



ADITYA KHARE

DEMOLITION MAN

Shristi Karki

A month into his prime ministership, Balendra Shah sent in security forces on a massive demolition drive of squatter settlements along Kathmandu's riverbanks.

Public reaction is mixed. A fierce propaganda battle is raging in cybersphere between pro-Balendra content creators who praise the prime minister's decisiveness and ridicule fake squatters who own property, and those who see it as a gross violation of human rights.

The government says it is identifying the 'genuinely landless' to rehouse. Police forced reporters to delete images of families in flimsy shelters taking cover from Wednesday evening's storm.

Before the election, the RSP's Rabi Lamichhane had said he would stand between a bulldozer and the genuine landless if they were evicted. But PM Shah made no distinction when he ordered the settlements razed this week. He is said to have acted without consultation within his party or with local government.

"It is a given that we want this government to succeed," says

analyst Ashutosh Tiwari. "But the ethos of this leadership seems to be move fast and break things. That's not how an elected government works. They don't have to do everything in 100 days."

Critics and activists question why the RSP chose to begin with demolitions before identifying and providing alternatives.

"The issue of landless Nepalis is tied to housing, employment, discrimination, poverty—it is a microcosm of everything that is wrong in Nepal," says Tiwari.

For critics, the PM is still acting as if he is mayor and pursuing showcase urban beautification as visible proof of his resoluteness in order to appeal to the middle class.

PHILOSOPHICAL DIVIDE

Says political scientist Sucheta Pyakuryal: "A politically mature and administratively well-versed government would not have started this without proper programs to accommodate the poor."

PM Shah's decision to unleash bulldozers on slums is symptomatic of a deeper ideological dichotomy — not just between the leaders of the party, but also with the RSP's own electoral platform.

There have been other puzzling decisions. Provisions of a draft

NRN Bill does not deliver on the RSP's progressive election pledges and has angered overseas Nepalis who had mobilised support for the party for the RSP's win in the election.

The party manifesto promised citizenship by descent, and friendlier economic and investment provisions. But the proposed draft does not mention citizenship, and includes a one-house ownership limit as well as a 50% tax on the sale of inherited ancestral property.

"Going back on promises made during elections by a party that rose to prominence selling old parties' lies and lack of accountability can impact the RSP's popularity," says Pyakuryal.

While Nepali migrant workers prop up the economy with remittances, NRN could be a source of investment. Says Tiwari: "This draft bill adversely affects the dynamic between Nepali diaspora and the government. Their investment could be much larger than the taxes they pay."

The government's attempt to bypass Parliament and issue a slew of ordinances even when it has a near supermajority, has also invited criticism — and not just from

opposition parties.

Law Minister Sobita Gautam justifies the move saying the government needs to quickly amend the Constitutional Council Act so that the Chief Justice and others can be appointed with a simple majority.

"By trying to govern through ordinance, the RSP has bypassed both the House and its own lawmakers who form the majority in the House. RSP has, in the past demonstrated lack of democratic practices especially during decision-making processes," says Pyakuryal.

There are questions about whether policies and decisions are even discussed in Cabinet meetings, or simply handed down by the Prime Minister.

So far, as chair of the RSP Lamichhane has been careful not to publicly disagree with the prime minister's decisions.

But some of the frustration among party leaders is seeping out. RSP lawmaker Ganesh Karki posted: 'Whether or not it was a necessity for a party with a near two thirds majority to suspend the Parliamentary session and issue ordinances, might be clear later, but this is not a courageous act.'

The Great Digital Leap Forward
EDITORIAL
PAGE 2



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The Great Digital Leap Forward

Over 35 of the 100 points in the government's good governance plan mention tech in one form or another

Vishad Raj Onta

The new government's 100-point good governance plan was released on 28 March, just one day after Balendra Shah was sworn in as prime minister. This was a statement of ambition, and the first move of a government that promised delivering results.

The document moved with the times, its main theme being digital governance. Over 35 of the 100 points mention tech in one form or another: tech reforms in taxes, healthcare, agriculture, project monitoring, accountability and law enforcement.

However, timelines are unrealistic, and sometimes outright contradictory. While there are specific gems, digitisation has been thrown around as a panacea that will cure all our ills. In that sense it is not really a strategy document, more a to-do list.

Successful implementation will require careful planning and execution. The good news is that the RSP government, with its near supermajority in the legislature for the next five years (hopefully) has a reasonable timeframe to deliver on many of the clauses.

The document does identify the biggest problems that hold the country back: the governance obstacles that cause the average Nepali the most pain and loss of time.

It also identifies the need for ministries to share data and talk to each other. Clause 67 points out that the Company Registrar's Office, Department of Industry,



and Ministry of Commerce, Supplies and Consumer Protection must be digitised and able to use each other's data.

Startup registration should be done within two days with an autofill system. Indeed, if Nepalis have to go through labyrinthine processes to get a citizenship certificate, national ID and passport, the least the state can do is make all three easy to get. And the way to do that is to retrieve digital data instantly whenever needed.

At present, forms for IDs and licenses have to be filled online, but a hardcopy is still needed for fingerprinting and signatures.

Clause 64 envisages a 'central dashboard with KPIs for priority projects, ministry-level performance tracking, and a problem and obstacle resolution mechanism' so the PMO can review progress at the click of a mouse.

The document aims at faceless, time-

bound, trackable digital systems, somewhat like a blockchain approach. Most of the document is not that specific, and read as if digital transformation of government will be magical and super-efficient.

Clause 50, for example aims to 'resolve irregularities, misuse of advance payments, and delays' by implementing a 'data-based end-to-end e-procurement

monitoring system' in three months. But why did these irregularities happen in the first place? What elements of the procurement process, such as hiring the cheapest contractors, allowed for substandard systems?

Digitisation puts the cart before the horse. The new government first needs to take a long hard look at the culture of government, its inertia, lethargy and greasing palms. Otherwise, the inefficiencies will just make their way into the technology.

The timelines look ambitious. Complex, national-level systems that need coordination and data sharing are given only 30, 60, or 90 days to accomplish. This is a hope, and not a plan.

It is not possible to draft an IT and E-governance Bill (Point #40), establish an Independent Regulatory Authority (Point

#38), and build a national data exchange platform (Point #36) within 60 days, in parallel. These steps must happen one after another.

The part about Digital Governance is actually the weakest. Points #28 to #42 contain multiple targets to reduce unnecessary steps, setting up different bodies and regulators, and passing bills. This would actually add redundancy and bureaucracy, which the plan was supposed to do away with.

There are glaring omissions. Such a complex, interconnected national data sharing system should have cybersecurity safeguards as the highest priority. There is also no acknowledgement of the existing government digital systems. Will these systems be scrapped? Integrated? Superseded?

WHERE AI?

AI and its applications are conspicuously absent from the document. Despite these flaws, the 100-point Plan identifies what needs to be done and setting goals. This is a lot more than any previous government has done. But given how prominently tech appears, perhaps we are owed another document when the government completes 100 days about how it is all going.

Nepali tech talent is booming both domestically and in the diaspora. Under the right conditions and for decent salaries, the government could certainly put together the requisite teams to build the digital skeleton on which Nepal will function from here on out. 🇳🇵

Trending Online



Nepal's yak economy

by Ken Shimizu

The annual National Yak Day last week was important step in Nepal's effort to revitalize Himalayan pastoralism, food security, ecology and culture, writes the FAO Country Representative. Visit nepalitimes.com for details.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Love thy neighbours (and America)

by Sonia Awale

With top envoys from the US and China in town almost simultaneously this month, and PM Balendra Shah prepping for his India visit, Kathmandu is at the centre of a geopolitical tug-of-war. Follow us for latest developments.

Most popular on X

When Aura meets Audit

by Nobel Rimal

Home Minister Sudan Gurung's resignation over allegations of financial misconduct is the first real verdict on what happens when auramaxxing collides with accountability. Analysis on our website.

Most commented



25 April is not over

by Ramu Kharel

The 2015 earthquake is etched into the national psyche, exposing the harsh reality of Nepal's disaster management system that reveal long-standing weaknesses in our lack of preparedness. Go online to read more.

Most visited online page

Letters

SUDAN GURUNG

The fact that Sudan Gurung resigned speaks volumes of the new government's commitment to keep corruption at bay, which sounds like accountability to me ('When Aura meets Audit', Nobel Rimal, #1308).

Abhaya Karki

I wonder how many reporters and editors will be left standing if faced with the same audit that Sudan Gurung did.

Anish Singh

An excellent feature on Nepali Times. This is one of the finer observations and articulations of current Nepali politics [and society] I have read in recent times.

Kashish Das Shrestha

Sudan Gurung is accountable, that's why he resigned. The previous corrupt government did not care about these things, which is why the GenZ protest was needed to eradicate them.

Manas P. Mahanta

Not long ago, the same people calling out Sudan Gurung now were backing political change and supporting the new leadership. If there are real concerns about his actions or connections, he must be questioned. Holding leaders accountable is important. But staying fair and seeing the bigger picture matters too.

Rajeet Gurung

Corruption is everywhere, even in developed nations, but you don't see their ministers resigning within months of being appointed. This government should be given a chance to settle down and work its way up.

Frequently toppling the government will not help, otherwise, a foreign entity might take advantage.

Gaurov Yakthumba

GEOPOLITICS

The front page has an interesting headline that captures the essence of Nepal's foreign policy ('Love thy neighbours (and America), Sonia Awale, #1308). With US officials visiting Nepal, one can point out the increasing presence of the US and its interests.

Krishnaveer Singh

It is interesting to witness our two neighbouring giants struggling to influence Nepal.

Sandeep Risal

America isn't even our neighbour. They don't want love, they only want proxy wars.

Annada Rajbhandary

China and India should be our first priority because diplomacy is realistic, not emotional.

Uday Neupane

2015 EARTHQUAKE

25 April 2015 was a painful and shocking reset of time ('25 April is not over', Ramu Kharel, nepalitimes.com). So many people died, were injured, or lost their homes suddenly. But it was inspiring to see people come together, as well as local and international efforts to help people survive and rebuild fast.

Wolf Price

The earthquake was something that can never be forgotten. The analysis of the disaster must span thousands of pages, and while new policies and standards were set, many of those things remained confined to paper.

Bipin Adhikari

Online Package



UNHOLY RIVER

A short Nepali Times film that follows the Bagmati from a spring in Shivapuri National Park, through the city to Chobar. Read how to clean up the holy river that sustains Kathmandu Valley civilisation on page 10-11.



MUSTANG MONSOON

Watch tourists and pilgrims on their way to the scenic Valley of Mustang and the holy Muktinath. Read story on page 5, and subscribe to our YouTube channel for multimedia content.

1,000 Words



SOBITA GAUTAM / SOCIAL MEDIA

EDUCATIONAL VISIT: Kathmandu-based ambassadors have been making the rounds of Singha Darbar meeting various ministers. This is Chinese Ambassador Zhang Maoming with Law Minister Sobita Gautam earlier this week.

Times

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Nepal is a 13-day country

The country's strategic stockpile of petroleum lasts less than 2 weeks, it must legislate against future energy shocks

Ashutosh Dev

Every time the price of fuel rises in Nepal, the country performs a familiar ritual: a longer weekend is announced, officials speak of austerity, an odd-even for vehicle is mulled, and the nation tightens its belt, waits for the global market to settle, and then returns to exactly where it was before: exposed and dependent.

With barely ten days of petroleum in reserve, this is not crisis management but crisis theatre. And we have been performing it, with minor variations, during every crisis in the past 50 years.

Crude prices have surged past \$100/barrel and may increase if the Strait of Hormuz blockade continues much longer. The oil shock hit Nepal hard with the new government raising fuel prices four times in the past month. Blaming this on external factors may be comforting, but dishonest.

In 2015, Nepal's economy was brought to its knees when the fuel supply from India was stopped for five months. Factories shuttered, hospitals ran short of medicines, private vehicles were off the roads, and earthquake relief was stuck.

Black market petrol was sold in mineral water bottles by the roadside for three times the official rate. When it was over, the reckoning was swift and the promise was absolute: Nepal would build petroleum reserves that would last 90 days.



NEPAL OIL COOPERATION

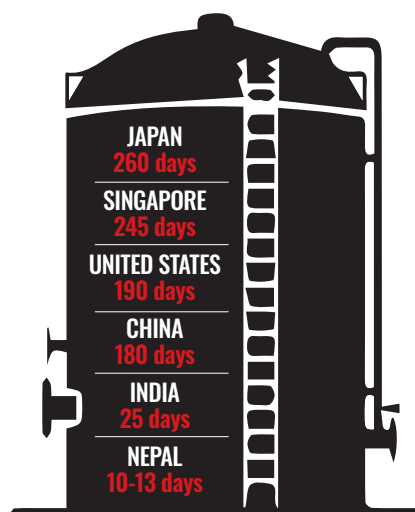
A decade later, Nepal holds only 13 days of fuel reserves. That number is the failure of every government since. The Lothar oil terminal is under construction, and its expansion plans exist only on paper. Construction timelines slip, budgets stretch, and every few days there is a queue outside every petrol station. The same panic, the same ritual of official proclamations.

What makes this particularly difficult to defend is not the vulnerability itself. Nepal is landlocked, import-dependent, and subject to geopolitical pressures it cannot fully control. These are genuine constraints. The tragedy is that the vulnerability is entirely foreseeable, and has been for years.

Strategic petroleum reserves are not a sophisticated intervention.

WHO STORES HOW MUCH OIL?

Strategic Reserves (to last in days)



They are a buffer, the most elementary form of national insurance for major economies that import fuel. The International Energy Agency (IEA) sets 90 days as the global standard.

The problem is that storage has never been made a legislative obligation, never written into law with a deadline, a penalty, and a mechanism for enforcement.

Every government has treated it as a target rather than a threshold. And targets, in the history of governance in Nepal, have an unhappy tendency to drift.

The good news is that Nepal is ahead of countries with a much higher adoption of EVs. This is no small achievement, and reflects a genuine and organic momentum in the economy, driven as much by citizens choosing EVs as by any

government mandate.

But this momentum is built on an unstable foundation. The energy transition, however real, has not yet reduced Nepal's vulnerability to petroleum shocks. Diesel still moves nearly all freight. LPG still cooks most meals. Aviation, industry, and heavy transport remain entirely dependent on fossil fuels.

The tactical response, price adjustment, tax relief and demand suppression, addresses none of this. It is the work of a country that has accepted its own fragility as a permanent feature, and learned to manage the symptoms rather than treat the condition.

ENERGY SECURITY ACT

The new government arrives with something its predecessors did not have: an unambiguous parliamentary majority and a mandate built explicitly on the promise of structural reform. Political capital of this magnitude must be spent on hard decisions, or it is spent on nothing at all.

The hard decision here is not complicated: it requires a single piece of legislation, an Energy Security Act that mandates a minimum strategic petroleum reserve of 60 days within three years, establishes an independent monitoring body, and makes non-compliance a matter of ministerial accountability rather than administrative aspiration.

There will be other wars, border disruptions, geopolitical rifts that will create a fuel shortage.

Will Nepal, by then, have built itself a margin of survival? The pledge of 2015 to build strategic reserves is still unfulfilled. The new government can finish the job. 🇳🇵

Ashutosh Dev is a PhD researcher at Victoria University of Wellington and a New Zealand Award Scholar specialising in renewable energy systems, energy resilience, and the socio-technical transitions of the Global South.



NMB BANK
एनएमबी बैंक



Nabil teaches

Nabil Bank is holding financial literacy and entrepreneurship workshops at 16 rural locations across Nepal. Financial sessions will cover budgeting, insurance, investment; technical sessions will teach goat, pig, buffalo, mushroom and vegetable farming. The first event was held on 20 April in Sinja, Jumla.

One-stop investment

The Investment Board Nepal has launched a digital one-stop service center portal to streamline the investment process. Investors can submit proposals and access services from 14 government agencies, including the Department of Customs, Inland Revenue Nepal Rastra Bank. Once fully operational, the portal aims to increase efficiency by handling company registration, permits, taxes.



Carlsberg Golf Classic

Tenzing Tshiring won the Carlsberg Golf Classic at Gokarna Golf Club on 24 April. Playing off scratch handicap, Tshiring scored 39 Stableford points, winning new golf equipment and a golfing holiday to Malaysia. Sushma Singh won the ladies' category. There were a total of 111 players.

Against fake parts

As the Nepali government tightens border controls against smuggling and illegal imports, Siprodi Autoparts has launched a nationwide awareness campaign urging consumers to use only genuine Tata parts. Siprodi reps are visiting garages, repair centers, and transportation hubs in major border cities including Dhangadhi, Bhairawa, Birganj, and Nepalganj to educate technicians and customers.



Icefall finally fixed

After significant delays, a joint Sherpa effort has successfully fixed a route through the Khumbu Icefall on Mount Everest, reaching all the way to Camp 2. The route has been secured with ladders, ropes, and anchors, allowing rotations to Camp 1 to begin. Fixing of the remaining route to the summit, including Lhotse, will follow. However, this is the latest the Camp 1 route has opened since commercial expeditions boomed. With 425 foreign climbers holding permits and over 1,000 people expected on the mountain, teams have minimal time for acclimatization rotations before summit attempts.

Brick kiln smoke

New emission standards state that brick kilns have two years to limit particulate matter to 250 mg/Nm³. Petroleum coke, tyres and plastic may not be used as fuel anymore. Similar rules apply to cement plants. The Department of Environment will monitor compliance.

Tea to be tested

India's Tea Board will enforce mandatory lab testing on all tea imports starting May 1. Nepali exporters warn this will halt shipments. Tea exports already fell 19% this fiscal year, with production down 25–30% due to pest infestation. Exporters are exploring China as an alternative market.

Edu Minister visited

Chinese Ambassador Chang Maoming visited Nepal's Minister for Education, Science and Technology, Sasmit Pokharel, at his Singha Durbar office to discuss bilateral cooperation in education, science, technology, and sports. Key topics included developing and digitizing education infrastructure. Separately, British Ambassador Rob Fenn also met Pokharel, discussing a wide-ranging education partnership. The foreign ministry is reportedly miffed at being circumvented for these visits.



24,500MW by 2033

The GoN aims at 24,500MW of electricity generation by fiscal year 2092/93 BS through public and private investment. Key projects include the 1,200MW Budhigandaki, 490MW Arun IV, 828MW Uttarganga, and a 1,000MW solar plant. Private solar projects totaling 14,000MW are also planned. The strategy includes underground distribution systems, electric stove subsidies, EV charging expansion.



Vet meds banned

The Department of Drug Administration has officially banned three veterinary medicines — Nimesulide, Aceclofenac, and Ketoprofen — citing serious risks to public health, animal welfare, and the environmental balance. Existing market stocks may be sold for the next six months. Bird Conservation Nepal recognises this as a significant milestone in Vulture Conservation.

Wagle White Paper

Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle released a white paper about the current economic situation of Nepal that identifies crony capitalism, policy corruption, and weak governance as causes of economic stagnation. Key findings include public debt rising from 22.5% to 43.8% of GDP. Foreign direct investment remains the lowest in South Asia at 0.2% of GDP, with the economy heavily dependent on remittances. Youth unemployment is at 22.7%. Wagle targets 7% average growth to raise per capita income above \$3,000 within 5–7 years.

MCA highway

Millennium Challenge Account Nepal has started upgrading the 40km Dhan Khola–Lamahi section of the East-West Highway in Dang. For the first time in Nepal, the project will use Full Depth Reclamation and Superpave construction methods which offer improved durability, sustainability, and cost-effectiveness by reusing existing asphalt, the MCA says. The road will be widened to 12 meters with a 7-meter carriageway. The initiative is co-funded by the government and the US Millennium Challenge Corporation.



PHOTOS: ALEXANDRA COLTMAN

Highlanders have high hopes

Those remaining in Lo Manthang have a wishlist for Nepal's new leaders

Alexandra Colman
in Mustang

In the arid trans-Himalayan town of Lo Manthang, Rinzin Sangpo leans against his spade, with farm manure at his feet.

It is just a few weeks after the election, and while the RSP's blue wave swept the rest of the nation, Mustang stood by its legacy party, reelecting the incumbent Nepali Congress candidate to Parliament.

"I'm just a farmer," 72-year-old Sangpo says, yet, he has high hopes for his town and district -- including an improved water supply, clean canals for agriculture, and better schools for his grandchildren who are out playing on the streets.

Voices like Sangpo's from Nepal's rural and underserved communities have been largely overlooked by mainstream media and political leadership. He has little faith that the new government will deliver.

Even though a majority of people did not vote for the RSP, those who did look forward to what the new leaders will do.

Rinzin Guru, a 45-year-old hotel owner, was one of 759 people in the district who voted for the RSP in March, in hopes

that the younger generation of elected officials would invest more in the youth of Mustang.

Guru echoes Sangpo's wish for better schooling. His two young children are enrolled in boarding school far away from Lo Manthang because government schools here only have classes up to Grade 5. He pays up to Rs300,000 a year for their schooling, adding to the financial pressure on him.

These challenges in Mustang's education sector are only a part of a larger picture of infrastructural failures that impact the everyday lives of its residents.

Sonam Tsering, 60, works at the local hospital, and laments the lack of adequate facilities, outdated equipment, and limited treatment options for patients in the region.

"The medicines the government sends are simply not effective or sufficient," he says.

Tsering explains how this means that many residents have no choice but to travel six hours away, to Pokhara. "Better facilities always go to bigger, wealthier cities," he adds.

Across town Yang Dolkar, 47, agrees that hospitals in Mustang could use upgrading and improvements: "We don't have treatments for common problems like cavities. But to ensure that modern machines and equipment



Yang Dolkar



Pema Tenzin



Rinzin Guru



Rinzin Sangpo

can operate properly, we need stable electricity."

Dolkar also voted for RSP believing that a new younger government would better address these challenges faced by the people of Mustang.

Moreover, better healthcare for Mustang also depends on access to and improvement of other infrastructure.

On this day, Dolkar, along with two other women, are huddled around a pipe that juts out from the ground in Lo Manthang, doing their laundry. In the absence of sustained running water in their homes, this pipe on the side of the road serves as the laundry centre for residents of Upper Mustang's capital.

NEED BETTER ROADS

It is not just electricity or running water, roads need upgrading too. For those who must travel to the city, including to Pokhara, it is often a matter of life or death, and yet the roads remain treacherous and unsuitable for many vehicles. Beyond emergencies, functional roads are imperative to stimulate Mustang's economy.

Better roads would mean improved market connectivity, and would facilitate the ease of movement for tourists traveling to and from Mustang. Poor roads have made transport costs exceptionally high, while tourist

permits to Lo Manthang cost \$50 per day.

The lack of road connectivity, education, healthcare, water supply, electricity, or economic opportunity has pushed young people to leave Mustang, moving to urban centres or abroad. The future of Mustang's youth is directly tied to the promise for infrastructural change from the new government.

At present, there are only 23 young people living in Lo Manthang, including 25-year-old Pema Tenzin and Kunga Sanpo, 23, both of whom voted for RSP in hopes that a younger generation of leaders would bring new economic opportunities.

"I can't say much about how politics works, but I am hopeful to see new faces," Sanpo says.

Tenzin, the president of the Lo Manthang youth club says, "With better roads and fewer restrictions for visitors from the government, Mustang would have the chance to flourish economically through trade and tourism. If this wasn't so hard, youths would not have to leave."

The overarching feeling among the people of Lo Manthang is that of hope, in the roads not yet paved, the young people who have not yet left, and the shared belief that one way or another, change will come to Mustang. 🇳🇵



Mosquitos ascend to the base of Mt Everest

Climate change makes both the vector and virus carry dengue fever ever higher up the mountains

Text and Photographs by
Yuri Segalerba

Nepal is experiencing a worrying spread of dengue fever higher up into Himalayan valleys where the mosquito-borne disease was unknown until a few years ago.

In 2025, 15 of the country's 16 high-altitude districts reported infections, marking an unprecedented ascent of the vector and virus over 2,400m. A Tribhuvan University study has confirmed the presence of *Aedes aegypti* and *Aedes albopictus* mosquitoes and their larvae, in Jumla (2,438m).

In Solukhumbu district, no systematic scientific research has yet been conducted, but dengue cases have been reported in patients without travel history, suggesting the presence of vectors at the base of Mt Everest as well.

Until recently, *Aedes* mosquitoes had only been detected up to 2,100m. Over the past two years, however, dengue has spread across almost the entire country, affecting 76 of Nepal's 77 districts in 2024, and 75 in 2025 (see graphics, next page).

The Epidemiology and Disease Control Division data shows 42,647 people were infected since January 2024, 19 of whom died. But the

number of unreported infections is probably much higher.

Scientists from the Nepal Health Research Council (NHRC), in collaboration with the Institute of Tropical Medicine in Antwerp, collected mosquito samples to examine how they adapt to warmer temperatures and resistance to insecticides.

The specimens are carefully observed, photographed, and catalogued, allowing researchers to document patterns of survival, distribution, and resistance.

Experts attribute the spread of dengue into Nepal's mountainous regions primarily to global warming, which creates more

favourable conditions for mosquito survival and reproduction, even in areas once considered at low or no risk. The dengue-carrying mosquito mainly bites in the early mornings and evenings when people are out and about.

Increased mobility within Nepal with the spread of the road network, and greater international connectivity have also contributed to circulating the virus. As a result, dengue is reaching remoter Himalayan communities with poor healthcare facilities.

In these isolated and hard-to-access areas, many residents continue to rely on traditional Tibetan medicine,


known as Sowa Rigpa, practiced by traditional Amchi healers who enjoy strong cultural trust and have long served as key healthcare providers within local communities.

Practiced across the Himalayan region and influenced by Indian Ayurveda and Buddhist philosophy, Sowa Rigpa combines clinical observation, herbal remedies, and a holistic view of health, in which body, mind, environment, and spiritual dimensions are deeply interconnected.

To curb the spread of dengue, Nepal's health authorities have a two-pronged prevention and

awareness strategy that involves using insect repellents and mosquito nets, proper household environmental management, and community campaigns to eliminate stagnant water and strengthen vector surveillance.

The goal is to improve the capacity of communities to respond promptly to emerging health threats in a territory increasingly exposed to the impacts of climate change.

Vaccines against the two main strains of dengue exist, but they are unreliable, are expensive, and have side effects. Prevention and vector management are therefore the primary strategies available to combat dengue. 



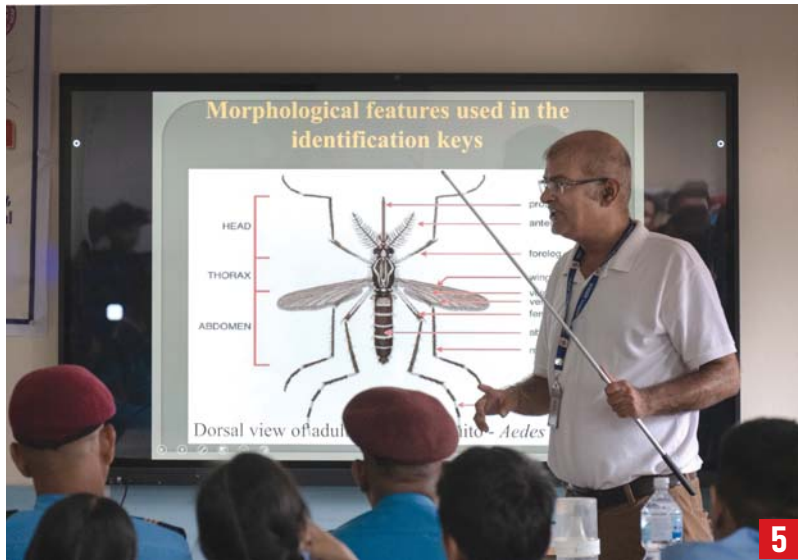


4

With rain comes dengue

Heavy pre-monsoon showers presage an early start to the dengue season

SUMAN NEPALI



5

1 Devi Kanya Kathayat, 33, breastfeeds her son Nehan Budha (2) under a treated mosquito net in Jumla. Her family lives at 2,438m but now needs mosquito nets to prevent infections.

2 Picturesque Jumla is the highest that the dengue-carrying *Aedes aegypti* and *Aedes albopictus* mosquitos have been detected.

3 Phaplu's District Hospital where patients with no travel history were infected with dengue.

4 Santos Pandey, Pratima Bhandari, and Sangita Chand examine dengue vector mosquitos under a microscope at the NHRC laboratory in Kathmandu to identify the subtle differences between the two strains of dengue-carrying mosquitos.

5 Ishan Gautam of Tribhuvan University speaks at an awareness campaign at a school in Kathmandu to prevent mosquito breeding.

Sonia Awale

Nepal's worst dengue outbreak was in 2022, when at least 88 were killed nationwide and 54,000 were diagnosed. In 2024, there were 10,000 cases in Kathmandu Valley alone, although the real figure was many times higher.

With heavier than usual pre-monsoon showers in April, public health experts warn that there could be another upsurge of the deadly mosquito-borne infection this year.

The first ever case of dengue in Nepal was reported in a traveler returning from India in 2004. But since then, dengue is locally transmitted and as the atmosphere warms the vector is moving up the mountains (see main story, left).

Dengue is spread by the daytime bite of the female of two species of mosquitos, the *Aedes aegypti*, and the *Aedes albopictus*. Researchers have found that *A. albopictus* in particular has adapted to colder conditions and is moving to higher elevations.

Warns virologist Sher Bahadur Pun at Sukraraj Tropical and Infectious Disease Hospital in Kathmandu: "If we go by past cycles, we are due for a major outbreak because it takes place every 2-3 years, and it could be the worst yet."

There are four serotypes of dengue, and each consecutive infection by a different strain can be increasingly more severe. The same goes for outbreaks, Pun adds, and Kathmandu could face two more major outbreaks, possibly by 2030.

Infected *Aedes* mosquitos breed in stagnant water and hatch infected offspring. August-September during the monsoon is usually when dengue cases peak, and rain followed by sunshine is the ideal condition for the larvae to metamorphose into pupae and hatch.

"The longer the gap between dengue occurrences, the bigger the outbreak," explains Sudeep Adhikari at the Oxford University Clinical Research Unit (OUCRU) Nepal office. "There are three scenarios: a new serotype that the population isn't immune to yet, the same serotype for which the population has lost its immunity, and a mix of more than one serotype."

Vaccines are now available and the WHO recommends them for children in high dengue burden areas, but they are not as effective as they do not equally prevent infections from all serotypes. In Nepal it is not yet available and the newer vaccines haven't existed long enough to analyse their long-term effectiveness.

Prevention, therefore, is the best form of cure. Draining clear stagnant water in the city and in

the home from drains, used tyres, flower pots, even bottle caps, will prevent mosquitos from breeding. People are advised to wear full-sleeve shirts, rub insect repellent on exposed skin, and use treated mosquito nets.

"If we don't control mosquitos at the larvae stage and wait for the outbreak to deploy search and destroy mode, that is too late," says Pun. "At most, we will manage to contain the spread in that specific area. But this is a daytime biter, and people going to school or work could be infected at any point."

Despite rising temperatures and early rains, there is no sense of urgency at the public and government level. He laments: "We are all too busy with hardcore politics to care about public health. Local governments, especially, must immediately mobilise volunteers to clear stagnant pools of water before the outbreak hits."

Many who are infected are asymptomatic, but can spread the virus through mosquito bites. The mortality rate among patients is low, but dengue is called break-bone fever because patients suffer unbearable pain in the joints and eyes, severe headache, and vomiting, which can only be managed but not treated.

HOW TO PREVENT DENGUE:

Drain clear stagnant water in neighbourhood, wear full-sleeve shirts (especially mornings and evenings), rub insect repellent on exposed skin, use treated mosquito nets.

"Because there is no treatment, people just go about their daily lives despite the infection, treating it like a common cold, further spreading the disease as well as aggravating their condition," says Pun, who now calls the fever "walking dengue".

Because regular dengue fever is extremely painful, it is often not easy to identify when an individual has progressed to severe haemorrhagic dengue. That is when dengue patients tend to crowd hospitals because of persistent and extreme symptoms, occupying beds for weeks at a time when there are other infections.

"There must be a public understanding of what constitutes a normal dengue case versus a severe case, and we have to upgrade hospital services to prepare for the dengue season," says Adhikari.

He adds: "Ultimately, Nepalis are reactive and therein lies the problem. Preparedness is an on-going process, and public awareness is of paramount importance to actively identify stagnant bodies of water before an outbreak, not after." 🇳🇵

MOUNTAIN MOSQUITOS

Rising global temperatures have allowed mosquitos to thrive higher than ever before in the Himalaya. This means an increase in the distribution and intensity of vector-borne diseases like dengue, malaria, encephalitis and zika.

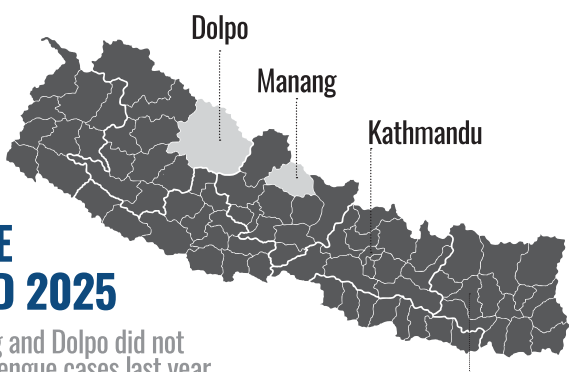
Mosquitos breed all year round at lower elevations, but higher up the invasive mosquitos are seasonal and exist alongside native species. In Nepal, dengue-carrying mosquitos were only found below 2,000m in summer. But the vectors and their larvae were recently detected at nearly 2,500m in Jumla, and there is evidence it has also spread to Solukhumbu.

Out of Nepal's 77 districts, last year dengue patients were found in 75. Factors are: climate change, urbanisation, poor awareness and greater domestic and international connectivity.

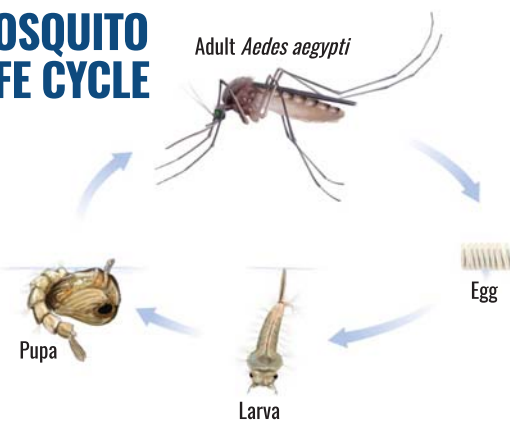


DENGUE SPREAD 2025

Only Manang and Dolpo did not record any dengue cases last year.

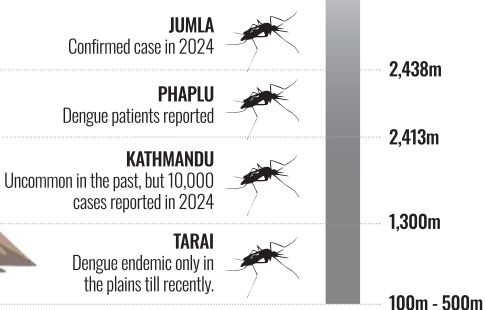


MOSQUITO LIFE CYCLE



VERTICAL VECTORS

Global warming is moving mosquitos up mountains





Events



Buddha Jayanti

The 2,570th Buddha Jayanti this week will be celebrated in Lumbini and across the country with peace rallies, donation campaigns and meditation programs. The auspicious day holds special significance among Buddhist and Hindu communities in Kathmandu Valley and in the mountains.

1 May

Comedy Jatra

Aakash Gupta is coming to town for his Daily Ka Kaam Hai- Nepal Tour. Enjoy a lively stand-up comedy show full of everyday humor and relatable gags.

2 May, Rs999-3,799, 4pm onwards, Nepal Academy Hall, Kamladi

Fulchoki Phedi Hike

Lace up your hiking boots to be one with nature and enjoy the scenic views along the trails of Fulchoki this weekend.

2 May, Rs1,000-1,500, 6:40am, Brikutimandap



Grand Rehearsal

Watch Grand Rehearsal, a comedic play celebrating chaos and mishaps under laughter. Presented as a play-within-a-play, this is a murder mystery.

Until 17 May, 5:30pm, Mandala Theatre, Thapagaun

Le Sherpa Farmers Market

From fresh organic produce to cheese and bakery items, Le Sherpa Farmers Market has it all. Drop in and shop with friends and family.

Every Saturday, 8am-12:30pm, Le Sherpa, Maharajganj



Knitting & Crochet

Participate in this knitting and crochet event and explore your creativity. Immerse in lively conversations with fellow crafters.

Every Saturday, 12pm-4pm, Meet & Spice Lounge, Thamel

Khorlo Exhibition

The Khorlo/Wheel exhibition brings together four Tibetan diaspora artists from India. The exhibition explores how individual practices engage with questions of selfhood within the complexities of contemporary life.

Until 2 May, Takpa Gallery, Lazimpat



Darbar Marg Street Fest

Mark your calendar for a weekend full of music, energy and culture: performances by popular artists, Tik Tok corners, kids activities, cosplay characters, dance surprises and more.

2 May, 11am onwards, Darbar Marg



Music

Grasslands Festival

Grasslands Music Festival returns to the outdoors for its 10th edition. Check Khalti for price details.

2 May, Grand Norling's Hotel Resort, Gokarna

Blues Music

Light up your weekend with raw blues energy and electrifying vibes. Watch Satis Sthapit and The Blue Acidz perform live.

2 May, Rs500-1,000, XO Club, Thamel



John and the Locals

John and the Locals will be performing live for Hami Ek Hau at Sasa: Twa in Kirtipur. Don't miss the chance to listen and groove to your favourite tunes with good food.

16 May, Rs800-900, Sasa: Twa, Kirtipur

Echoes of Mind

Soothe your ears with some jazz tunes by artists from the Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory School of Music. Hop in for an evening filled with soulful music and rhythms.

3 May, 7pm onwards, Moksh, Jhamsikhel



Makadox Fest

Are you in western Nepal this Friday? Attend 'Makadox Fest' where Purna Rai & Band along with Sabin Rai & The Pharaoh perform.

1 May, Rs999-1,999, Butwal International Convention Center, Butwal



Getaway



Chandragiri Hills Resort

Chandragiri Hills Resort sits atop lush green hills overlooking Kathmandu Valley. Catch glimpses of snow-capped mountains, marvel at stunning sunsets and take a dip in their infinity pool this summer.

Thankot (01) 5970796

Sukute Beach Resort

Just about 69km from the capital, Sukute Beach Resort offers a beautiful destination on the shores of the Bhotekosi. Visitors can enjoy multiple activities including rafting and camping.

Chautara, Sindhupalchowk, 9851316057



Mystic Mountain

Situated amid the forest of Nagarkot, the resort is exquisitely built using ultra modern designs and world-class comfort.

Nagarkot (01) 5913206

Countryside Spring Resort

Enjoy delicious food with lush green surroundings and relaxing views. Immerse in calmness and stillness in their villas and tree houses.

Khole gau, Nuwakot, 9708050677

Peacock Guest House

Housed in a World Heritage Site, 3-storied Newari-style building provides splendid views of the Dattatreya Square and the Bhimsenthana temple.

Bhaktapur (01) 6611829



Dining

Tamarind

If you're looking for a restaurant with great drinks and food, Tamarind is the place to go. And if you're in the mood to Salsa dance or just marvel at the moves of the regulars, stop by on Tuesday evenings.

Jhamsikhel (01) 5522626

La Casita

With a direct view of Boudhanath Stupa, La Casita is the ideal place for taking pictures and eating tacos, burgers and tapas.

Boudhanath (01) 4915645



Achaar Ghar

Nothing beats a home-cooked meal with an assortment of pickles prepared from recipes that have been passed down from generations.

Kupondol, (01) 5912440

Cafe Soma

For a sunny spot to grab brunch in and mouthwatering desserts, head to Soma's Baluwatar location. And if you're looking for a place to work by yourself, the Jawalakhel location is perfect for you.

Jhamsikhel (01) 5428732 /Baluwatar (01) 4415792

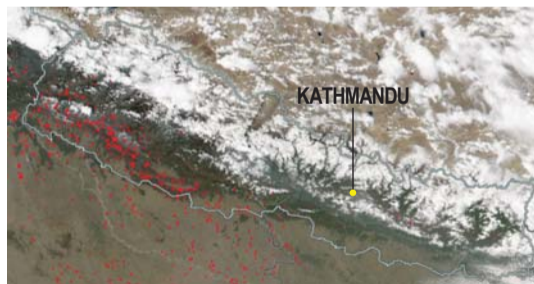


The Belgian Waffle

Want something to satisfy your sweet tooth? Treat your taste buds from a wide range of waffle sundaes and Waff-wiches.

Darbar Marg, 9849636013

Weekend Weather



Stormy Evenings

In April, Kathmandu Valley receives an average of 30-40mm of rain. This April, the total precipitation has exceeded 100mm. So why has the rain not doused wildfires and cleared the haze? That is because western Nepal is still relatively dry, and as this NASA infrared satellite image from Thursday shows, western Nepal still has many hotspots. The forecast for the weekend and beyond is mostly clear mornings with evening and night thunderstorms. The maximum temperature will be below normal in Kathmandu, but the Tarai is baking. Eastern Uttar Pradesh recorded 47.6°C on Tuesday.

Our Pick



The 2026 biopic directed by Antoine Fuqua and written by John Logan follows the early life of American singer Michael Jackson, dubbed the King of Pop. Michael is portrayed by his nephew Jaafar Jackson in his acting debut, and the movie depicts the singer's involvement in the Jackson 5 in the 1960s up to the Bad tour in 1988 with father Joseph Jackson as the manager of the group. Also stars Nia Long, Keilyn Durrel Jones, Laura Harrier, Jessica Sula, Mike Myers, Miles Teller, and Colman Domingo.

सामाजिक सञ्जाल प्रयोगमा सचेतता अपनाऔं

- सामाजिक सञ्जालमा अपरिचित व्यक्तिको साथी बन्ने अनुरोधलाई विश्वस्त भएर मात्र प्रतिक्रिया जनाऔं ।
- अपरिचित व्यक्तिलाई जथाभावी साथी बन्न अनुरोध नपठाऔं ।
- सामाजिक सञ्जाल तथा अन्य विद्युतीय माध्यमबाट चिड्डा पुरस्कार जस्ता आर्थिक प्रलोभनका प्रस्तावको भरमा नपराँ ।
- आफूले प्रवाह गरेका सन्देश वा सूचनाबाट समाजमा पर्नसक्ने नकारात्मक प्रभावको ख्याल गरौं ।
- आफ्नो सन्देशले कुनै व्यक्ति वा अन्य कुनै समुदायको आत्मसम्मानमा चोट नपुऱ्याऔं ।



नेपाल सरकार
विज्ञापन बोर्ड

A long run for women's rights

Sprinting across the Himalaya for women and girls everywhere

Alexandra Coltman

Three years ago, Alicia Bayer had never run a marathon. In fact, she was not even a regular runner. Now, she runs at a pace of a marathon per day through the Himalaya.

On 16 April, Bayer completed her ultra run of 140km, summiting Kyanjin Ri (4,700m) and Tserko Ri of Langtang Valley (4,985m) in just seven days. A few weeks before that, she had run 640km from Mumbai to Goa along the western coast of India in 15 days.

Bayer's runs are documented daily on her Instagram page, amassing nearly 25,000 followers. Through photographs, short videos, and personal stories, her goal is to draw attention to the rights of women.

As a young woman, Bayer witnessed firsthand and learnt through news reports about women being exploited around the world. She used to think that if women across Europe, and her home country of Germany still struggle with equality, it has to be worse in more traditional parts of the world. "I saw the problem, but I didn't see how I could change it," Bayer recalls thinking.

But last November as she meditated at a monastery in Nepal she decided to turn inwards, reflecting on these feelings. Bayer knew that running empowered her personally, but doing it solely for



JEEVAN LAMA

competition was not making an impact. So she asked herself: how can I turn what I do into something meaningful?

"Then I realised that if you really want to change something, you need to do little things on small levels rather than trying to help everyone at once. You have to rebuild systems and support the people who are already helping," adds Bayer.

This is how Bayer found ultra running and social media as her medium for advocacy. Her goal

is to draw attention from global audiences through her extreme running feats, and then direct that to women's rights organisations already doing grassroots work.

MEANINGFUL PARTNERSHIPS

In Nepal, Bayer ran on behalf of Freedom in Disasters, a 'for-purpose organisation' that works globally to prevent disaster victims from being trafficked as happened in Nepal post-earthquake in 2015. Because Nepal is disaster-prone, many women fall

into human trafficking during times of crises.

Freedom in Disasters is an umbrella organisation working across different regions and crises. In Nepal, it partners with groups deeply rooted in the community, including Alliance Against Trafficking in Women and Children in Nepal (AATWIN), the Sunita Foundation which works to aid survivors of human trafficking, Chhori that empowers young women through education and skill training, and Shakti Samuha that

supports survivors of abuse.

Each of these organisations play different roles in the various stages of recovery for vulnerable women and children. Bayer included a donation link to Freedom in Disasters in each post and story during her seven-day run, encouraging followers to support the organisation.

She also works directly with women in villages along the trail where she runs. In India, she visited schools and spoke face-to-face with girls, encouraging and empowering them.

"Fathers would proudly bring me their daughters to speak to me, it brought me so much joy to see them feel inspired," Bayer tells Nepali Times, adding that she plans to continue partnering with charitable groups in Nepal working on menstrual health and equity in sports.

On 29 May Bayer is hoping to become the first German woman to complete the Everest Ultra-Marathon, running 70km from Everest Base Camp to Namche Bazar.

Says Bayer: "I hope my accomplishments will show women across the world that even if systems try to convince us all the time that we are the weaker gender, that we don't deserve education or rights, we should never forget how powerful we are and that we deserve the same opportunities and rights as men." 🇩🇪

Instagram: @runtheworldwithalicia

Skier of the Himalaya

American mountaineer on a personal campaign to map out ski routes below the world's highest mountains

Vishad Raj Onta

Having grown up near the Teton mountains in Idaho and Wyoming, Luke Smithwick has always been passionate about mountains. He has now channeled that into The Himalaya 500 project to map out 500 aesthetic ski lines in the Himalaya.

A mountaineer, skier and founder of Himalaya Alpine Guides, he is also an avalanche forecaster and educator who first visited Nepal in 2001 when he was still a student of Environmental Biology and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Colorado.

"That trip completely changed me, I knew Nepal would be a part of the rest of my life," says Smithwick, who speaks Urdu, Kashmiri, Ladakhi, Tibetan, Nepali, Hindi, Spanish and English. What inspires him is seeking out blank spots on the map for skiing right across the Himalayan arc from Nepal, India, Bhutan, China and Pakistan. And along the way he can also appreciate tremendous biological, geographical and ethnic diversity of the world's youngest and highest mountain range.

The idea for his vast skiing project came about when Smithwick was working in snow safety and development on the Indian side of Kashmir. When choosing a line, some of the things he takes into account are the people, climate, geology, and orography that he will be skiing through.

The next is getting permits since the Himalaya is also a geopolitical hotspot and many border areas are restricted. After that, he checks for lodges or tea houses in the area as well as suitable camp sites in the higher reaches.

Smithwick's background in avalanche is vital to keeping him safe during runs. He says a lot of it has to be intuition: "There is a daily avalanche forecast for many regions, but you also have to do it yourself. We have to figure out what is going on with the snowpack."



PHOTOS COURTESY: LUKE SMITHWICK

RECENT SKIING FEATS

Mountaineering sucks all the oxygen from the media, and skiing is often ignored. But recently there have been major feats: Polish ski-mountaineer Andrzej Bargiel skied down the South Col face of Mt Everest without any supplemental oxygen, and American Jim Morrison skied down the Hornbein Couloir on the North Face. This spring another Pole, Bartek Ziemski, plans to ski from the summit of Lhotse.

Smithwick says the best areas for skiing in Nepal are in the west where there is more snowfall in winter. Some Nepali guides go to Gulmarg in Kashmir to get practice, but with adequate facilities Nepal could set up its own ski centres.

Smithwick spoke to Nepali Times from Phu in Manang which has seen heavy snowfall this spring. His latest post on Instagram is a video of a puja as he prepares to climb Mt Himlung, 7126m. Writes Smithwick: 'Pujas for me have always been a time to think about why I'm here, and to bring the team together in a bonding moment.' 🇩🇪

Lifeline becomes liability

Roshni Gurung

Rivers have been the lifelines of civilisations with their dynamic ecosystems providing vital services for human survival and ecological balance through the ages.

But accelerating anthropocentric footprints are causing severe, and often irreversible, damage to river systems across the world, including those across High Asia, a region that sustains nearly a fourth of the global population downstream.

An example is the Bagmati River that courses through Kathmandu, crossing the Himalayan foothills to join the Ganga in India. A river that once shaped the Kathmandu Valley Civilisation is now a polluted and biologically dead water body constricted by urban sprawl, choked by construction debris, chemical waste and untreated sewage.

The loss of a sacred river is tragic enough, but its hazards related to health, life and livelihoods are not limited to the Valley, nor is its enormity fully gauged by the metrics of fatality, income loss, flood return periods, runoffs, embankment failure.

It is a systemic collapse of ecological integrity, socio-economic stability and cultural heritage, affecting its downstream users as well. The death of Bagmati is a peril for a population size way bigger than circa 5 million residents of



THE WAY WE WERE: The Bagmati flowing wide and clean at Thapathali in the 1960s, and the same area today.

TONI HAGEN

Kathmandu Valley.

The degradation started in the 1980s and has accelerated. Why has not enough been done to save this iconic river that runs through Nepal's capital?

The Bagmati River Basin Improvement Project (BRBIP)

was designed to make headway to restore the river with a sewage treatment plant, dams for storing water to support dry-season runoff, recharge groundwater, create green biodiversity corridors along the river bank to also serve as recreation areas, reduce the urban

heat island effect, and also provide cultural continuity.

The project also envisages collection of hydrological data for managing Bagmati multipurpose water systems and providing flood forecasts and early warnings aimed at protecting lives and property,

among other things.

Most importantly, the project takes the integrated water resource management approach, which, in principle, is a holistic and collaborative way of managing all elements of the water cycle to ensure water security, public and

Satellites are monitoring

The holy river can be cleaned up with political will and free remote-sensing data

Sumit Mahato

The holy Bagmati River is in the news this week because of the eviction of settlements along its banks, but that alone will not revive the river and its tributaries that are ancient symbols of the Kathmandu Valley civilisation.

I have stood at Pashupati and watched the Bagmati flow past, a river that looks like it is not alive anymore. The stench is overpowering and stays with you long after.

Priests were performing funerary rituals right next to where sewers entered the river. Devotees cup that same water in their hands. I was a student then, and did not fully understand what was happening.

Things have improved somewhat, but the broad free-flowing Bagmati is still essentially a channelled sewer. Now, years later, researching water quality for a living and understanding the policy failures that lead to such desecration, I am even more worried.

The Bagmati is the most sacred river in the region, and also the most polluted. Those two factors co-exist and we have normalised the contradiction. Every Shivaratri, Hindus

from Nepal, India and across the world flock to worship at Pashupati and the river.

The numbers are numbing. More than 95% of wastewater in Kathmandu Valley is discharged into the Bagmati and its tributaries without treatment. Of that, 93% is domestic sewage — liquid waste flowing out of homes, apartments, restaurants, and hotels, not just factories.

A 2023 research found 615 coliform bacteria colonies in sites along the river, and nearly 80% of those bacteria were resistant to common antibiotics.

This is no longer an environmental issue — the presence of antibiotic-resistant pathogens in a river is still actively used for bathing, ritual practice, and daily contact represents a serious public health concern.

We have been spending money to fix it. The Asian Development Bank (ADB), the OPEC Fund, and the Nepal government have spent \$136 million in restoring the Bagmati over the years. Volunteers have pulled out more than 20,000 metric tonnes of physical waste from the river since 2009. Yet pollution levels continue to worsen.

The investments are real, results are not. And a significant part of the problem lies in how the river is monitored. At present, water quality is assessed through manual field sampling at a limited number of locations, conducted a few times each year.

This approach, while scientifically useful, is inherently constrained. The river changes every single day. Pollution spikes after rain, and discharge patterns shift by season. A handful of field measurements cannot capture any of that.



YELLOW RIVER: Raw sewage emptying in to the holy banks of the Bagmati at Sankhamul in Patan.

Clearing of squatter settlement along the Bagmati has highlighted the urgent need to save the sacred river

of legal battle for Nepal's Supreme Court to pass orders for mandatory septic tanks in all homes in Kathmandu Valley, relocate of squatters from Bagmati river banks to government-built houses, and embargo on dumping and burying garbage on the banks of the river and its tributaries.

Despite court orders, however, actual results have been unsatisfactory. Restoration of Bagmati barely made it to any political debate or electoral manifesto this time. Treatment plants have not been operational for years, yet no one is held accountable. The population ignores waste segregation or single-use plastic rules to check littering.

The current condition of the river therefore seems to have more to do with the lack of public awareness and behaviour change than the failure of various master plans.

Why does the deep danger of a dead river fail to arouse widespread civil society concern, let alone action? The apathy is perhaps underlined by an innately anthropocentric understanding of the river as a mere resource to be exploited, rather than the backbone of existence.

Such a paradigm shift is possible when river or river systems are understood to be necessary for a harmonious coexistence with human populations. The more pertinent question is not whether a dead river can be restored because there are many examples from around the world where that has been successfully achieved.

It is whether we choose to restore our rivers for intergenerational equity. This would require a holistic perspective and political will to revive reverence for a river system so that its symbiotic relationship with human settlements can be restored. 🇳🇵

Roshni Gurung is Research Assistant, River Basins at the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD).



environmental health and amenity. This should pave the way for managing a river as a connected ecological, social, and economic system by enabling coordination across agencies and disciplines, stimulating technological innovation and financial

investment. The success of this approach depends on long-term political will and commitment that transcend political cycles, but also needs strong community and civil society in defining issues and proposing solutions, creating

and sharing knowledge, taking independent action to inform practice, monitoring and evaluating policies, and participating in public decision-making. Civil society, especially, is making the revival of the Bagmati River a pressing governance issue.

The Bagmati Action Plan 2009, a precursor to the BRBIP, was designed in response to lawsuits filed in 2000 and 2004 by an independent legal practitioner of Kathmandu against waste dumping in the river. It took him almost two decades

the Bagmati, why aren't we?



EYES IN THE SKY

This is where satellites come in. Several earth observation satellites pass over Nepal continuously, and their data is free to download. The European Space Agency's Sentinel-2 satellite revisits the same location every five days and can image a river's surface at 10m resolution to detect turbidity, algal growth, and sediment load across the entire river in a single pass.

NASA's Landsat series has been operational since the 1970s, and provides 30m resolution imagery every 16 days and has decades of historical data that could let us reconstruct how the Bagmati's condition has changed over time.

The NASA MODIS sensor offers daily observations and is useful for tracking broader seasonal trends.

And NASA's newest PACE satellite carries hyperspectral sensors that can detect water chemistry at wavelengths the human eye cannot see, including dissolved organic matter and specific types of algal pigments.

As a researcher who works with several of these satellite images in the context of US water quality monitoring, I can speak to both their capabilities and their limitations. The technology is not experimental. These systems are proven, operational, and in most cases freely accessible.

Countries like India and Bangladesh are

already integrating satellite monitoring into their river management systems. Nepal has a scientific community capable of doing the same. What has been absent is institutional coordination and commitment.

Satellite observation does not replace field measurement. Ground-based sampling remains essential for calibration and verification.

The value lies in combining both: satellites provide spatial coverage, frequency, and historical context that field teams alone cannot match, while field data ensures accuracy and interpretability.

The Department of Hydrology and Meteorology, the Ministry of Forests and Environment, and Kathmandu Valley municipalities can come together to use freely available satellite systems that could provide near-continuous, basin-wide monitoring.

Additional investment in wastewater treatment capacity is necessary but not sufficient. Effective intervention requires knowing precisely where pollution loads are highest, how they vary across seasons, and how they move through the catchment.

Remote sensing can provide that foundation. Without it, restoration efforts will remain reactive rather than informed.

The Bagmati carries deep cultural and spiritual significance for the Nepali people. It deserves a monitoring system worthy of that significance. The tools exist. The data is free. What remains is the will to use them. 🇳🇵

Sumit Mahato is a PhD candidate in environmental engineering at the University of Cincinnati in the United States.



Heidelberg returns rare manuscripts

German university sends back to Kathmandu a trove of 700-year-old palm leaf scrolls after decades of preservation and documentation

German academics handed back to Nepali officials the first of 800 rare archival documents during a ceremony in Heidelberg this week.

The trove of ancient manuscripts from Kathmandu were in the collection of Bavarian collector Josef Peter Walter Rindfleisch who had acquired them between 1980-2000, and had been previously entrusted to the Indologist Axel Michaels of Heidelberg University with the explicit aim of eventual repatriation.

Scholars say the holdings are one of the largest collections of Nepali palmleaf rolls outside Nepal. They include 465 Newari palm-leaf scrolls, most of them bearing clay seals dating to the Malla period in Kathmandu 1200-1779 CE.

“This collection offers a unique window into Nepal’s political, legal, and religious history across several centuries,” said Alex Michaels, who heads the Documents on the History of Religion and Law of Pre-modern Nepal project at the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities.

The archive also includes royal decrees, court records, Sanskrit manuscripts, and a wide range of historical materials from legal documents and ritual texts to photographs, maps, and personal writings. The collection includes 15 bound volumes that record palace



BACK WHERE IT BELONGS: Chargé d’Affaires a.i. Sagar Phuyal and Prof. Axel Michaels.



A palm leaf roll from the collection.

PHOTOS: PHILIPP ROTHE

life, state expeditions, and official correspondence from the 19th and early 20th centuries.

When the manuscripts first arrived in Heidelberg, their provenance was only partially documented, and many items were in poor condition. Mould, insect damage, and earlier repair attempts had left visible traces. Conservation specialists restored the items by humidifying the fragile palm-leaf scrolls, which were then carefully opened, cleaned, repaired, and digitised before being rolled again and placed in acid-free archival storage.

The project was supported by the Transforming Cultural Heritage initiative, enabling systematic cataloguing and digitisation and is now accessible online via Heidelberg University Library and integrated into the Documenta Nepalica research database. An open access catalogue of metadata of the collection will soon be released from Heidelberg University Publishing.

Manik Bajracharya and Rajan Khatiwoda, scholars of the project, were at the handover ceremony on 24 April, as well as Prof Christiane Brosius, a researcher

at the Heidelberg Center for Transcultural Studies which systematically records endangered cultural assets in Nepal—such as temples, monasteries, palaces, and inscriptions—and makes them digitally accessible.

HOME COMING

With the handover, a substantial body of Nepal’s written heritage will be returned home – preserved for future generations, yet accessible to researchers around the world.

For Alex Michaels, the dual approach of digital access and

physical return was essential. “Making the materials available worldwide is one goal,” he said. “But returning them to Nepal is equally important. It acknowledges their cultural significance and our responsibility towards their history.”

In Nepal itself there was generally positive reaction to the news, as it follows a series of returns of Nepal’s stolen religious artefacts from the United States and Europe in recent years. However, there were some voices saying the rare scrolls may have been safer if Germany kept them. 🇩🇪

TATA **ev**

TATA

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