The business of politics

Shikhar Kharel

The cause of prolonged political paralysis in Nepal is cynicism, and the only way to uplift it is by tackling its sources: MP-buying by big business, the criminalization of politics and the politicization of crime is now the business of politics. Lawmakers become lawmakers. Gangsters become ministers. The short-cut to becoming a legislator and minister without even standing for elections is to buy one’s way to the top.

Political integrity has become an oxymoron. No matter how popular or honest politicians may be, they cannot win elections without financial backing. And the cash comes from businesses seeking a healthy return on investment. There are two ways to seek ROI from politics. Firstly, by offering a straightforward donation (a bribe in polite parlance) to a politician standing for elections and demanding a pound of flesh later. The second is to offer an even better ‘campaign contribution’ to directly become a nominated MP from that party without ever contesting an election.

The constitutional provision to ensure proportional representation for marginalized communities has become the backdoor for tycoons to enter the House chambers. Education entrepreneur Umesh Shrestha was one of SHER Baburaj Dashu’s first ministerial appointments after assuming office two weeks ago, and one he took without consulting his party or coalition members. Shrestha is a self-made but wealthy man, and has announced he will not take a salary as minister. Unlike unselected politicians, he may be less tempted by petty payoffs. However, appointing someone who is setting up a chain of private hospitals to the Health Ministry is akin to putting a fox in charge of the chicken coop. The prime minister has not been able to give a clear rationale for this conflict of interest, and after widespread criticism of the move, said rather ambiguously: “It won’t happen again.”

This week, the new businessman-turned-state minister allowed the private sector to import Covid-19 vaccines. How does this make sense when G2G agreements are in place, OXAX doses are in the pipeline, and if private importers will compete with the government for vaccines from the same global supply chain? We can give Shrestha the benefit of doubt, and argue that the boy who came from Bhujpur to Kathmandu in his flip-flops to build a business empire, may be better at managing healthware delivery than clueless and corrupt politicians. In fact, if there is blame to be placed on anyone, it should be on an expensive system that allows greedy political actors to elevate their cronies to important positions in government.

Cynicism was also in full display in the Gandaki Province drama last month; Debate Biswakarma was all set to become the only Dalit minister in the provincial government, but was suddenly supplanted by Binda Thapa, a Dalits loyalist rewarded for party funds. When Nepal’s development is driven by contractors, it is no surprise that politics is also contracted out. For politicians, ‘prosperity’ is measured by highways, bridges, view towers and not by quality schools, accessible health care and meaningful jobs for young Nepalis.

An investigation in this paper after the 2017 elections showed that up to 40% of elected local government representatives were contractors renting out their own excavators and tipper trucks to themselves. The way to address this rot is to stop allowing Nepal’s richest businesses from using the quota for indigenous and ethnic minorities to become unaccounted ministers. The ballot box is not a cash box, and for Nepal’s equitable progress, the next election must stop votes being bought with notes.
A hotter Himalaya

Scientists are now warning that the Himalayas are melting faster, threatening water supplies for millions.

The Himalayas are the world’s highest mountain range, stretching across eight countries in Asia, from Afghanistan to Myanmar. They are a vital source of water for millions of people in the region, supplying rivers that flow through India, China, Nepal, and other countries. However, recent studies have shown that the Himalayas are melting faster than ever before, posing a serious threat to the region’s water resources.

The melting of the Himalayas is caused by climate change. As the Earth’s temperature rises, the glaciers and snowpack that form on the mountains begin to melt, releasing water into rivers and lakes. This process is accelerated by human activities, such as deforestation and pollution, which trap heat in the atmosphere and cause the Earth’s temperature to rise faster.

The implications of the melting Himalayas are significant. In addition to affecting the water supply, the melting of the glaciers also contributes to sea level rise, which could lead to flooding of coastal areas. The melting of the glaciers also affects the timing and volume of river flows, which can have significant impacts on agriculture and fisheries.

There are several actions that can be taken to address the problem of melting Himalayas. First, we need to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions to slow down the rate of climate change. This can be done by transitioning to renewable energy sources, improving energy efficiency, and reducing deforestation.

Second, we need to manage the water resources in the region more effectively. This means developing new technologies to capture and store water during the wet season for use during the dry season, and creating systems to prevent flooding.

Third, we need to adapt to the changes that are already occurring. This means building more resilient communities, developing new industries that are less dependent on water, and improving infrastructure to cope with the impacts of climate change.

In conclusion, the melting of the Himalayas is a serious concern for the region and the world. We need to act now to reduce the rate of climate change and develop new strategies to manage and adapt to the changes that are already happening.
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Nepal needs to plan for plenty and scarcity of water

What is the long-term viability of the Melamchi Water Supply Project considering the growing threats on freshwater supplies? Climate change is already impacting rainfall patterns in Nepal. We need to have downpours in January and February, but now winter rainfall is becoming increasingly precarious. Even in the monsoon, rainfall patterns have completely changed. The intensity of precipitation is rising, which causes larger runoffs and landslides, and lower infiltration. At the same time, heavy downpours in the winter months seem to be disappearing, impacting on the distribution of water. Although the total amount of rain has not changed a lot, when we need water, we don’t have it. When the rain does come, we seem to be getting too much of it. The Melamchi Water Supply Project is meant to be a long-term solution to address water shortage in the Kathmandu Valley. However, the Melamchi river itself is snow-fed and may get less water due to climate change. But we can safeguard ourselves from the worst-case scenario through the development of water storage projects within or just outside the valley. Water storage projects and inter-basin water transfer projects can balance water availability. This can help in transferring water from surplus to deficit basins. Water storage can either be done through constructing large-scale reservoirs and dams, or small scale ponds and household level reservoirs and even rainwater harvesting. Dams are critical for the long-term sustainability of water management and irrigation in Nepal.

Was the flood on the Melamchi in June anticipated as a once-in-a-century event? Yes, the headworks of the Melamchi project were designed with 100-year floods in mind. To ensure adequate protection, the project includes emergency energy dispatch and safety mechanisms. The structures have been constructed to minimize flood damage due to the worst possible events in a 100-year return period. However, an event can occur which is even more intense.

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

About 40% of the annual flow and 70% of dry season flows of the Gandak in India originate from Nepal’s rivers. The Gandak basin is home to about 500 million people, which can in itself explain the importance of Nepal’s rivers for people living in northern India. Floods during the monsoon and a lack of adequate water for agriculture in the dry season are the two major issues there. Obviously, the construction of storage projects in Nepal’s territories to regulate river flow could solve both problems in India to a great extent. If reservoirs are to be built in Nepal, the pressure of the impounded water must be judiciously determined for win-win cooperation between the two countries. China upstream also shares our rivers. Nepal’s main concern with Chinese water relations is the sharing of flood and rainfall data. Because precipitation and weather events in China affect Nepal’s rivers downstream, better cooperation is needed to properly manage transboundary water risks.

Last month, China sent a warning that the Tama Kosi river was dammed due to a large landslide, upstream of the 485MW Upper Tama Kosi project. What are your thoughts on a single hydropower project having such a large proportion of the national hydropower generation?

Firstly, given the geology and steep slopes of the mountains as well as intense rainfall that occurs in Nepal, the structures we build on the Rivers are always vulnerable. It is often difficult to predict the worst-case scenario. There are computer models to estimate near to actual situations, however, how accurately we predict the input data largely determines how closely we can predict the flows. Due to climate change, this type of prediction has become more and more difficult. The Tama Kosi headworks are designed to weather a flood with a 1,000 year return period, including a glacial lake outburst flood, meaning the headworks are designed to withstand a flood so intense it is only predicted to occur once every 1,000 years. This level of risk planning is common practice, and would normally be safe for the typical worst-case conditions. Secondly, Nepal’s per capita electricity consumption is very low, around 300 kWh. As the country progresses, the per capita consumption grows, and you need to produce more electricity. In such a situation, a 45MW project like Tama Kosi is not actually that big, and we will have similar projects distributed all over the country. However, for the present condition of the country, when a single project generates about one-third of electricity, there is always the risk of electricity shortages due to an unproven natural disaster in the Tama Kosi basin.

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

Water is a finite resource, and there is increasing stress on water resources. Our attitude of abundance and overuse is risky, and we must uphold a sustainable way to water usage to protect this precious resource for future generations. Nepal also needs to explore the possibilities of recycling and reusing water to achieve an optimum sustainable level of consumption. Pollution of our available freshwater resources is another major issue that must be understood and addressed at the individual level. Experts from different stakeholders will give critical insights into the various aspects of water use.

Sarbottam under probe

Beinga a Syndicate investigator, Pramode Chaulagain, a former vice chairman of the Bank of Nepal, has been arrested. He was arrested in connection with the King’s Bank fraud case. His arrest comes after he was released on bail on 6 August.

Nexa loan

Customers buying Tail’s new Nexa EV priced at Rs 3.6 million can now get subsidised loans from NAB Bank. Loans will be available at a 0% premium with the bank’s base rate indexed, and will cover up to 80% financing with 36 working hours. NAB Bank recently launched three models, EV 35 Plus and 32 Plus.

Marasini in MoF

Madhuni Kumar Marasini has been appointed the new secretary at the Ministry of Finance. He was previously the Advocate General and has considerable experience in budgeting, tax planning and foreign assistance coordination.

IME Pay- Greenway for Cycle Travel

IME Digital Solutions (P) Ltd’s IME Pay and Cycle City Network (Greenway) are collaborating to promote cycling with a campaign where participants will receive IME for each kilometer they travel on IME Pay.

Heifer

Agris Support

Heifer International Nepal, working for the sustainable development of small farmers, has collaborated with women entrepreneurs and established 40 Agri transport vehicles to be managed by them across the country.

Buddha Air

Pokhara-Nepalgunj

Buddha Air has ordered three additional aircraft. Flights from August 7 onwards will continue and the number of flights will be increased as per demand. The flights will operate from 13:00 AM and return from Nepalgunj at 10:00 AM.

Sanima Bank KICCI Aid

Sanima Bank is providing medical treatment to Kathmandu Institute of Child Health (KICCI), which offers care to children and works to improve the lives of children through preventive healthcare throughout Nepal.

pratha Bank

IMF Pay-Greenway for Cycle Travel

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She was more than a child helper turned child bride

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

Sita showed up one afternoon on the motorbike of her former employer at our home on the outskirts of Kathmandu. She was wearing a small bag of clothes. She was wearing a kurta with traces of dirt—something I had seen my relative wear before, now altered to fit a 14-year-old. I had met Sita before when I had visited my relatives, a radiant face twining on tall, lean limbs. Her eyes were light brown and her hair the same colour, swaying in an array of curls over her forehead and her temples. She did not look much different when she arrived at ours. And neither did she look nervous for someone coming to live in a new place.

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

Sita held her bedding every morning, arranging it under my bookshelf which hung on the wall. If someone asked me sitting on it with a book between my fingers, she would tell me off in fluent News: “Matcha! Ana mako.”

Sita made our home hers, quickly. She was expected to bring my sister and me to the bus stop every day and help Ami run errands. But Ami complained that “the child” delayed her. Clearly, she also made her laugh.

Man, with wings of grey sticking over her head would sit under a tree in the afternoon, smoking her bidi. On a hot day, she would fall asleep under the tree, and Sita would get to work, pecking her ear with a leaf. Furious, Man would clench her hand into a fist and threaten to hit Sita. “This girl has too much energy. Ghraham chakchak!”

And so it proved to be. Sita made sure to punctuate our days with events. One morning, as we waited for our school bus to arrive, Sita pointed at the pipal tree and said, “Nest!” And below knew we, she was climbing the tree.

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

When we stepped off at the bus stand that afternoon, Man was waiting for us. Sita had been grounded. Upon entering my room, I saw two weaver birds’ nests. One was over a foot long, the other one was smaller. Sita had nailed them to two corners of our room. I dumped my bag on the floor to touch them. “I saw you read about them in your science book,” she beamed. My science book had a chapter on different kinds of bird nests, one of them had been the weaver bird’s nest.

A couple of weeks later, Sita was allowed to go to the bus stand again. As we waited under the pipal tree, my sister said, “Bring the nest.” She hadn’t finished her homework. Sita pulled out her notebook and hurriedly wrote her homework for her. “There, your teacher won’t scold you now.” She whipped my sister’s head, “Bandit!”

Coming home from school was also coming home to Sita’s radiant face. One time, she greeted us with bracelets all over her limbs, epicyclic bracelets woven over the front porch. She had climbed a thorny tree to gather firewood for Shivavani, letting down fresh branches that would not burn. When my mother explained how terrified she had been that she might fall, Sita reminded her that she had “compared” a pipal tree. I did not understand my mother’s patience with her.

One afternoon, Sita latched herself to the kitchen for hours. When she unlooked the door, she had made achaar. She said it was her “special” for us, the first time she had cooked. The potatoes were raw and I told her the achar was horrible. But my mother ate it, smiling as she did. When Sita turned 15, her father showed up. Man found her hiding at the dhalage doors by the hillsides. It was time for her to go home. When we returned from school, we could still see under my bookshelf but the lightness of her presence was missing. It amazed me that no one had told me she was leaving, but no one told a child such things.

Sita had been “given away in marriage” after she went back home, we heard. A decade later Sita visited my mother in our home in M巴基斯坦, when she brought a relative to the Teaching Hospital.

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

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

Suburban Tales is a monthly column in Nepal Times (based on real people and real events changed in prati Bhakti’s life).
Kathmandu’s ‘flash flood’

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

• Tom Robertson

Kathmandu Valley’s geography enjoy several structural advantages. It is too high for floods but too low for much snow and ice. That, and its location between north Indian population centers and the high Himalayan pass, positioned it perfectly as a historical epicenter. But the valley also suffers from earthquakes and flooding. The floods hit almost every year during the monsoon, and used to bring soil and silt to the farms, but more recently have delivered mostly damage and devastation.

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

And yet, many of today’s flash floods have human origins. The haphazard development of the Valley, and not just the floodplains, have contributed to everything that makes the floods both more common, and more consequential.

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

The pace of change since the mid-1980s has been fast, erratic and mismanaged,” says water expert and book author Prithvi Pant explaining Nepal’s biggest disaster, Ajeya Dixit. “Urban expansion has taken place at the cost of hydrological integrity, which makes things worse when intense rainfall occurs.”

Monsoon Patterns

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

In the major Himalayan rivers, however, the Valley’s rivers are not snow-fed and start nearly in the Shyangtang and surrounding hills. The Bagmati’s first drops sweep out of the north of Bhaktapur onto the shoulder of Shivapuri almost 2.5km above sea level. From there it winds 10km to Changu nar, where it leaves the Valley to descend another 140km to the Indian border.

At Bhaktapur the Bagmati drops sharply, about 10km every kilometre. It flows at it hits the Valley Floor, flowing past Patan and Lalitpur, an incline of only 2.7km per kilometre. Then after Chobar, the river takes its final 10km to route through the Mahabharat Range, to only slow again when it hits the Tarai.

Most of the Valley’s rain, over 85%, comes within three months from mid-June to mid-September. But it does not fall evenly, stopping and starting, at times but a drizzle, at others dumping huge amounts of water in torrential monsoons and cloudbursts. Just south of the Valley, the Bagmati watershed can get over 400mm in a single day and 40mm in an hour. Heavy rain brings flash floods. After a 1973 visit, the British East India Company’s Col William Kirkpatrick commented on the Valley’s heavy monsoon flooding: While the descent of the rivers through the valley is not so precipitous as to carry off the waters with much rapidity, the consequence is, that their banks, wherever they happen to be low, are very liable to be overflowed.

The floods, he noted, could be "very injurious to the husbandmen" and farmers often have the barrier. Valley residents adapted, building their homes on higher ground, saving the low floodplains for crops.

Higher ground meant the apron around the Valley’s mountainous walls, but particularly the fingers-like plateau (22) that stretched from the mountain base to the Valley’s centre in between the low lying waterways. Valley residents built their settlements, including their historic cities, on these terraces.

In the 1850s, British physician Henry Ambrose Gifford noted this pattern: "Nearly all the inhabitants of the Valley live in the high level lands. All the cities, towns, principal villages, are, it is said, upon them.

A regular rule, Gifford continued, "all the lowlands of the valley, from their facility of irrigation, and certainty of flooding during the rains, are appropriated to the cultivation of rice. Here and there a few cottages, or a pew or a temple may be seen upon them, but usually these lands are very thinly inhabited." Economic calculus drove this pattern. The extreme fertility and productivity of the lowlands, Gifford said, "causes them to be too valuable to be much used for building purposes."

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

Increasingly fierce flooding

But Kathmandu’s 23rd century floods differ from what Kirkpatrick and Gifford described in the 19th century. The situation has changed. Now, it is not just that Valley residents have built where they never used to, on lowlands where floods routinely swept over. But the environment has also been remade: not just in the floodplains, but the entire landscape, so that the annual floods have grown much worse than before.

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

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

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

But, Upadhyaya adds, regrettably, “we have changed everything very dramatically.

The biggest change is all the big buildings and concrete that block water flowing into the ground. Instead of seeping into the soil, monsoon rain now hits the roofs and pavement and shoots directly into low areas, filling riversides to the brim, sometimes within minutes.

“We have sealed all the land. Now water goes straight to the street (stream), not to end and through the ground,“ Upadhyaya says. “Water is lost.

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

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

All this concrete and change has disrupted the Valley’s traditional drainage patterns, blocking absorption and accelerating runoff. "The concrete surfaces and the loss of open spaces and wetlands,” Ajeya Dixit explains, “have taken away beds and left to insufficient surface runoff when high-intensity rains occur.”

Adding to the problem, as Kathmandu grows, is the widespread building of feet, the small hillocks of sand that used to dot the Valley’s landscape, especially its northern half.

“Our Old Rivers”

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

Send no longer braided riverbeds. Waters flows through...
much narrower channels. Walls on one or both river banks new guide water flow, squelching the rivers. In places, low brick walls have been filled, often with rubbish or waste, and built upon. Riverbanks are now walled in and tall.

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

"We don’t have the skill of the past, the roads are long gone," lamented Udupayha.

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

The Bagmati has also become a new river. In the 1870s, the visitor noted that it had "a very wide channel" and the water spread out according to its width and depth. "Even during the rains," he said, the water was shallow, only "knee-deep.

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

Writing at about the same time, Oldfield also commented on the Bagmati’s flow: "The Bagmati is always shallow, but, during the rains, it swells into a wide and rapid stream."

He also noted that the Bagmati’s waters are sullent to be only sacred, but peculiarly pure and wholesome.

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

Big Changes to Small rivers

But perhaps nothing has changed more than the many smaller but powerful rivers such as the Dhisho Kholi, the Hanumante, implemented by government authorities to mitigate and prevent the flood prior to the Bagmati Flood 2018, concluded a recent study by the Armed Police Force.

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

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

The rain in Bhaktapur fell fast the day of the flooding. It was far from record rain. The area had received the same volume of precipitation three previous times. And even, in 1990, well before all the pavement and buildings had come to the Kathmandu and Bhaktapur, 230cm of rain fell in a single day, nearly twice what caused the 2018 flooding. Some parts of the mountains near Kathmandu have seen rainfall twice even that amount.

Seasonal Streams

Similarly, Kathmandu has invited flooding by reconfiguring hundreds of the Valley’s 800, small seasonal streams.

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

Traditionally, no one built over the kosi, knowing that in monsoon they would fill with water. But now, as new construction has gobbled up the land, developers cannot resist the temptation to turn the streams in to floodwaters. Predictably, problems have emerged.

Near Boudha, for instance, at Micket Lepcha writes in the Record, the 1990s real estate boom swallowed up several seasonal streams. Fields turned into concrete canyons, turning streets into and rivers turned to roads.

People ignore the ecological role of the kosi. Local residents and environmentalists blame Udupayha. In the 1990s, building contractors and real estate owners saw these wetlands as wastelands.

For instance, Lepcha says, has a way of ‘reclaiming its space’. Moreover, every year in the Valley’s ancient seasonals and wetlands, even if built up over and over tons of concrete fill up and dry.

Some floods damage and destroy houses and property. ‘You know the flood and the Bagmati troubled you,’ Bhattarai’s son Awan points out.

An Assisted Missingness

The stagnation of the Valley’s water landscape started in the 1970s and 1980s with people putting up buildings, including homes, on the lowlands by the for the first time concrete structures piled up along the Dhipi Kholi, Samakthi, Bhakpati, and Bagmati.

Alarmed by the changes to longstanding traditions, some plans were warned of the unhappy results. A 1986 Government of Nepal/USAID report observed: ‘It is noteworthy that Kathmandu... has only recently begun to recognize the lower-lying flood plains... As these areas are subject to flooding and high water, new landfills and building sites should be encouraged.’

Some may blame Kathmandu’s environmental problems on its exploitative population growth. But this is not enough to explain planning. Noting that new buildings were going up on the right bank of the Bagmati from the Dhipi Kholi to Boudha, the report added: ‘Conditions here are less as deplorable as they are along the Vishnumati, and severe problems lie squarely with the Government.’

The report called for preserving lowlands for agricultural use along with Lalitpur’s Bagmati, Khokha, and Sabhak and on Kathmandu’s, Bhumisati, Balkhu, and Samakthi. ‘Not only are these vegetable belt farms of Kathmandu but they have high water tables and are poorly drained. Thus they are not good sites for urban development... Problems will surely occur.’

The report also observed that greenbelts along the rivers: ‘Preserving the banks for agriculture will not only avoid costly environmental problems but will also maintain a series of greenbelts throughout the urban area as it expands.

The report specifically warned about Gango: ‘Expansion of flood plains in Lalitpur/Gangon should be controlled. Too much pressure will exist for this area to be fully preserved. It is best suited for nonresidential use due to drainage problems.’

Many of the multi-storey buildings built in this area since this warning were destroyed in the 2015 earthquake, killing many people. Although many features determine earthquake risk, shock waves generally do more damage in the soft sediments of Kathmandu than in rock.

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

What Now?

Looking back, Udupayha warns of more intense floods. ‘The valley’s hydrology is completely different.

We have already created a ticking time bomb... The storm water just cannot flow out of the narrowly jacked river channels without causing far, far, far more damage and destruction.

I asked the experts what could be done. ‘One has to go back to the planning,’ said Awan. ‘I would say, our need for new master plans...’

They need to be designed to accommodate future growth, to be resilient to extreme events and understand what needs to be done. The focus should go toward interdisciplinary water education.

Udupayha also called for technical help. ‘We need to have the technical help, I would say, we need a massive campaign to manage our water, not just boutique activities like building a few ponds and planting some trees.’

In the end, the solution is not an easy one. It requires political will and a commitment to change, but with the right leaders, it can be achieved.

An Assisted Missingness

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The report called for preserving lowlands for agricultural use along with Lalitpur’s Bagmati, Khokha, and Sabhak and on Kathmandu’s, Bhumisati, Balkhu, and Samakthi. ‘Not only are these vegetable belt farms of Kathmandu but they have high water tables and are poorly drained. Thus they are not good sites for urban development... Problems will surely occur.’

The report also observed that greenbelts along the rivers: ‘Preserving the banks for agriculture will not only avoid costly environmental problems but will also maintain a series of greenbelts throughout the urban area as it expands.

The report specifically warned about Gango: ‘Expansion of flood plains in Lalitpur/Gangon should be controlled. Too much pressure will exist for this area to be fully preserved. It is best suited for nonresidential use due to drainage problems.’

Many of the multi-storey buildings built in this area since this warning were destroyed in the 2015 earthquake, killing many people. Although many features determine earthquake risk, shock waves generally do more damage in the soft sediments of Kathmandu than in rock.

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

What Now?

Looking back, Udupayha warns of more intense floods. ‘The valley’s hydrology is completely different. We have already created a ticking time bomb... The storm water just cannot flow out of the narrowly jacked river channels without causing far, far, far more damage and destruction.

I asked the experts what could be done. ‘One has to go back to the planning,’ said Awan. ‘I would say, our need for new master plans...’

They need to be designed to accommodate future growth, to be resilient to extreme events and understand what needs to be done. The focus should go toward interdisciplinary water education.

Udupayha also called for technical help. ‘We need to have the technical help, I would say, we need a massive campaign to manage our water, not just boutique activities like building a few ponds and planting some trees.’

In the end, the solution is not an easy one. It requires political will and a commitment to change, but with the right leaders, it can be achieved.
**EVENTS**

**CONFERASIA 2021**
A 4-day international conference will bring together youth delegates from Kathmandu University, Silalaya, Colorado Central, Makawanpur and INTRAU, Indonesia to discuss global and cultural issues. 8-12 August

**Flash Fiction**
Submit a work of fiction or nonfiction in any genre in less than 1,000 words for a chance to win Rs 1,000 and get published in the Writer Magazine. Learn more at writing.com. Deadline: 12 August

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**PHOTO ARCHIVES**

**Nepal Picture Library**
Look at archived photographs from throughout Nepal’s history and learn the stories behind them at www.nepalpicturelibrary.org

**Digital Archaeology**
Look at historic photographs from Kathmandu, Patan, and Bhaktapur, Durbar squares, and watch 3D reconstructions of temples across Nepal. Visit the Digital Archaeology Foundation website for more details.

**World Press Photo**
Browses through the World Press Photo (https://www.worldpressphoto.org) online or in person, an award-winning photographic and photo stories from around the world.

**Project Apollo Archive**
The Project Apollo Archive on Apollo, created by photographer Fippo Teguara, is an online repository of more than 16,000 digital images of NASA’s manned landing program from 1964 to 1972.

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**GETAWAY**

**Chhaimele Village Resort**
Located with pin trees, Chhaimele Village Resort is an ideal destination for anyone seeking to escape the madness of Kathmandu city.
Chhaimele, 68806/6485

**The Famous Farm**
The three-story boutique hotel set of Kathmandu is Nepal’s best kept secret. This little traditional house has a lot of rich cultural heritage to share.
Kathmandu, 4722617

**Hotel Shamshala**
Located in the bustling Kathmandu, Hotel Shamshala is a fusion of cultural heritage and modern luxury. Enjoy Tibetan-themed rooms and a refreshing dip in the infinity pool overlooking the city.
Bagmati, 4760231

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**AIR QUALITY INDEX**

**KATHMANDU**

The Rain Air Quality Index (AQI) but measures the concentration of suspended particles below 2.5 microns in air, a bit larger than particles likely in Kathmandu. It is based on data provided by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and adjusted for local conditions. The AQI is a scale ranging from 0 to 500, where 0 is clean and 500 is hazardous. Follow the AQI for updates on www.aqi.kathmandu.org

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**DIARY**

**Kimff 2021**
Fill in the Kimff 2021 entry form and send it before 1 February 2019. Go to https://kimff.org/kimff-21 for more details.
Deadline: 1 September

**Learn French**
Consider learning a new language right from home, join the World Congress’s 6-week language immersion course. Get details on Facebook. Registration deadline: 13 August, 4 kr.

**Bouluka market**
Buy fresh and organic fruits and vegetables, freshly baked goods, and other delicious goods. Support local producers and businesses, and follow physical distancing guidelines: Saturday, Gopali Cafe, Bouluka

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**DINING**

**Bungalow Bar and Kitchen**
Enjoy authentic Thai dishes like Som Tam and Pad Ka Pao and Red Curry, or fusion dishes like the Park Lao/Chinese, Buff Lemoen Laos, and Fried Omelet, with a side of refreshing beverages. 9801095966

**Emra Restaurant**
Hotel Shambhala’s Emra Restaurant offers an upscale fine dining experience with chef’s unique dish, which is served with fresh meat soup, vegetable sauce, and the Emra house burger. Bagmati, 9801967287

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**ABOUT TOWN**

**KAIROS CAFE**
With a customizable breakfast, variety of juicy burgers and an assortment of Italian, Spanish and English cuisine, Kairos Cafe is a must for fodder.
Jalalabad, 54130807

**Uptala Cafe**
Uptala Cafe, a monastery restaurant, is perfect for anyone looking for halal vegetarian options with their signature use of fresh produce and moist-washing baked goods. Bhaktapur, 9801077163

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**YOU HAVE HIGH STANDARDS. SO WE DO!**

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**OUR PICK**

Like the 2017 series from the Marvel Cinematic Universe, see the thrilling God of Thunder captured by the Time Variant Acroythor (THA) – a powerful black and white robot that adds length, time and space to monitor and preserve the time flow of the world – a friend whosex jumps to the elder war and creates circles in the timeline. Under the INK act as a temporary-in-time agent who must make a choice: Help the agent who is arrested from termina or be weak. That is him, or be torn between three emotions.

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**WEBSITES**

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**KAIROS CAFE**
With a customizable breakfast, variety of juicy burgers and an assortment of Italian, Spanish and English cuisine, Kairos Cafe is a must for fodder.

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**ABOUT TOWN**
Letter to a Nepali aunty
You were me once, too, guide us to become a better version of ourselves

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

Life Time
Nejana Rajbhandary

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

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

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

I think I know why you are the way you are. It is because we have both lived the same life. You were me at some point, and I hope I am like you in the future, minus some of the qualities that you developed along the way.

We both grew up with rules and expectations. We both represented the grace and the shame of our families, where one wrong decision, and we would be scared for life. That is the life of the woman in our society. We were meant to be pure, untouched and strong enough to wait for a man who comes back home at 1AM.

In the beginning, you used to upset me. You always talked about my skin tone, my weight, and my future wedding date. You made me question if I was still of a desirable age. As I grew older, I realised some things.

You had a difficult life because you had it more challenging than me. Maybe it was your to-be, your aunty or the society that tasted you every step of the way and hardened your heart with the years.

You had to survive, and you did what you had to do to protect yourself. You grew stern and distant. You hid your vulnerability to the point where you forgot you have a heart. You took away your softness to not feel hurt.

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

You felt the pain, and you know how much it hurts. I wish for you not to let me go through it.

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

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

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

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

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

I promise to test you before tomorrow’s reception so we do not show up wearing the same shoes. Much love.

Your Younger Version
Anjana Rajbhandary

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Elderly left in Bhutan

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

- Mukesh Pokhrel in Jhapa

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

Dambar Kumar Khatiwada and his wife Kasturi Bahadur wait away their days at the Sunamche Refugee Camp just as they have for the past three decades in the same bamboo shed, but now without their two daughters and a son who have been resettled in the United States.

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

The couple are among more than 100,000 Nepali-speakers who were driven out of Bhutan in 1990-91, transported across India and driven into Nepal. Most of them were resettled in eight countries around the world, nearly 95,000 of them in the United States. But there are still 7,000 refugees left in two camps in Nepal, most of them elderly.

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

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

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

Japan award for Bhutan minister opposed

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In the wake of the center Bhutanese diaspora has come together to raise their voice of concern against Japan’s decision to confer this award,” said Jogen Gamza, convenor of the Japanese chapter of the global campaign. The Bhutanese are regarded as the world’s most forgotten refugees after 100,000 of them (one-sixth the population) who had been living in the country for generations were driven out of the country by the regime beginning 1990, and with the help of India forcibly driven into Nepal.

There are still 7,000 Bhutanese in two camps in southeastern Nepal, with the rest having been resettled in eight countries around the world, mostly 96,000 of them in the United States.

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

He was promoted to Home Minister and served from 1993-1998 before being made ambassador to Japan from 1999 to 2006.

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

Bhutanese human rights activist Tshon Karchi Ritual who was an Amnesty International ‘prisoner of conscience’ and imprisoned for 15 years has said he cannot understand why Japan is honouring a man like Tshering.

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

The selection has been described as the largest by any country in modern history in terms of the proportion of the original population, a process criticised by rights activists as Bhutan’s “ethnic cleansing” of its people.

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

T P Mishra, whose father was also detained and tortured by the Bhutan regime, and who is now settled in the US, “As a Jain, you must understand and appreciate the impact of the other side of Tshering’s career—that of the ethnic-cleansing of the Nepalese-speaking population in Bhutan and the hindering of them when resettled.”
Skeletons in the Cabinet

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

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

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

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

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

We also need more ministers because that will kick-start the economy after the pandemic slowdown, and have an immediate downstream impact on the labour market. A larger council of ministers will have a multiplier effect by unleashing Nepal by creating more jobs in the civil service, manufacturing, and the service industry.

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

That is just one minister. With the constitutionally-mandated size of the Cabinet, multiply all that by 3 and imagine the effect on the economy. It will create thousands of new jobs, and increase Nepal’s per capita GDP so we can stanch middle-income status ahead of schedule.

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

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