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Ramesh Kumar

A country is being offered its largest ever infrastructure grant, but is torn between accepting it or not. The donor nation appears more eager to give the money than the recipient to take it.

That, in a nutshell, is what is happening to the \$500 million Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) grant from America to upgrade Nepal's power grid and highways. Political leaders opposed to the MCC have weaponised it to strike at rivals to such an extent that they cannot now backtrack – even though generated power is already being wasted because of the lack of transmission capacity.

The tussle over the MCC in Nepal has geopolitical undercurrents because of growing Sino-US tensions. Frequent visits to Kathmandu by US functionaries are an indication of just how important the project is for Washington – even though its official line is that it is up to Nepal to take it or leave it.

The US Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs Donald Lu and his deputy Kelly Keiderling are both in Kathmandu this week to meet Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and other leaders. These visits follow a 4-day trip in September by Fatema Z Sumar, Vice President of Compact Operations at the MCC.

The Americans seem genuinely mystified about why a country like Nepal that needs all the help it can get to develop

its infrastructure, and which stands to lose billions in wasted hydroelectricity in the coming years because of the lack of transmission lines, should be so hesitant about their grant.

Officially, the US Embassy said in a statement this week that Lu and Keiderling were in Kathmandu as part of a regional trip to discuss 'climate change, Covid-19 response and strengthening democracy'. The MCC was pointedly not mentioned.

Lu has been posted before in New Delhi, and is a South Asia hand. Diplomatic sources say MCC is definitely going to figure prominently in his discussions here, which will be a follow-up to the short interaction Prime Minister Deuba had with US President Joe Biden in Glasgow two weeks ago during COP26. Deuba also met the deputy chief of the MCC Alexia Latortue, and told her that he and the leaders of his five-party coalition supported the MCC moving ahead.

On his return from Glasgow, Deuba told the press that he and Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal had written to the Americans assuring them that they would push MCC ratification. Dahal subsequently backtracked, saying he had only agreed to amendments to the contract. One source said Dahal told party insiders he did not want the controversy to weaken the coalition, and cost votes in elections.

The private sector has warned that Nepal faces huge losses if the five-year compact is not approved. "We will lose Rs142 billion annually if we do not upgrade our infrastructure for power distribution, the

MCC is designed to help us with that," says Dinesh Shrestha of the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI).

At present, Nepal is generating 2,000MW of energy, but in the next three years this figure will soar to 4,500MW, not taking into account power generation from smaller plants. Peak demand is at 1,500MW which is increasing by 20% every year. Even then, Nepal will have excess of 4,700MW by 2025, which it risks wasting unless there are new transmission lines – with or without the MCC.

Most of the \$500 million MCC grant is earmarked for the Kathmandu-Hetauda-Butwal 400KV transmission line to distribute electricity from existing and new hydropower plants in central and eastern Nepal, and also connect to a high-capacity line to Gorakhpur so Nepal can sell surplus monsoon electricity to India.

Says hydropower investor Gyanendra Lal Pradhan: "If the Kathmandu-Hetauda-Butwal transmission line is not built under the MCC, investors will have folded, and even banks that have backed the projects will be in deep waters. It will be tragic for a country with such immense hydropower potential."

It has been four years since a coalition government consisting of the Nepali Congress and Maoists signed the MCC contract in Washington, which is awaiting ratification by Nepal's Parliament. In her last visit, the

MCC' Fatema Sumar said the US was not prepared to wait indefinitely for Nepal to get its act together.

"Countries knock at our doors all the time for capital, as it is getting harder and harder to obtain development funds," Sumar said in Kathmandu in September. "We are holding \$500 million for Nepal. We cannot wait forever. When will it be the right time for Nepal?"

The project was held hostage by prolonged political infighting first between Prime Minister Oli and Dahal, and now between radicalised members within the ruling coalition. With the 2023 elections approaching, leaders who were themselves responsible for using the MCC against rivals do not want Parliament ratification to affect their poll prospects. Dahal's explanation to his party that he wants the MCC pushed to after elections proves this.

The cost of no MCC

Electricity going waste

PAGE 4-5

Current Demand-Supply

Projected generation (estimated)

Projected peak demand

2018

2021

2023

2025

2030

MW

10,000

5,000

2,000

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Good COP, bad COP

Just as the deadlocked climate summit in Glasgow was being extended by a day last week, Kathmandu was once again shrouded in smoke and smog from stubble burning and industrial pollution from northern India, as well as the valley's own vehicular emissions.

Nothing could have drawn the link between global negotiations in Scotland to save the planet from catastrophic heating, and the clear and present danger stemming from flawed policies of national governments.

India was blamed for watering down the final resolution by changing 'phaseout' to 'phasedown' of coal, while rich countries like Australia, the US and others did not put their cash where their mouths were to make up for their historical and current emissions.

There were two Conference of Parties (COPs) going on simultaneously in Glasgow last week: one where mainly male politicians in suits protected their national interest to negotiate commas and brackets, and the other dominated by young women trying to warn world leaders that it was their future they were messing with.

The toxic air covering northern India and Nepal while COP26 was taking place was a stark reminder that developing countries cannot go around hectoring industrialised countries about 'climate justice' when their own policies poison their air, water and soil.

With winter approaching, it looks like this year's Indo-Gangetic smog will only get worse since India does not have to 'phaseout' coal, and there is no mandatory timetable even for 'phasing down'.

Nepal is not doing much better. Its petroleum import bill is doubling every few years, and we do not see the political commitment to implement provisions in the updated Nationally Determined Contribution, or the *Climate Ambition at the Top of the World* report that was unveiled in Glasgow.

Nepal was praised internationally (and also modestly patted itself in the back) for its three pledges in Glasgow: to increase forest cover to 45% by 2030, start reducing emissions to become carbon negative after 2045, and ensure climate resilience for all vulnerable people by 2030.

The forestry target is the most do-able, because Nepal's total forest area is already at 44.74% -- we just have to make sure no more trees are cut in the next nine years.

So, no Nijgad.

But we have no idea how the government expects to help all Nepalis adapt to climate impact. That goal is so vague and non-measurable as to be meaningless.

And then there is the aim to be 'net-zero' by 2045. Net-zero is an excuse to keep burning fossil fuel, hoping that forests somewhere will absorb the carbon. Besides, net-zero will not protect citizens from toxic emissions from car tailpipes and smokestacks.

Nepal's commitment is conditional upon financial support, and there may be a strong moral argument for 'loss and damage' compensation because the country only contributes 0.5% of total global greenhouse gas emissions.

However, we do not have to wait for donors in order to switch from petro-energy to hydro, solar and wind. Tax rebates for electric public transport, subsidies for cooking appliances, and switching industries like cement, steel and manufacturing to electricity just need political will.

As we have argued here before, Nepal needs to do this not so much to avert a planetary emergency, but to save our economy

from collapse, and to protect the public from breathing poisonous air.

Every year, Kathmandu's pollution level sets a new record. This spring, the Valley's air quality index (AQI) hit nearly

700 because of vehicular emissions combined with wildfire smoke. This was 40 times the level deemed safe to breathe by WHO's new guidelines. Covid patients at ICUs across the country are being replaced by people with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

Given Nepal's small carbon footprint, we might even attain net-zero status before 2045 because vehicle manufacturers are going electric, so we could not import diesel buses after 2030 even if we wanted to. But government policy must align with our Glasgow pledges. The on-again-off-again tax rebated on EVs in the past four years does not bode well for the future.

In addition, Nepalis need help to adapt to cope with the water crisis and resulting food insecurity, as well as the impact of weather-related disasters like in Melamchi and Manang this year. (*See page 10-11*)

After returning from lobbying rich country delegates in Glasgow, Nepali activists and scientists should now turn their attention to putting pressure on our own government to get climate smart.

Sonia Awale



Rich countries failed the planet in Glasgow, now countries like Nepal have to come up with local solutions to protect our own economy and ecology

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Reinventing News

During the height of the Maoist insurgency in the 2000s, the general public was fed up with anything that had to do with news, because news meant death, violence and bloodshed.

Every day, there were dozens of innocent Nepalis across the country being killed, tortured, disappeared or robbed. It reached a point where no news meant good news, and the people, used to bad news, had become desensitised by the numbers.

The news by definition has to be negative and this narrative hasn't changed much over the years. There must be a disaster, a massacre, abduction or a major accident for the news to make it to the front page. Scoops are synonymous with uncovering misconduct. The media is hardwired to report the negative.

Here at Nepali Times, we have been trying to change that through in-depth reports and field stories. We write not just about prevailing problems, but also their possible solutions. Contrary to popular belief, there are many examples of a deeds well done in Nepal, from community forestry and wildlife conservation to school enrolment and childhood immunisation.

Excerpts from an editorial 20 years ago this week from #68 16-22 November 2001:

UNICEF's former director, Jim Grant, used to talk about the silent emergency that stalks our land. Some 500 children die every day of causes that are preventable, but that is not news. Now, suppose those



500 children were travelling in two jets that crashed simultaneously. Would that be news? Yes, because it fulfils the main criteria of news: a sudden, spectacular disaster. Nepali children are dying quietly, slowly, one by one, in homes throughout the country. The grief of their parents is private, isolated and scattered. It is not a loud emergency like a landslide that buries a village. And yet the reasons many of them are dying — criminal neglect, corruption and inequality in the delivery of services that are supposed to save their lives — should make banner headlines everyday. But they don't.

Last year this time, policemen were being butchered every other week. We in the media couldn't keep up with the carnage, and our reporting made people numb. It's like slowly increasing the intake of poison until you can take a lethal dose without dying. We got so used to the bad news, that 70 people slaughtered overnight didn't shock us anymore. Human beings have this capability of being inured to bad news.

And they get used to good news as well. This year, we have got used to the ceasefire, we have stopped noticing that there are no front page pictures of widows sobbing over husbands blown apart by pressure cooker bombs in some remote and forgotten police post. The media is incapable of reporting an outbreak of peace, so the public takes peace for granted.

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

ONLINE PACKAGES



CITIES IN INK

For Sujan Dangol, art is a three-point collaboration between an artist, the object and the viewers who exist in the space between the abstract and the real. His cities feel at once familiar and foreign — like they have acquired an almost metaphysical aspect. Watch video and read profile on *page 6-7*.

BEFORE AND NOW

Stories like this are possible only if people love their locale and stick to their place of origin ('Kathmandu's passage of time in photos', Ashish Dhakal, #1085). Domestic migration has changed the face of Kathmandu Valley for good and to some extent to the point of distortion. Tight well-knit Newa communities have been replaced with people from all over the country in lack of decentralised development. The feel of home has therefore been diluted forever.

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• There's nothing better than private enterprise for creating economic independence and stability. This essentially what we call the American Dream, the right to go into your garage and start a business.

Sigmund Stengel

FORESTS

Applause ('Nepal can up forest cover to 45% by 2030', nepalitimes.com)! However, why can't the developed nations step up to the plate and take the lead in combatting climate change with real actions?

Shaun Sarvey

• Sad that the previous government's threat to fine people for fallow land directly led the the felling of many acres of private forest in the Pokhara area.

Marcus Cotton

• Trees have a major contribution to the sustenance of the environment ('Will Nepal ever be paid for saving trees?', Mukesh Pokhrel, nepalitimes.com). They provide oxygen, improve air quality, maintain climate, conserve water, preserve soil, and support wildlife. Trees take in carbon dioxide during the process of photosynthesis and produce the oxygen we breathe.

Michelle Russell

NIELS GUTSCHOW

This extraordinary scholar should have been granted dual citizenship with all of the rights and privileges of being a citizen for he has done more to preserve and promote the culture of Nepal than any Nepali in the last 50 years. ('Niels Gutschow leaves home', Ashish Dhakal, #1084).

Stephen T Eckerd

CLIMATE AND CHILD MARRIGE

Thank you for fact-based field reporting from remote Nepal ('How the climate crisis adds to child marriage in Nepal', Sonam Sherpa, #1085).

Man Bahadur Sairam

COP26

Thank you for writing this excellent article ('Nepal's greenwashing in Glasgow', Reema Baskota, nepalitimes.com). I have shared it with Mr Alok Sharma MP, the President of COP26.

Philip Holmes

SURPLUS ELECTRICITY

If they sell electricity to the people at a lower rate instead of exporting it, they can continue their business at home ('Nepal's precious electricity going waste', Anita Bhetwal, *page 4-5*). This will also reduce migration while developing our country.

Sanjay Naupane

INFRASTRUCTURE FOR WILDLIFE

I'm glad that Nepal is prioritising wildlife corridors ('Infrastructure for wildlife in Nepal', Biraj Shrestha and Pramod Neupane, nepalitimes.com). Definitely a right step toward sustainability.

Prashamsha Sharma

TRADITIONAL SWEETS

I hope to come make a purchase the next time I visit Nepal ('Hitting the sweet spot this Tihar', Sonia Awale, #1084).

Lucky 7 Tattoo & Piercing Tahoe

• I always buy sweets from this shop, they are very delicious. My mother also used to buy sweets from here.

Sanskritipremi matopremi

ANGER MANAGEMENT

It will not persist for long if women raise their sons properly with the right values ('Feel angry? Read this.', Anjana Rajbhandary, #1083).

Bhumi Limbu

KATHMANDU

Kathmandu is truly a gem of a place, we need to preserve this living heritage ('Between the lines with Sujan Dangol', Ashish Dhakal, *page 6-7*). Historic building in the darbar square area should be rennovated and only public transport should be allowed within its vivinity. The rivers flowing through the city should be cleaned up.

dj4ngo94

CORRECTION:

Dina Bangdel passed away at the age 53 in Richmond, VA, not in Doha as stated in 'Lain in New York' on *page 7*.

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING



Kathmandu's passage of time in photos

by *Ashish Dhakal*

Photographer and development worker Scott Faiia tracks the transformation of Kathmandu Valley and its people with his camera. Watch dramatic before and after images and read the review on our website.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Most commented



How the climate crisis adds to child marriage

by *Sonam Lama*

As harvests fail due to drought and floods, girls from marginalised families are forced to marry earlier to escape poverty. Read the field report from Bajhang district in Nepal's far-west and watch video at nepalitimes.com

Most popular on Twitter



From Nalapani to Kalapani

by *Alisha Sijapati*

The history books are replete with the siege of Khalanga hill that took place in the winter of 1814. This is the famed battle where the Gorkhals fought even as they cried out for water with their supply cut off by the British for a month. This was the last of the five-part series, the other parts are on our archive.

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
During summer nights, on grounds illuminated by solar-powered lights, nuns at the Druk Amitabha Nunnery near #Kathmandu, practice kung fu wielding swords, sticks and paper fans.



Lhamo Y Sherpa ལམོ་ཡ་ཤར་པ། @Lhamo_Y
Wow these nuns are also learning Construction, electrical work and solar maintenance. May be women in Nepal must be trained as plumbers, electricians etc too instead of only beauty parlor and sewing/knitting. #EconomicIndependence #Nepal



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Multipronged response to Nepal's multi-hazards #Nepal needs to plan a multi-hazard approach to reduce disaster risk like the avalanche in #Mustang on Monday, writes Jack Rusk.



Mahavir Sherpa @SherpaMahavir01
It is time Nepali authorities hatch a new plan to tackle multiple hazards at the same time.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Will #Nepal ever be paid for saving trees? Lots of pledges in #Glasgow, but doubtful if they will actually bring Nepal cash for protecting forests. @mukeshjee reports:



Pigreen @plgreen1
Much of the recent regeneration is because deforestation has been less, in part because of greater reliance on non-agricultural incomes.

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The cost of no MCC

Nepal's private sector says country will lose Rs142 billion annually if the US-aided project is not ratified

Nepal could lose Rs142 billion a year in wasted surplus energy if the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) project designed to upgrade the electricity grid and highways is not endorsed by Parliament.

Nepal is currently generating 2,000MW of hydroelectricity with an additional 2,500MW under construction. This figure will soar to 7,300MW by 2025 as per Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) estimates.

Presently, Nepal consumes 1,500MW of electricity during the peak season, which is increasing by 20% every year. At this rate, in the next four years, the peak demand will be at 2,600MW, which means there will be an excess of 4,700MW.

Nepal can export this surplus power to India and there are already agreements in place to facilitate trade between the two countries, but the existing Dhalkebar-Muzaffarpur cross border transmission line can only handle 800MW each way.

"If Nepal is unable to sell excess energy, we will be losing Rs142 billion every year. At a time when we are lagging in infrastructure, we shouldn't stop the MCC from being approved," says Dinesh Shrestha, chair of the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI).

FNCCI, Confederation of Nepalese Industries (CNI), Nepal Chamber of Commerce, Federation of Contractors' Associations of Nepal, Independent Energy Producers' Association and Nepal-US Chamber of Commerce and Industry have submitted a memorandum to Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba urging the government to stop delaying the five-year compact and implement it soon.

This is the private sector's second memorandum to the government in a month. The group also states that some 7,000 Nepalis will be employed during the construction phase of the MCC, which also includes the upgrade of arterial highways to facilitate efficient transportation.

The FNCCI memo came just before the arrival in Kathmandu on Wednesday of US Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs, Donald Lu who is expected to discuss the MCC ratification with Prime Minister Deuba and other party leaders.

It is an indication of the importance the US attaches to the project that Deputy Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs Kelly Keiderling also arrives in Kathmandu on Thursday.

Deuba met US President Joe Biden at the COP26 Glasgow summit two weeks ago, and revealed that he and Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal had written jointly to the US government saying the MCC would be ratified. But the project has become such a political hot potato in Nepal that Dahal quickly backtracked, clarifying that he had only said that it needed amendments before being passed.

A large chunk of the US-aided \$500 million grant project is set aside to build the Kathmandu-Hetauda-Butwal 400KVa transmission line which will distribute electricity from existing and new hydropower plants on the Budi Gandaki, Trisuli, Kali Gandaki, Marsyangdi, Kosi, and Tamakosi corridors, and also connect to a high-capacity line to Gorakhpur so Nepal can sell surplus monsoon electricity to India.

In fact, in anticipation of the MCC project being completed, the NEA signed an agreement with the state-run Power Grid Corporation of India (POWERGRID) for the Butwal-Gorakhpur cross border transmission line extension two months ago in September, ahead of MCC vice president Fatema Z Sumar's visit to Nepal.

But the MCC, the biggest grant aid Nepal has ever received has become the victim of intense power struggle and political infighting within the country. It was first weaponised to unseat K P Oli and now threatens to split the ruling coalition led by Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba.

The project is seen by the critics as part of America's Indo-Pacific Strategy to counter China's Belt and Road Initiative. The anti-MCC rhetoric has gained such momentum that the public is convinced it supersedes Nepal's Constitution and is anti-national, forcing even the staunch supporters from speaking in its favour.

Adds FNCCI's Dinesh Shrestha: "The MCC is crucial for Nepal's energy sector and is to our benefit. Moreover, this is a grant, not a loan. Further delaying and cancelling the compact will tarnish Nepal's image and credibility in the world community."

MCC or no MCC, one thing is for sure. Nepal must build transmission lines and upgrade its electricity grid one way or the other so as not to waste surplus energy it is set to generate in the near future.

Alternatively, experts say, the government must work immediately to electrify transport and cooking for domestic consumption of surplus power and reduce its import bill on petroleum products and LPG. 🇳🇵



This transmission line along the Tama Kosi corridor was delayed for years by local opposition.

prabhu BANK

Economic crisis

Total remittance in the first three months of the current fiscal year further declined by 7.6% to Rs239 billion, compared to the same period last year, latest Nepal Rastra Bank data shows. This is despite an increase in the

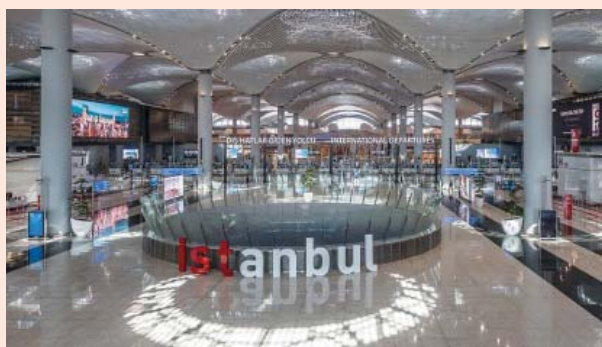


number of people leaving for work abroad. Similarly, Nepal's trade deficit has increased by 58.3% to Rs413.47 billion as of mid-November. The country imported goods worth Rs478 billion, only 36% of which is consumables against the export of only Rs65 billion.



Toyota Raize

Toyota Nepal representative United Traders Syndicates is launching a new A-SUV segment model – Raize in December. The new SUV boasts 200mm of ground clearance, minimum turning radius of 4.9m, 17 distinctive storage spaces and come in four variants and eight colours. Price will start from Rs6.6 million.



Passengers on international flights (except transfer passengers and passengers under 6 years old) disembarking in Istanbul must also submit the online Ministry Of Health Of Turkey Traveler Entry Form via <https://register.health.gov.tr/> within last 72 hours prior to their flights. Print out or the mobile screenshot of the filled form will have to be submitted at check-in. Passengers who are not able to present a proof of vaccination will need to follow quarantine protocols in Turkey for 10 days, after which they will be subject to a PCR test.

Indian grant

The Indian Embassy, Nepal's National Reconstruction Authority (NRA), the UNDP and the UNOPS on 15 November marked the end of a \$150 million India-funded reconstruction of 50,000 houses in the Gorkha and Nuwakot districts affected by the 2015 earthquake. The event was attended by Deputy Chief of Mission Namgya C. Khampa from the Indian Embassy, NRA's Sushil Gyawali.



Chandragiri is best

Chandragiri Hills Resort has been named the 'Best Luxury Resort in Nepal' at the 16th Annual International Hospitality and Travel Awards. Nepal's Minister of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation Prem Bahadur Ale and Indian politician Vijay Goel handed over the award in an event in New Delhi.

Turkey reopens

Turkey is ending travel restrictions, making way for Nepalis to travel to the country from 15 November. Turkey had allowed some nationalities, including Nepalis, to only transit Istanbul since the spread of the delta variant. Travellers will need to present a negative PCR test taken up to 48 hours before arrival, certify that they have been fully vaccinated against Covid at least 14 days before flying with a vaccine approved by WHO.



New Khukri Rum

Nepal Distilleries unveiled the rebranded Khukri XXX Rum last week which has a new bottle design. "We assure the same taste in the new pack. In fact, we hope that our customers find an even richer experience with the newly designed pack," said Suvash Lamichhane of the Nepal Distilleries. Khukri Rum was a recipient of a Gold Medal at the London Spirit Competition in 2019 and 2020, and is sold in 13 international markets.

Daraz 11.11 record

Daraz has set a new record during its 11.11 campaign generating over Rs360 million in sales within the first hour on 11 November. This is a 130% increase from last year. Nepal's increasing use of e-commerce has also been put on display with half the payments taking place online through credit cards, wallets and other services.





KUNDA DIXIT

● Anita Bhetwal

While almost 10% of the Nepali population continues to live without power, the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) has begun to export surplus electricity to India citing the absence of transmission lines to transport power to load centres. Nepal reached a deal with the Indian Energy Exchange (IEE) on 1 November and from the following day began exporting up to 39MW of surplus electricity to India as part of the first phase of the agreement. However, even while the country sold excess electricity across the border, many parts of the far western districts of Bajhang, Dolpa, Bajura, Jumla and Mugu are not yet connected to the national grid. Three major transmission lines are in various stages of construction: the Butwal-Bhairawa double circuit which was started two years ago, the Biratnagar-Inaruwa 132KV line that began five years ago, and the Inaruwa-Dhalkewar-Hetauda 400KV transmission line which was started a decade ago. The market for electricity expands beyond the border, but industries at home, particularly

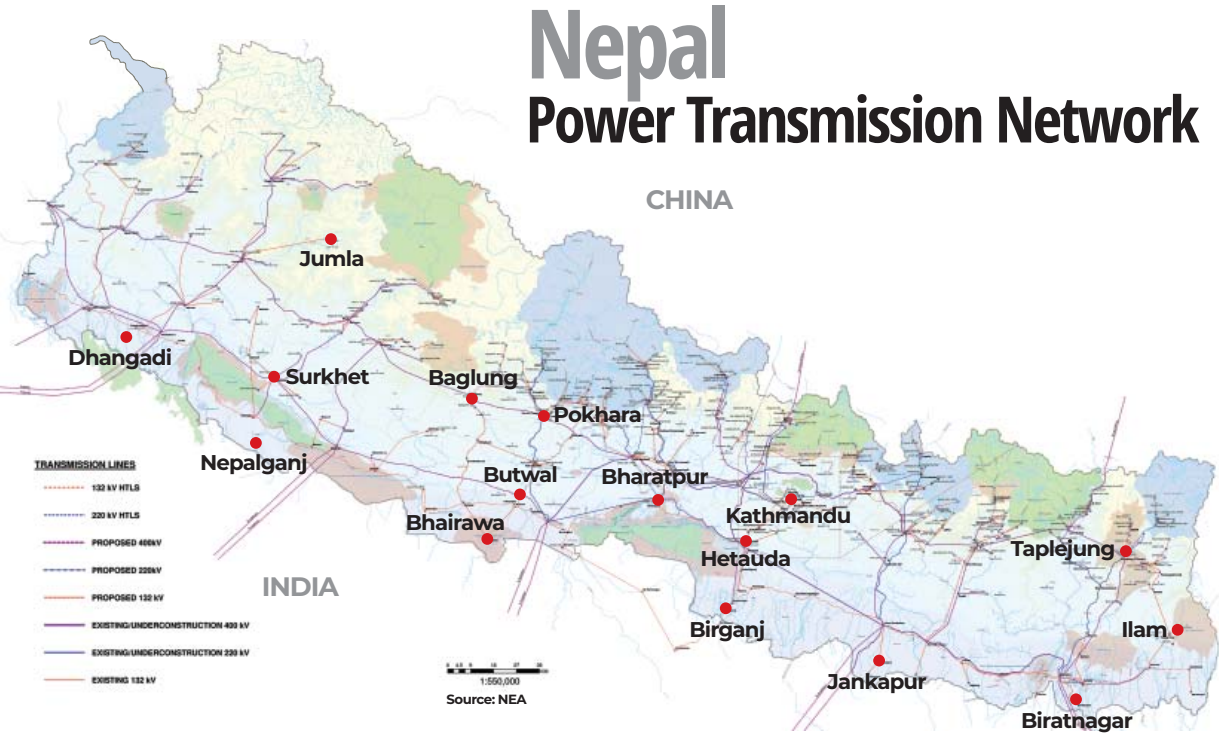
cement and steel, are still unable to operate at full capacity due to the unavailability of required electricity. The Sarvottam Cement factory in Sunwal of West Nawalparasi has been forced to reduce working hours and run on generators, as the NEA only supplies 8MW of electricity from the 20MW required for the factory to run at full capacity. Of that, only 6MW of the electricity is actually usable because of circuitry and voltage issues. To make up for the shortage, Sarvottam Cement set up its own

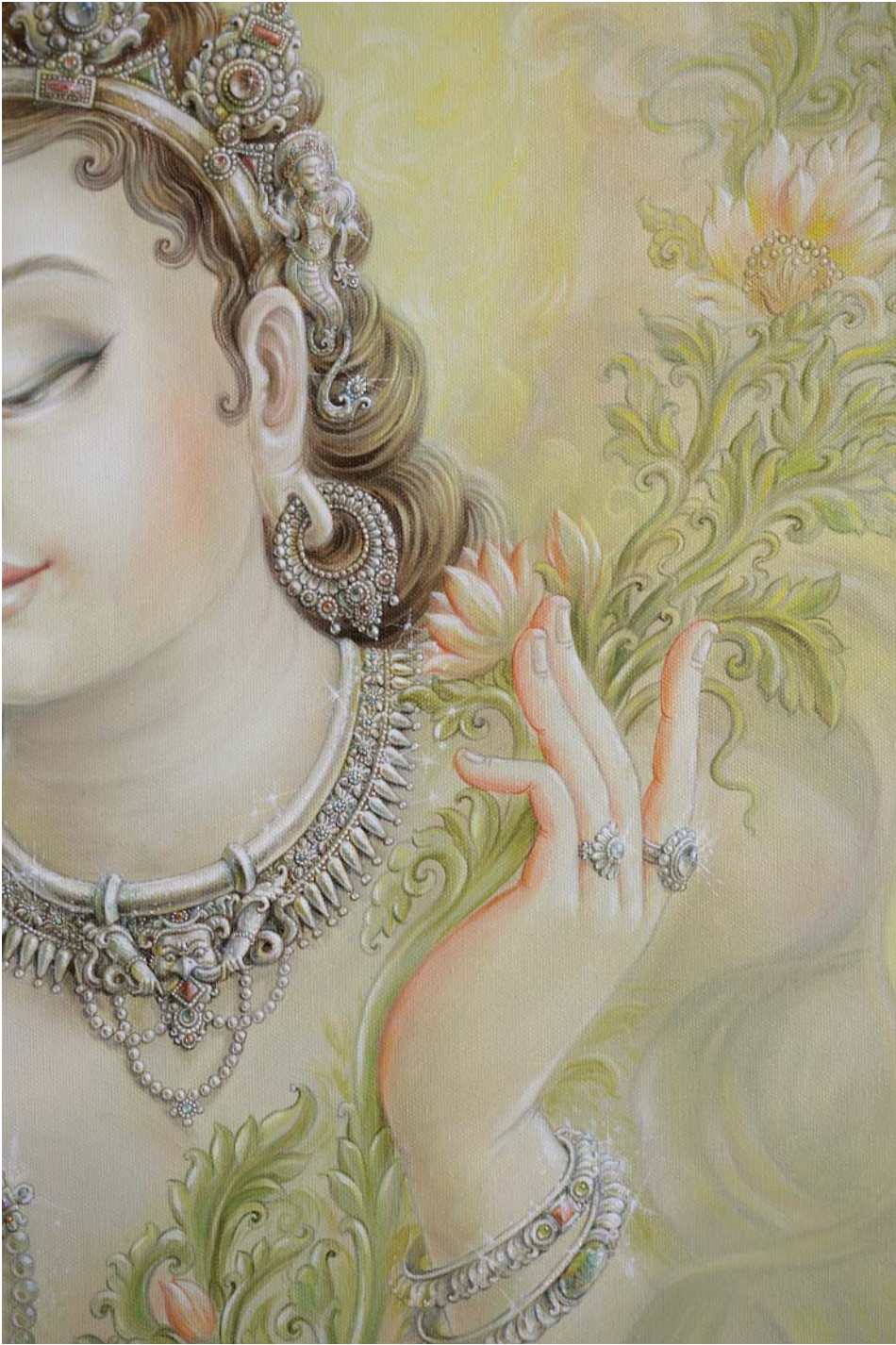
ELECTRICITY GOING WASTE

Absence of transmission lines means expensive hydropower is being ‘spilled’

diesel-powered plant, but this only adds to the cost. NEA supplies electricity at Rs10 per unit, while a unit of electricity from a diesel-powered plant costs Rs27. “The country and industry both would have prospered had the government prioritised transmission lines and increased electricity consumption within the country,” says Surendra Mahaseth, manager of the electricity department at the factory. The government made a policy-level decision last year to extend the national grid, prioritising cement and agro-based industries. But delays in the construction of transmission lines have stymied progress. It is not just industries that are worried. Private power producers which have already started construction are worried that their power will have limited distribution because of the lack of adequate transmission lines. Adding to their doom and gloom is the protracted delay in ratifying the US-supported \$500 million Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) project to build a 400KVA transmission line in Central Nepal to distribute power westwards as well as to India through the Butwal corridor. The Argakhanchi Cement Industry requires a transformer with a capacity of 20 mega-volt ampere (MVA) for its operation, but is only supplied with one for 10 MVA. Like Sarvottam cement, it has set up its own diesel power plant that produces 2.5MVA current. “We have been asking for as much electricity as we can get, and have been promised that it will be available soon,” says Uddhav Karki, manager of Argakhanchi Cement industry. “We will have to see if that happens.” Meanwhile, NEA has started distributing electricity this week

through its 132kV Bardaghat-Sari transmission line to supply 30MW of power to Hongshi Cement Nepal-China joint venture in Nawalparasi. There is hope that more will follow, but so far Hongshi looks like the exception. The NEA has cited delays in building substations and transmission lines as the reason why it cannot distribute surplus electricity during the monsoon, leading to its wasteful ‘spill’. It has blamed private landowners haggling over compensation for transmission lines over their property and lengthy legal battles for the delays. “All planned transmission lines under construction across the country should have been completed within two years, but there is a lot of local opposition,” says NEA spokesperson Suresh Bahadur Bhattarai. “If only these pylons could be laid, we could reach customers and not have to waste a single watt.” However, others blame the scarcity of electricity on policymakers who prefer to export electricity rather than expand and expedite transmission lines and substations to increase access within Nepal. “It is like selling food to a neighbour while your own family goes hungry,” says water resource expert Ratna Sansar Shrestha. “We would have earned much more by increasing electricity consumption in the country and reducing the use of fossil fuels. This is the result of a three-decade-long ‘grand design’ by the Nepal government to earn profit by exporting electricity instead of building infrastructure within the country.” NEA could actually earn more from selling power domestically instead of exporting it. Nepal’s private industries are paying up to Rs11 per unit in electrical bills, while the average price of electricity sold to India is just Rs4.33 per unit. Environmental campaigner Bhushan Tuladhar agrees that successive governments have failed to increase domestic electricity consumption by either not having the transmission lines to take it to load centres, or pricing it too high. He asks: “Why has the government not taken any steps to operate trolleybuses and electric public transportation despite having included it in multiple five-year plans?” He adds that the government has failed to form an environment protection and climate change management committee even though it made a promise to do so years ago. Adds Tuladhar: “When the government fails to build proper infrastructure and a strategic plan to increase electricity consumption for Nepali industries, transportation and households, it is left with no choice but to export it.”





PHOTOS: MONA

The compassionate V

Samundra Man Singh's art explore the eternal questions of existence

Samundra Man Singh Shrestha began his career in art when he was only 14, and today he is one of the most sought-after Nepali artists by museums, galleries, collectors and monasteries all over the world. His expressionism has inspired a whole new generation of young artists, and prints of his work are found in prayer rooms of private homes, business offices and spiritual centres.



FOR ART'S SAKE
Rajan Sakya

Shrestha's sketches, watercolours, *paubha*, neo-traditional and conceptual works are known for their own unique style that transforms and communicates the most complex ideas into approachable and relatable visual manifestations. Indeed, Shrestha's style and methods are imitated by many Nepali and international artists.

Shrestha himself views these works as compliments to his craft, style and aesthetic sensibility (Samundra means 'ocean'). An unveiling of his new paintings is always a highly anticipated affair in the art community.

Saptalochani, or the White Tara, is one such work. Spectacular and beautiful, it represents a new era of Shrestha's oeuvre. A variety of emotions emerge, from surprise to awe, when viewing this masterpiece, culminating in a sincere understanding that with this painting, Shrestha has indeed redefined beauty once again.

A prominent feature of any masterpiece is not just its aesthetic magnificence but the way it provokes our innermost feelings

at an intimate level. When contemplating *Saptalochani*, one is immediately immersed in a calming wave of quietude.

Shrestha's confident, effortless and surrealist brush strokes can be seen in his linework, the rhythmic flow and blend of colours. What one sees is not just a drawing of a beautiful deity representing compassion and contentment, but a visual expression of Shrestha's lifetime of experience and learning. The mind, body and soul resonate with this osmosis of gentle spiritual energy touching the inner self, elevating one's consciousness.

The White Tara is a symbol of love, compassion and beauty, and *Saptalochani* as a work of art reminds the viewer to appreciate that, and to be humble, grateful and compassionate ourselves — to be mindful of the pain and sorrow of those around us.

But understanding just the meaning of the word, and only asking what we can do to be more compassionate do not make us better persons. We must also implement our understanding and findings into actions to help another being overcome their miseries without expecting anything in return. Shrestha communicates this essence of compassion through his art.

The ancient teachings and paintings of the White Tara are strict on iconography, and we can find perfect depictions of the deity in *paubha*, *thangka*, idols, temples and monasteries in Nepal. Iconography is the visual language through which a spiritual art is communicated.

However, as with all works of art, there is a question of how one can pass down the knowledge of this language from one generation to the next, retaining the same level of intensity, emotion and faith.

Between the lines with Sujan Dangol

The loss of old Kathmandu Valley in intense drawings of a densely-packed urban landscape

● Ashish Dhakal



MONIKA DEUPALA

A vast circle is crammed with densely packed houses stacked on top of one another. Drawn in black ink, their edges merge as they jostle for space.

The narrow strips between the houses have fluid shadows, and in the middle of this urban universe is a white hole.

"That is a doughnut," says a visitor at the Siddhartha Art Gallery where artist Sujan Dangol's meticulous line drawings are on display at the *Tales of a City* exhibition till the end of the month.

"I cannot impose my concepts or ideas on viewers, their interpretation is just as genuine and appropriate," Dangol explains in his studio in Koteswor.

Light bounces off his round glasses as the 40-year-old artist's gaze turns to a large window. The studio is an open space with sofas, bookstands and tables about.

In one corner is a large painting. ("A friend is working on that one".) Metal and clay sculptures sit on shelves. He is dressed in a long, brown corduroy shirt, and his hand hangs above a work in progress of another sketch filled to the brim with tiny houses and streets.

It is clear that the drawings depict the transformation that has turned Kathmandu Valley's rich urban-agro civilisation into a concrete jungle.

Dangol's sketches dizzyingly packed towns with teetering

temples and dilapidated homes, almost like a cartoon, or satire.

For Dangol, art is a three-point collaboration between an artist, the object and the viewers who exist in the space between the abstract and the real. The experience is incomplete even when only one of the three is missing.

The drawings feel at once familiar and foreign — the sprawling urban landscape is part of our daily lives, but they have acquired an almost metaphysical aspect.

A giant *vajra*, for example, looks as though wrapped in a shawl of windows and roofs — and Dangol invites viewers to fill in the gaps, and rediscover their own stories.

Dangol grew near the

Kathmandu Darbar Square when the historical towns of this emerald valley were still located along ridges with the slopes down to the rivers below devoted to agriculture.

"I still remember the sights, sounds and smells of eating rice on the balcony during winter holidays," adds Dangol, lamenting that today none of the things he used to enjoy as a child are accessible or possible.

The concrete canopy of houses block out the sun, there are no public open spaces, and there is the ever-present din of the city.

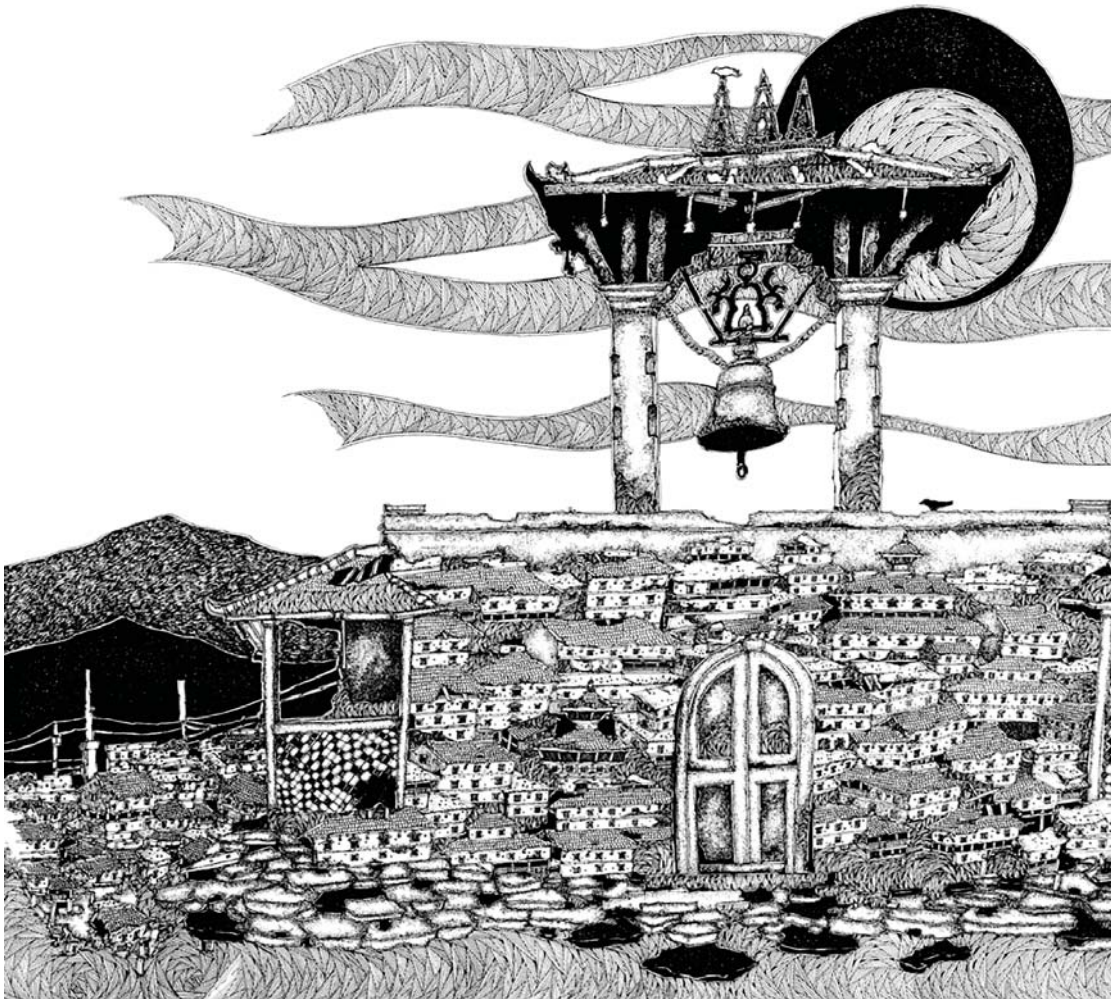
These feelings of loss and nostalgia permeate all of Dangol's exhibits. The artworks are rigorous and complex: each cityscape is

meticulously drawn in pen and ink, filled with stark emotional and intellectual intensity.

He recreates history and architecture in a visual language that is uniquely his, built on the bedrock of his own memories and infused with elements of folklore.

Big Bell (pictured above) is a rendition of the one that stands in Patan Darbar Square, but its base is crammed with little houses and temples. Dark hills stretch behind, and at the feet of the monument are slabs that look like funeral *ghat* with black blobs.

It is an ominous piece, foreboding. The sun casts a shadow behind itself and, on closer look, the roofs are bare and have holes in



e White Tara

ence, impermanence and compassion

The answer perhaps can be found in Shrestha's style and creation. His detailed knowledge of the White Tara is prominent in the painting's simplicity, subtlety and beauty. In these qualities he has poured his emotions and love, expecting nothing in return.

Many artists paint for money, but Shrestha takes it a step further in communicating what is important and what might be lost as we grapple with modern lifestyles. He shows us how to express and understand the impermanence of beauty.

Viewing Shrestha's work makes it clear that the key to a peaceful life can be found in creating art, sharing it, and then letting it go. While a masterpiece may connect with individuals in personal ways, looking at it through the artist's eyes helps us identify with the artist rather than just relating it to our own life experiences.

This helps us to develop compassion for the artist's craft and style, something we are often tempted to overlook. Art styles can emerge from an infinite number of sources, and continuously transform. There are many external forces that bring about such changes such as war, famine and disaster, which may be easily recognised.

However, there are internal influences as well, such as personal grief, and experiences that are not obvious. Yet, artists are moved by their surroundings and their feelings, and it is through their art that they express them.

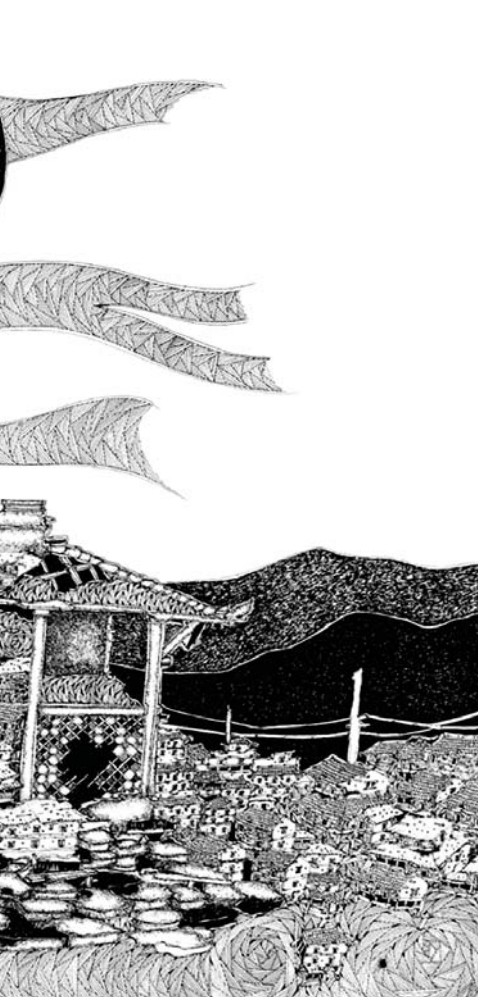
Shrestha's White Tara invites us to participate in this shared experience, uniting both the artist and the viewer in a peaceful and compassionate embrace. The essence of art is that it should be provocative and inspire viewers and artists to engage in

discussions, and lead to an understanding of our place in this world.

Let us hope that Samundra Man Singh's art satiates our hunger to delve further into art and the eternal questions of existence, impermanence and compassion. 🇳🇵

Rajan Sakya is the founder of the Museum of Nepali Art (MoNA) at Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel and contributes this monthly column For Art's Sake in Nepali Times.

Museum of Nepali Art will be displaying Samundra Man Singh Shrestha's work in a solo exhibition from 28 January to 15 February 2022 at MoNA.



PHOTOS: SIDDHARTHA ART GALLERY

them with wooden beams poking out. The bell itself looks weary, the roof above it is worn out, and it is almost like a deep sigh escapes this 38x48 inch frame with an overwhelming sense of loss.

The other drawings evoke similar pathos. Carved Malla-era windows stand next to neoclassical doors, and somewhere in the middle are bare walls. But between them the galli is quiet and temple eaves have come undone. The ever-watchful eyes on the stupas look aged and tired, perhaps by the desolation they have witnessed.

With the touch of pen and ink, Dangol reinvents a visual vernacular of memory and loss. But he does not want the messaging to

be too direct or blatant.

"I am not a conceptual artist ... if I start a piece with too much intention, it disrupts my workflow," he says.

Proud of his Newa heritage, Dangol aspires to develop a new grammar for Nepali contemporary art that builds on the culture and skills that he grew up around, and relics of which are still present.

There is no western influence here: the styles are borrowed from gardeners, woodcarvers, tailors, masons and brick-layers, and also the struts, carved windows and exteriors of abandoned buildings.

The trademark cross-hatching in Dangol's drawings are inspired by his wife's straw mats, whose miniature installations are also on exhibit in *Tales of a City*.

Sujan Dangol traces the origin of this series to 2012, when as his graduation installation he built a city of 1,500 cardboard boxes and cartons of various brand names in the Nepal Art Council.

The installation had streets that people could walk through. Architecture and heritage heavily influenced his art and outlook.

"It takes over 500 or 1,000 years to build and develop an urban civilisation, and nurture its language, heritage, culture and cuisine," says Dangol. "But when I look at Kathmandu today, I am saddened by the changes in the last 20-30 years, and especially following the 2015 earthquake. Development should be gradual, not disorganised."

Houses are not just places of residence. The traditional brick, timber and tiles of buildings with their carved wooden columns, windows and doors represent an invaluable legacy and expression of craft,

history, experience and expectations that span generations.

"Individual houses are just as important as temples," he says. And a street of houses has a collective ambience, so heritage conservation must look beyond just monuments to these ordinary neighbourhoods and their old dwellings that are being torn down to be replaced with concrete."

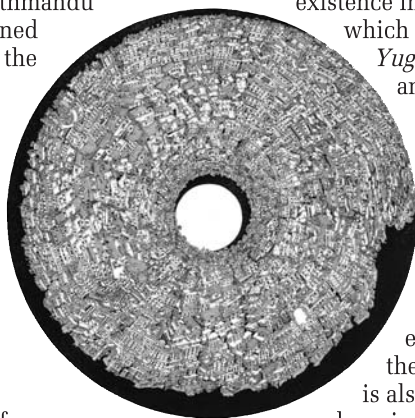
The *bahal*, *falcha* and *hiti* are being overrun with selfishness and greed, the accelerated consumerism and obsession with money that does not value the heritage of Swoinga, Kathmandu Valley.

Depicting these changes in his drawings is an outlet for Dangol's aggravation with the accelerated and irreversible change transforming the Valley.

One particularly gloomy drawing is *Kalki* that depicts one of the ten *avatar* of Vishnu. He has fiery hair and wings, rides a leaping horse above a city as contrails swirl behind him. Kalki looks straight at the viewer with a deeply unsettling expression — the rage in his eyes shared by his horse which has a chain of skulls looping around his neck.

Kalki is associated with destruction, and is the prophesied incarnation of Vishnu at the end of the current *Kali Yug* cycle of existence in Hindu cosmology which is followed by *Satya Yug*, when the chaos and darkness end.

This is an important metaphor in Dangol's drawing: destruction looming over a city, heritage on the verge of extinction. But, at the same time, Kalki is also the harbinger of cleansing and renewal. 🇳🇵



The exhibition 'Tale of a City' is open until 29 November at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisted, Kathmandu.



Lain Singh Bangdel, *Moon over Kathmandu*, 1962, oil on canvas, 32 x 22". Collection of Mervin Stevens.

Lain in New York

20 years after he died, the first solo exhibition of paintings by Nepal's renowned polymath in the US

The first posthumous solo exhibition outside Nepal of paintings by Lain Singh Bangdel is being held in New York in January, nearly 20 years after the artist's passing at age 83 in Kathmandu.

The exhibition is being held at the Yeh Art Gallery of St John's University, with 25 of Bangdel's paintings, focusing on the abstract style influenced by his sojourn in Paris in the 1960s.

Lain Singh Bangdel: Moon over Kathmandu is curated by Owen Duffy, the Director of the Yeh Gallery with the support of Bibhakar Shakya, chair of the Bangdel & Shakya Foundation and who was married to Lain Singh Bangdel's daughter, Dina.



Self-portrait of Bangdel at MoNA in Kathmandu.

Duffy himself was a student of Dina Bangdel, and says that this is a personal project for him. Dina Bangdel died suddenly at age 53 in Doha in 2017.

"It occurred to me that there hasn't been a museum exhibition outside Nepal focused on Lain's work and this seemed like the right moment to look back at his contribution as a foremost modernist in Asia, and his impact on art history," Duffy said.

"What we are looking at through the show is how Lain arrived at abstraction, why he decided he needed to paint abstractly, and tracing the development of his interest in the mountain ranges that he encountered growing up in Darjeeling and have now come to strongly signify his homeland Nepal," he told *Nepali Times*.

For Bibhakar Shakya the show is also

a personal responsibility. He and Dina had always talked about organising an exhibition of her father's works.

"It became a matter of urgency once Dina passed away," Shakya said from Richmond in Virginia. "It was as if I didn't do it, it was never going to happen."

The urgency is especially relevant now in light of the growing trend towards repatriation from Europe and North America of stolen holy objects from Nepal. Lain Singh Bangdel produced groundbreaking books like *Early Sculptures of Nepal* (1982), *Stolen Images of Nepal* (1989), and *Inventory of Stone Sculptures of the Kathmandu Valley* (1991).

"At present, many Nepalis in Nepal and abroad do not know of Lain Singh Bangdel's legacy, work and his contribution," Shakya added. "Now seems like the perfect time to reintroduce him to the world and especially to the younger generation of Nepalis."

Owen Duffy remarked that the study and development of modernism has been largely limited in Europe and the US, and the exhibition looks to reassess that.

"As an art historian, we should reconsider the history of modernism and what we show in our museums and galleries," he said. "When you look at Lain's output as a painter, novelist, art historian, preservationist and academic, he becomes a very important figure."

The paintings at the New York exhibition have come from all over the world: the Bangdel residence in Kathmandu, Bibhakar Shakya's home in Virginia, several have been borrowed from collectors in New Hampshire, Arizona, and from people who knew Lain Singh Bangdel. Many of the paintings have not been exhibited before, and certainly not together.

The exhibition will take place from 27 January through 9 April 2022, and is primarily an academic and aesthetic exploration of Lain Singh's oeuvre, as opposed to a commercial gallery display.

There will also be a 3D walk-through live on the exhibition website for enthusiasts unable to visit in person. A catalogue will also be available. 🇳🇵 **Ashish Dhakal**

EVENTS



Film festival

The Human Rights Film Center’s 9th Nepal Human Rights International Film Festival will feature films and documentaries from across the world as well as panel discussions, master classes, workshops, and more. Log on to www.9nhriff.muvi.com to watch. 22-25 November

Patan Museum

Stop by Patan Museum, which is temporarily exhibiting its collection of stone sculptures on the occasion of its 26th exhibition. *Until 2 January, Patan Museum*

Rara Marathon

Antaral has announced the Rara Marathon to promote tourism as well as adventure and high altitude sports in the region on the occasion of Democracy Day 2022. The marathon will begin from Rara Lake and end in Jumla. *24 April 2022*

Boudha market

Buy fresh and organic fruits and vegetables, fresh baked items, and other delicious goodies. Support local products and businesses, and follow physical distancing guidelines. *Saturdays, Utpala Cafe, Boudha*



Photowalk

Join aspiring photographers for walks across the valley and take pictures that inspire. Follow distancing protocols. Get details about schedules on PhotoWalk Nepal’s website.

DINING

Little Tibet

Indulge in piping hot bowls of noodles, da-pao and mouth-watering Tibetan, Bhutanese and Nepali food. Get the Lowa Khatsa, Mustang Aloo, Sha Phale and more. Find the menu online. *Narsing Chowk (01) 5342656*



ONLINE GAMES

Arkadium

Arkadium is a veritable treasure trove of free games, no sign-up required. Browse through an online arcade of all types of games, from puzzle and numbers to memory-based. Go to the Arkadium website to get started.



GeoGuessr

This web-based geographic discovery game uses Mapillary to generate street views from around the world. Paying members can use semi-randomised Google Street View to guess places from around the planet. Find on the GeoGuessr website.

Night in the woods

Explore frozen forests, gather round the campfire, and trace the constellations in Lost Constellation and Longest Night, two games within the world of the Night In The Woods game series by Infinite fall.



Roblox

Roblox is a global video game platform that hosts used-created games of multiple genres. Join the immersive 3D world and enjoy games created by players for players.

Kahoot!

A game-based learning platform, Kahoot! is used as educational technology in schools and educational institutions. Its learning games, ‘Kahoots’, are user-generated multiple-choice quizzes that can be accessed via a web browser or the Kahoot app. Play with kids.



Mamagoto Nepal

Get a fill of some delicious Pan-Asian food from Mamagoto, a restaurant that serves a variety of Asian fusion dishes. Order Spring Rolls, Soups, Dumplings, Ramen and more. *Panipokhari, 9802320960*

Buingal

With a wide range of vegetarian and non-vegetarian options, Buingal has something for everyone. Give the piro aloo, fish nuggets, and chicken sandeko a try. *Maitidevi (01) 4421393*

GETAWAY



The Famous Farm

The three-storey boutique hotel west of Kathmandu is Nuwakot’s best-kept secret. This little traditional house has a lot of rich cultural heritage to share. *Kuwapani, Nuwakot (01) 4522617*

Pataleban Vineyard Resort

Pataleban Vineyard Resort is an eco-resort with great views, jungle walks, and picnics to rejuvenate from the stress of a tedious routine. *Chisapani (01) 4316377*

Raniban Retreat

A unique boutique hotel located on the secluded hillock of Raniban forest, offering an eco-friendly environment specifically tailored for guests. A must visit for a peaceful and relaxing weekend. *Pokhara 9841218466*

Mount Princess Hotel

Surrounded by mountains and forestry, Mount Princess is a haven for city-dwellers. Spend the morning sipping a warm cup of Nepali tea while taking in the breathtaking views. *Dhulikhel (011) 490616*



Hotel Country Villa

Perched on the top of the Nagarkot hill, the hotel provides spectacular sunrise and sunset views, and the mountain range on clear days. A natural and relaxing retreat for those wishing to escape the pandemonium of the city. *Nagarkot (01) 6680127*

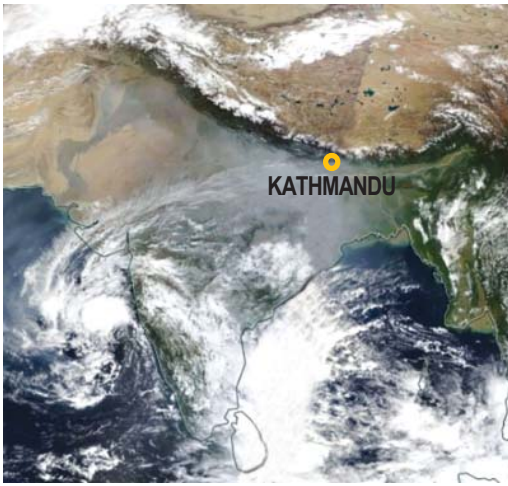
Utpala Cafe

Utpala Cafe, a monastery restaurant, is perfect for anyone looking for healthy vegetarian options with their scrumptious use of fresh produce and mouth-watering baked goods. *Boudha, 9810700763*



The Chocolate Room

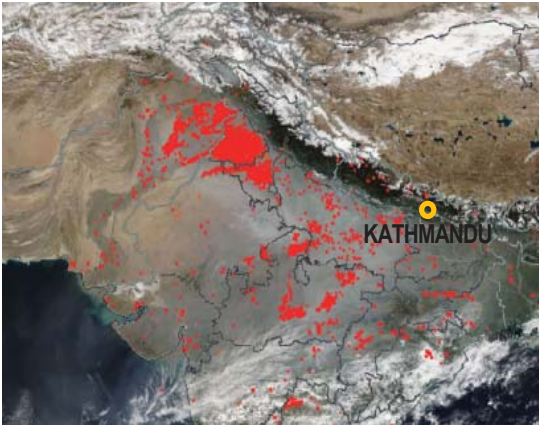
Enter a world of flavourful cupcakes, decadent brownies and chocolate of every size and shape. Between the chocolate, try the Peri Peri fries and milkshake. *Jhamsikhel, 9823837885*



A weak westerly that has spun off a depression in the central Arabian Sea (*left*) will send a fast-moving frontal system across western and central Nepal on Friday and Saturday. This could bring flurries and high winds over the Himalaya, with snow coming down to 4,000m. Mid-mountain valleys, especially along the Trisuli and Marsyangdi will be blanketed in thick morning fog, and partial cloud cover during the day. The afternoons should still be warm in Kathmandu, although mornings and nights will feel wintry with the minima in the single digits. The system should move on, bringing a sunny Sunday in the Valley.

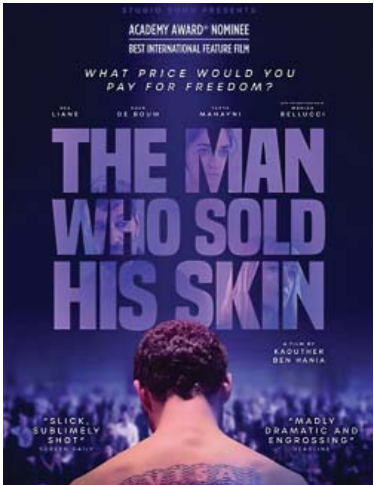
FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
22° 10°	22° 9°	24° 9°

AIR QUALITY INDEX



As this NASA Fire Information and Management System satellite thermal image on 17 November (*left*) shows, crop residue fires are abating in Pakistan but there is still a lot of burning going on in India. The smoke is being transported by prevailing winds into the Nepal Tarai and up the river valleys in the afternoons. Combined with high levels of vehicular pollution from Kathmandu itself, this means deteriorating air quality index (AQI) over the weekend, with levels exceeding 150. The AQI is still not as bad as it will likely get next month.

OUR PICK



Kaouter Ben Hania’s Academy-award nominated 2020 Tunisian film *The Man Who Sold His Skin* follows Sam, a Syrian refugee living in Lebanon. When his fiancée Abeer is forced to marry another man and relocate to Europe, Sam resorts to having his back tattooed as a Schengen visa to arrange money and paperwork to reunite with her. Having turned his body into a living work of art, however, he is promptly exhibited in a museum. Stars Yahya Mahayni, Dea Liane, Koen De Bouw, and Monica Bellucci.

कोरोना लागेपछि
न धुँदा जाने, न रुँदा जाने
त्यसैले कोरोना लाग्ने नदिन
मीडभाडमा नजाने

कोरोना लागेपछि: कसले मर्ने? कसले बच्ने? कसले ठीक हुने? कसले ठीक हुने? कसले ठीक हुने?

कोरोना लागेपछि: कसले मर्ने? कसले बच्ने? कसले ठीक हुने? कसले ठीक हुने? कसले ठीक हुने?

नेपाल सरकार
विज्ञापन बोर्ड

#SERIOUSABOUTBEER

WE PUT SERIOUS HOURS IN
YOUR HAPPY HOUR.

Drink responsibly

Holy Matrimoney

As some of you disgustingly young whippersnappers of reproductive age who tied the nuptial knots of holy matrimony during the human breeding season last month will no doubt attest, marriage is not just a popular card game in Nepal.

The institution of marriage is a binding contract between a man and his in-laws under which the bride will provide all possible assistance to bring forth new human beings onto the planet in exchange for a Bajaj Pulsar motorcycle as a gift for hubby-boy.

Those of you addicted to card games will soon realise that you are in familiar terrain because marriage is also a gamble. For instance, you could discover on your wedding night that the person you have chosen to be your lawfully wedded husband because he is the son of a mover-slash-shaker is as hairy as a yak, and snores like one.

The perfect antidote to a spouse who snorts in his sleep is to learn to snore yourself so you can drown out the all-night nasal saxophone on the next pillow, and turn a solo concert into a duet.

The Ass has been married for donkey's years now, and has some unsolicited advice to all you newly-weds out there about the birds and the bees, and what they do in private. (At this point, all those below the minimum age for marriage are requested to surfing TikTok on their mobiles.)

The most important event of any marriage is the wedding party which takes place simultaneously with approximately 15,000 other parties in party palaces all over town, including the five-party coalition's High Level Political

Coordination Committee launch party, and the Nepal Bund by the Bigplop Party.

The wedding night is the second most important event in the institution of marriage, and a time for couples to weigh their pros and cons and decide that, despite the armpit aroma, on the whole cohabitation is a good thing.

In a marriage, one engages in the most intimate acts known to man: holding hands while watching the sunrise from Nagarkot, and sharing masks.

For conjugal bliss, a marriage must be filled with love and passion, and one of the most romantic activities you can engage in is the mutual pleasure of squeezing each other's zits under the winter sun.

Because it's like having a room-mate for life, a marriage is about compromise. Even after 20 years of marriage, for instance, it drives a wife nuts when her husband insists on taking a leak without lifting the seat in an upright position. So, as a compromise, she replaces the loo with a squatting toilet. This then drives the husband nuts.

Since men and women are from different planets in the Solar System, there are things that start as minor irritants in conjugal life that can blow up into World War III. For example, some wives just can't take it anymore that their husbands are incapable of screwing the cap back on after they squeeze the toothpaste.

Great thing, marriage. Whoever invented it deserves a medal.



The Ass

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SIPRADI

Multipronged response to

The country needs to plan a multi-hazard approach to reduce disaster risk like the avalanche in Mustang on Monday

● Jack Rusk

Hazards in the Himalaya do not queue up politely to occur one at a time. More often, they occur together and, when they do, their cumulative effect is greater than the sum of their parts.

When floods and landslides happen at once, for instance, the impact of each is intensified by the other. Still, it remains common to approach risk reduction for each hazard individually. In Nepal and the wider Himalayan region, the coincidence of multiple hazards necessitates a multi-hazard approach to disaster risk reduction.

At best, considering one hazard at a time is wishful thinking. At worst, single-hazard approaches reduce the risk of one hazard only to increase the risk of others. To avoid these tradeoffs, a multi-hazard approach manages the connections between hazards to reduce overall risk.

Shifting perspective from single- to multi-hazard risk may appear subtle, but our recent research shows the stakes are high. Our team studied three dominant hazards — floods, landslides and wildfires — and found that many Himalayan residents live in areas highly susceptible to more than one of them.

If other hazards (like drought, heat stress, or earthquakes) were added to our study, it is likely that the population exposed to multi-hazards would be even higher. The predictions made by hazard models can vary considerably and their results depend especially on which set of previous hazards they consider, but the message emerging from this research is clear: Since many people in the Himalaya live in multi-hazard environments, managing one hazard at a time could have disastrous consequences.

Importantly, adopting a multi-hazard approach does not mean making things more complicated. Instead, it can identify synergies to address them together, while providing a basis for collaboration for aligning single hazard management and governance practices that could otherwise conflict.

A multi-hazard approach is relatively new, but multi-hazards themselves are already here. They can take many forms. Sometimes, one hazard causes another: In 2015, the Mw 7.8 Gorkha earthquake caused thousands of landslides and claimed thousands of lives.

Or, in February of this year, a rockslide triggered massive flooding in the Chamoli district of Uttarakhand, claiming over 70 lives and damaging multiple hydropower projects.

Other times, hazards happen together. For example, this year's monsoon season caused destructive



A woman surveys her destroyed home in Manang after deadly floods in July that was a combination of extreme weather that unleashed heavy rain on slopes ravaged by wildfire, and glacial retreat.



Heavy rainfall on 16 and 30 July, 2021 led to erosion of a glacial sediment in the Melamchi River in Sindhupalchok district, unleashing a deadly debris flow downstream.

flooding and landslides in many districts in Nepal (the effects of which were exacerbated by the ongoing pandemic).

Without causing another hazard directly, one hazard can worsen the effects of another, such as last year's widespread forest fires in Nepal that denuded hillsides, making the slopes more prone to landslides, mudflows and flooding.

Other threats loom on the horizon. The latest report by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) makes it clear that climate-related multi-hazards will become more common and more intense in the future. Glacial lakes at risk of outburst flooding are growing due to climate change, while changing precipitation patterns could make both seasonal flooding and forest fires more frequent and destructive. These changes interact in complex ways, raising the overall threat from multi-hazards.

As climate change intensifies multi-hazards, current patterns

Nepal's multi-hazards



MUKESH POKHREL



The avalanche that came off Mt Tukuhe in Nepal's Mustang District on 14 November illustrates the kinds of multi-hazards present in the Himalaya. A dozen students fleeing a school below were injured while escaping, and there were reports of widespread livestock loss. Excessive post-monsoon snowfall could have contributed to the avalanche, which also resulted in flooding on a tributary of the Kali Gandaki.

of urbanisation will continue to put more people in harm's way. Our research shows a high level of settlement in areas also prone to multi-hazards; people may be unaware of multi-hazard risk, or immediate concerns for their

livelihood overrule potential future risk from catastrophic multi-hazards.

In either case, people settle in multi-hazard-prone areas to access economic, healthcare, or educational opportunities.

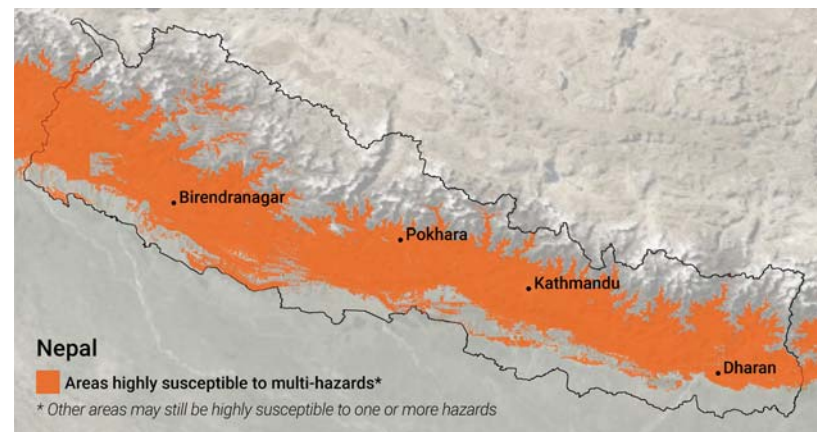
Thus, an important component of reducing risk is in providing sustainable livelihoods in less risky areas. Impoverished people in multi-hazard areas may not have the resources necessary to recover from disaster or to settle in safer areas if those areas have lower levels of access. Gender disparities increase risks to women, and religious minorities may not have equal access to disaster preparedness resources in some places. Multi-hazards are natural events with human effects. Thus, besides technical and governance issues, a multi-hazard approach should consider how multi-hazards multiply the risks faced by already vulnerable populations.

With a multi-hazard approach, synergies are possible. For instance, soil bioengineering is an established set of techniques in Nepal that focuses on conditions — vegetation, drainage and sediment — that contribute to multiple hazards. By focusing on the conditions where hazards intersect,



Glacier debris in the July floods completely covered the Gangapurna glacial lake in Manang.

MUKESH POKHREL



practices like bioengineering could be more suitable for a multi-hazard environment than those that focus on reducing the risk of a specific hazard alone.

Without a multi-hazard approach, reducing the risk from one hazard could increase the risk of another. In the wake of this year's fire season, for example, unvegetated buffers around developed areas may seem like a good option for preventing fire damage to structures. But these areas more easily erode, potentially contributing to landslides or mudflows. Similarly, slope stabilisation to prevent landslides, especially around road cuts, can increase surface runoff and exacerbate flooding.

Engineering approaches are important, but multi-hazard risk reduction is not just a technical problem. Governance issues are at the root of both major opportunities and challenges for mitigating multi-hazard risk. A significant obstacle to adopting a multi-hazard approach is existing mandates for governing bodies to manage single hazards in isolation.

For example, federalisation in Nepal gave the Ministry of Home Affairs the mandate to manage forest fire risk, but the mitigation of floods and landslides, which interact with forest fires, often remains at the municipal level. These divisions can lead to conflicts between agencies, while a multi-hazard approach can align mandates otherwise focused on single hazards. Nepal's Disaster Risk Reduction Strategic Action Plan is already taking steps in this direction.

In addition to managing connections between hazards, governance practices aimed at reducing multi-hazard risk can facilitate two other forms of collaboration: across borders, and between people, residents and otherwise, with different forms of expertise. First, current collaboration across borders in the Himalaya should be expanded and strengthened. Both hazards and people cross borders, so multi-hazard mitigation must do the same. This last summer, for instance, a landslide-dammed lake in the

Rongxer basin in China threatened Nepali settlements downstream along the Tama Kosi River with flooding.

Further along the same river, sedimentation in Nepal is one of many factors contributing to downstream flooding in Bihar, India. The establishment of cross-border early warning agreements is an important way to reduce these risks and is a first step toward connecting upstream and downstream risk reduction through a multi-hazard approach.

Second, the collaboration between people with different types of knowledge about hazard risk — including technical, development and local experts — is essential for ensuring the success of risk reduction programs. An inspiring precedent for this kind of collaboration is the development of *jholmal* natural fertiliser and pesticide.

The development of *jholmal* required combining local practices with the work of technical specialists and efforts to reduce chemical runoff and farming costs to create a cost-effective formula easily communicated to and replicated by the region's residents and other local experts. This collaborative and multi-pronged approach can serve as model for mitigating multi-hazard risk.

A focus on multi-hazards does not contradict the need to reduce the risk associated with individual hazards; instead, a multi-hazard approach is an opportunity to align risk reduction measures to avoid tradeoffs and find synergies.

Adopting a multi-hazard approach may present technical or governance challenges but the opportunity is clear: in the face of ongoing climate change and urbanisation, effective disaster risk reduction in environments such as Nepal, the Himalaya, and other mountainous regions necessitates a multi-hazard approach. 🇳🇵

Jack Rusk is a member of the Urban Himalaya research team. Urban Himalaya is an international, interdisciplinary, collaborative research partnership that seeks to understand urbanisation and vulnerability in the Himalaya. Our recent research on multi-hazards was published in the journal *Science of the Total Environment*.



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