Government in installments

Mith Mohan

More than two months after Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba took office to lead a five-party coalition, he has not even been able to form a complete Cabinet. He had amassed a lot of experience in coalition bargaining during his previous five tenures as prime minister, but that has not prepared him for this.

Now, he is having a difficult time enthroning the kinglets within knots within the governing alliance. First, he has had to divide up ministerial portfolios among his coalition partners which turned out to be a major hurdle.

After the government was formed in mid-July, Deuba’s Nepali Congress (NC) and the Maoist Centre (MC) took the powerful finance, energy, home and law ministries for themselves.

He then appointed a loyalist to be state minister of health, and on Wednesday he hurriedly appointed Narenn Khadka as foreign minister to represent Nepal at the United Nations General Assembly.

Khadka was named, sworn in by the president, assumed office and departed for New York all within 12 hours.

The ministerial appointments had been stalled because Upen Yadav of the Janata Samajwadi Party (JSP) had wanted the post, which he has held twice before. Deuba has finally got all four parties to agree on a quota system for the NC and MC, and 5 each for the NC and the UML (US) of Madhav Kumar Nepal.

However, this still leaves the question of which party gets which of the remaining ministries. Predictably, the JSP and the UML (US) want portfolios with the biggest budget – education, agriculture, transport and physical infrastructure. Since this government will oversize the 2023 budget, the parties all want ministries with either power, or money, or both.

A Cabinet meeting on Tuesday decided abruptly to recall 12 ambassadors, including those to the US, UK, India and China, all political appointees of K.P. Oli. Among the envoys being recalled is Deuba’s own mother-in-law Prabhahapa Rana in Tokyo.

Analysts say one reason for this purge is to offer plum postings to newly coalition partners not satisfied with their allocated ministerial portfolios. Deuba also has to contend with demands from within his own NC, especially his rival Ram Chandra Paudel, for ministerships.

There has been outrage and ridicule on social media and from commentators about Prime Minister Deuba adding minister in installments.

The prime minister’s job is not easy. He had to suspend Parliament in the middle of the budget session in July so that he could pass an ordinance amending the Constitution to allow parties to split if they commanded only 20% of the membership of their parliamentary party.

But that ordinance, which needs to be ratified by Parliament within 60 days, has now become an albatross around Deuba’s neck.

Madhav Nepal of the UML (US) on whose behalf the ordinance had been introduced so he could legally break away from Oli’s UML, is worried that if it is not ratified his party will not have legal standing.

Nepal is also nervous about a writ filed in the Supreme Court by Oli, and if its verdict makes his party unconstitutional.

Yadev of the JSP, meanwhile, wants the ordinance scrapped before Cabinet expansion so that disgruntled members of his own party who do not get their preferred ministerhips do not break away.

Coalition members had said Cabinet expansion would happen on Wednesday, but negotiations appear to have stalled because of Madhav Nepal and Upen Yadav wanting different things for their own partisan reasons.
Nepal needs to get its climate act together

Adapting to a hotter Himalaya will need measures for climate resilient agriculture, lowering flood risk of glacial lakes, and helping fish and wildlife adapt to the new climate. The country also needs to ensure that its carbon footprint is reduced.

The mountainous terrain and the Himalayas are home to some of the world's most diverse habitats. Nepal is home to over 100 species of mammals, 1,100 species of birds, and over 250 species of reptiles and amphibians. The country also has a significant number of endangered species, including the Snow Leopard, Asian Elephant, and the Great Indian One-Horned Rhinoceros.

In addition to the biodiversity, Nepal has a rich cultural heritage. The country is home to the ancient city of Kathmandu, which is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the nearby Pokhara, which is a popular destination for tourists.

Despite these natural resources, Nepal is facing a number of challenges, including deforestation, pollution, and climate change. The country is one of the least developed in the world, and its economy is heavily dependent on agriculture and tourism.

The government of Nepal needs to take action to address these challenges. This includes implementing policies to reduce carbon emissions, protecting the country's biodiversity, and promoting sustainable tourism.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Nepal needs to take action to address the challenges it is facing. This includes implementing policies to reduce carbon emissions, protecting the country's biodiversity, and promoting sustainable tourism. By taking these steps, Nepal can ensure a brighter future for its people and its natural resources.
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Sino-Nepal ties in the ‘post-Afghan’ era

The MCC debate in Nepal must be seen in the context of Asia’s restructured geopolitics.

Bhaskar Koirala

The course of Sino-Nepal relations is likely to enter a new historical phase in the aftermath of the US exit from Afghanistan, and the signing of the ‘Aksai’ security pact this past week between Australia, the UK and the US.

WORLD WIDE

The associated decline in the importance of global terrorism is a defining feature of international politics. But there is also a sharper emphasis on great power rivalry, primarily in the context of China’s expanding role globally, specifically in Eurasia.

The United States has now determined the Indo-Pacific as its core area of interest in this new period. How to and to what extent the fundamentals of Sino-Nepal relations will be impacted by this structural change in geopolitics is yet to be determined.

Neither the lessons of the Cold War nor the period of globalisation that followed, will serve as an infallible basis upon which to extrapolate about the future contours of bilateral relations between Nepal and China.

What is now emerging is the principal fault line in international politics after the Global War on Terror is the question of hegemony in Asia. Is the US prepared to tolerate a potential peer competitor that gains increasing primacy in Asia, and steadily erodes its options and manoeuvrability in the region, including in capitals like Kathmandu?

The vociferous and cacophonous debate in Nepal concerning the MCC, for instance, should be understood within this broader framework (instead of deferring to an intellectually convenient position of assuming that bilateral relations (whether Sino-Nepal), Indo-Nepal or US-Nepal) exist in an unvarnished vacuum.

If there are any lessons to be learnt from the history of the Cold War or the period of globalisation that followed, it is that the bilateral relations between any two countries do not operate in a bubble.

However, history does serve as an indispensable point of departure for any analyst that seeks to prognosticate the nature of Sino-Nepal relations in the coming near future. Some five months prior to the 9/11 al-Qaeda attacks that prompted the US invasion of Afghanistan, tensions were rising between Washington and Beijing as the George W Bush administration labelled China as a ‘strategic competitor’.

That was, of course, in masked contrast to his predecessor Bill Clinton’s policy of forging a strategic partnership with China, embodied most explicitly in the US Congress passing legislation to grant Permanent Normal Trade Relations with China and the US Senate’s vote to give China permanent most-favoured-nation status, both in 2000.

This paved the way for China’s eventual accession to the WTO in 2001.

George W Bush was laser-focused on shifting attention away from what was perceived as Clinton’s flawed and benign approach vis-a-vis Beijing, towards what was deemed as an emerging “near-peer” threat from China. But after the twin towers in New York were brought down by al-Qaeda operations, this radically, abruptly, and almost completely, shifted US attention to Asia. Washington first attacked al-Qaeda bases in Afghanistan to decimate the fulcrum of radical international terrorism. Events in Iraq, Libya and Syria would soon follow.

Some analysts have argued that had the 9/11 attacks not reoriented US attention, the likelihood of China’s path towards great power status would have been considerably easier, even contained. That logic is that the US would have shifted in its defence and economic posture towards China much earlier than when it actually did towards the end of the first term of the Obama presidency.

Obama’s pivot to Asia in 2012 and the ‘Indo-Pacific Strategic’ conceptualised by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, was advanced vigorously by the Trump administration, and is being given continuity by President Joe Biden.

In 2007 when the ‘Global War on Terror’ was launched, China had just been admitted to the WTO and was weakly linked to the world economy. Two decades later, China has become the largest economy in the world measured in purchasing power parity terms, and is substantially interwoven within the global economy. It is now the largest export destination for 35 countries, and the largest source of imports for 60 countries.

Bhaskar Koirala is the Director of the Nepal Institute of International and Strategic Studies.

Budget approved

Amidst a Covid surge that has seen 4,600 new cases and 16 deaths in the last 24 hours, Parliament passed the budget for fiscal year 2077/78 as an Appropriation Bill this week. The previous and nearest introduced by Finance Minister Janardan Sharma on 15 August because of IMF assessment of fiscal payment, after which government spending was paused. The Rs6.5 trillion budget is now passed by the National Assembly and ratified by the President.

City Express and Terrapad

Terralay, a global payment technology infrastructure company, has partnered with the City Express Money Transfer, to strengthen its network for inward remittances into Nepal. Terrapay’s interoperability engine and reach in 70 countries will enable individuls residing overseas to send payments in a scalable, secure, transparent, and efficient platform, and reap the in real time,” says Chandra’s “lender of City Express.

Citroen in Nepal

Shriya Khobchub, authorized dealer of Citroen cars in Nepal, has opened branches for the C4 Cactus cars of 6.5 million. Citroen has already set to arrive in Nepal by mid-July.

Cathay Pacific’s 75 years

Hong Kong-based Cathay Pacific is celebrating 75 years of service. Cathay Pacific is the world’s third oldest surviving airline over the years. We have successfully navigated unprecedented challenges, such as the global pandemic, which we are all still overcoming,” says CLO Angus Tang.

Sanima-Samsung tieup

Sanima Bank, a leading bank in Nepal, has signed an agreement with Samsung Electronics to provide payment for the purchase of mobile phones and Samsung devices. Sanima Bank will also extend its credit card services to Samsung customers.

Buddha Everest flights

Buddha Air has resumed its flights to several destinations from Kathmandu. The airline is operating flights on Saturdays and costs Rs 5,950 for Nepali passengers who also get a complimentary flight on the return.

AEDs on Himalayan

With the international border open for tourists and trekkers, the government has increased the number of automated external defibrillators (AEDs), a portable device that automatically diagnoses and treats life-threatening sudden cardiac arrest, around all its five of three AEDs and one AEDs. The AEDs can be found at the exits of all heliports and ground handling offices at the airport. All cabin crew and ground personnel have been trained to use.

Global IME debenture

Global IME Bank Ltd (GIM) has issued a Rs7.5 million in Rs 15.6 percent Debenture 2078/79 (Fiscal year) (Report). The debenture has a five-year term period with an 8.5 percent interest, awarded annually.
2 more Nepali antiquities traced to US museum

Activists aim to have the sacred objects returned to shrines in Kathmandu from which they were stolen

A
s the return by Western museums and private collectors of Nepal’s stolen antiquities gathers pace, two more religious objects from Kathmandu Valley shrines have been located at The Rubin Museum of Art in New York.

The wooden artifacts between 400-700 years old were tracked down at The Rubin by the group Lost Arts of Nepal which has been investigating sacred objects so that they can be returned to the shrines from where they were stolen in Kathmandu.

One of the items is a 14th century carved wooden architectural element of a flying gandharva (divine singer) that was stolen from Hum Bahad in the 1980s. The other is a wooden torana (doorway) that is 500 years old and was wrenched out of a doorway in Til Bahad in Patan.

Both objects are exquisite examples of Newa devotional art and photographs in art and architecture publications in the 1970s of the objects in situ in Kathmandu shrines prove their provenance. It is not known who stole them, and how they came to be in the possession of The Rubin, which has now been withdrawn from view.

Announcement about the two objects was made at the official launch on Friday at the Patan Museum of The Nepal Heritage Recovery Campaign by Lalitpur Mayor Chitraboke Maharjan. The Campaign aims to work for the return of sacred objects to the temples and monuments from where they were stolen, or to

museums in Nepal.

The Campaign has informed the Nepal consulate in New York about the objects in possession of The Rubin, and says it will start working immediately to facilitate the restitution of these and other antiques.

Lost Arts of Nepal is based in the US and has tracked down numerous other stolen Nepali antiques, some of which have already been returned or handed over to Nepal authorities.

Just last week, a 106th century stone figure of Uma Maheswar, stolen from the temple in Patan 50 years ago was handed over to the Nepal Embassy in Washington DC by the Denver Art Museum.

In the past year, six stolen stone and bronze sacred statuary have been handed back to Nepal. They include the 13th century Laxmi Narayan statue from Patan Temple in Patan returned by the Dallas Museum of Art, a 13th century carved wooden Apasmara from a temple save, and a 700 year old Buddha.

A 15th century Ganesh was also recently returned by the Manhattan District Attorney’s Office, and a 17th century Shrivalinga stones from Kathmandu was returned to the Nepal Embassy in Washington by the Art Institute of Chicago.

These objects are temporarily stored at the Patan Museum or National Museum in Chitwan before being returned and conserved at their original shrines.

“We are committed to restoring the sacred statues that have been returned to the temples from which they were stolen,” Mayor Maharjan said at the launch of the Nepal Heritage Recovery Campaign.

The Campaign’s patron is historian Suyamohan Joshi and is chaired by Rudhi Baha Pradhan, former Director General of the Department of Archaeology. Other members include Dilendra Shrestha of Patan Museum, lawyer Sanjay Adhikari, Robin Ramkirti of the Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust, Rbansha Minha of Taunggung Museum and journalist Kannal Mani Dixit.

The anonymous investigator of the Lost Arts of Nepal is in the Advisory Council with other international art restitution activists, including Art Crime professor at the City University of New York Elinor Evans-Pritchard.

After news broke of the gandharvas and Uma at The Rubin, Thompson tweeted on 17 September: ‘What do you say, Rubin Museum – will you join the Denver Art Museum and Dallas Museum of Fine Arts in repatriating stolen sacred artwork from Nepal?’

The Rubin Museum of Art was founded by Sherman and Donald Rubin who began collecting Himalayan art in the 1970s, and has as its main mission, “inspiring personal connections to the ideas, cultures, and art of Himalayan regions”.

After the 2013 earthquake, the Rubin held a special exhibition of some of the Nepali antiques in its collection, including a gilded Durga statue from the 13th century, of which the museum says it is confident about its provenance.

Last week on Ganesh Chaturthi, it highlighted a copper alloy Ganesh figure from Nepal in its collection.

An AI favours investigation in 2018 of sacred antiques stolen from Mustang titled ‘The Great Funder’ led to police raids and probes of antique shops in Kathmandu and museums.

In a statement at the time, The Rubin said that it ‘vehemently opposes the trafficking of stolen cultural items’, which does not acquire any material known or suspected to be stolen or illicit.

The Nepal Heritage Recovery Campaign is chasing up 15 other stolen Nepali antiques in the possession of collectors and museums in the US, UK, Australia, Germany, France and other countries. It has started work on investigating the provenance of the stolen objects to provide proof for their repatriation to Nepal.

The District Attorney Office in Manhattan has been involved in an investigation of a $243 million antiques smuggling ring that stole and sold artifacts from Nepal, India, Cambodia, Thailand and other countries. It seized some of the stolen objects, and in 2011 extradited Dibi Suhbbeh Kapoor, who was arrested in 2011.

In July, the DA’s office arrested 56-year-old British aristocrat Neil Perry Smith after extraditing him from Britain. He is accused of preparing 23 stolen antiques valued at $82 million for sale to Kapoor’s clients at his gallery, Art of the Past. Some of those objects were from Nepal, the indictment says.
15 years after the Ghunsa tragedy, the Kangchenjunga Conservation Area is a nature protection model

Ghena S Gurung

Tucked in the sacred Himalayan landscape of the northeastern corner of Nepal, the Kangchenjunga Conservation Area (KCA) is home to the world’s third highest mountain ecosystem. It is also Nepal’s first conservation area managed by the local community.

It was declared ‘A Gift to the Earth’ by the Nepal government in support of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Living Planet Campaign in April 1997, and has a long-standing history of perseverance, resilience, and of striking a balance between conservation gains for people and nature.

The KCA’s 2,035 sq km area hosts a vast assortment of biological diversity. It is part of the Eastern Himalayan Global 200 cross-border eco-region, and millions of people downstream depend on it and its water towers. Recognizing the significance of the region, there have been integrated efforts to protect its biodiversity and improve livelihoods of local communities.

WWF Nepal’s engagement in the KCA dates back to 1990, when it first conducted a feasibility study followed by the inception of the Kangchenjunga Conservation Area Project (KCAP) in 1998.

It was rolled out in partnership with local communities under the leadership of the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation. After almost a decade, the government of Nepal undertook the historic step of handing over management responsibilities of KCA to local communities on 22 September 2006 – making it the first protected area to be managed by the local community in Nepal.

Community-driven conservation hinges on the notion of increased community participation in decision-making and natural resource management, which has allowed the KCA to address key challenges such as forest degradation, human snow leopard conflict, and gender inequality.

These initiatives have been critical in promoting women’s empowerment by enhancing their role in nature conservation and decision-making, particularly in natural resource management.

Since its inception, KCAP has supported 35 Mothers’ Groups and helped them secure a critical role in decision-making and management. Starting off as a small network, the Mothers’ Groups have expanded to include a wide spectrum of activities including support for non-formal education to the older generation, and education for girls. There are cleanliness and health-hygienic programs, childcare, and initiatives to promote financial independence of women through saving and credit schemes. The Mothers’ Groups are a model for translating the rights of the women over natural resource management into action, and provide scholarships to girls from low-income families through an endowment fund of Rs. 6 million in each group. It supports income generation activities and provides scholarships for students, particularly girls from vulnerable households. So far, 206 girls have benefitted from scholarships.

Community-based snow leopard conservation and prey monitoring has also begun in which citizen scientists have been trained to keep track of the endangered cats and their prey. This project uses a wide gamut of technologies from conventional sign surveys to camera traps, focal DNA surveys and GPS collaring.

Already, the KCA’s presence is seen in increased forest cover, from 31.50% in 1999 to 54.80% in 2015. As a result, from zero snow leopards in 1999, there were 38 of the animals moving between India, China and Nepal. The return of the Himalayan wolf is also encouraging, as is the increase in population of Blue sheep from 1,167 in 2007 to 1,638 by 2015. While encouraging, there are still challenges like human-wildlife conflict, especially with the return of the wolves. Even
so there have been for retaliatory killings of wolves, with not a single case since the establishment in 2004 of Chitwan Community Snow Leopard Insurance Scheme, supported by University of Zurich. There are four livestock insurance schemes with a revolving fund of Rs 4 million, along with a Rs 2.7 million crop damage relief fund.

KCA has earned national and international recognition for its conservation success and taken forward the legacy of the conservation heroes who tragically lost their lives in a helicopter accident in Ghunsa on 23 September 2006, just a day after handing over the Keelingchowki Conservation Area to the local community.

KCA has come a long way in the 15 years since. There are challenges about representation and leadership of women in the management Council of the KCA needs to increase. The role of local governments in the Council also has to be redefined.

There is also the possibility of developing the Keelingchowki region as a T inbound Peace Park as a model of transboundary and regional cooperation for biodiversity conservation.

The community-based Livestock Insurance Schemes have grown to be a successful human-wildlife conflict mitigation measure, but this activity needs to be scaled up and integrated with the government compensation mechanisms.

Then there is the potential to promote nature-based tourism and green enterprises as alternative livelihood options for the communities past-Covid.

Environment and wildlife friendly infrastructure have to be designed to maintain ecological connectivity in the region particularly with the new roads and hydro-power projects in the region.
**EVENTS**

- Writing workshop: Sign up for Kathmandu’s writing workshop on ‘Fragments’ facilitated by writer Sherin Ahmed, who will guide participants to draft and compress written work. Register at https://www.kathmandu.org/nepal/workshops/on-fragments by 30 September. 2 October, 9am onwards. Fee: Rs 1500.

- Film festival: Watch films from across Europe and Nepal on environment and climate change at the Nepal European Union Film Festival (NEUFF 2021). Go to https://www.ethniko harassed by the power of the wild.

**MUSEUMS**

- Virtual Museum Tours: Google Arts & Culture has teamed up with over 2,500 museums and galleries around the world to bring everyone virtual tours and online exhibits of some of the world’s most famous museums.

**GETAWAY**

- Bandipur Kaushi Inn: A small, quiet place to stay in the idyllic village of Bandipur, replete with cultural diversity and traditional architecture. Bandipur, Chitwan, (985) 509850.

**GASTRONOMY**


- Bhumil: Experience authentic Newari flavors in a peaceful setting.

- Curio: Get a taste of diverse cuisines, from Korean to Japanese, with a variety of dishes.

- French Bakery: Enjoy a unique bread-making experience at the French Bakery, where you can watch the local potters shape the bread, and try it with some delicious baked goods.

**Air Quality Index**

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**OUR PICK**

- Photo Sindhu: A creative photography tour of the city of Kathmandu. Pack your cameras and explore the city’s cultural heritage.

- Global Nepali Museum: Global Nepali Museum is the first museum of its kind that features Nepali art and artifacts that have been housed in museums around the world. Go to https://globalnepalmuseum.com for more information.

- Comic Museums: Meet superheroes, villains, and guest robots on a Google Earth virtual trip around ten of the most iconic comic book settings, including the Batman Museum, the Spiderman Museum, and the X-Men Museum.

- The Pavilions: A luxurious resort with a focus on fitness, spa, and relaxation.

- Akam Hotel: A boutique hotel offering a fusion of local Nepali and international cuisine.

**KATHMANDU**

- Event: "Serious About Beer: We Put Serious Hours in Your Happy Hour."


- Call: 400-50097

- Email: info@seriousaboutbeer.com
Toilet encounters

The tendency in men to use the toilet carelessly can be disturbing for others.

When are you going to turn your feature into?" he yells at me from the toilet.

"Sorry?" I turn my head towards his voice. The door to the Men's is open.

As always, I hate having to use the toilet at Nepal Tourism Board. In live, I've always wondered how one is expected to use a space as small. I tend to get agitated even before I enter it.

I open the main door and standing before the mirror, I am, towering over the basin. They're doing some last-minute fixing, standing taller than anyone I have met in my life, placed grandly in a peach silk gown, with floral patterns. I love your blog posts about massage. I've often wondered what kind of pain actually brings, I say.

"Thanks," they say and continue to get dizzy by the mirror. It was the first time I was speaking to someone who uses 'they' as a pronoun. I carry an oil into the cubicle, where it feels like the walls are about to crush me. I wonder how they might have used a space so tiny. I also think of how we had watched for a few minutes in a tight space and how, unlike similar encounters with men, I had not felt threatened.

Suburban Tales

I put AKIRA on the table, and it looks even more stylish in the dim light.

AKIRA
Elegance Redefined
PREMIUM NEPALESE WINE

"Yes, in the hills-town, women fall for him every time they heard him speak during church. And there were other rumours that made the girls blush. But there was, standing amidst us, talking about ethos and love for all living beings. Just as the bell rang after lunch break, I showed my bag into Rosy's arms saying, 'I need to use the toilet.' I ran as I always did and stopped suddenly at the main door of the lavatory.

The door to the cubicle in the centre was open, partly showing off the dark navy blue attire. Facing away from me was Fr. K, relieving himself. When he heard the steps, he tilted his head, looked at me and said, 'Oh, hello.' And continued at what he was having.

I felt like my face was on fire. Why was he in the students' toilet instead of the GENTS in the staff room building? Had no one briefed him about the toilet rules in an all-girls' institution? I walked away, the startling sound of shower softly hitting the toilet floor ringing in my ears.

Back in the classroom, Rosy asked me why I looked so frustrated. I said it was nothing, I said, I was glad the retreat would be over in a few hours. She looked at me like she couldn't believe my ears.

I make my way to the toilets, a short walk from the hall at the literature festival venue. The door to the toilet is open. A man stands inside, relieving himself. He is wearing loose clothing. His short shirt collar is met at the neck by pepper curls. A cotton bag is slung over his shoulder. "Sorry," he says.

When I go back to my seat, I see this man again. He is now seated on the stage alongside other speakers. The moderator introduces him as the writer of a book which is named after a certain exploding fruit. Later, I would try to read the book and never be able to finish it.

"I'm your fan," I say to the politician, as he walks into the studio, preparing for a live interview. As the studio producer helps him with the lapel mic and framing, I make small talk.

"I disagree with your thoughts regarding feminism, but I have always been impressed by how clearly you make your argument on why we don't need it."

"That's all right, Nano," he says. "In a democracy, we are all allowed to disagree."

The interview is over and it is my turn to go on the air, before which I always use the toilet. I walk towards the row of restrooms. The first one on the floor has its door flung open and our guest's colourful Dhaka salwar stands out in the semi-darkness of the cubicle.

"Eat," he says.

Part AKIRA is always time for your last cup of tea. I am standing by the lift, waiting, when he absently, slowly walks past me towards the toilet, muttering a casual hi. Given the short distance between the lift and the toilet, a strong smell would sometimes hover in the lobby.
Nepal's most expensive project to supply water to Kathmandu will be at heightened risk for decades

Mukesh Pokhrel

Two months after a massive debris flow on the Melamchi River knocked out Nepal's most expensive water supply project, geologists investigating the disaster say the danger will remain for decades to come.

Torrents of boulders and mud paste buried the headworks of the Melamchi Water Supply Project under 25m of debris on 11 and 30 July. Waves of debris washed away the highway and bridges connecting the site, submerged settlements, and killed at least 30 people.

The much-delayed $350 million project had started test distribution of water from the Langtang National Park through a 24km tunnel to Kathmandu residents in April. Fortunately, the tunnel had been sealed for inspection a few hours before the flood hit, and was saved.

Geologists and experts are now trying to study the upper reaches of the Melamchi watershed to determine what caused the disasterous debris flow, and to see if anything can be done to mitigate future floods. What they found does not bode well.

Project engineers say that the two big floods in July caused damage worth more than Rs 2 billion, including destroying the 22km link road, 6 bridges, warehouses and offices. Six project staff from Nepal, India and China were killed.

"Melamchi is now uncertain, we do not know when we can restart the project," says senior divisional engineer Rajendra Prasad Pant. "We need to make a much more extensive study of the watershed upstream to determine if we can control future floods, and if so, how long it will take."

Indeed, aerial inspection and satellite imagery of the Melamchi Valley upstream shows a massive sediment field that is constantly collapsing and being washed down by heavy monsoon downpours. Engineers say they are trying to mobilise heavy earthmovers to clear the debris and send water into the tunnel through a temporary channel by the end of the year to resume the 370 million litres of water supply a day to Kathmandu. Just this part of the job will add another Rs 1 billion to the cost of the project.

But there remains the enormous challenge of dealing with the 3.8km long crumbling sediment field upriver, which they say will pose a danger for decades to come. No one has an estimate of how much any mitigation measures will cost, or if it is even possible.

But besides immediate repairs at the headworks, the disaster has also put on hold the second and third phase of the project, which was to extend the tunnel to Yangai and Larki, two parallel valleys to the east to augment the tunnel capacity by another 340 million litres per day (see map, overleaf).

Although engineers had studied the upper reaches of the Melamchi to scope out any glacial lake or unstable slopes, they had never expected the sediment field to be so fragile and unstable.

"So far, we think the disaster was caused by record rainfall in the catchment area which had been destabilised by the 2015 earthquake," explains Shiva Baskota of the Department of Mines and Geology, who recently flew over Bhotekosi region, and said he saw extensive slope failure on the Melamchi and its tributary stream, the Pumdang.

Baskota estimates that some 150 cubic metres of fluvial, glacial or lacustrine deposits still sit on the river upstream at an elevation of 3,500m, and this is constantly being washed down by the river because of continuing heavy rains. On 31 July, a weather station in nearby Sermathang recorded 110mm of rain in 24 hours.

Some scientists blame the extreme weather events on...
climate change, and say that heavy downpours are now falling on higher altitudes where there used to be snowfall. Other researchers believe that in addition to heavy rainfall, a glacial lake in Langtang National Park burst, adding material to the debris flow.

“It looks like there has not been an adequate disaster risk assessment of the catchment area,” Baskota says. “This means we have to study the glaciers above Langtang and Lura before starting the next phase of the Melamchi water project.”

There is a way to reduce the danger from future flooding in the Melamchi by building check dams along the river to slow the flow of the debris. But they admit it is a huge and expensive undertaking which has to start as soon as the monsoon ends to be prepared for next year’s rains.

Climate scientist Raja Pandit Chhetri says that the impact of global warming in the Himalayas is only going to increase, so current and future infrastructure along the mountains have to take the risk into account.

“Living on bridges, highways, water supply all have to be designed to withstand extreme events,” says Chhetri. “It may drive up the cost of the project, but they will prevent greater loss. Planning for a disaster like this would not have affected the Melamchi project as badly as it did.”

Some water experts say that an expensive project like Melamchi should never have been built in the first place. When cheaper alternatives to supply water to Kathmandu through reservoirs on the Valley rim to stores monsoon water was possible.

“Even back then, some of us had warned that Melamchi was not a feasible project,” says water scientist Ajaya Dixit. “We had not foreseen a disaster like the one this year, but we know that Kimchi’s rugged terrain made it a risky place to invest in expensive infrastructures.”

Government officials, however, say that although the Norwegian consultants of the Melamchi project had assessed seismic and environmental risk and designed it for a lifespan of 130 years, nothing like the flood in July was ever expected.

“Was it perhaps not factored in was the new risk added by accelerated global warming?” says Pant. A British consultant had conducted a study in 1988 of rivers in and around Kathmandu Valley to select the most suitable river for a project to augment the Valley’s water supply, but on the route of flow, in the incised and prominent Melamchi was chosen as the most appropriate.

The Melamchi project was thus launched, but there were delays due to political interference, local opposition, earthquakes, blockades, pandemic and other upheavals.

The project therefore took three times longer than it should have and was inaugurated on 4 April by President Bidya Devi Bhandari. Households and businesses in Kathmandu felt a great sense of relief that the water had finally arrived, but within three months the flood damaged the project and stopped the water supply.

In the Ministry of Water Supply, there is already talk of finding alternative sources of water for the Valley even if Melamchi is restored — because of the continued flood risk on the river, and the fact that the project will not be able to satisfy the thirst of an expanding capital.

As present the water utility for Kathmandu supplies between 80-170 million litres to consumers every day from existing reservoirs, streams and groundwater. Melamchi had doubled that supply, but it still did not meet demand. Pumping groundwater has also lowered Kathmandu’s water table, and that supply is dwindling.
Filled your CCMC form?

As an adventure destination, Nepal’s policy has always been to make it as thrilling as possible for tourists who visit the country with attractions like white water rafting, bungee jumping, trekking, and negotiating gridlocks at Nagthungan.

Now that Covid-19 cases are going down, tourism will pick up again and we must exult that sense of excitement to the Nepal holiday. The Dept of Tourism & Museum is on it in: together with the Covid-19 Control and Management Center (CCMC) it has a mandatory application form, and you need to fill it out and get a QR code before landing at Kathmandu airport.

The CCMC has designed the form like an entrance exam to a medical college – just to add to the thrill of visiting Nepal.

Here is a sample:

**CCMC-19 Clerk Management Center (CCMC), Kathmandu**

**Nature of arrival in Nepal:**
- [ ] by flight
- [ ] by road
- [ ] by train
- [ ] by Underground

**Travel date since Covid:**

**Name of the holder:**

**Circumstances to get Quarantined for 14 Days After Arrival in Nepal:**
- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

**Reason for return to Nepal:**
- [ ] Missing home/medicine and desperately needed for treatment
- [ ] Booked flights and no other alternative
- [ ] Heart as an urgent treatment in Nepal. Guests are Gems?

**Proof of contact with patients with breathing difficulties in 14 days:**
- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

**Do you have any of these symptoms:**
- Fever
- Cough
- Difficulty breathing
- Shortness of breath
- Fatigue
- Nausea
- Diarrhoea
- Conform
- Loss of taste

**Other:**

**Special remarks:**

**Signed:**

The Ass