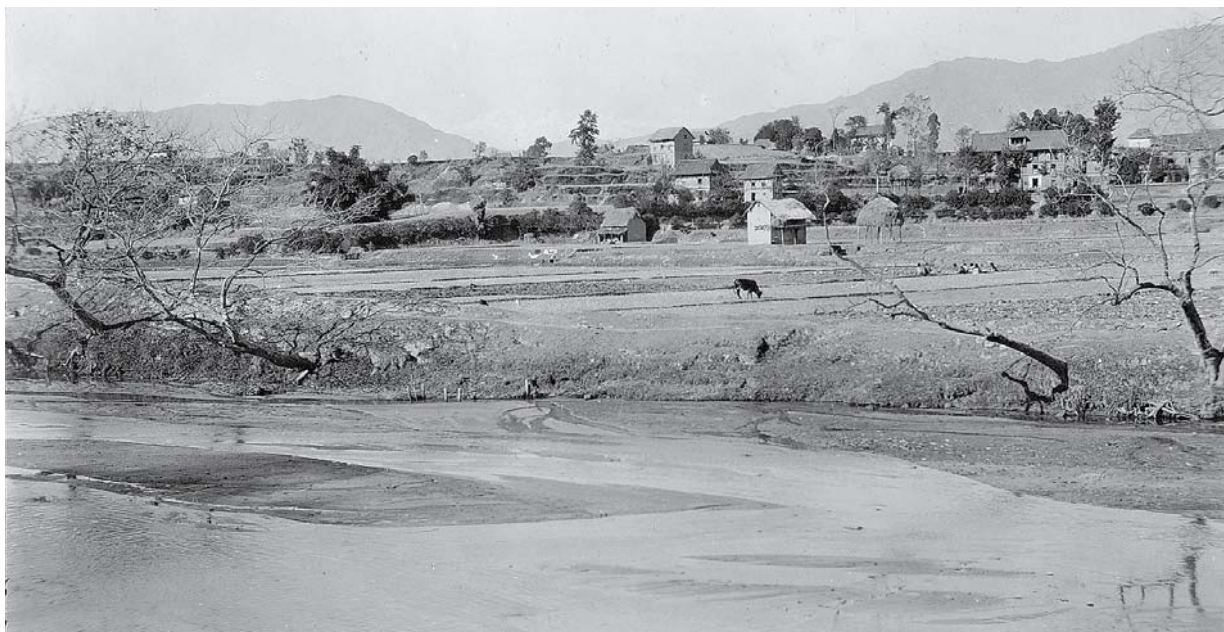
Monsoon Patterns

For centuries floods have periodically swept through Kathmandu Valley. It is what monsoon rivers do, especially when fast-flowing heavily sediment-loaded Himalayan waters hit flatter terrain.

Unlike major Himalayan rivers, however, the Valley's rivers are not snow-fed and start nearby in the Shivapuri and surrounding hills. The Bagmati's first drops seep out of the earth at Bagdwar on the shoulder of Shivapuri almost 2,700m above sea level. From there it winds 30km to Chobhar gorge, where it leaves the Valley to descend another 140km to the Indian border.

At Bagdwar the Bagmati drops sharply, about 130m every kilometre. It slows as it hits the Valley floor, flowing past Pashupati and Teku on an incline of only 2.7m per kilometre. Then after Chobhar, the incline accelerates again, en route through the Mahabharat Range, only to slow again when it hits the Tarai.

Most of the Valley's rain, over 80% of it, falls within three months from mid-June to mid-September. But it does not fall evenly, stopping and starting, at times just a drizzle, at others dumping huge amounts of water in torrential rainstorms and cloudbursts. Just south of the Valley, the Bagmati watershed can get over 400mm in a single day and 40mm in an hour. Heavy rain brings



MADAN PURASKAR ARCHIVES



MADAN PURASKAR ARCHIVES



flash floods.

After a 1793 visit, the British East India Company's Col William Kirkpatrick commented on the Valley's heavy monsoon flooding: 'While the descent of the rivers through the valley is not so precipitate as to carry off the waters with much rapidity, the consequence is, that their banks, wherever they happen to be low, are very liable to be overflowed.'

The floods, he noted, could be 'very injurious to the husbandman' and farmers often bore the brunt. Valley residents adapted, building their settlements on higher ground, saving the low floodplains for crops.

Higher ground meant the apron around the Valley's mountainous walls, but particularly the finger-like plateaus (ढर) that stretched from the mountain base to the Valley's centre in between the low-lying waterways. Valley residents built their settlements, including their historic cities, on these tars.

In the 1850s, British physician Henry Ambrose Oldfield noted this pattern: 'Nearly all the inhabitants of the valley live on the high-level lands. All the cities, towns, principal villages, &c. are situated upon them.'

'As a general rule,' Oldfield continued, 'all the lowlands of the valley, from their facility of irrigation, and certainty of flooding during the rains, are appropriated to the cultivation of rice ... Here and there a few cottages, or a *powa* or a temple may be seen upon them, but usually these lands are very thinly inhabited.' Economic calculus drove this pattern. The 'extreme fertility and productiveness' of the lowlands, Oldfield said, 'cause them to be too valuable to be much used for building purposes'.

And so did health concerns. The 'lowness and dampness' of the lowlands 'make them unhealthy'. But, so did flooding. Oldfield described the 'certainty of flooding' because monsoon downpours meant periodic flash floods. Kirkpatrick described these floods a half century earlier.

Increasingly fierce flooding

But Kathmandu's 21st century floods differ from what Kirkpatrick and Oldfield described in the 19th century. The situation has changed. Now, it is not just that Valley residents have built where they never used to, on lowlands where floods routinely sweep over. But the environment has also been remade: not just in the floodplains, but the entire landscape, so that the annual floods have grown much worse than before.

Climate change has brought more intense rain. It is part of this new calculus, but only a part. Instead, other widespread changes to the Valley's environment, especially to the water system, have made floods more frequent and fiercer.

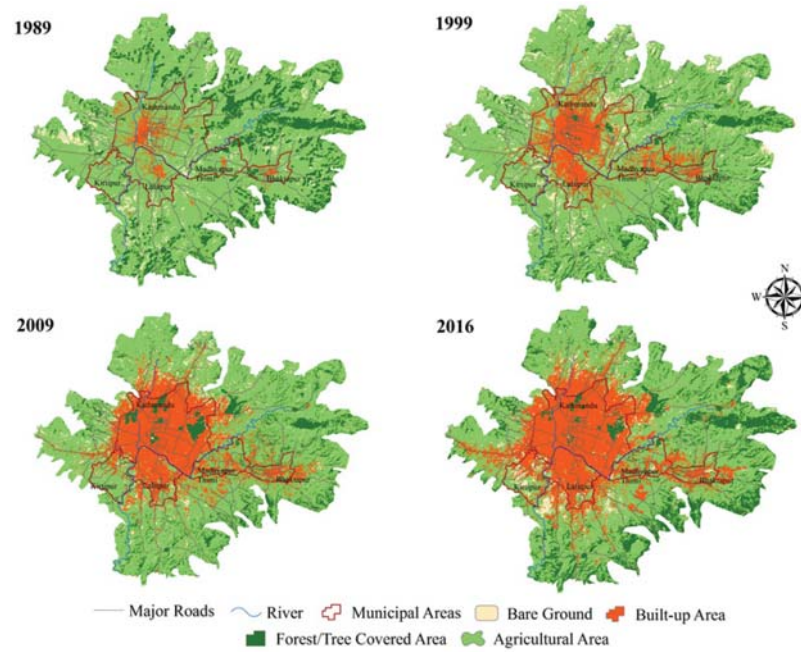
Most importantly, until a couple decades ago, the Valley's soil and sand collected much of the year's monsoon rain soaking it up like a sponge in the summer and releasing it slowly throughout the year. In fact, the ground absorbed and held so much water that the Valley's bigger rivers did not go dry even during the eight dry months of the year. The soil's absorbing power slowed flooding during the monsoon's heavy rains.

"The soil absorbing so much water prevents flooding in the peak season," water expert Madhukar Upadhyaya told me. Indeed, historically, the entire water landscape revolved around rainwater's "gradual absorption and gradual release".

But, Upadhyaya adds, regretfully, "We have changed everything very dramatically."

The biggest change is all the big buildings and concrete that block water flowing into the ground. Instead of soaking into the soil, rainwater now hits the roofs and pavement and shoots directly into the brim, sometimes within minutes.

"We have sealed all the land. Now water goes straight to the खोला (stream), not to and through



ISHITIAQUE ASIF, MILAN SHRESTHA, AND NETRA CHHETRI

the ground," Upadhyaya says. "Water हवात आउछ."

The problem is not just new buildings in the floodplains. All over the Valley, buildings and roads and courtyards and other 'impervious surfaces' block the recharging of groundwater. Once a compact city of bricks and mud, wetlands and ponds, Kathmandu and the entire Valley has become a sprawling metropolis of concrete.

Between 1980 and 2010, Kathmandu quadrupled in area, and is still spreading fast with heavy in-migration, a more mobile population, and bulldozers carving out roads in every direction.

All this concrete and change has disrupted the Valley's traditional drainage patterns, blocking absorption and accelerating runoff. "The concrete surfaces and the loss of open spaces and wetlands," Ajaya Dixit explains, "have taken away buffers and lead to instantaneous surface runoff when high-intensity rains occur."

Adding to the problem, as Kathmandu grows, is the widespread bulldozing of ढिको, the small hillocks of sand that used to dot the Valley's landscape,

especially its northern half.

"We have lost sand hillocks at the foothills around the valley that stored rainwater and released it slowly," Upadhyaya pointed out to me.

Owners sell the sand to go into concrete, then sell the flattened land for houses or other construction. They reap double rewards, but the larger ecosystem suffers. The loss of ढिको contributed to the big 2018 floods on Bhaktapur's Hanumante River.

"Before the Hanumante flood lots of hillocks were removed and replaced in the watershed all the way up to Nagarkot," says Upadhyaya. The floods caused enormous loss. Because of all these changes, Kathmandu Valley water now flows in new patterns. Altering the Valley's complicated ecological system has brought unintended consequences.

"We No longer have Our Old Rivers"

Just as the Valley's water storage and flow patterns have been completely transformed, so have its riverbeds. Kathmandu's rivers no longer resemble what they used to be.

Sand no longer blankets riverbeds. Waters flows through

ds' are 4 decades in the making



EARL WEBB/DOUG HALL PEACE CORPS COLLECTIONS



NEPALI TIMES ARCHIVES

(clockwise) The wide Bagmati floodplain near Gujeswori Temple, looking east in the 1920s.

The Bagmati flowing below Chabahil in the 1920s.

Aerial photograph of Kathmandu Valley, looking west over the floodplain in 1967.

The Hanumante overflowed and inundated the Kathmandu-Bhaktapur highway in 2018.

Maps of land use change in Kathmandu.

the Samakhusi and even smaller streams. These tributaries and creeks have been covered and sometimes built over. Often, it is hard to tell if the streams even exist — until heavy rains arrive and fill and overflow the old channel.

Bhaktapur's Hanumante River is less than 20km long. It flows by the lower parts of the city and under the Arniko Highway, the main artery between Kathmandu and Bhaktapur. On 11 July 2018 heavy rain fell in the catchment area: 129.6mm at the Bhaktapur weather station and 117mm at the Nagarkot station. Soon after midnight, flood waters arrived, cresting for several hours.

The flood's devastation sprang from several causes. Over the last two decades, the entire watershed has witnessed widespread development. Rain water now shoots directly into the river instead of seeping into the soil.

Scores of sand hillocks that used to soak up and store the water have been removed. In the floodplain itself, whole new housing colonies and scores of businesses have sprung up, mostly along the highway. Garbage and narrow bridges add to the problems, blocking the drainage.

The Hanumante itself is different than it used to be. In 1964 the river stretched 6m across. Today, encroachment means that it is only 2m across. Buildings and other development came up with little heed for the consequences.

"There were no strong measures

implemented by government authorities to mitigate and prevent the flood prior to the Bhaktapur Flood 2018," concluded a recent study by the Armed Police Force.

The Hanumante flooding washed away standing crops, and spilled onto the main highway connecting Kathmandu and Bhaktapur, blocking traffic for several hours. Flood waters swept into 500 houses, over 100 shops, 28 small industries including petrol pumps, two schools and two hospitals. In some places, the muddy water stayed for a week.

The police deployed rafts and cranes to rescue hundreds of people. At least three people died, reportedly from landslides upstream triggered by the heavy rain.

The rain near Bhaktapur fell fast the day of the flooding but it was far from record rain. The area had received the same volume of precipitation three previous times. And once, in 1990, well before all the pavement and buildings had come to the Hanumante and Bhaktapur, 250mm of rain fell in a single day, nearly twice what caused the 2018 flooding. Some parts of the mountains near Kathmandu have seen rainfall twice even that amount.

Seasonal Streams

Similarly, Kathmanduites have invited flooding by reconfiguring hundreds of the Valley's खहरे, small seasonal streams.

For most of the year, these streams are empty and dry, scarcely noticeable. But when the rains start, they emerge from their out-of-the-way corners, flow for a few weeks or a month or two, snaking around the valley, often creating seasonal wetlands, ponds or marshes (known as डोल in Newa), then disappear as the skies clear.

Traditionally, no one built near the खहरे, knowing that in monsoon they would fill with water. But now, as new construction has gobbled up the land, developers cannot resist the terrain through which the streams flow. Predictably, problems have emerged.

Near Boudha, for instance, as Minket Lepcha writes in the *Record*, the 1990s real estate boom swallowed up several seasonal streams. 'Fields turned into concrete houses; streams turned into streets; and rivers turned into roads.'

People ignore the ecological role of the खहरे. Local resident and environmental lawyer Chiranjibi Bhattarai notes, "In the 1990s, building contractors and real estate owners saw these wetlands as wastelands."

But nature, Lepcha says, has a way of 'reclaiming its space'. Almost every year, the Valley's ancient streams and wetlands, even if built up and over with tons of concrete, fill up and flood.

Some floods damage and destroy houses and property. "You trouble the खहरे and the खहरे troubles you," Bhattarai's son Ayushman points out.

A Missed Opportunity

The big transformation of the Valley's water landscape started in the 1970s and 1980s with people putting up buildings, including homes, on the lowlands by the rivers for the first time. Concrete structure popped up along the Dhobi Khola, Samakhusi, Bishnumati, and Bagmati.

Alarmed by the changes to longstanding traditions, some planners warned of the unhappy results. A 1986 Government of

Nepal/USAID report observed: 'It is noteworthy that Kathmandu ... has only recently begun to occupy lower-lying flood plains ... As these areas are subject to flooding and high water tables, alternative sites should be encouraged.'

Some may blame Kathmandu's environmental problems on explosive population growth. But this argument is no excuse for bad planning. Noting that new buildings were going up on the right bank of the Bagmati from the Dhobikhola to Teku, the report added: 'Conditions here are nearly as deplorable as they are along the Vishnumati, and responsibility lies squarely with the Government.'

The report called for preserving lowlands for agricultural use along Lalitpur's Bagmati, Khodaky, and Nakhu, and Kathmandu's Bagmati, Bishnumati, Balkhu, and Samakhusi. "Not only are these "vegetable belts fertile" but they have high water tables and are poorly-drained. Thus, they are not good sites for urban development ... Problems will surely occur.'

The report also called for greenbelts along the rivers: 'Preserving the flood plains for agriculture will not only avoid costly environmental problems but will also maintain a series of greenbelts throughout the urban area as it expands.'

The report specifically warned about Gongabu: 'Expansion on flood plains in Balaju/Gongabun should be controlled. Too much pressure will exist for this area to be fully preserved. It is best suited for non-residential use due to drainage problems.'

Many of the multi-story buildings built in this area since this warning collapsed in the 2015 earthquake, killing many people. Although many factors determine earthquake risk, shock waves generally do more damage in the soft sediments of floodplains than in rock.

Today, after decades of increasingly severe, costly flooding, the 1986 USAID report seems prescient. Sadly, it now seems a missed chance to head in a better direction. What would Kathmandu look like today if even half of these recommendations had been followed?

What Now?

Looking forward, Madhukar Upadhyaya warns of more intense floods: "We have altered the valley's hydrology completely. We have already created a ticking time bomb ... The storm water just cannot flow out of the narrowly jacketed river channels without causing harm."

I asked the experts what could and should be done. "One has to go back to the basics of hydrology," Ajaya Dixit said, "and heed to water science in our ways of doing business."

More specifically he mentioned four things:

- Floods risk reduction is more about drainage than control.
- Rivers must be given space.
- Tools are needed to address extreme events and understand them better.
- Focus should go toward interdisciplinary water education.

Upadhyaya also called for rethinking the basics: "Broadly, I would say, we need a massive campaign to manage rain water, not boutique activities like building a few ponds and planting some trees."

Tom Robertson, PhD, is an environmental historian who writes about Kathmandu and Nepali history.

much narrower channels. Walls on one or both river banks now guide water flow, squeezing the rivers. In places, low banks have been filled, often with rubbish or waste, and built upon. Riverbanks are now walled in and tall.

Where, in generations past, buffalo and goats used to graze and people used to wash, pray, and play, today buildings now sit and cars and motorbikes zoom by at dangerous speeds.

"We don't have the खोला of the past, those are long gone," laments Upadhyaya.

A birder's description of the Bishnumati River from a century and a half ago startled me. "The stream is always shallow, and its channel, though tolerably wide, is for the most part hardly lower than the adjoining cultivated land," wrote a foreign visitor in the 1870s. The Bishnumati 150 years later mostly flows three metres below walls on both sides.

The Bagmati has also become a new river. In the 1870s, the visitor noted that it had 'a very wide channel' and the water spread out according to its wishes and needs. 'Even during the rains,' he said,

the water was shallow, only 'knee-deep'.

At that time, the Valley's soil still worked as a giant sponge and the river could meander like a grazing buffalo. This was before concrete sealed much of the Valley's soils and river walls squeezed and deepened river currents.

Writing at about the same time, Oldfield also commented on the Bagmati's flow: "The Baghmatti is always shallow, but, during the rains, it swells into a wide and rapid stream." He also noted that the Bagmati's 'waters are esteemed to be not only sacred, but peculiarly pure and wholesome'.

Kathmandu's two biggest rivers, the Bishnumati and Bagmati, are now narrowly constrained by stone walls. The sand banks are gone, and they meander less. They are no longer 'always shallow'.

Big Changes to Small rivers

But perhaps nothing has changed more than the many smaller but powerful rivers such as the Dhobi Khola, the Hanumante,

EVENTS

CONFERASIA 2021

AISEC's three-day international conference will bring together youth delegates from Kathmandu University, Dehradun, Colombo Central, Islamabad, and UNTAN University in Indonesia to discuss global and cultural issues.

6-8 August

Flash Fiction

Submit a work of fiction or nonfiction in any genre in less than 1,000 words for a chance to win \$1,000 and get published in The Writer Magazine. Learn more at writermag.com/contests.

Deadline: 12 August



Kimff 2021

Fill in the Kimff 2021 entry form and send relevant films produced after 1 January 2019. Go to <https://kimff.org/kimff-21/> for more details.

Deadline: 1 September

Learn French

Consider learning a new language right from home. Join Alliance Française Kathmandu's 6-week long beginner French language classes. Get details on Facebook.

Registration deadline: 13 August, Fee: Rs 9,900

Boudha market

Buy fresh and organic fruits and vegetables, fresh baked goods, and other delicious goodies. Support local products and businesses, and follow physical distancing guidelines.

Saturdays, Utpala Cafe, Boudha

PHOTO ARCHIVES



Nepal Picture Library

Look at archived photographs from throughout Nepal's history and learn the stories behind them at www.nepalpicturelibrary.org.

Digital Archaeology

Look at historic photographs from Kathmandu, Patan, and Bhaktapur Darbar squares, and watch 3D reconstructed videos of temples around Nepal. Visit the Digital Archaeology Foundation website for more details.

World Press Photo

Browse through the World Press Photo's (<https://www.worldpressphoto.org>) archive of powerful award-winning photographs and photo stories from around the world.

Project Apollo Archive

The Project Apollo Archive on Flickr, created by photographer Kipp Teague, is an online repository of more than 16,000 digital images of NASA's manned lunar landing program from 1969 to 1972.



Nature Picture Library

The Nature Picture Library provides access to more than 500,000 images and videos covering every aspect of the natural world's wild animals, plants, landscapes, environmental issues, marine life, pets and native people. Browse through the galleries.

GETAWAY

Chhaimale Village Resort

Adorned with pear trees, Chhaimale Village Resort is an ideal destination for anyone seeking to escape the madness of Kathmandu city.

Chhaimale, 9860676495



The Famous Farm

The three-storey boutique hotel west of Kathmandu is Nuwakot's best-kept secret. This little traditional house has a lot of rich cultural heritage to share.

Kuwapani, Nuwakot (01) 4522617

Hotel Shambala

Located in the bustling Kathmandu, Hotel Shambala is a fusion of cultural heritage and modern luxury. Enjoy Tibetan-themed rooms and a refreshing dip in the infinity pool overlooking the city.

Bansbari (01) 4650251



The Soaltee Kathmandu

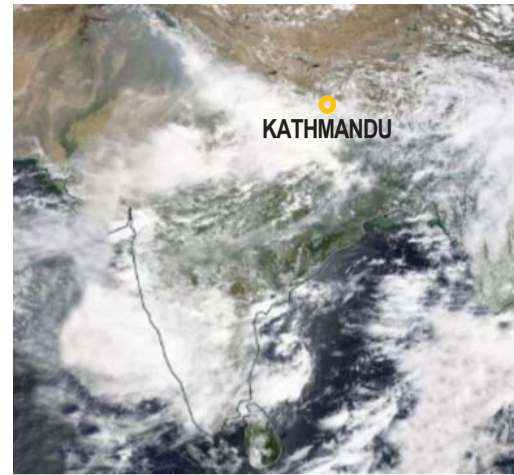
Spend a relaxing day at the outdoor restaurant or at the indoor Garden Terrace at The Soaltee Kathmandu. Go online for details on the staycation package.

Tahachal Marg (01) 4273999

Traditional Comfort

Blending traditional Newa designs and the comfort of modern amenities, Traditional Comfort's ankhijhyaal windows and the hand-painted scenes of local life on the walls give guests a glimpse into the past.

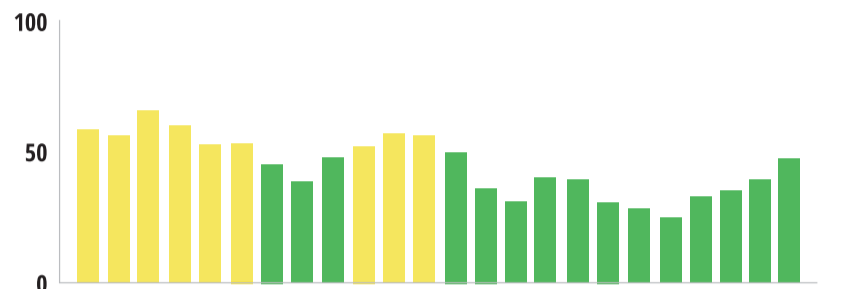
Kamalpokhari (01) 4410009



The monsoon has been wetter than usual, just as the weather modellers had forecast. The unusual part of it is the higher than usual precipitation in the higher mountains. This trend is likely to continue. The showers will stretch into Friday, ease somewhat on Saturday, but return, possibly with some renewed localised vigour, on Sunday. In Kathmandu, it can get hot and muggy when the sun is out with cool wet evenings and nights.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
28° 19°	28° 19°	29° 19°

AIR QUALITY INDEX



10AM 4 August to 9AM 5 August measured at US Embassy, Phobar Darbar

The Air Quality Index (AQI) that measures the concentration of suspended particles below 2.5 microns is on a bit of a roller coaster lately in Kathmandu. It dips down to the Green 'Good' Zone below AQI 50 following monsoon showers. The AQI shows spikes during rush hour when there is more traffic on the roads. But generally the pollution levels have stayed below 100 this monsoon, and after longer spells of rain below 50. Follow live AQI updates on www.nepalitimes.com

OUR PICK



Loki, the 2021 series from the Marvel Cinematic Universe, sees the notorious God of Mischief captured by the Time Variance Authority (TVA)—a powerful bureaucratic institution that exists beyond time and space to monitor and preserve the flow of time—after having stolen the space stone and created a branch in the timeline. Under the TVA's custody as a 'time variant' Loki must make a choice—help the agent who arrested him terminate a threat far greater than himself, or be forever erased from existence. Stars Tom Hiddleston, Sophia Di Martino, Gugu Mbatha-Raw, Wunmi Mosaku, and Owen Wilson.

DINING



Kairos Cafe

With a customisable breakfast, variety of juicy burgers and an assortment of Italian, Spanish and English cuisine, Kairos Cafe is a must for foodies.

Jawalakhel, 9813493902

Bungalow Bar and Kitchen

Enjoy authentic Thai dishes like Som Tam Essan, Pad Kra Pao and Red Curry, or Asian-fusion dishes like the Pork Bamboo Shoot, Buff Lemon Grass and Fried Calamari, with a side of refreshing beverages.

Naxal, 9801068630

Erma Restaurant

Hotel Shambala's Erma Restaurant offers an upscale fine dining experience with chef-curated continental dishes. Try the cream of beetroot soup, vegetable saslik, and the Erma house burger.

Bansbari, 9803867240

Utpala Cafe

Utpala Cafe, a monastery restaurant, is perfect for anyone looking for healthy vegetarian options with their scrumptious use of fresh produce and mouth-watering baked goods.

Boudha, 9810700763



Yala Cafe

Get a stack of fluffy pancakes, well-seasoned eggs benedict, or a country breakfast at Yala Cafe. Go online for takeaway details.

Thamel, 9801169212

बालबालिका माथि हुने हिंसा, दुर्व्यवहार, शोषण भएको, जोखिमपूर्ण अवस्थामा रहेको वा बालअधिकारको उल्लंघन भएको छ भने बाल हेल्पलाइनको पैसा नलाग्ने

फोन: नं. १०९८ मा खबर गरौं ।



नेपाल सरकार

सञ्चार तथा सूचना प्रविधि मन्त्रालय

सूचना तथा प्रसारण विभाग

YOU HAVE HIGH STANDARDS.
SO DO WE!



Drink responsibly



Letter to a Nepali aunty

You were me once, too, guide us to become a better version of ourselves

Namaste Aunty,
It has been a while. I think the last time we met was at our cousin's wedding. It was a good one, lasted one whole week, and I can imagine how stressed everyone was, but it went well.



LIFE TIME

Anjana Rajbhandary

It is always a headache to find five different outfits, we cannot repeat *saris* because God forbid, someone might notice. Also, I did not repeat jewellery because what would people think if I wore the same earrings twice in a week?

I know you judged every woman there, you noticed what she wore, how much she ate, who all she spoke to, and you may have also seen some women who were quiet the whole night, either sitting alone staring at the unknown or standing next to their husbands. Not every couple is genuinely happy. But we all gossip and tell tales.

But I also know you are strong. To be a woman and a Nepali woman, you have to be. You have the world of responsibilities on your small yet strong shoulders. You have managed households and raised many. I think I am trying to understand how you changed from how I am to what you are at present.

I think I know why you are the way you are. It is because we have both lived the same life. You were me at some point, and I hope I am



MONIKA DEUPALA

like you in the future, minus some of the qualities that you developed along the way.

We both grew up with rules and expectations. We both represented the grace and the shame of our families, where one wrong decision, and we would be scarred for life. That is the life of the woman in our society. We are meant to be pure, untouched and strong enough to wait for a man who comes back home at 3AM.

In the beginning, you used to upset me. You always talked about

my skin tone, my weight and my future wedding date. You made me question if I was still of a desirable age. As I grew older, I realised some things.

You had a difficult life because you had it more challenging than me. Maybe it was your in-laws, your aunts or the society that tested you every step of the way and hardened your heart with the years.

You had to survive, and you did what you had to do to protect yourself. You grew stern

and distant. You hid your vulnerability to the point where you forgot you have a heart. You took away your softness to not feel hurt.

But when you say something about me, ask yourself if you would do that if I was your daughter. And if you do not have a daughter, think of me as someone you used to be. Please do not teach me also to harden my heart. Please let me live a happy life without the constraints of society. You felt the pain, and you know

how much it hurts. I wish for you not to let me go through it.

Please try to live the life that makes you happy and let me live mine the same way because we only have one. What I feel now is what you felt, you were once tender and kind. It is still there inside you.

The beauty in your simplicity is forgotten but remember who you used to be. Remember the light inside you. Remember, you are the same woman who has lived the life we live now and bring to the surface the softness that you have hidden for so long, and all of us will be in a better place.

Our lives are divine. Relight the radiance in your compassion. You are a force that can end wars. You are governed by love and kindness. And I know it will be slow, but you and I are meant to get along. You are the light to lead me in the darkness because I trust you to show me the path.

Let us not hide the unspoken truth: you have been hurt, and you have all suffered, so please understand the pain. Do not hide your true self anymore. It is both our worlds together, let us make it more liveable together.

I will always carry love and respect for you in my heart because you taught me that respect is mutual irrespective of age and gender. Help me be a better person. Be the guide that I need. Look at me with the eyes that you wish your aunts looked at you with because you were me once too.

I promise to text you before tomorrow's reception so we do not show up wearing the same shoes.

Much love,
Your Younger Version

Anjana Rajbhandary lives and works in Chicago. She writes this fortnightly Nepali Times column Life Time about mental health, physical health and socio-cultural issues.

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Elderly left in Bhutan

Elderly refugees from Bhutan left behind in Nepal by families who have been resettled abroad (from left to right) at Beldangi camp last week: Liladhar Acharya, Dhamala Adhikari, Man Bahadur Rai, and Mekh Tamang.



With younger relatives resettled around the world, seniors wait in the hope of returning to their homeland

● **Mukesh Pokhrel** in Jhapa

Thirty years after they were driven out of Bhutan, and after spending all that time in camps in eastern Nepal, elderly refugees are by themselves and hope to see their homeland one last time.

Dambar Kumari Khatiwada and her husband Kharka Bahadur wait away their days at the Sanischare Refugee Camp just as they have for the past three decades in the same bamboo shed, but now without their two daughters and a son who have been resettled in the United States.

"Our children are in the US, but we did not want to go and adapt to a completely new culture again, we want to see our motherland one last time before we die," says Dambar Kumari. "But we did not realise how difficult it would be for the family to be separated like this."

The couple are among more than 100,000 Nepali-speakers who were driven out of Bhutan in 1990-91, transported across India and driven into Nepal. Most of them were resettled in eight countries around the world, nearly 96,000 of them in the United States. But there are still 7,000 refugees left in two camps in Nepal, most of them elderly.



Bhim Bahadur Gurung's mother, father, brother, sister, wife and children are all in the US. At 50, he is often sick and bed-ridden, but there is no one to take care of him.



Mekh Tamang in the hut where he has spent the last 30 years of life after being evicted from Bhutan, and where he now lives alone.

Liladhar Acharya is now 75 and all by himself in Beldangi Refugee Camp in Jhapa after his two sons, five daughters and wife all took up the offer to be resettled in America five years ago.

"It would have been good if at least one of them had stayed behind, and they tried to convince me to also leave, but I am not going anywhere. Bhutan threw us out, but I still love my country, and I am waiting to go back," says Acharya, who has preserved receipts of property tax his father and grandfathers paid to the Bhutanese state as proof of citizenship.

Dhamala Prasad Adhikari was 40 when his family was forced out of its homestead in southern Bhutan in 1990. His wife, two sons and two daughters also decided to resettle in the US. To stave off loneliness and depression, Adhikari keeps himself busy tending a small garden outside

refugee camp



ALL PHOTOS: MUKESH POKHREL



Liladhar Adhikari showing his Bhutan citizenship papers. Like many elderly relatives he wants to go back to the homeland that evicted them.



Dambar Kumari Khatiwada and her husband Kharka Bahadur in their kitchen at the Sanischare Refugee Camp, where they live alone after two daughters and a son were resettled in the United States.

his hut in Beldangi Camp.

"I keep myself busy so thoughts don't play in my head," he says. "It is a tragedy that our family is on different continents."

Of the 1,400 families still in Beldangi, many are elderly refugees whose families have left. They all complain of loneliness and mental stress, but say that it is most difficult when they fall ill and the family is not around to take care of them.

Last year, when 58-year-old Mekh Tamang got sick, he was too weak to even cook for himself, and went hungry for days. His wife, two sons and a daughter are in America, and another son in Canada.

"This is the life in the camps, everyone is gone, and even if you fall sick you are by yourself," Tamang says.

One of them is Bhim Bahadur Gurung, whose mother, father,

brother, sister, wife and children are all in the US. He is 50, and we found him bed-ridden on the porch of his hut in the humid heat of the Tarai. "There is no one to even bring me water," he sighed. "If I die, there will be no one at my funeral."

Bhim Poudel and his handicapped son are the only two members of another family still in camp. Both were infected with Covid-19, Bhim Poudel is in intensive care at the BP Koirala Institute of Health Sciences in Dharan. His son died last week, but he has not been told yet. There was no one at his son's cremation.

Many of the elderly complain that their families abroad have forgotten them. They have their own lives now, and most of them rarely call. Families blame their elderly relatives for refusing to leave the refugee camps with them.

"They never phone, and even

when I call they rarely pick up," says Bhim Gurung. "Maybe they are all busy."

Now that support from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and others are winding down, the fate of the remaining refugees hangs in the balance. Bhutan has shown no interest in taking them back, the Nepal government has also abandoned them, and they depend on charities.

The International Welfare and Support Foundation of America has built a senior citizen home in Sanischare which is already caring for 95 elderly refugees, and another is being set up in Beldangi.

"We are registering them, and will take care of the seniors who do not have family here," says Ram Baniya of the Foundation. "At least they will have each other when they spend time together at the shelters." ❏



Japan award for Bhutan minister opposed

Bhutanese diaspora writes to Japan PM to revoke award to former home minister Lyonpo Dago Tshering

Lyonpo Dago Tshering served as Bhutan's Home Minister between 1991-98 and saw the eviction of 100,000 Bhutanese to Nepal, in the world's least-known refugee crisis.

A consortium of dozens of Bhutan organisations all over the world have sent a letter to Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga to withdraw his country's decision to confer an award to Bhutan's former Home Minister Lyonpo Dago Tshering, saying he had violated the human rights of citizens and suppressed democracy in the country 30 years ago.

The Global Bhutanese Campaign Coordination Committee for Japan Campaign 2021 sent the letter in July asking that the 'Order of the Rising Sun, Gold and Silver Star' on Dago Tshering be revoked.

"The decision of the Japanese government to award Dago Tshering, a primary perpetrator of human rights violations and voice of democracy in Bhutan during the 1990s has come to us with surprise, pain and shock," the letter says.

"While we acknowledge the desire of your government to strengthen mutual relationship between Bhutan and Japan through the conferral of this award, we regret to state that this very gesture of goodness has unlocked deep-seated injury and trauma that many of us Bhutanese have personally undergone during the Home Minister's tenure," it adds.

The letter, signed by organisations of Bhutanese in Australia, Canada, Denmark, Nepal, New Zealand, Norway, United Kingdom and United States urges the government and people of Japan to review the decision.

"The entire Bhutanese diaspora has come together to raise their voice of concern against Japan's decision to confer this award," said Jogen Gazmere, convenor of the Japan chapter of the global campaign.

The Bhutanese are regarded as the world's most forgotten refugees after 100,000 of them (one-sixth the population) who had been living in the country for generations were driven out of the country by the regime beginning 1990, and with the help of India forcibly driven into Nepal.

There are still 7,000 Bhutanese in two camps in southeastern Nepal, with the rest having been resettled in

eight countries around the world, nearly 96,000 of them in the United States.

As deputy Home Minister of Bhutan, Dago Tshering in August 1990 issued a written directive revoking the citizenship of the Lhotshampa people of southern Bhutan. When they protested, Bhutanese activists say Tshering mobilised the state machinery to arrest, torture and evict the southern Bhutanese and render them stateless.

He was promoted to Home Minister and served from 1991-1998 before being made ambassador to Japan from 1999 to 2008.

The refugees spent nearly 20 years in makeshift camps in Nepal. Bhutan refused to take them back and by the time they started being resettled in third countries, the refugees numbered 120,000. Bhutan has maintained that those evicted had illegally settled in the country and were recent migrants.

Bhutanese human rights activist Tek Nath Rizal who was an Amnesty International 'prisoner of conscience' and imprisoned for 10 years has said he cannot understand why Japan is honouring a man like Tshering.

"I cannot fathom how a country like Japan, which has championed for the guarantee of human rights and democracy in Bhutan in various forms for years, has now decided to award Dago Tshering, a racist, ruthless and corrupt former home minister," Rizal, who now lives in Nepal, wrote in the portal, *The Diplomat*.

The eviction has been described as the largest by any country in modern history in terms of the proportion of the original population, a process characterised by rights activists as Bhutan's 'ethnic cleansing' of its people.

The letter from the Bhutanese organisations to the Japanese prime minister says: 'As the Home Minister, Mr. Dago Tshering exercised enormous power and authority, next only to the King. He misused his powers to silence and repress people often with no restraint or control.'

T P Mishra, whose father was also detained and tortured by the Bhutan regime, and who is now settled in the US, says, "Japan must understand and appreciate the impact of the other side of Tshering's career — that of the ethnic-cleansing of the Nepali-speaking population in Bhutan and the hounding of them when resettled." ❏



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Skeletons in the Cabinet

Coalition politics brings out the best in a democracy. The five-party anti-Oli alliance has been in grabberment for less than a month and it already has a three-member Cabinet. That is quite an achievement, and confirmation that Prime Minister Dubya adheres strongly to the Common Minimum Program by having the minimum number of ministers.

However, Parkinson's Law will sooner or later manifest itself and the Cabinet's workload will expand to fill the time allotted to it. How will the wealth ever get spread around with such a small Cabinet? The PM will have to be prepared to expand his Cabinet for stability and prosperity (of ministers).

With five parties in the governing coalition, including a disgruntled faction, it will be a challenge to ensure a division (if not multiplication) of the spoils. It will not have only three full ministers, one minister of state, and a couple of others lying in state.

It is a shame that for a country with so much potential and kinetic energy, the government is so critically understaffed. GONe has to be an equal opportunity employer that believes in levelling the playing field by giving every citizen a chance to hit the jackpot.

The PM needs to be more decisive to immediately deploy an army of ministers, not just the pathetic squad he has right now. It is a skeleton Cabinet with skeletons in its closet.

We also need more ministers because that will kick-start the economy after the pandemic slowdown, and have an immediate downstream impact on the labour market. A larger council of ministers will have a multiplier

effect by unleashing Nepal by creating more jobs in the civil service, manufacturing, and the service industry.

Every new minister will need a 15-member security detail, personal assistant, valet, peons, cook, driver, *chamchas*, power brokers, *gundas*, extortionists, and wives. Every new member of the Cabinet will also be transacting with quarry contractors, sand mining mafia, and medical school tycoons. Besides jobs, each minister will also need a new SUV, half a dozen pickups for bodyguards, a new sofa set with mini bar and attached bathroom, and a large closet to store skeletons in.

That is just one minister. With the constitutionally-mandated size of the Cabinet, multiply all that by 25 and imagine the effect on the economy. It will create thousands of new jobs, and increase Nepal's per capita GDP so we can attain middle-income status ahead of schedule.

Having been PM five times previously, Dubya has plenty of experience with splitting ministries to appease coalition partners. For example, the Ministry of Civil Aviation, Tourism and Culture can be divided into The Ministry of Civil, Ministry of Aviation, Ministry of Tourism and Nepotism, and the Ministry of Vermiculture.

The Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens can also be split into the Ministry of Married Women, Ministry of Unmarried Women, Ministry of Teenagers, the Adolescent Ministry, Ministry of Infants and Babies and the Ministry of Wild Asses.



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