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DEPARTURE FROM NORM

REAL



When Prime Minister Balendra Shah departed from Kathmandu on Tuesday on a scheduled Qatar Airways flight, there was no guard of honour, no diplomats and officials lining up to say bye, no imported gladioli to be handed to the bodyguard, no motorcade with flashing lights bringing him to the ramp below the plane. He stepped out of his limo onto the tarmac in his signature all-black attire, shades and Goldstar shoes. Shook hands with Home Minister Sudan Gurung. And that was it. This low-key departure was universally lauded, even from those usually critical of the RSP ministers pulling off populist stunts.

This was a deliberate departure from the grandiose pomp and ceremony displayed by his predecessors before and after foreign visits. Even the PM's entourage was minimalist: Chief Adviser Kumar Bhanjankar (Ben), his personal secretary and the foreign secretary, security detail, and a photographer. Foreign Minister Shisir Khanal had left for New York with his own small team a few days prior.

This has been Shah's branding in the seven months he has been in office: to show that he is different from the old leaders.

Prime Minister Shah was received in Doha at the airport by Qatar's Minister of Transport Jassim Saif Ahmed Al-Sultani, and was seen in videos being transported via airport buggy with Kumar Ben in his trademark shirt to catch his connecting flight to JFK.

But this attempt to avoid fanfare on departure was in sharp contrast to how his followers on social media portrayed his arrival in New York. Balen fans at home and abroad created a narrative of a wild welcome for their dear leader in New York. AI-generated videos and real clips of other world leaders cruising down Fifth Avenue to cheering crowds were captioned as being for Nepal's prime minister.

Fake photos of Shah being personally received by President Donald Trump at JFK went bacterial on the web, as supporters and even mainstream media who did not know any better, shared it. Videos of Trump sounding the opening bell for the stock market in the Oval Office in July as well as clips of the bell rung at the UN General Assembly floor to mark the beginning of this year's session were jubilantly shared as representing the RSP's bell election symbol.

Nepalis need another reminder that the country should not have an inflated sense of its own geopolitical importance. The best way for supporters to prove their backing for Balen may be to let him be who he wants to be.

Nepal, one month after
EDITORIAL
PAGE 2

UNREAL



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माथि चढ्न, भित्र पसेर सफा गर्न र प्लम्बिङ काम गर्न सकिने, आवश्यकता अनुसारको मोटाई, आकार र क्षमताको उपलब्ध छ ।

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NATUREKNIT

Nepal, one month after

The Bhote Kosi-Trisuli disaster will soon be a distant memory, but it left lasting lessons

Editorial

Sonia Awale

On Saturday it will be exactly one month since the catastrophe on the Bhote Kosi-Trisuli. The death toll in Nepal and China is exceeding 8,000.

One month on, only 110 of the 1,450 recovered bodies have been positively identified and handed over to families.

On Friday morning, Prime Minister Balendra Shah delivered his address to the UN General Assembly where he reminded the world of what befell his nation.

Secretary-General António Guterres mentioned the Nepal disaster in his speech in the context of climate breakdown. But international memory is short, and easily distracted by wars and calamities elsewhere.

The geopolitical climate is not quite right for climate justice. We can raise concerns, but not have unrealistic expectations that rich nations will suddenly develop pangs of guilt about their historical emissions.

It would have been useful for our prime minister after flying all that way to stay longer for the New York Climate Week, and highlight how despite being in the least-developed category, Nepal has done its bit to expand carbon sinks, ensure 100% renewable energy and promote electric transport.

The prime minister is to visit India in November to clear the air with New Delhi. Indian investment in current and future river projects in Nepal will loom large.

Three Indian hydropower projects are



BARSHASHAH

being built along the Arun River in a cascade. They are exposed to a domino effect similar to one that hit the Trisuli basin last month that swept away 13 plants. The Arun projects will generate up to 3,000MW in the coming years, nearly 80% of it for export to India.

The Indian parastatal investor must have seen how a glacial lake outburst flood in Sikkim in October 2023 breached the Chungthang Dam reservoir, sending a debris wave down the Teesta River.

A dam that generated 1,200MW and took six years to build at a cost of \$1 billion was destroyed in seconds. Similarly, two major

hydropower plants were destroyed in the Chamoli flood in Uttarakhand in 2021.

The Arun River originates in China and has the highest mountain in the world in its catchment. It is fed by glacial lakes that are rapidly expanding. A megaquake in southern Tibet could cause these lakes to burst simultaneously, unleashing a catastrophic flood downstream.

RESETTLE, RELOCATE

Here in Nepal, the most urgent need is to care for the 30,000 people who have lost relatives, homes and livelihoods. Many have now spent

a month in shelters. The government has identified locations in Rasuwa, Nuwakot and Dhading for survivors.

Families do not just need resettlement, they need safer places, a community and jobs. People from three villages in Rasuwa that were destroyed in the 2015 earthquake were resettled along the banks of the Trisuli. Many of the 1,400 who survived the earthquake were swept away by last month's flood.

Nearly 500 children have lost one or both parents, they need counselling, homes and schools. Getting them back to classrooms is the quickest way to restore their routine.

Nearly 14,000 people were rescued through prompt action by the security forces, including from hydropower tunnels which has been the biggest challenge. The Prime Minister's Relief Fund has received Rs15.06 billion so far, and need-based cash handouts could be the fastest way to get families back on their feet. This is an urgent need, and should not be mired in bureaucracy.

Despite delays and hiccups, the RSP government has been more diligent than previous ones in immediate response. We would have liked to see less grandstanding on social media by some officials, but such stunts come with the territory.

Nepal has not had a break from calamities, political and otherwise, since 1990. We have always bounced back, but that is not the same as having learnt from them. Dasain is a month away, and in characteristic Nepali fashion we could fall back on our legendary apathy and fatalism.

How wisely the RSP government responds to this catastrophe will define its legacy more than anything else. 🇳🇵

Trending Online



Death toll rises in flood

by Nepali Times

Children are among the most affected by the Bhote Kosi-Trisuli flood. A government survey showed 488 children are missing, 102 have lost both parents, while 439 are still separated from their families. Details at nepalitimes.com



Most reached and shared on Facebook

Non-political ambassadors

by Nepali Times

After months of delay, Nepal nominated 13 new ambassadors to countries whose envoys were recalled after last year's GenZ protests. Most appointees are non-political personalities with experience and education in their host countries. Details on the website.



Most popular on X

The Mary Slusser exposé

by Alisha Sijapati

Mary Slusser was a remarkable scholar with deep affection for Nepal, but she took the country, its people, and its legal frameworks for granted. The Himal Southasian investigation last week revealed the very person who painstakingly documented our deities was complicit in their theft. Read page 9.



Most commented



Nepal takes its message to the world

Editorial

PM Balendra Shah's message at the UN General Assembly a month after the Bhote Kosi-Trisuli flood: look at what happened to us, it will happen to you unless we all stop pumping more greenhouse gases into the air.



Most visited online page

Letters

MARY SLUSSER

There were other expats and notable collectors, who were involved in the stolen art trade ('The Mary Slusser expose', Alisha Sijapati, page 9); like Mary Slusser, some later turned to scholarship, so she was not alone in trying to balance the bad karma of earlier expropriation with the assumed merit of exploring and explicating Newar art history.

Todd Lewis

■ The legendary excellence of the Newar artisanship not been seriously supported. The artisans I worked with often had to resort to menial work in order to pay school fees and put food on the table.

Robin Marston

■ I plan to assign the article on Mary Slusser to my first year anthropology students, many of

whom end up working at Moesgaard or the National Museum, two Danish institutions with Nepali art. In particular, I found the section where she appears to have unethically blocked Nepali scholars from professional opportunities in the US particularly revealing.

Cameron David Warner

■ Most museums have very small to insignificant installations of Nepali art. Slusser's placement of works as they exist substantially increases Nepal's culture in US museums, without which, Nepal's presence-- let alone appreciation-- would be virtually nonexistent.

Maureen Drdak

BHOTE KOSI

I stayed in Rasuwa for a few weeks in 1969 before all the development and before tourists ('FUTURE SHOCKS', Sonia Awale, #1329). The question now is

whether this special place is too hazardous to return to live. I shall be watching what happens in the future. Gatlang, Rasuwa, Langtang, forever in my heart.

Jenny Te Whata

■ An exact number of individual landslides in the Himalayas each year may not be known because many remote, non-fatal slope failures go unrecorded, but broad satellite and deep-learning mapping studies indicate that tens of thousands of discrete landslide events occur annually across the entire mountain chain.

Douglas Kessler

■ Sustainable planning for remote areas is a must ('How on earth to finance Nepal's disaster', Rastraraj Bhandari, \$1329).

Maryse Dumas

■ Temples must not be rebuilt in the same spot. We must consider

current and future risks of the area, since disasters have already destroyed religious buildings on numerous occasions. ('Even gods were not spared by the flood', Rajan Khatiwada, #1329)

Sea Ansley

■ I understand the sacred importance of the temples, ghats and artefacts. The destruction of sacred sites, all they contained, and the daily blessings of rituals is heartbreaking.

Kitty Delapurr

NEW AMBASSADORS

Good to see a General appointed as ambassador to the UK where many Gurkhas are serving. ('Nepal appoints non-political figures as ambassadors', nepalitimes.com).

Akku Chowdhury

Online Package



CLIMATE CHANGE & RICE

In Kaski, locals have set up a community seed bank to preserve seeds of native rice varieties as climate-induced erratic monsoon impacts rice breeds. Watch video on YouTube.



TALE OF TWO FLOWERS

Locally known as Yenyā, Indra Jatra is dedicated to the god of rain Indra. The festival is marked with much enthusiasm for eight days by Hindus and Buddhists in Kathmandu Valley. Subscribe for multimedia content.

1,000 Words



UNITED NATIONS

CLIMATE FOR CHANGE: Nepal's Foreign Minister Shisir Khanal shares the stage with delegates from small island and mountain regions at risk from climate breakdown at a high-level climate meeting convened by UN Secretary-General António Guterres on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York on Wednesday.

Khanal said the 'Himalayan Tsunami' in Nepal was a warning to the world, and demanded climate justice. Also present was Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Türkiye is hosting the UN Climate Change Conference (COP31) in Antalya from 9-20 November.



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Duane Berian Clifford Jones, 49

Welshman who spent three decades in Nepal was eye witness to the country’s recent history

Thomas Bell

Duane Berian Clifford Jones, who worked for nearly 30 years in Nepal, died of cancer on 8 September at 49.

A talented linguist, he was as dedicated to Nepal as to his native Wales. Partly inspired by language politics, he raised his children speaking Nepali at home. He is remembered as a man of great integrity, who had an endless curiosity about people, observing, listening and trying to understand.

Born in England, because his parents “couldn’t get back to Wales in time”, his peripatetic childhood followed his father’s career to various English prep schools, and school holidays were spent with grandparents in West Wales.

After completing school, a year teaching English in Pokhara made him change his university course from history at Bristol to SOAS in London, where he learnt Nepali.

Duane first worked as a translator for the ICRC, visiting prisoners held by both parties in Nepal’s conflict to find whether they were treated in accordance with the Geneva Conventions.

The work involved walking in remote districts which had no roads at the time. The prisoners were mostly held by the police, and later also by the Maoists, such as after the attack on Pashupatinagar (when the ICRC negotiated the release of prisoners), or after the attacks on Beni and Pili.

Duane met Selina Chan from Sydney during an ICRC training in Colombo. She was working in Burma at the time, and he “pursued her across the world at enormous expense”. They married in 2006.



CHRISTINE WOOD

The CDO at Beni signed Duane and Selina’s wedding certificate, as deputy CDO of Kathmandu. A son and daughter followed.

Duane joined UNMIN and worked as a political officer in the Madhes, where he had previously been posted by the ICRC. He saw the first Madhes Andolan up close in Birganj and Janakpur. By 2008, “disgusted” by what he saw as UNMIN’s attempts to extend its mandate, he resigned. The family moved to Sri Lanka, where Selina worked on post-tsunami reconstruction.

He recalled being a “stay-at-

home expat dad” while a few hundred miles away “there was a genocide happening on a beach, of which I had no knowledge at all”.

In 2009 the family were back in Nepal where Duane became the Basic Operating Guidelines (BOGs) Officer, created to mediate between Nepal’s development partners and various muscular political groups.

IDENTITY POLITICS

“Almost every single ethnic group had an agreement [with the government], or an army, or a militia,” he recalled. His job was to run around and for example

mediating between the Chhetri Samaj and the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID), who he said had no idea how unpopular their identity-based development programs had become.

Daune maintained a wide network of regional political actors, including in the many Adivasi movements, and groups such as Akhanda Sudur Paschim and Chure Bhawar. Although he insisted that he “never did anything politically active in Nepal ever”, his own Welsh identity informed his private sympathy with the Adivasi movements, and his Nepal

experience influenced his support for Welsh independence.

Of Duane’s four grandparents, three were Welsh speakers and his mother’s mother was Jewish, although he recalled that “we didn’t have any Jewishness in our lives until after she died”. Neither did he learn Welsh until later in life – a situation he compared to the way Newari has faded away in many middle-class families.

Besides English, elaborate Nepali, and Welsh, he could speak (among other languages) French, Urdu, Bengali, Tharu, Maithili, and some of Selina’s family’s original Cantonese.

In 2014 Duane travelled to Burma as a UN consultant to look at setting up a genocide early warning system in Rakine State. The proposal was ultimately rejected, large scale atrocities against the Rohingya began shortly afterwards.

He described his experience as “probably as traumatic as anything I have ever done, in terms of atrocities and what you could see coming.”

Returning to Nepal, Duane worked on the UK’s earthquake response in Rasuwa, Dhading, Gorkha, and Lamjung. For several years he ran DFID’s risk management office. During this time he “had the honour” of playing rugby for Nepal, in what may have been the country’s first rugby international, against Hong Kong.

Duane faced his terminal diagnosis with dignity, courage and remarkable emotional restraint. A Celebration of Life will be held in Cardiff on 9 October. He will be buried in the British cemetery in Kathmandu on 19 December, followed by a wake at the Sterling Club at the British Embassy. 🇬🇧

BRIEFS

Turkish best

Turkish Airlines has been named Best Airline in Europe for the 11th time at the Skytrax World Airline Awards 2026. In addition to the Best Airline in Europe title, Turkish Airlines also received the World’s Best Business Class Onboard Catering for the 10th time and the Best Airline in Southern Europe for the 13th time. Turkish Airlines also received five additional awards across the Economy and Business Class categories in Europe and Southern Europe, bringing its total number of awards at the ceremony to eight.



Turkish Airlines Chairman of the Board and the Executive Committee Prof Murat Şeker said: “We are delighted to be named Best Airline in Europe for the 11th time, and to lead in further categories. This achievement once again demonstrates the international recognition of the high standards we uphold throughout our guests’ travel experience, from service quality to our culinary offering. The fact that these awards are based directly on our passengers’ evaluations makes them particularly meaningful to us.”

Tanahun Forest Office

The Tanahun Forest Office recorded economic activity of Rs172.3 million in the fiscal year 2082/83. The revenue was generated through product utilization and community forestry programs.



Sipradi Yatri

Sipradi Yatri has launched a new electric scooter, adding to the choice in electric two-wheelers in Nepal. The difference with the Yatri P2 is that it is made in Nepal, and has been priced at Rs329,900.

BhatBhateni rises again

Bhat-Bhateni Supermarket had 12 of its branches destroyed in last year’s GenZ protests. Within a year, the company has reopened 10 of the 12 branches, including its flagship store in Tangal. The Damak and Hetauda branches are set to reopen by December and January respectively.



Royal Enfield

Royal Enfield Nepal organised a rally in which 1,500 riders across Nepal participated and contributed towards a cause. The ride named as ‘One Ride’ started from Kathmandu and concluded at Godavari after which Royal Enfield Nepal has donated Rs200,000 to Nepal Down Syndrome Association.

Samsung S26 FE

Samsung Nepal has launched Galaxy S26 FE, the newest addition to the Galaxy S26 series. In a thin and light design, Galaxy S26 FE carries the iconic Galaxy S experience forward for the users. The phone is priced at Rs119,999.



Ather in Surkhet

Ather Nepal has opened its 16th Center in Surkhet for its electric scooter range, expanding on customers in the Karnali region.

Flood reconstruction

A total of Rs100 billion will be required to rebuild infrastructure damaged by the Bhote Kosi-Trisuli floods. The NDRRMA had submitted an initial requirement of Rs90 billion, but additional cost of drinking water and other infrastructure added up to Rs100 billion.

The reconstruction of flood damaged Pimalta-Jagaram suspension bridge in Nuwakot has been completed by the Department of Local Infrastructure Development completed the work and it plans to reconstruct 33 more bridges damaged by the floods.

The United States will be providing \$31 million to provide flood relief to Nepal to rebuild bridges, infrastructure and for drinking water, sanitation, shelter and livelihood. The announcement was made in New York after Foreign Minister Shishir Khanal met US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Allison Hooker on Tuesday.



Nepali FlyDubai

FlyDubai launched daily flights connecting Pokhara and Dubai on 23 September, and commanding the Boeing 737 Max 8 was a Nepali Captain Sarbjeet Yadav. Pokhara mayor Dhanraj Acharya and other Gandaki Province officials greeted Yadav and the FlyDubai crew on arrival in Pokhara.



Shinta Mani

Shinta Mani Mustang has been awarded One MICHELIN Key in the 2026 MICHELIN Guide hotel selection. Announced on 18 September, One MICHELIN Key recognises hotels that offer a ‘very special stay’ to their guests. Namgyal Sherpa, CEO of Sherpa Hospitality Group says, “We are delighted that Shinta Mani Mustang has been awarded One MICHELIN Key. This is a wonderful recognition for the property, our team and for Mustang as a destination.”

We had no name for what came down the Trisuli

We have the science and the capacity. What we lack is the authority to name.

Tri Ratna Bajracharya
and Truong Huyen-Chi

On Thursday in New York, Prime Minister Balendra Shah addressed the UN General Assembly. He has said the Bhote Kosi-Trisuli disaster happened because of climate change, and that answering it is a global responsibility rather than only a national one.

He is right that we cannot carry this bill alone. But the case will meet a question the world is entitled to ask, and we should answer it: What did Nepal do with the plan it already had?

Nepal had planned for two kinds of floods: glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs) and monsoon rivers rising. But on 26 August a mountain failed and a flood whose source our plan does not describe ran 200km down the Trisuli.

Here is the part that should trouble us most: a warning was issued. The Syaprubesi gauge stopped transmitting at 08:50. By 09:15 the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology (DHM) had confirmed a major flood wave and issued a warning.

The water reached Galchi at 10:28 and Devghat at 15:20. Downstream, it does not matter whether the flood was released by a GLOF or a mountain collapse: a wave is a wave. Nothing could have helped in the worst-hit places, and Nepal’s existing warning systems saved lives downstream.

The warning system was not blind to the flood, it was blind to the mountain. And in the six hours it had, it could not turn what it knew into what people did.

At a secondary school in Nuwakot, the head teacher moved 900 children to high ground about 10 minutes ahead of the water, acting on four informal warnings, one of them a call from Betrawati upstream. He was right, the children are alive, but nothing in the system helped him be right.

He was following no protocol, because there is none. The DHM can forecast and warn, but it cannot order anyone to move, and no rule turns a forecast into an evacuation. In the floods of late September 2024, more than 200 died across central Nepal despite advisories issued days in advance.

The National Adaptation Plan (NAP) of 2021 and running to 2050 is a serious document: 64 costed programs, a sectoral hazard assessment, Asia’s first national adaptation plan financed by the Green Climate Fund. A regional study now under review finds that Nepal and Pakistan each set out 19 glacier-related adaptation measures, more than any other country in the Hindu Kush-Himalaya.

LOOKING FOR LAKES

Most of Pakistan’s measures are now complete or under way. Most of ours are still planned. Our NAP rates GLOFs and avalanches as likely to increase, and puts the cost of reducing that risk at \$1 billion by 2030.

That figure was never a Nepali commitment: of the roughly \$47 billion the plan costs, Nepal undertook to find \$1.5 billion at home, the rest was always conditional on international finance, as the convention’s own architecture intends.

The Trisuli is in the Gandaki. But every action in that plan is a lake action: identify dangerous



Projects approved by the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage to date: 0



lakes, assess moraine dams, lower water levels, install lake sensors. Not one of them points at a slope.

Satellite radar shows the source area accelerating from the middle of June, and about 15cm of bedrock deformation over four months in late 2025. The seismic signature of the failure was recorded within seconds by networks in China and by the international catalogue. That one existed in real time and nobody was reading it.

Nepal submitted the NAP to the UN in October 2021. But five and a half years on, Nepal’s official picture of its own mountain hazard still looks for lakes and rain and nothing else. The NAP provides for its own correction: a vulnerability and risk assessment updated every five years, and a review of implementation on the same cycle.

On 20 August, a call went out for consultants to update the 2021 assessment, funded from abroad and commissioned not because the NAP required it but because a report was due to the climate convention. Proposals closed four days after the flood, and the work had not begun. No review on implementation was published.

Nepal did ask for the money. The NAP put glacial lake risk reduction and early warning at \$1 billion by 2030. Nepal has received around \$45 million for the purpose, under 5% of it. Pakistan has been running glacial lake projects since 2011, first on Adaptation Fund money and then on Green Climate Fund money, both through UNDP.

Of all bilateral glacier and lake funding across the Hindu Kush Himalaya since 2002, more than half has gone to Pakistan. Nepal’s first equivalent (same fund, same agency, same category) was approved only in July last year, and covers four lakes – Thulagi, Lower Barun, Lunding Tsho and Hongu 2. None of them are on the Trisuli.

Nothing about the ice above our valleys explains the 14-year gap. Money moves where a category has been recognised, and recognition is granted elsewhere.

Money was short, knowledge was not. The damage assessment before the government was led by the National Planning Commission with 15 officials across nine agencies, and within days of the collapse, Nepali and international scientists had established its source and sequence from imagery

anyone may download, working with Chinese colleagues who shared photographs of the failure zone.

What does not exist is an institution mandated to commission that work before an event. Nepal has no common alerting protocol, and no warning system for the hydropower sector.

Damage assessment puts recovery needs at 12% of last year’s national income, more than half of that in energy. Public hydropower projects were uninsured, so taxpayers carry the loss. We will build after the flood, at that price, what we did not build before it. The money will mostly be borrowed.

Our finance and environment ministers asked the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage to act ‘rapidly, directly and effectively’. That request was right to make, but climate finance is slow as well as small: the Fund’s entire first allocation, shared among every eligible country on earth, is smaller than the bill for this one disaster.

And the next one may not be a flood at all. What came down the Trisuli began as mountain collapse and became an avalanche, an air blast a kilometre across, a slurry of ice melted by its own falling, a

debris flow, and a landslide that dammed the river. We called it a flood because that was the only word we had.

None of this is an argument against the NAP, and it is not a failure of Nepali effort or expertise. It is a failure of categorisation. Hazard in the Himalaya is not a single object a plan either sees or misses, it is sorted into kinds, and the kinds are ranked.

GLOF is a funded category, with a database, an inventory and a line in every national report. Rock and ice avalanche in dry conditions is not a category at all in our planning instruments. What fell on 26 August was not unforeseen. It was unclassified.

Categories are chosen, first elsewhere, then here. The plan was costed for a fund that disburses against recognised categories, the assessment is being revised because a report is due to a convention that asks in those categories.

The region’s principal record of these disasters sits in the HKH Regional Information System, and it is a record of lake bursts: 697 stretching back to 1833, while the same platform holds no permafrost data, and when asked

for avalanches on Langtang in 2015, returns none – the year the village was buried.

The World Weather Attribution (WWA) describes a catastrophic rock-ice avalanche on Langtang Lirung that same year. To be visible in that system, a disaster must first be the right kind of disaster. The selectivity is not ours, the consequences are.

The WWA assessment finds that human-caused warming added about 1.5°C to the July and August temperatures at the site of the failure, and that Langtang Lirung’s ice has been receding some four times faster since 2010 than in the two centuries before.

It does not claim the slope would have held in a cooler world. It says the conditions around it have changed, measurably, and because of human activity. The deeper task, though, is not a list. It is who does the naming.

A hazard with no name in the plan gets no instrument, no budget and no watcher. Naming decides what is seen, and what is seen decides who lives. The scientists who read the imagery from the north slope of Tsangbu Ri within hours are in Kathmandu. What they lacked was not capacity but standing: the authority to set the categories their own state, and its funders, plan by.

The Prime Minister spoke for Nepal in New York this week. The rest of the speaking has to be done here, by Nepali scientists, in terms we set ourselves. The knowledge is here, the knowers are here. The naming is the part that nobody else can, or should, do for us.

The mountains will not wait. Neither will the families: in three weeks the 49th day for the final rites will come, the crossing will be complete, and the dead of Rasuwa will be beyond anything we can do for them.

The living along that river will not wait. 🇳🇵

The regional study cited in this article is under review, led by Dipesh Chapagain at the United Nations University Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS).

Asian Mountain Academic Alliance (AMAA) is a non-profit registered in Switzerland. Tri Ratna Bajracharya is President, AMAA and Truong Huyen-Chi is Director, AMAA Asia Coordination Office. Both live in Kathmandu.



FIVE ACTIONS

We need a decision and a budget line, and the recovery package already holds most of the money. None of these five actions depend on settling whether climate change caused this collapse:

1. Publish the implementation review and the updated assessment, put cascading hazards in the taxonomy where lakes now sit alone, and name a standing custodian for the plan – an office, not a person, with a duty to report on the cycle.
2. Adopt a common alerting protocol and a warning system for the hydropower sector. Give one agency the legal authority to order an evacuation based on a forecast, and write the procedure that binds it.
3. Build the inventory of slopes that could fail next, and the seismic monitoring to watch them.
4. Legislate for custody of our own hazard record: data generated on Nepali territory should be deposited with a Nepali public institution, and the classification it is filed under should be ours to amend.
5. Agree a data-sharing and joint warning mechanism with China: of the 47 glacial lakes judged dangerous to Nepal, 25 sit inside Tibet. We hold such agreements with India and Bangladesh.



PHOTOS: PUMORI JOURNEYS

Are exoskeletons or gimmicks?

Robotic mechanical assists bring the biggest



HYPER-SHELL

Shuvani Singh

During the spring mountaineering season this year, exoskeletons helped some climbers summit Mt Everest. Wearable robotic assists are here, and already poised to bring the biggest revolution in Himalayan climbing since bottled oxygen.

Elderly pilgrims with mobility issues can circumambulate Mt Kailash with help from Arc'teryx MO/GO hiking pants fitted with battery-powered carbon fibre springs. In China, Kenquin Technology has already started

renting out π -series exoskeletons to help tourists climb up Mount Tai.

Exoskeletons are wearable robotic frames that attach to legs, hips, and lower backs and provide powered assistance in walking, climbing, or carrying weight.

There are two batteries that give them a range of 30km of hiking or 4 hours of climbing. In Nepal's mountains, this technology can offer mechanical relief for porters and high altitude rescue teams by reducing their effort by between 20-40%.

"Mechanical aid will likely find a way into the mountaineering sector," predicts Ben Ayers, a NatGeo explorer and co-founder

Expeditions hunker down as monsoon storms batter peaks

Climbers evacuate Manaslu and Dhaulagiri due to blizzards and avalanche danger

Smaranika Shakya

Autumn climbing season was in full swing, but then the weather deteriorated. And with the Broad Peak avalanche in July which killed 10 climbers including six Nepali guides on everyone's mind, many decided to head home.

A massive late-monsoon weather system from the Bay of Bengal is battering the Himalaya, and although the rain and snow was not as heavy as first predicted, no one seems to be taking any chances.

Despite the catastrophic flood last month in an adjacent valley a record number of international climbers were on Mt Manaslu (8,163m), the eight highest peak in the world. It is regarded as an 'autumn peak' that expeditions use to prepare and acclimatise for spring ascents on Mt Everest.

The season did not start well. On 20 September, an avalanche at Camp III killed two climbers, German national Dhruba Jyoti Guha and his Nepali guide Phursemba Sherpa. Last week, 50-year-old Singaporean died during an acclimatisation descent

at 6,000m, and Nepali guide Tashi Sherpa, 20, was asphyxiated by generator exhaust in his tent at base camp.

"Strong winds and snowfall have forced climbers to reassess summit plans and return to base camp," writes Miles Sherpa, from the Summit Force team at Manaslu. By Wednesday, many

more had called it quits and were helicoptering out to Kathmandu or Pokhara. It is not clear if they intend to return to the mountains.

Manaslu has garnered massive attention this season, with 480 permits issued to foreigners – more than on Mt Everest during this year's very crowded spring season. In addition there were 500

Nepali high altitude guides and support staff. The Mountaineering Division of the government collected \$1.479 million in just climbing fees this autumn, which is non-refundable.

Altogether, 55 expedition teams comprising 432 male and 147 female climbers were in 11 peaks this season.



MANASLU IS ASKING US TO WAIT: Expedition teams have returned back from higher camps to Manaslu Base Camp to wait out difficult weather conditions forecast for this week.

SEVEN SUMMIT TREKS



Exoskeletons gamechangers in the Himalaya?

Biggest change in climbing since bottled oxygen



of the YouTube site, Everest Live. “If there is demand, they will be embraced by the industry.”

However, when adapting to any new technology, its implications, benefits, and possible risks must be weighed with the advantages. Exoskeletons raise serious questions about who benefits, who carries the risk, and what remains of the pure human challenge of

mountaineering.

It is possible that the technology will first arrive in the guise of safety, but since its appeal runs deeper, expeditions clients will seek easier and faster ways to climb 8,000m peaks in Nepal, and the technology-friendly industry will be only too glad to help. Just as there is an age-old debate in mountaineering between alpine style and siege style climbing, or between those who use high altitude guides, porters and bottled oxygen, and those who do not,

there will be a similar argument to classify successful summits as being ‘exoskeleton assisted’, or not.

Last year, there was a lot of hoohah about British ex-army climbers on Mt Everest that reached the peak in five days from London because climbers first acclimatised in normobaric hypoxic tents and breathed xenon gas. Purists described it as cheating.

Ayers predicts that exoskeletons will also spread to other eight-thousanders like Lhotse, Makalu, Annapurna and Dhaulagiri in the coming years. The question, then, is not whether the technology will be available but how they reshape an industry that is already dominated by commercial expeditions using fixed ropes, siege tactics and hundreds of support staff.

PURE MOUNTAINEERING

The arrival of exoskeletons revives a longstanding debate on what actually counts as ‘real’ mountaineering. To assess its implications, it is first important to note who is having this debate.

The objections to technology in climbing, Ayers argues, are not coming from Nepalis at all: “People who are pushing for purity are foreign elite climbers. The idea of purity is a bit of a regression. You have to look at this as a business endeavour.”

Indeed, the alpinism versus mountaineering debate has never carried much weight in Nepal, where large commercial expeditions are the norm, they contribute to the national economy and employ tens of thousands of people.

Alpinist Billi Bierling of Himalayan Database points out that these standards have shifted before,

citing the use of supplemental oxygen as once controversial, but now regarded as routine.

“Mountaineering ethics were thrown out the window a long time ago. Things like oxygen and cable cars have been done in Europe for so many years, and we don’t worry about them. There will always be opponents of new technology in the mountains, but frankly, climbing ethics no longer exists in commercial mountaineering.”

She also notes a double standard in how new technology is judged. In Europe, most people ride cable cars to the Aiguille du Midi and start Mont Blanc expeditions from there, but no one calls it cheating. The Himalaya is much higher, and much more dangerous.

The more serious concern is about porters who literally bear most of the burden and carry more risk during climbing expeditions. There is a direct parallel here with supplemental oxygen.

Oxygen gives paying clients an advantage and life-saving help in the Death Zone above 8,000m. But it needs an army of porters to carry those oxygen bottles to high camps.

The porter who is usually not on high-flow oxygen, must keep up with clients who have an artificial advantage and thus take on more risk to do it.

“The same thing might

happen with exoskeletons,” Ayers cautions.

Mechanical assist harnesses like Hypershell X Ultra used for hiking and mountaineering cost \$2,000, and if clients wear them while porters cannot afford to, the same imbalance persists. The climber has an advantage, and the porter has to keep pace.

The technology, Ayers warns, could disproportionately benefit less experienced climbers and risk taking porters for granted.

But if rescue teams use exoskeletons they could reach stranded climbers quicker and save lives. It could lessen drudgery for porters and reduce risk. Says Bierling: “We still need porters despite helicopters and drones. For them, it could be a great thing.” The Hypershell X series has already summited the world’s highest peak. Outdoor providers like Pumori Journeys are using them in Kathmandu Valley hikes (pictured, left). And RoboCT’s assistive exoskeleton aided climbers on the slopes of Mount Kailash for cleanup and conservation work.

For now, the technology is marketed as ‘assistance’. Whether it stays that way or becomes another advantage to only those who can afford it on the world’s highest mountains is an open question. It also opens the issue of what kind of regulation, if any, the Nepal government intends to impose on their use.

If exoskeletons are adopted without proper safeguards, it could risk the safety and business of both valley- and high-altitude porters – the backbone of Nepal’s mountaineering sector which brings in \$8 million just in royalties and another \$200 million in trickling down to the economy.

The conclusion of experts is that if Nepal wants to fully embrace exoskeletons, appropriate policies are needed so that a tool meant to lighten the load does not add to it. 🇳🇵



ELITE EXPED

OTHER PEAKS

Thirty four climbers from four teams were on Dhaulagiri I (8,167m) the world’s seventh highest peak, some of them have decided to head back down. There is also a small team attempting another eight-thousander, Makalu I (8,485), the fifth highest in the world.

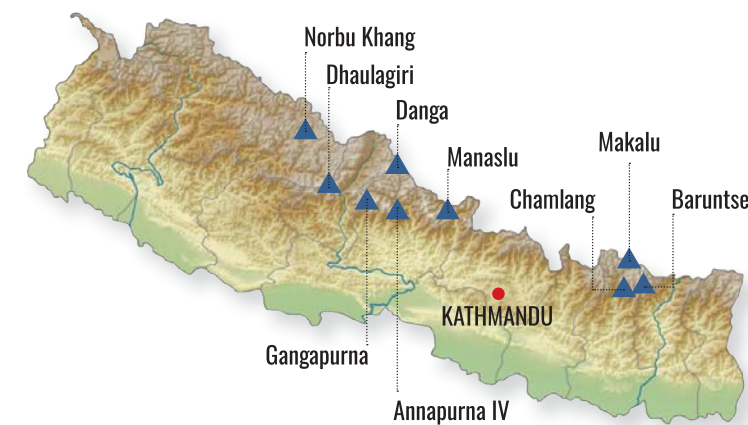
Chamlang (7,319m), Baruntse (7,129m), Gangapurna West (7,455m) and Annapurna IV (7,525m) also have expeditions on them. These peaks are in demand because new rules make it mandatory for anyone seeking a permit for Mt Everest to have climbed at least one peak in Nepal above 7,000m.

Nepal’s lesser but technically challenging and remote peaks have also attracted 16 climbers on Lamjung Himal (6,983m), Danga (6,238m), Norbu Khang (6,005m) in Dolpo and Thorung Peak (6,114m).

The first Manaslu summit of the season was on 17 September when Expedition Operators Association team of Nepali climbers fixed ropes to the summit, opening the route. However, an avalanche the day before buried their ropes and climbing equipment, and the rope-fixing team decided it was not worth trying to retrieve them. Without the ropes, it is likely that everyone except Alpine style climbers will come down.

There is said to be more than 1m of snow already on Camp I, and there is a danger of avalanches, especially below Camp III.

“The priority is team safety, snowpack stability, avalanche conditions, and real-time mountain observations rather than a reliance on forecast models”, writes Halung Dorchi Sherpa, from the Summit Force team. 🇳🇵



ELITE EXPED



Events

RN Joshi Museum

The RN Joshi Museum opens with its titular exhibition Imbricated: R. N. Joshi and the Making of Nepali Modern Art. The museum invites visitors to explore the development of Nepali modern art from the 1950s onwards.
R. N. Joshi Museum of Modern Art, Pulchok, 9808525790



Indra Jatra

Locally know as Yenyā, Indra Jatra is an annual festival dedicated to Indra, the god of rain and the lord of heaven. Celebrated with traditional music, dance and rituals in Kathmandu over eight days.
Until 30 September, Kathmandu

Shree Bijjo Bhoot

The drama Shree Bijjo Bhoot explores the socio-cultural context of the far western Nepal that shares a history, culture, and a border with India. Catch the play at Mandala Theatre.
Until October 11, 5:30pm, Mandala Theatre, Thapagaun



Le Sherpa Market

From fresh organic produce to European cheese and bakery items, Le Sherpa Farmers Market has it all. Support local businesses.
Saturdays, 8am-12:30pm, Le Sherpa, Maharajganj

Mask painting

Paint on hand-made clay masks of either Pulukisi, Buddha, or Ganesh under professional guidance. Participants will be able to take their creations home at the end of the session.
26 September, Rs 2,000, 2pm, Spaces, Patan



Music



Albatross

Jam to Albatross' rock favourites with friends at Club Nova this weekend.
26 September, Rs1,499, Club NOVA, Thamel

Unfinished

Celebrate a space for connections, expressions and conversations at this intimate evening filled with poetry and music.
27 September, Utpala Café, Boudha



Nepathya

Enjoy the cooling evening weather outdoors with Nepathya and listen to their enduring hits.
10 October, Laboratory School, Kirtipur

Himalayan sounds

Yaju and the Mischievers and Thuma Souls will perform live sounds from the Himalayas to raise funds for victims of the recent floods.
3 October, Rs750, Moksh, Jhamsikhel

Kutumba

Join this charity event where Kutumba will be performing their acclaimed music, with special appearances by Hari Bansha Acharya and Madan Krishna Shrestha. All proceeds will go to children and families affected by the flood.
2 October, 5pm, Rs4,850, Yala Darbar, Shankhamul



Getaway

Hotel Barahi

Located just beyond the banks of Phewa Lake, Hotel Barahi offers expansive views and luxury rooms. The rooms are decorated with rustic pieces, earthy tones and a clean design.
Lakeside, Pokhara (61)460617



Hotel Baha

This traditionally built hotel is located in the heart of Bhaktapur and is surrounded by temples. Explore the cultural heritage of Bhaktapur while enjoying the peaceful ambience of the hotel.
Bhaktapur (01) 6616810

Sapana Village Resort

At this gateway to the heart of Sauraha, experience the rich Tharu and Chepang cultures, marvel at the beauty of the lush national park, witness elephants lumbering through the forests.
Sauraha, Chitwan (56) 580308



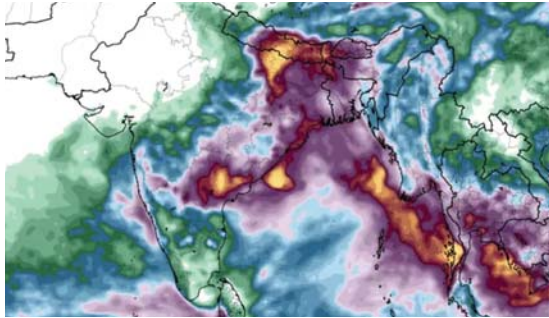
Shivapuri Heights

Situated atop the hills of Budhanilkantha, Shivapuri Heights Cottage is the ideal retreat for nature enthusiasts. Surrounded by lush greenery, it offers fresh mountain air, a cool breeze, and panoramic views of the Kathmandu valley.
Budhanilkantha, 9846232271

Balthali Village Resort

A small, cosy retreat with a bird's eye view of green terrace fields dotted with ochre painted houses. Ideal for those seeking to get out of the city but not too far.
Panauti, Kavre, 9851087772

Weekend Weather



FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
 21° 17°	 23° 17°	 26° 16°	 28° 17°	 28° 17°

Monsoon's Last Gasp

The DHM has downscaled the forecast for extremely heavy rain across Nepal Friday-Sunday, because the low pressure system weakened as it moved into central India. However, in Nepal there will still be heavy downpours and blizzards in the higher elevations, and this could be especially dangerous along the Trisuli Valley where there could be movement of fresh debris and sediment. By Sunday, the precipitation is expected to start tapering off as the weather returns to its more regular post-monsoon pattern.

Our Pick



Morgan Matthew's 2026 drama 500 miles follows young siblings Charlie and Finn, who run away from their home in England to escape their fractured family and seek refuge with their estranged grandfather, who lives in the remote west coast of Ireland. As the brothers embark on their road trip, their bitterly fighting parents are forced to put their differences aside and come together for the sake of their children. The film is based on Mark Lowery's novel Charlie and Me, and stars Bill Nighy, Dexter Sol Ansell, Roman Griffin Davis, Claire Dunne, Michael Socha, and Maisie Williams.

MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



सामाजिक सञ्जाल प्रयोगमा सचेतता अपनाऔं

- सामाजिक सञ्जालमा अपरिचित व्यक्तिको साथी बन्ने अनुरोधलाई विश्वस्त भएर मात्र प्रतिक्रिया जनाऔं ।
- अपरिचित व्यक्तिलाई जथाभावी साथी बन्न अनुरोध नपठाऔं ।
- सामाजिक सञ्जाल तथा अन्य विद्युतीय माध्यमबाट चिठ्ठा पुरस्कार जस्ता आर्थिक प्रलोभनका प्रस्तावको भरमा 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



Dining



Embassy

Enjoy a hearty meal in this centrally located restaurant known for its lively ambience and assorted menu. Try the Duck Breast, served on a bed of mashed potatoes and roasted vegetables in a rich peppery steak sauce.
Lazimpat, 9802024040

La Casita

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



Lhakpa's Chulo

From Nepali dal bhat, Newari khaja, Swiss Rösti, Italian Risotto and Thai green curry. Lakpa's Chulo has a variety of cuisines to offer. Garlic chilli prawn at this cosy restaurant is to die for.
Jhamsikhel (01) 5442986



Garden Terrace

The Garden Terrace has a wide selection of international cuisine including Nepali, Indian, Continental, Oriental, Japanese and Italian. Relish delicacies from the hotel's lavish buffet spread or order A la Carte dishes from the elaborated menu.
Soaltee Crowne Plaza, Tahachal (01) 4273999

Kebab Village Restaurant

The Kebab Village offers some of the best and largest variety of kebabs in Kathmandu. From Hara Bara Kebab to Kebab-E-Sabziyan, this restaurant serves them all.
Naxal (01) 4422177

The Mary Slusser exposé

How an American scholar’s archives became both a record of theft and a roadmap for return



Stone and Song
Alisha Sijapati

On 16 September, Nepal’s cybersphere was rattled and divided after an explosive investigation in Himal Southasian by Erin L Thompson exposing the compromised legacy of American scholar Mary Shepherd Slusser.

The piece forced Nepalis, expatriates and the art world to confront an uncomfortable truth about scholars who have written the history of Nepal’s heritage.

When criminologists Emiline Smith and Erin L Thompson first published A Case Study of Academic Facilitation of the Global Illicit Trade in Cultural Objects about Mary Slusser in the International Journal of Cultural Property in 2023, it had ignited fierce conversation in academia.

Scholar Charles Ramble’s response appeared in the European Bulletin of Himalayan Research, defending Slusser.

In 2001, Slusser told the Art Gallery of New South Wales (NSW) in Australia that she had 1,969 photographs of a shalabhanjika strut stolen from Ratneswor Temple in Patan and that it ‘had best be left on loan to Australia’.

She overrode the community’s right to decide by appointing herself gatekeeper. After extensive mediation, the NSW Gallery sent the strut back to Nepal in 2023.

This made me connect the dots, and led to the digital catalog of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA), where there were a surprising number of objects from



Nepal well over 100 years old.

Slusser bypassed Nepal’s Ancient Monuments Preservation Act (1956) that protected antiquities from export when she was collecting in the 1960s.

I met Thompson during the return of Lakshmi-Narayan in Patko Tole. That connection led to a revealing 2021 email exchange concerning a 16th-century Buddhist scroll painting from I-Bahi in Patan, now in the VMFA.

SAVIOUR COMPLEX

Slusser first photographed the work in 1967 and later played a key role in its acquisition by the museum, saying she ‘rescued’ it from deterioration. A rationale used for countless objects she moved out of Nepal.

Slusser was a remarkable scholar with a deep affection for Nepal, but she consistently took the country, its people, and its legal frameworks for granted.

The reaction online to the Himal Southasian exposé has been polarised. Many argue she should be remembered strictly for her contributions, that she documented what Nepal was neglecting, and without her, we would have lost even the memory of these objects.

But to canonise her solely as a saviour validates an extractive history. It entirely ignores the local complicity that left our temple doors unlocked in the first place.

Slusser had a saviour complex. The very person who painstakingly documented our deities was complicit in their theft.

But accountability goes both ways: the Nepali state must also take responsibility for a crisis rooted in decades of weak institutions and low heritage literacy. We elevated foreign experts to god-like status, handing them the power to negotiate even the fate of our gods.

Foreign scholars claimed

authority over local knowledge, wrote our history, named our gods, and decided what was ‘art’ and what was an ‘idol’, often without consulting the communities who still worship those figures.

Their archives became weapons of power: whoever kept the records got to decide what was real, who owned it, and what it was worth.

The biggest lesson from the Slusser exposé is that boundaries are imperative and sensitivity is non-negotiable:

scholars, tourists, dealers, and collectors must recognise where their curiosity ends and our sovereignty begins, asking who has the right to speak for a community, who benefits from an acquisition, and what harm is caused when objects are removed from their living contexts.

Slusser died in 2017, but her archives remain. Her detailed documentation is a clear call for Nepalis to respect, reclaim, and fight for their heritage. Slusser can no longer defend herself, but it was she who chose to make her life and work public, and in doing so, left behind not just a legacy of extraction, but also a roadmap making restorative justice possible.

Slusser is part of a broader network of complicity. Other dealers, scholars, institutions, and intermediaries — both in the West and within Nepal, were either directly involved in similar thefts, or did not speak against what they knew was happening.

The investigation must go

beyond Mary Slusser. Those who facilitated, benefited from, or enabled the removal of Nepal’s cultural heritage must also be implicated.

Given my involvement in Thompson’s investigation, when I attempted to track down the dealers, middlemen, and thieves in Kathmandu, I hit a wall of silence. Most perpetrators were dead, many families have left, others are reluctant to speak. Awareness of the loot only drives remaining enablers deeper into the shadows.

Slusser decided what Nepal could keep and let go. The ball is now in Nepal’s court. We can make decisions for our own ownership, using her archives, as evidence to reclaim our deities, and write our own heritage narrative.

Heritage reclamation is labour-intensive work that cannot be done by overworked and understaffed Department of Archaeology (DoA), it needs a state-led institutional plan.

It must include a dedicated repatriation unit within the DoA with clear mandates and protocols, training and exposure for bureaucrats on international repatriation frameworks and negotiation tactics. It needs ring-fenced financing to support long-term field inventories, legal research, diplomatic travel, and public heritage literacy campaigns.

Heritage recovery cannot be a one-off press event when the deities are returned to Nepal, it is a marathon of paperwork, diplomacy, and community engagement.

The responsibility to protect now belongs to the Nepali state. Slusser’s archives have the evidence to trace and demand the gods stolen from us. 🇳🇵

Alisha Sijapati is a writer and cultural heritage practitioner.

The god who never wanted to leave

Nepali artist performs outside British museums to highlight looted sacred art

Saurav Thapa Shrestha

A masked figure stands outside the British Museum, one of the largest repositories of sacred and ancient objects collected from all over the world.

Around it tourists, students, office workers stream out of the gate, none of them looking twice at the man in the mask. This is the image that photographer Aayush Shrestha keeps returning to (right). Not because it is the most striking in his new picture book, but because it represents what he set out to say: a god can stand in the middle of a big city and go entirely unnoticed.

Titled The Unwilling Travellers, the book imagines sacred sculptures taken out of the Kathmandu Valley over the past century and now sitting in museums and private collections across the West as reluctant migrants, still adjusting, decades on, to lives in exhibit stands or in underground storage.

“When I first went to the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert I was upset to see the Nepali gods inside glass boxes,” Shrestha says. “As humans we migrate with purpose, but the gods were forced away from their places. They are still waiting to go home.”

Shrestha, 27, works mainly as a



fashion photographer. He studied fine arts at Kathmandu University before moving to London for a master’s in digital photography at Ravensbourne University, but he has kept a personal practice going alongside the commercial work built around Nepali myth, ritual and memory.

TRAVELLER GODS

Shrestha’s book does not try to settle the history that Nepal’s living gods were stolen and turned into ‘art’ pieces. Instead he works on an imagined premise that the gods after years away, became travellers themselves.

In the photographs, masked and ornamented figures move through ordinary London life – waiting at bus stops, cycling down streets, sitting alone in parks. “I explored the cityscapes of London to use it as a space opposite to where the gods should belong,” Shrestha says. “I wanted the gods to look a bit lost, yet trying to cope.”

In Nepali ritual tradition, a mask made and consecrated for performance is understood to hold divine presence, not simply represent it. That belief runs underneath the whole project, and it is also why museum display troubled Shrestha.



PHOTOS: AAYUSH SHRESTHA

“Once it’s inside a museum, it’s given an inventory number,” he said. “A museum might keep the item carefully, but does not preserve its original meaning and purpose.”

Shrestha stops short of calling his project activism, though he does not rule it out completely: “The exhibition begins as an artistic investigation, but it inevitably enters the political conversation surrounding restitution and repatriation.” 🇳🇵

Aayush Shrestha’s Master’s graduation exhibition was on at Photobook Cafe in the UK from 11-13 September. He plans to publish the book in Nepal soon.

After the deluge


People Power
Bikash Pandey

The catastrophic flood of 26 August put Nepal's dependence on hydropower under scrutiny, with some suggesting a fundamental rethink. There should certainly be an evaluation, but the disaster is unlikely to bring hydropower development to a halt.

Construction will continue but at a slower pace and under a more demanding technical, regulatory, and financial conditions.

Hydroelectricity has become too important a part of Nepal's economy to simply stop. Some 260 hydropower projects are currently under construction, and another 360 are in various stages of feasibility assessment, design, financing, or licensing.

Tens of thousands of Nepalis depend on the sector. Cement and steel factories, steel pipe and gate fabricators, suppliers, engineering firms, transporters, consultancies,



DAMNED: The \$700 million 456MW Upper Tamakosi built entirely with domestic funds before it was destroyed by the 2024 September floods in central Nepal.

environmental specialists, insurance companies, banks, and retirement funds all have a stake in the continued construction of hydropower projects.

A sudden halt would have economic consequences extending far beyond the power sector itself.

Nepal has spent the past 25 years building a domestic base of hydropower expertise with engineers, hydrologists, geologists, project developers, environmental specialists, tunneling experts, and construction contractors capable of adapting designs to emerging risks.

Nepali engineers are not starting from scratch. They have long been required to account for hazards such as GLOFs and landslide dammed flash floods. The latest disaster has introduced a third even more deadly category of extreme mountain hazard: floods caused by

the collapse of glaciated slopes.

Better data, more rigorous studies and risk assessment, increased monitoring and reliable early warning, safer siting criteria for intake structures and power plants, improved planning for emergencies, and stronger

Rethinking risk and

A warning system only works if people and institutions can act on it, particularly with last-mile redundancy

Ajaya Dixit
and **Monirul Mirza**

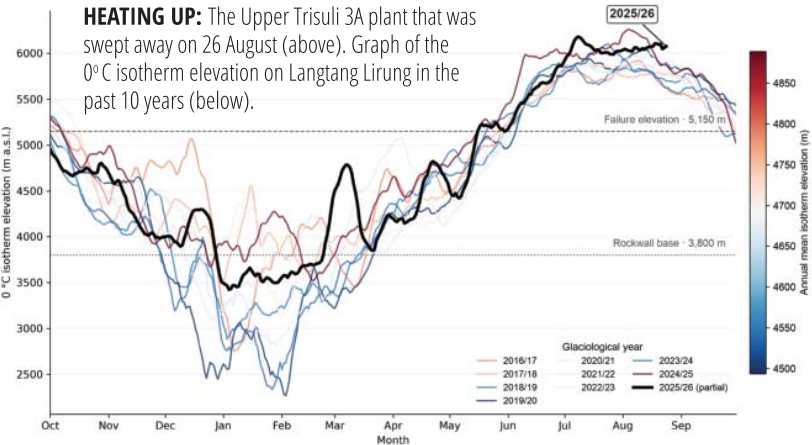
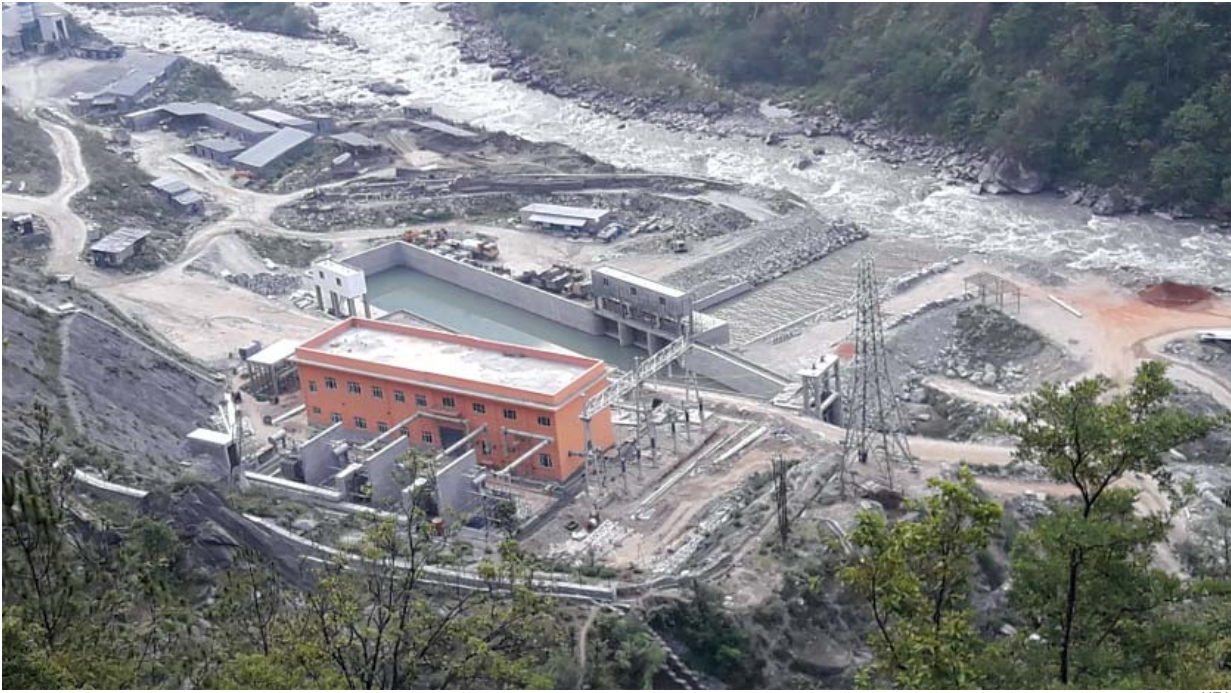
The World Weather Attribution rapid review last week of climate models based on weather observations and existing geological research reinforced what scientists have long argued: climate change is altering the physical conditions of the mountains.

A combination of geological and hydrological processes in the cryosphere caused the Bhote Kosi-Trisuli disaster. A warmer atmosphere, shifting rainfall and snowfall patterns, glacier and snow loss, and permafrost degradation can affect slope stability and the movement of water and sediment.

These changes interact with geology and topography and increase the likelihood or magnitude of cascading hazards.

The IPCC Fourth Assessment Report in 2007 described the Himalaya as a scientific 'white spot' because of limited hydro-meteorological stations and peer-reviewed research.

Two decades later, the region remains poorly understood. We know little about how permafrost dynamics are changing, snowfall and rainfall patterns are shifting,



rain is reaching higher elevations, and rising temperatures affect snow and glaciers.

We also lack understanding of how these changes interact with the mountain slopes and river hydrology. The rivers are not what

they were a century ago, their flows altered by dams, diversions, roads, settlements and infrastructure.

As climate and physical conditions change, we must ask what happens to dams and reservoirs when sediment loads

increase exponentially? How should infrastructure be operated when the timing and intensity of floods shift? What happens to river-sharing when the hydrology on which they were based changes?

AI ANALYSIS

Monitoring and research in the Himalaya are too limited for the scale and complexity of the changes underway. Advanced remote sensing can identify surface deformation across large and difficult-to-reach areas. AI can analyse large volumes of data and detect patterns more easily.

But technology alone is not enough. Satellites can show that a surface is moving, they cannot by themselves explain what is happening beneath it. Its value depends on institutions, skilled

people, field observations, and sustained resources. Ground-based research remains essential. We need long-term field research, ground and satellite monitoring, better geological and cryosphere data, early-warning systems, and institutions capable of interpreting information and communicating warnings in time.

Scientific knowledge becomes useful only when it reaches those who manage risks and those who may be exposed to them. This means thinking about redundancy, particularly in the last mile. A warning system is only as strong as the people and institutions that can act on it (page 5).

Getting to such a future requires investment and a different way of thinking about public infrastructure. The larger question is not only how we adapt to climate change, but what kind of development we pursue in a changing physical environment.

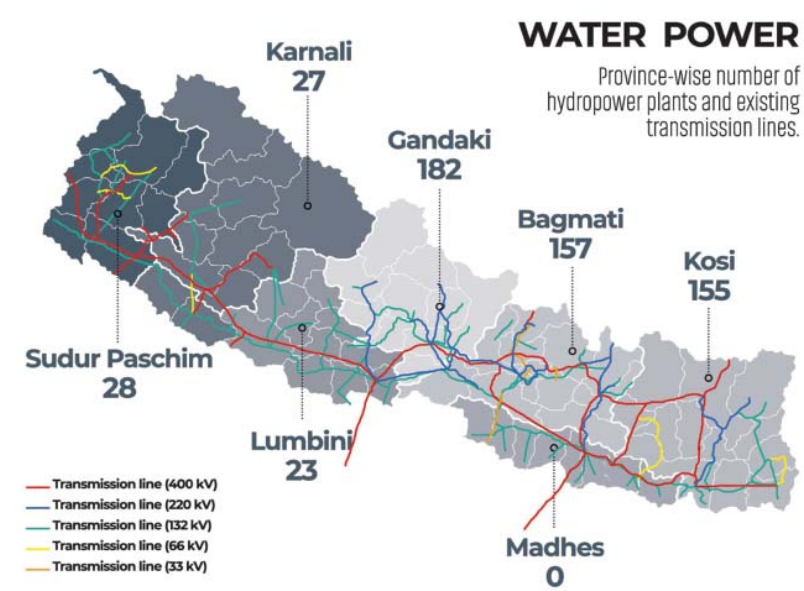
For decades, development has often meant building more roads, expanding settlements, increasing energy production, connecting remote regions, and making more land accessible.

We have continued to build (and after damage, rebuild) without adequately heeding heightened risks created by the intensity of extremes, compounding exposure, and vulnerability. 'Build back better' has too often remained rhetoric rather than practice.

Yet development can also increase exposure when infrastructure and settlements are placed in unstable terrain or when natural systems that regulate water are altered.

Roads can disturb slopes, excavation changes drainage. River engineering alters sediment

Hydropower development should not stop, it must evolve factoring in mountain hazards



protective infrastructure can reduce risk from all these threats.

These changes will increase costs and development timelines, but the most attractive projects will proceed. Expanded climate-risk assessment, hydro-meteorological modeling, more stringent engineering standards, and rising insurance premiums will all raise investment costs.

Many marginal projects in the pipeline may no longer prove financially viable. Yet, Nepal still possesses an enormous portfolio of attractive hydropower sites. Projects with strong resource characteristics, ready access, manageable risks, and favourable economics will continue

to attract developers and financiers.

The hydropower sector has expanded at extraordinary speed over the past decade, with annual additions often exceeding 20% of installed generation capacity.

Nepal enjoys an electricity surplus during much of the year, creating space for regulators, developers, and policymakers to take stock and implement reforms without facing the immediate pressure of energy scarcity.

Hydro and solar projects have spread across 54 districts, not centralised sources. If a majority of this generation capacity was along a single river valley, a flood of this magnitude would have collapsed

the entire power infrastructure with few prospects of recovery.

Nepal can build on this proven strategy based on risk mitigation through decentralisation, increased diversification, and allocating risk mitigation responsibilities to the government, project developers, and financing institutions in specific areas where they are most capable of managing those risks.

Nepal's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) currently commits to 15% of electricity generation from non-hydropower renewables by 2035. This target now needs to be reconsidered.

There is solar and wind energy potential, particularly in trans-Himalayan districts with high solar irradiation, low cloud cover, good wind energy, and relatively low exposure to flooding hazards that affect the south of the Himalaya.

Solar and wind generation costs have declined dramatically worldwide and could compete with hydropower in Nepal if the government invests in road and transmission line access to attractive sites in the relatively remote districts like Mustang and Dolpo where resources are most plentiful and land for siting projects is relatively inexpensive.

A higher target, of a quarter to a third of power being generated by non-hydropower sources by 2035, would improve energy security by reducing the country's exposure to climate-related hydrological risks.

A distinction must be made here between projects that depend on glacier-supported rivers, and those exposed to glacier-related hazards. Most hydropower projects in Nepal larger than 10MW benefit to some degree from glacier and snowmelt contribution to river flows.

A subset of these has significant glacier-hazard exposure in projects located in basins containing large glacierised catchments, unstable glacial lakes or hanging glaciers.

The Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation must therefore identify and map river basins for glacier-hazard exposure. Such information should be made publicly available and pro-actively utilised in basin-level planning and hydropower licensing.

Investors should not have to independently reconstruct hazard assessments that government agencies are better positioned to undertake, and are uniquely positioned to utilise as part of their responsibility to regulate the sector.

100-YEAR FLOODS
Developers have to design and build more secure projects. The era of relying on historical flood records has ended. If so-called '100-year floods' are now occurring every decade, hydrological models and infrastructure design must reflect that reality.

Each project must carry out its own Climate Risk Assessment along the drainage basin before the project is approved. They will need to account for increased frequency of extreme rainfall events as well as those of GLOFs, landslide-dam failures, and glacier-collapse floods.

As the tragic and seemingly futile attempts at rescuing worker trapped in tunnels of Upper Trishuli 3-A (pictured, left), 3-B and Rasuwagadi show, every hydropower project must be required to have Emergency Action Plans by regulation, particularly covering the period during construction when there can be hundreds of workers on site, but also during operations.

Conservative assumptions and proactive safety measures will increasingly become a commercial necessity rather than simply a regulatory compliance issue.

Banks and insurers are likely to demand it. Projects that can demonstrate robust risk assessments and resilient designs should be rewarded by them with lower financing and insurance costs. Those that cannot do so may face significantly higher premiums, regardless of their location.

Engineering adaptations will also become more common. Future powerhouses may need to be located farther above river level, accepting some loss in hydraulic head and power generation capacity in return for safety from flooding.

Critical electrical equipment and substations may need additional protection. Projects facing elevated hazard exposure may require gates capable of isolating headrace and tailrace tunnels during extreme events, preventing floodwater and debris from inundating critical infrastructure. Early warning systems, remote monitoring technologies, and emergency shutdown procedures are also likely to become standard practice.

None of these measures will eliminate risk entirely. Nepal is, located in one of the world's most dynamic geological and climatic environments. But they can substantially reduce vulnerability. The lesson from the 26 August tragedy is not that hydropower development should stop. It must evolve. 🇳🇵

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development in the Himalaya

movement. Hydropower plants concentrate people and infrastructure in narrow valleys. Urbanisation places people and assets in areas exposed to floods, landslides and other hazards.

An infrastructure project that appeared reasonably safe under past climatic and geological conditions may face different risks in future ones. What was once considered an extreme event may no longer remain outside the range of experience. This does not mean every hazard is caused by climate change, it means the assumptions used to define risk can no longer be treated as permanent.

Adaptation needs to be understood more broadly. It cannot simply mean protecting the existing development model from a changing climate. Risk needs to become part of the basic design question, rather than something added after a project has been planned. Development must take account of geological processes,

changing hydrology, ecosystems, climate projections and the limits of what can safely be built in particular places.

The real question is what these changes mean for development, disaster risk reduction and people's well-being in Nepal and across the Himalayan region. Climate change also brings the question of whether people will continue to have safe land for housing, reliable food production, drinking water, energy, and access to essential services as the physical environment changes.

The global climate signal is becoming harder to ignore. The growth in global CO₂ emissions has slowed, but atmospheric CO₂ concentration continues to rise. Slowing the growth of emissions is not the same as reaching net zero. The latest assessment estimates that average warming during 2016-2025 was 1.26°C above the 1850-1900 baseline, compared with about 0.93°C during 2006-2015.

Of this, 1.24°C was human-induced. The recent rate of warming should not be projected forward as a precise forecast. Annual temperatures vary, and the 2016-2025 average was influenced by exceptionally warm years, particularly 2023 and 2024. Yet the longer-term direction is clear. Global emission reductions are not occurring as envisioned by the 2015 Paris Agreement.

As per UNEP's Emissions Gap Report 2025, current Nationally Determined Contributions and policies still place the world on a trajectory of roughly 2.3–2.5°C of warming by 2100 under full implementation, and close to 2.8°C under existing policies.

Temporary exceedance of 1.5°C is now very likely within the next decade due to insufficient emissions reductions. Limiting the magnitude and duration of that exceedance will require accelerated action, with most responsibility falling on countries

of the Global North given their historically high cumulative emissions.

Exceeding 1.5°C will intensify extreme weather events and risks of irreversible tipping points. This is where the 2026 disaster becomes more than another event to be managed. At the national and community levels, the question is how people will live with risks that are already emerging and those that cannot be avoided.

A safer development pathway will require better understanding of hazards, protection of natural ecosystems that buffer risk, risk-based placement of infrastructure, stronger communities and local institutions, and enforceable rules. It will also require redundancy so that the failure of one road, institution, service or communication channel does not cascade into a larger disaster, despite the added cost.

The lesson of the 2026 catastrophe is that the physical

and climatic conditions under which we plan development are changing. Many development practices still rely on assumptions drawn from a more stable climate past. The task is not simply to use yesterday's development approach to adapt to tomorrow's climate, it is to rethink the development pathway itself.

Development has to work with the changing climate, mountains, rivers, and ecosystems. Countries in the Himalayan regions also need to cooperate. Acting alone, we risk losing the game. Acting together, as all countries united, we stand a fair chance of winning the battle. 🇳🇵

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From fighting feudalism to fighting cancer

Former Maoist guerrilla Lila Sharma recounts struggles through war, peace and illness

Sudiksha Tuladhar

Lila Sharma was born into a family of seven sisters and a brother. From childhood she was aware of sharply defined gender roles. Women stayed home, daughters were married young to toil for in-laws.

As an adolescent, family pressure mounted for her to conform: cook, clean, marry and bear children. But Sharma had a rebellious streak, she quit college and joined the Maoists.

“People in Dang were mostly uneducated and culturally conservative, there was inequality and patriarchy,” Sharma recalls. “Bonding with Maoists in my age group, and learning to use a gun were empowering. We truly believed a revolution was necessary and possible.”

The Maoists had launched their armed struggle in February 1996, and young men and women were attracted by their promise of a just and egalitarian Nepal. People were also pushed to support the Maoists after police atrocities in the midwestern mountains in 1997-98.

Women made up one-third of the Maoist militia, and were often on the frontlines of attacks like the one on the Nepal Army base in Khara in 2002. The fighting raged all night, 90 guerrillas were killed. In hot pursuit, the Army strafed those retreating from helicopters.



KUNDA DIXIT

“For one week, we fought our way out of Rukum to Salyan. We had nothing to eat as we carried our wounded comrades,” Sharma, who was battalion commander, recalls. “It was either kill, or be killed.”

Lila Sharma is now 50, and still believes in societal transformation. The sacrifices were not in vain, she

says, it made Nepalis more aware of their rights.

“In a way, the GenZ uprising last year was a continuation of our struggle, and proof that some of the things we fought against were still prevalent,” Sharma says. “We called it people’s war, but it was actually a youth war. We were all young and idealistic.”

Twenty years after the 2006 peace accord, Sharma is disenchanted with how it all turned out: “When they got to government our leaders forgot what we fought for, the party let the people down.”

Sharma says there was genuine support for the Maoists in rural

Nepal, where villagers protected, fed and helped the guerrillas, not always out of fear.

After the ceasefire, Sharma established the ex-PLA Women’s Academy, speaking at public fora defending women’s rights and gender equality. “We took up arms and we laid them down, but the struggle for equality goes on through peaceful mobilisation.”

MEMOIR OF WAR

Sharma was always a voracious reader, and kept a war diary. Recovering from cancer, she started turning it into a memoir. युद्ध लडे क्यान्सर जिते (Fought a War and Defeated Cancer) was launched in her native Dang recently. For Sharma it has been cathartic to relive the hopes and disappointments of war, and now waging her own personal battles.

She writes of the brutality, hunger, exhaustion, grief, but also an adrenalin-driven exhilaration of going into battle, with the fierce idealism of youth. The violence was so pervasive

that the boundary between dream and reality blurred.

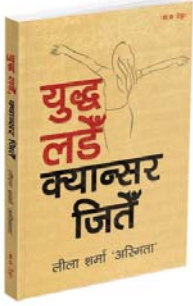
Young people were integral to the insurgency, and spent their formative years at war. There were relationships, marriage, and some even had children amidst the conflict. Sharma advised younger combatants that relationships were a personal choice, but that parenthood could wait.

After the ceasefire, Sharma joined the Young Communist League rather than apply for integration into the Nepali Army. She married another comrade and has a son.

“The marriage was a simple gathering to make a promise in front of our comrades to dedicate our lives to the nation,” she says.

Sharma was battle-hardened, physically and mentally strong. But there was another battle still to be waged: against cancer. Once again, just as on the battlefield, her fellow-fighters stepped in to help save her life through therapy sessions.

“The splits in the party leadership during the war, and what happened after the ceasefire did not match what we were willing to give up our lives for,” Lila Sharma says. “But it did raise society’s awareness about women’s rights, class and caste discrimination. A new generation of young Nepalis is now intolerant of injustice.”



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