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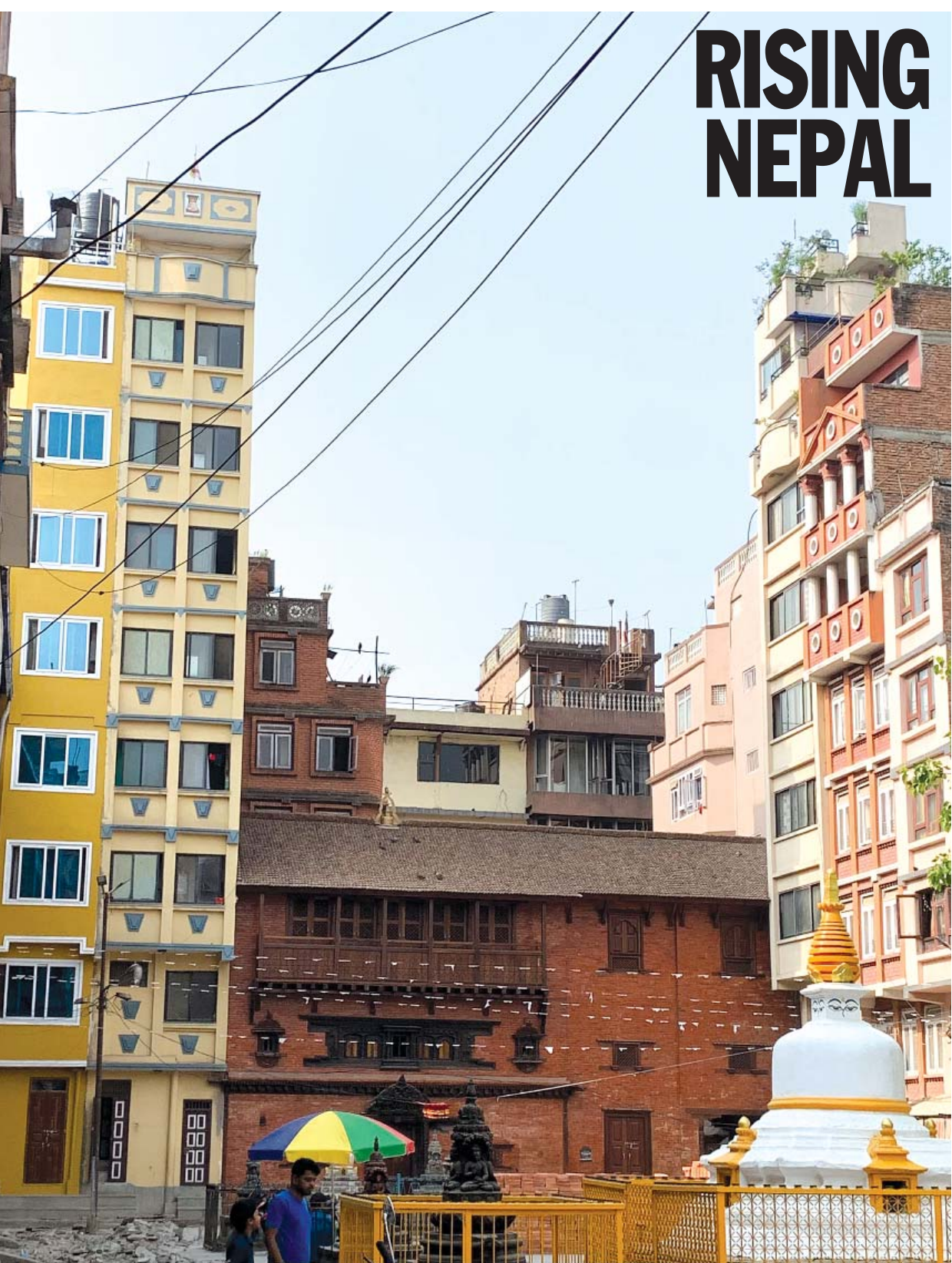
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## RISING NEPAL

● Sahina Shrestha

The historic town of Harisiddhi is just 2km from the Ring Road, and still bears the scars of the earthquake from seven years ago. There are ruins of abandoned homes, and concrete high rises have come up where older houses collapsed.

As many as 850 houses were destroyed or damaged in this town, leaving 24 residents and two visitors dead, 150 more were injured. As Harisiddhi rebuilds, it has also been transformed from a historic city with heritage buildings that defined the core area, into one that is no different from the rest of Kathmandu.

The town is on the highway to Godavari, now a jumble of multi storey cement structures (*page 10-11*) over narrow alleyways. Here and there, we catch a glimpse of some old houses with tile roofs, empty lots where houses once stood, rubble overgrown with vegetation that still has not been cleared after seven years.

Harisiddhi is a microcosm of the Valley's many historic Newa towns — how the movers and shakers were the first to get compensation to rebuild, while women-led households, Dalits and some ethnic groups with limited ownership or inadequate documents have not benefited from the recovery (*page 10-11*).

"When they decided on compensation, they forgot to consider the traditional makeup of Harisiddhi. Even today many residents here buy and sell land in the old way. Not everyone has a land title, even if they have been living here for generations," explains Ganesh Kumar Maharjan, Chair of Ward 29. "This has delayed aid for many people."

Initially after the 2015 earthquake, the government committed to give Rs200,000 in three tranches to each family whose house was destroyed or damaged beyond repair. The amount was later increased to Rs300,000. The first installment of Rs50,000 was provided when the house owner signed an agreement with the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA), the second Rs150,000 on completion of plinth level construction, and the last

after completion of the roof level.

But to get the second and third tranches, a certification from the NRA engineers indicating that the house complied with seismic-resistant design and building code was mandatory. Land ownership papers were also needed, and many in Harisiddhi were deprived of their compensation despite years of scouring government offices.

In Ward 29, 252 households qualified for the assistance, and only 86 had land ownership papers. Some 58 houses are still waiting for money. The story is similar in Ward 28 which is still getting enquiries from survivors.

Land registration in Nepal began in 1965, but in many ancient settlements like Harisiddhi, the dense cluster of houses in a small area as well as unclear division of land among family members posed a problem in registration. The language barrier and other social factors meant that many still do not have land titles.

"It is a shame that houses that were built on once-public land have got their land titles but not the original inhabitants who have been living here for generations," says Bharat Maharjan, a researcher on Newa settlements.

To be sure, the government did facilitate the registration of land for survivors after the earthquake, but the latter say the window to register was too narrow and the process unclear.

"They should be able to start the process at any time. But when they define the time, it becomes difficult as not everyone may have money for the process. When people have money, the window to register may not be open," says Ramesh Maharjan, Chair of Ward 28. 🇳🇵

Concrete planning EDITORIAL PAGE 2



The history of heritage PAGE 6-7

Concrete lessons of 2015

Falling through the cracks PAGE 10-11



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# Concrete planning

On 25 April 2015 at exactly 11:56, the ground beneath Kathmandu Valley started shaking. Houses built on the soft alluvium of the former lakebed bobbed and swayed like boats in the sea.

Brick and clay monuments and homes collapsed in clouds of dust. Had the duration, intensity and frequency of the earthquake been more severe, reinforced concrete buildings would have also come down.

Because cement houses were spared, the public perception is that reinforced concrete buildings can withstand severe earthquakes.

While that is partly true, if the shaking had gone on for more than 1 minute, if it was 8 magnitude or more, or if the frequency

happened on a weekend.

Concrete structure rescue needs specialised robo-worm cameras, snake-eye acoustic, thermal and motion sensors, and human life detector tools like continuous wave Doppler radar and equipment to measure carbon dioxide levels from survivors.

Fortunately, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority (NDRRMA) is putting together a wish list of Rs350 million for such specialised equipment, and has already started training search and rescue teams from the Armed Police Force and Nepal Army. Their role will be vital in finding and extricating survivors.

This is not panic mongering. We look

back at 2015 in this issue of *Nepali Times* (pages 1, 6-7, 10-11) in order to ensure that state agencies and the public start preparing to be prepared. What happened in Gongabu is a microcosm of what the aftermath of a future mega quake in Nepal will look like.

In January 2015, four months before the earthquake, we reported in this space that earthquakes are not 'natural' disasters, they kill people because of weak buildings. An 8+ magnitude earthquake could occur in western

Nepal at any time (Left).

Concrete is good if quality standards are met, the steel rods are properly installed, and building codes are adhered to. But many pre- and post-2015 structures in Kathmandu do not meet these criteria. Things are far worse in western Nepal. If new reinforced concrete houses are not properly made, you do not even need a 7 magnitude earthquake to bring them down.

In the 2015 earthquake, nearly 4,000 emergency crew from 19 countries arrived in Kathmandu with Concrete Structure Search and Rescue equipment. Much of it was not needed. It was local first responders, Nepal Police and Army that rescued 5,000 survivors with simple shovels and spades. Next time, it may not be so easy.

The 7<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 2015 disaster is also a time to turn our attention to western Nepal, and start with retrofitting schools and hospitals, and enforcing building codes. Although 7,000 schools were damaged in 2015, most of those that had been retrofitted survived intact.

We know what to do. We just need to do it before the next one.

Nepali Congress were at each other's throats again.

Party president Girija Prasad Koirala had the Minister of Information and Communication, Jaya Prakash Prasad Gupta expelled from the party for supporting the commander-in-chief's recent statements. Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba had sprung to Gupta's defence, and the kangreis were clawing at each other even while the vultures started wheeling over Dang, and the stench of death began to spread through the villages along the highway.

There you have it. If you want an explanation for why the Maoist

insurgency has spread so far so fast, look no further. They are just filling a power vacuum at the centre. We thought that by now we had become immune to these chronic displays of disunity. But last week after Dang it was nauseating. How much worse do things need to get, how many more Nepalis have to die before our politicians start finding ways to work together, showing solidarity and begin to see beyond the tips of their noses?

From archive material of *Nepali Times* of the past 20 years, site search: [www.nepalitimes.com](http://www.nepalitimes.com)

## ONLINE PACKAGES



ON SHAKY GROUND

Seven years after the 2015 earthquake, the reconstruction of private and public buildings is nearly complete, and it is time to also focus on being prepared for the next big disaster. Watch this video that delves into why quakes are so devastating, and how retrofitting can be a cost-effective approach against the disaster. Read stories on *pages 10-11*.



TEMP COPS

When Nepal Police opened applications for 100,000 temporary cops for the local election to be held on 13 May, close to 300,000 youths applied for the position. Four successful recruits tell us how chronic unemployment and family situations led them to apply for the temporary job. Watch the video only on our YouTube channel.

### NEPALI MIGRANTS

These Nepalis are not only sending remittances to sustain us but also teaching us by example how to deal with our ephemeral human condition ('Fate joins, then separates, siblings', Anil Shrestha, #1107). Thank you very much for documenting these moving stories.

**Buddha Basnyat**

### PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT

It was indeed a 'joshilo' photo at the time ('Returning to the cradle of democracy', #1107). Best wishes Durga Thapa!

**Diwakar Chettri**

- Historic photo, keep up the great work.

**Suman Karki**

- I remember it like yesterday, this photo on the front cover of the "Dawn of democracy". It was quite powerful.

**Ram Chamling**

- Brave freedom fighter.

**Jayshiv Yadav**

I was witness to this sight on the day itself.

**Sunil Tandukar**

### WRITING AMBASSADOR

It would be great to see the Ambassador launch her 2020 book in person at a SE Asian writer's festival this year ('Australia's writing diplomat', #1107).

**Shir Een**

### SALT TRADE

I have always wondered how salt is formed ('The salt of the earth', Jag Bahadur Budha, #1105). When small we were told salt is made from the ocean water but never met anyone who worked in the salt industry to have first-hand information and confirm it.

**Yuvy Subedi**

- China had been mining salt since at least the 3rd millennium BC and never had a problem with the Tibetans or Nepalese. This ending of the salt trade route in the Himalayas is primarily due to the forced industrialisation of China by imperialist Britain.

**Ceecee Gowin**

- Wonderful article. In 1992, on the way from Simikot to Kailash, we followed the salt traders of far west Nepal who used goats and sheep to bring salt from Taklakot to the villages of Nepal. Fascinating insight into a now-lost trade practice.

**Devendra Basnet**

- In the seventies, the Swiss anthropologist Dr Hanna Rauber lived together with the Nepali-Tibetan salt traders in the high Himalayas and thoroughly studied and documented the trading and routes of salt between Tibet and India through Nepal.

**Edi Mühlemann**

- We do get pink Himalayan salt here in Penang, but I am not sure if they are from Nepal, Tibet, or more so from Pakistan as Pakistanis are emerging human resources.

**Alexandra Ong**

### SAJHA E-BUSES

That is a commendable initiative ('Nepal's journey to electric public transport', page 4). Now that Nepal is almost producing surplus hydropower electricity, this is the best course of action that the government has taken.

### TAKASHI MIYAHARA

Respect to the late Mr. Miyahara ('A ray of hope for Nepal', Kunda Dixit, #1107).

**Jit Gurung**

## 2 EDITORIAL

9-15 JANUARY 2015 #740

## UNNATURAL DISASTER

Next week, Nepal will mark the 10th anniversary of the Great Earthquake that killed at least 17,000 people. On a sunny winter afternoon of 15 January 1914 the north-east violently destroying many brick houses, temples and monuments in Kathmandu. Two of King Tribhuvan's daughters were killed when the palace collapsed. 22 people inside an eatery in Patan were crushed. Water and mud shot out of the ground like geysers. Liquefaction caused the ground to flood as if it was in a mountain gully. Some children who had summer camps are now senior citizens, and there will be large 10-15th floors were more than 100 people walked on collapsed roof tiles to find their homes.

The 8.3 magnitude earthquake killed at least 17,000 people in the Valley which at that time had a population of about 100,000. The capital's population has grown to 2.3 million since, the mud brick houses have been replaced by densely packed concrete buildings. Kathmandu is ranked number one on a list of top ten cities around the world most vulnerable to earthquakes.

The death and destruction from the next Big One will be unthinkable. Earthquake experts estimate that depending on the time of day, at least 100,000 people will be killed outright. Hundreds of thousands more will be seriously wounded, but will have nowhere to go because most of the hospitals will have also collapsed. Besides, the city's narrow roads will be blocked by rubble. International relief will be delayed by damaged airports and highways.

It has been accepted wisdom that there is a Great Earthquake in Kathmandu every 10 years and the next big one is due any day. Well, if it's any comfort, from North-South of the National Seismological Centre tells us the frequency of 8 magnitude quakes is more like 100 years. The last one in 2253 killed one-third of the Valley's population, including King Abhaya Malla. There have been smaller quakes every 10-150 years, but as Shrestha says: "You don't need an 8 magnitude earthquake to destroy Kathmandu, a 7 will do just fine."



Earthquakes don't kill people, weak houses and bad planning do

NEPALI TIMES EDITORIAL # 740 9-15 JANUARY 2015

of the shock waves was different, many of Kathmandu's concrete structures would have also come down.

Much of the reconstruction after the 2015 is now complete, although there are still families waiting for money to rebuild (*see page 10-11*). But we still have to be prepared for the next one. And the way to be ready is to retrofit schools and hospitals, ensure open spaces for shelters, and preposition rescue equipment, water and other essentials.

Teams need training in Collapsed Structure Search and Rescue. Compared to older buildings, search and rescue inside the pancaked ruin of a reinforced concrete high-rise is a whole different exercise.

Most of the concrete structures that collapsed in 2015 were illegally built high-rise blocks in Gongabu. Ironically, an eight storey engineering college in Dhapasi was also reduced to rubble. Its building permit was only for three floors.

Had the earthquake struck on a weekday, hundreds of students and staff would have been inside the college. Tens of thousands of students across central Nepal were saved because the disaster



## 20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

## Absolute anarchy

2002 was the bloodiest year in the history of a decade-long Maoist War, and this week we are revisiting the Dang attack. In April of that year, the rebellion ambushed the newly-formed Armed Police Force with 130 of its strong contingent posted in the tiny hamlet of Satbaria, the constituency of the then Home Minister Khum Bahadur Khadka. At least 150 people were killed in the night-long battle.

This editorial from 2002 spells out in clear terms the root cause of the Maoist insurgency and the continued anarchy: the inability of our leaders to cobble their way together for the greater cause. Twenty years down the line, we are nowhere closer to achieving that understanding and hence a just society remains an elusive, unattainable goal.

Excerpts from the editorial from the issue #90 19-25 April 2002:

When the sun finally rose at the crossroads town of Lamahi on Friday morning 12 March after a terrifying night-long battle, the carnage at the smouldering police station on the outskirts became visible. Most shops in the bazar remained shut. Some Lamahi residents tuned in to Radio Nepal to listen to the 7AM news bulletin. The main news was that back in faraway Kathmandu, the government and the party brass of the ruling



Nepali Congress were at each other's throats again.

Party president Girija Prasad Koirala had the Minister of Information and Communication, Jaya Prakash Prasad Gupta expelled from the party for supporting the commander-in-chief's recent statements. Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba had sprung to Gupta's defence, and the kangreis were clawing at each other even while the vultures started wheeling over Dang, and the stench of death began to spread through the villages along the highway.

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## WHAT'S TRENDING



### For children, about children

by **Ashish Dhakal**

In a set of new children's books, six authors and six illustrators address topics including bullying, harassment, identities, gender- and caste-based discrimination, and juvenile justice. Visit [nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com) for the full article.

**f** Most reached and shared on Facebook



### Returning to the cradle of democracy

by **Nepali Times**

Thirty years after photojournalist Min Bajracharya took the iconic photograph of her during the first People's Movement of 1990, Durga Thapa returned to the abandoned and dusty Khula Manch last week to mark the occasion. Thapa is currently the Assistant Chief District Officer of Rasuwa. Join the online discussion.

**t** Most popular on Twitter

**“ ”** Most commented

### A ray of hope for Nepal

by **Kunda Dixit**

Takashi Miyahara, a Japanese development worker who came to Nepal in the 1960s, was convinced that tourism-led development was the only way ahead for the country. His vision for his adopted country is spelled out in this memoir *A Ray of Light in the Himalayas*. Read the review on our website.

**🔍** Most visited online page

## QUOTE TWEETS

- Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
Thirty years after the iconic photograph of her during the first People's Movement of 1990, Durga Thapa returned to the abandoned and dusty Khula Manch this week to mark the occasion.  
Photo: Min Bajracharya
- हाम्रो कालापानी @4JzdJuPW8OIGNvC**  
Look at the current condition of Khula Manch after 30 yrs. An indicator of BAD GOVERNANCE.

- Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
#replug Every spring Kathmandu turns into a city of flowers blooming with jacaranda and bougainvillea. But few people know that these roadside trees and their colourful seasonal flowers are ill-advised for our climate, and can increase road hazard.

- Vibek Manandhar @Vbeckman**  
Thank you @NepaliTimes. I too restate this every season for good reason. I've seen very few concerned about this. #roadhazard

- Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
The #governor can be blamed for failing to curb lending to #realestate and #imports since last year, but it was the #government that increased spending, ensuring revenue by taxing imports. The Ministry of #Finance is responsible for the #economy, not the NRB.

- दिपक पौड्याल @DpakPoudyal**  
Deuba and Co is the main culprit

- Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
“We have to transition to electric public transport not just to reduce our carbon footprint and petroleum import bill, but also to reduce air pollution from diesel vehicles.”

- Satish @Satish27641555**  
It is really good way to go forward



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# Nepal's journey to electric public transport

The first of a fleet of new battery-powered public buses will start being tested in Kathmandu next week

Nothing could be more symbolic of Nepal's goal of being net-zero in energy by 2045 than the sight on new year's day last week as three new Chinese electric buses drove past a hydro-electric plant and a solar panel array on the Bhote Kosi River (pictured, right).

The three buses are the first of 40 battery-powered buses ordered by the Sajha Yatayat cooperative public transport service from China. They will be running on renewable energy generated by power-plants like the 45MW Upper Bhote Kosi hydroelectric project along the Arniko Highway to the Chinese border.

The three buses arrived at the Tatopani customs on Saturday, and will be brought to Kathmandu on flatbed trucks, since the highway is rough in places for the low-clearance buses. And after undergoing gradient, roadworthiness and range tests in Kathmandu, the other 37 buses will arrive later this year.

The \$3.7 million deal with China's CHTC company also includes the supply of 20 chargers of 90kW each, which can top up the batteries in two buses simultaneously in four hours.

"This is the future for transportation energy in Nepal," says Sajha Yatayat board member and clean energy activist Bhusan Tuladhar. "We have to transition to electric public transport not just to reduce our carbon footprint and petroleum import bill, but also to reduce air pollution from diesel vehicles."

Tuladhar talks about how the buses will address Nepal's 3E's: energy management, environment management and economic management. "Electric buses are a win-win-win for us," he adds. "Although the capital cost is high, with diesel prices being what they are, our operation costs will come down to make them feasible in the long-run."

Even before the current fuel price hike, 40% of Sajha Yatayat's operational cost was fuel, spare parts and maintenance. With the diesel price hike, operating costs will have gone up to 50%, and the additional benefit is that battery-powered vehicles have lower maintenance cost.

Besides the 40 Chinese electric buses, Sajha is also negotiating with an Indian company for four smaller buses to be operated within Lalitpur, with more buses to be added later.

Later, Sajha will also expand to add 12m electric buses for inter-province long-distance



BHUSHAN TULADHAR

connections. Earlier, the private Sundar Yatayat had also brought in four electric buses which it is using on its Ring Road routes, and Guna Airlines uses a fleet of electric ramp buses at Kathmandu's domestic airport.

Nepal imported nearly 2,000 electric vehicles in the last fiscal year, with 800 being imported through Rasuwa border in just this year from China. The switch to private electric vehicles is a direct result of the government's policy to reduce petroleum consumption, but electric bus prices are still high because of taxes and retailer margins are still high.

Nepal's plan is to electrify 25% of private cars and 20% of buses by 2025, but while private electric SUVs get a tax rebate and diesel buses are subsidised, electric buses cost five times more because of high customs duty and other taxes.

Nepal's installed generation capacity from hydropower plants increased by over 700MW in the past year, taking total generation to 2,150MW. However, most of these are from run-of-the river plants which means

generation falls in dry months, and there is a surplus during the monsoon. Currently, Nepal is importing up to 400MW from India because of the domestic shortfall, but can export to India during the rainy season.

At the COP26 Climate Summit in Glasgow last year, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba committed that Nepal would be on a path of "cumulatively net zero carbon" from 2022 and carbon negative after that by reducing fossil fuel consumption and increasing forest cover to 45% by 2030.

Nepal spent Rs217 billion last fiscal year in importing petroleum, and Rs180 billion just in the past six months. With the global price hike of crude oil this amount is expected to be much higher in the current fiscal year. Petroleum products make up 13% of Nepal's total imports. Petrol and diesel prices at the filling stations have been hiked four times in the past six months, and the cost of petrol is now Rs160/l – nearly double what it was last year. In fact, the government is planning to announce a five day work-week to reduce petroleum use by 20%.

The state-owned Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) says it loses Rs16 for every litre of petrol and Rs12 for diesel it sells, raking up losses of Rs5 billion every month, which means further price hikes are a certainty. NOC says it has run out of cash to pay for future fuel imports from India.

Although the sight of electric buses driving past hydroelectric and solar plants on their way from the Chinese border to Kathmandu was a welcome sight, the poor condition of the Arniko Highway was also an indication of the dilapidated state of Nepal's transport infrastructure. In fact, the buses cannot negotiate the bumpy road on their own and have to be loaded onto the backs of flatbed trucks to be ferried to Kathmandu.

The highway as well as the Kodari checkpoint between Nepal and China has remained closed after damage in the 2015 earthquake. Built in 1996, the Upper Bhote Kosi power plant was also hit by twin disasters of the earthquake and a glacial lake outburst flood in 2015, and resumed operation only three years ago after repairs. 🇳🇵

## prabhu BANK

### Turkish with GOL

Turkish Airlines and Brazil's GOL Linhas Aéreas have announced a Codeshare and Frequent Flyer Partnership (FFP) Agreement. Through the codeshare partnership, passengers from Africa, Asia, Far East and Middle East will



now be able to purchase tickets to destinations in Brazil and the region operated by GOL. The FFP between the two carriers on the other hand will enable members of the Miles&Smiles and Smiles loyalty schemes to earn and redeem miles when flying on either.

### Darbar Marg Festival

The Darbar Marg Festival organised with the support of Ncell, Gorkha Brewery, as well as various banks and businesses on the occasion of the New Year has wrapped up. The festival with its theme 'Promotion of Local product and Domestic Tourism', aimed to encourage local businesses affected by the pandemic, and had 100,000 participants.

### Growth now 3.7%

The World Bank has projected economic growth for Nepal at 3.7% for 2021-22 and 4.1% for 2022-23. The Nepal government had previously set a growth target of 7% for 2021-22. Alternatively, the Bank has projected inflation of consumer goods at 6% and 5.7% for 2021-22 and 2022-23 respectively. The country was just recovering from Covid when the Ukraine War sparked a global crisis.



### Spring climbing

A total of 250 mountaineers (194 women and 56 men) from 45 countries are attempting to summit Mt Everest this spring climbing season from the Nepal side. Altogether, climbers from 65 countries including Nepal, have already ventured into 19 peaks raising the government a total of Rs310 million in royalty.

### 20% less fuel

Nepal government has announced a reduction in its fuel expenditure by 20% due to increasing trade deficit and dwindling foreign exchange



reserves. This includes reduced fuel allowance for government officials, but does not apply to essential services, development projects, peace and security as well as local election-related bodies.



### Global IME

Global IME Bank has launched its new branchless banking service at Diktel in Khotang, through which residents will now be able to access banking services. The bank has also opened a new extension counter in Palpa's Hungi village.

### NMB sugarcane

NMB has provided concessional loans to 156 sugarcane farmers in the Tarai from Kalaiya and Golbazar. The bank had signed agreements with Reliance Sugar Mills and Himalayan Sugar Mills.

### Management Award

The Management Association Nepal presented Yogesh Bhatta Bade Shrestha with the 'Outstanding Management Award' of 2022 at a program organised last week.



### Endless Combo Packs

Ncell has launched 'Endless Combo Packs' to mark Nepali New Year. Prepaid customers can subscribe to day combo pack valid from 5AM-5PM at Rs25 including taxes by dialling \*17118\*1# or \*17123\*2# to receive 100 MB data volume and 200 min of all net talk time. Evening combo includes 250 MB data volume and 250 min of all net talk time also at Rs25 from 10PM-7AM. Customers can dial \*17118\*1\*6# to subscribe.



# Thinking locally, acting locally

● Sagar Budhathoki

Konjyosom Rural Municipality is just 30km south of the Ring Road, but it might as well be the remotest village in the mountains of far-western Nepal.

Schools are dilapidated, the health post has no staff. Despite its proximity to the capital, Southern Lalitpur's development indicators are much lower than the national average. Jets fly overhead one after another on their final approach into Kathmandu airport, but here on the ground the road disappears in a pall of dust. In the rainy season the road is so muddy it is safer just to walk.

"We have a choice of breathing dust or being knee-deep in mud, it takes nearly four hours to reach the city," says resident Pitambar Humagain.

There is just one health post, but it has no doctor or equipment. Schools are in such a poor state that parents have migrated to the city so their children get a proper education.

The villages are emptying, more than 150 families from just Sankhu village have moved out in recent years, leaving locked up houses and fallow terrace fields.

"There is no future for the children here," adds Silinge local Suresh Tamang "Elected officials have not shown any interest in the past five years to improve education and health facilities."

Indeed, despite local elections being less than a month away, Konjyosom's villagers do not have

It is not just the rural outskirts of Lalitpur that have suffered in the past five years. The historic city of Patan itself is over-run with unplanned construction.

Gone are the charms of the quaint alleys, multi-story concrete buildings now block the sky. Some of Patan's ancient stone spouts and monuments destroyed in the earthquake have been restored, but many ponds have been built over.

Lalitpur district has one metropolis, two municipalities and three rural municipalities, and they all share common concerns which should have been addressed by local governments in the past five years.

Still, incumbent mayors, chairs and council members want to run for office again. One of them is Lalitpur Metropolis mayor Chiribabu Maharjan of the Nepali Congress. "We have made progress in the last five years, but there is still a lot to be done," he admits.

Deputy mayor Geeta Satyal wants Maharjan's post, says, "My five-year term as the deputy has given me the necessary experience and confidence to run for mayor."

Meanwhile, UML has already selected district central committee members Harikrishna Vyanjankar and Manjari Shrestha as mayoral and deputy mayoral candidates for Lalitpur. Time is running out for elections on 13 May, and political parties are now unveiling their election strategies. The UML has said it will focus on delivery of health, education, employment, agriculture and infrastructure.

Land cleared for 'plotting' in Thecho in Lalitpur.



SAGAR BUDHATHOKI

much hope that it will change anything. In fact the candidates for mayor and chairs are in the city, and are not even campaigning in their constituencies. Since the 2017 election, the municipal council has built just one trail bridge, and the budget allocated to blacktop 14km from Ikudol to Dahchok has vanished without trace.

Guruprasad Gautam of Bhatte Danda shakes his head in disgust: "Candidates buy their election tickets from the party leadership, and when elected they bulldoze the whole village to the ground."

The rural municipalities of southern Lalitpur have become notorious for elected businessmen who have awarded themselves quarry and sand-mining contracts, allowed mountains to be carved for housing colonies and built random roads that have scarred the slopes.

Rampant 'plotting' has destroyed the landscape of scenic Lele Valley and Godavari. Community forests have been privatised under the guise of 'road expansion'. All this has disturbed drainage on the slopes, and springs have gone dry.

Illegal quarries in Godavari have increased the danger of landslides and worsened air quality. Locals whisper about the 'sand mafia' working in collusion with local officials. "Local dons have so much influence they now have got permission to mine river boulders and their crushers have made our community unliveable," complains Subhash Bista, holding a cloth to his face. "At this rate, southern Lalitpur will be buried in landslides."

The Maoist Centre has similar priorities while the Nepali Congress is set to focus on cultural and heritage preservation, traffic management and the environment.

Even as many voters have become disillusioned with local government, they also want their concerns taken seriously this time. Keshav KC of Thecho wants his elected officials to stop illegal mining and improve roads that have been in a dilapidated condition for years. Shiva Shrestha of Tikathali is concerned about air and water pollution, and wants a municipality head to solve those. Rajesh Darlami of Bhatte Danda village wants irrigation and fertiliser facilities as well as an efficient market delivery system of fresh produce.

Prakash Raut of Lamatar sees the need to control rampant use of excavators to level slopes in his neighbourhood for new housing colonies. "If unchecked plotting does not stop, there will be nothing but houses here in a few years," he adds. Suraj Bajgain of Gotikhel wants elected candidates to improve health and education services so that people do not have to move to an expensive city, and live hand-to-mouth.

Kishor Bista of Sunakothi believes that elected officials should be responsible for the preservation of local culture and heritage. "Our public spaces, community forests and heritage are disappearing. If we elect a representative who cared enough, we could preserve the beauty of this town for generations to come." 🇳🇵



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Seven years ago, on a particularly gloomy Saturday, the ground groaned as an earthquake shook Central Nepal, flattening villages and killing thousands.

Many historical monuments of Kathmandu Valley were reduced to rubble in just 50 seconds.

Photos of the ruins crossed the world: a broken Dharara, toppled houses leaning on each other over darkened streets, piles of bricks and timber covered in yellow dust.

Seven years later, monuments are coming out of their scaffolds, while others still have cracks that run the length of their walls.

Kathmandu has rebuilt itself every century after a major earthquake. The decision on how to rebuild is determined by the resources and sensibilities of the ruler at the time. What constitutes 'heritage' also changes with time.

"A family tree and heritage are almost synonymous," says conservationist Alok Siddhi Tuladhar. "Because what we get from our ancestors is our heritage."

Our parents and grandparents pass on heirlooms to us. Tuladhar explains, and this gives 'heritage' an immediate tangible tone, evidenced by the temples, monuments, *hiti* spouts that form the cultural legacy of Nepal spanning centuries of artistic and socio-political expression.

"Heritage also goes beyond just the physical monuments," he adds. "The concept of heritage beyond just an object or artefact is especially true in the case of Nepal, where traditional and Indigenous practices are still living and breathing."

This is different than, for example, the Colosseum in Rome which has archaeological significance, but in the absence of gladiators, that is now recontextualised.

"But here in Kathmandu, it is a vastly different feeling to interact with Ganesh and Gorakhnath, who are still worshipped," Tuladhar says. "The very manner of interaction is also part of Nepal's unique heritage."

Bharat Maharjan of Nepal Heritage Documentation Project agrees: "All human acts, including fashion, cuisine, agriculture and architecture, are heritage, evidence for which can be found in everything around us."

For instance toponyms give us a glimpse into the age-old practices of a certain place and community.

"In Kirtipur, there is a place called काँफन्ने which is now part of the university," he says, "there used to be a funeral mound and people would go during the time of pandemic to pacify the spirits with wind instruments. Now the practice is obsolete, but the name of the place helps us trace that part of our history and culture."

The Kathmandu Valley is remarkable because this ethnically and religiously diverse bowl-shaped valley of only 665 sq km has at least 130 important monuments, and lies at the crossroads of ancient civilisations of the subcontinent.

"Another uniqueness of the Valley is that human civilisation has flourished here continuously since ancient times without interruption, as can be found in



1973



2015

Patan's Taleju Temple in 1973 by Carl Pruscha, after the 2015 earthquake which toppled the cupola representing Krishna Mandir, and following restoration in 2018.

the inscriptions, monuments and historical records," adds Maharjan.

Continuity is integral to heritage, as without it there is no sense of inheritance. In fact, the word 'heritage' is related to Latin *heres*, meaning 'heir', and relies on practices and monuments being kept alive through people.

This is closely related to the Guthi in Newa communities, the membership to which is also almost always hereditary.

Tuladhar explains that the core value of building a monument revolves around the Guthi, a unique aspect of the Nepal Mandala's culture, which oversees the upkeep, *jatra*, *puja* associated with the monument through community participation and income from the land allocated to it.

"This is an important part of our heritage, because the practice brings together people to form the rich socio-cultural fabric of our society," Tuladhar adds. "All of which, while intangible practices, help conserve the physical monuments. This way, both tangible and intangible heritage can be kept alive."

#### SHAKING THINGS UP

When the 2015 Gorkha earthquake struck, the Valley had not experienced a natural disaster of such magnitude for 81 years. Many monuments that came down had also been destroyed in the 1934 earthquake, and had been hastily rebuilt. While some temples and palace complexes were restored to their original Newa style of architecture, others were rebuilt in the Rana-era Mughal flourish.

Bharat Maharjan thinks this was because of the strict restrictions on importing wood during the Rana-era. "When Jang Bahadur built the Kalmochan Temple with the Mughul-style dome, it quickly became a

# THE HISTORY

Which building style deserves

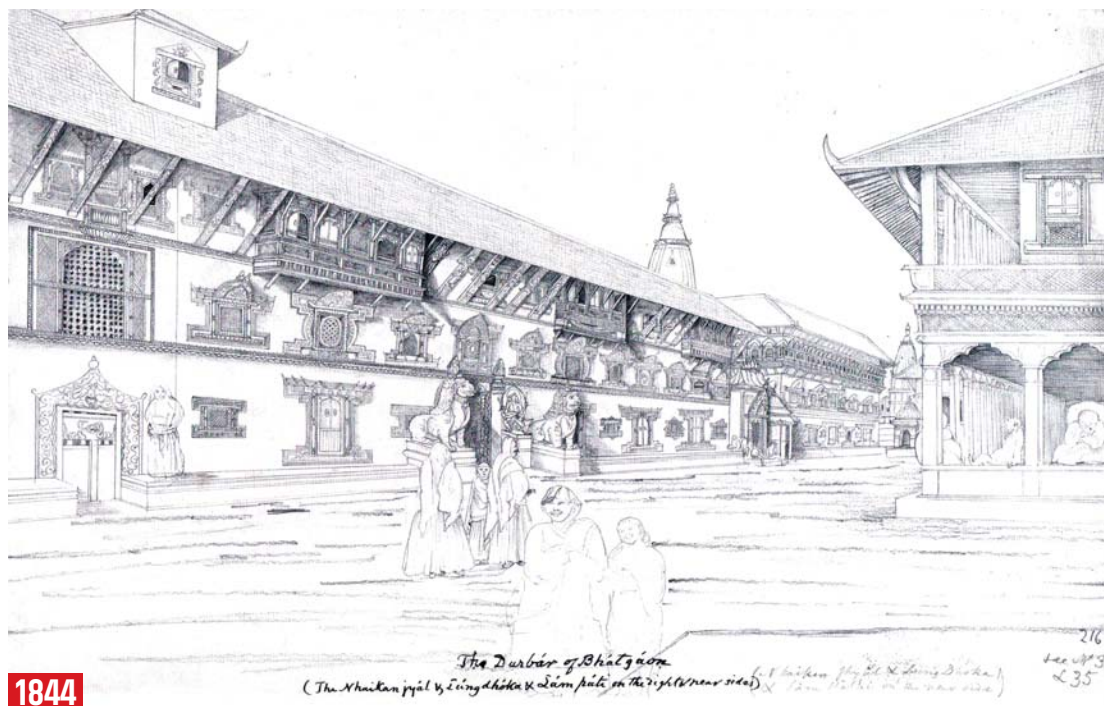
● Ashish

7 YEARS  
25 APRIL 2015



1920

The Rana-era neo-classical Agni Bhawan in Lazimpat was remodeled into the luxury heritage hotel, Hotel Shankar in 1964 after the death of Agni



1844



1858

The Lal Baithak in Bhaktapur Darbar Square in an 1844 sketch by Rajman Chitrakar. The baithak lies in between the statues of lion guards on left and the Golden gate on the right. Originally built in 1697 in the traditional Malla design, it was reshaped in 1855 by Dhir Shamsher, as can



K/P/T



K/P/T

2018

# OF HERITAGE

## s protection changes with time

ish Dhakal



HOTEL SHANKAR

2019

Agni Shamsher. The original palace complex in its current structure was completed in 1894, and the hotel retains much of the original exterior.



NHDP

1930

as can be seen in the 1858 watercolour by Henry Ambrose Oldfield. The photograph taken before the 1934 earthquake shows the eastern part of the building. Lal Bahadur Shastri Museum in its current condition following the 2015 earthquake.



MONIKA DEUPALA

2022

in brick and wood and construction and reconstruction methods informed with a greater empirical understanding of the action of deteriorating agents of climate, earthquake and fire.'

Countries and communities have different understanding of heritage and its conservation. "The dictionary definition and umbrella practices may not relate to each and every place," explains Tuladhar. "Nepal has its own rituals, practices, materials and climate, which affects how heritage can be protected and restored."

At the same time, restoring these cultural sites go beyond replacing the broken pieces. Heritage is intrinsic to the polis, history and cultural activity.

Tiwari suggests that is what King Anshuverma must have been thinking 1,500 years ago when he inscribed after the restoration of the wood and brick Devkula Temple in Kathmandu, "having repaired carefully so as to keep it in good condition for longer into future".

Heritage, says Bharat Maharjan, incorporates the different aspects of society – political, economic and cultural – into one common identity. And every age has its own identity. Palaces and monuments that once looked out of place in Kathmandu have now become a part of Nepal's heritage.

Ram Bahadur Kunwar of the Department of Archaeology says: "Each building style and cultural practice mirrors a particular time and society."

The stark contrast between the Malla-era buildings and the European neo-classicist Rana architecture that favoured wide walls and tall windows with Greco-Roman columns tells us that different historical periods developed their own distinct heritage in Kathmandu Valley, often determined by the availability of both materials and craftspeople, and influenced by exchanges with other regions.

For example, UNESCO regards the architecture of the Valley as having developed with particular attention to traditional values, cultures and norms to create a harmonious urban landscape through the prohibition of infrastructure taller than temples in an area.

At present, the scenario is quite different. 'City by-laws have often neglected height restrictions and related measures to protect the immediate surroundings of palace squares and other important sites, which can impact the quality and integrity of the sites,' UNESCO Nepal wrote in a response to a *Nepali Times* query.

'Conservation processes need to be informed by traditional practices, skills and knowledge, for without safeguarding the living heritage and the link to the community, it is difficult for the conservation of such monuments and sites to be meaningful.'

Alok Siddhi Tuladhar sees that in the tiered-roof temples and shikhara-style shrines complementing each other in the Valley.

"Imagine, in the past, the temple roofs with the mountains behind them, against the blue sky, like twins, side-by-side. It is the urban landscape taken together in harmony with nature."

In contrast to this image are the highrise steel structures towering over the ancient towns. The skywalk in-progress in Kamaladi, for example, if seen at the right angle, breaks out behind the Ghanta Ghar like a glitzy attraction in a travelling fair.

But then that is probably how residents of Kathmandu regarded the alien design and dimension of the Ghanta Ghar when it was built. Will the Kamaladi structure and the many view-towers across the country also one day become a part of our heritage? 🇳🇵

popular style," he adds, "The use of brick and stucco plaster was much cheaper and less time-consuming than that of wood, which also included carving."

The Bhaidega Temple in Patan used to be an impressive three-tiered structure built in 1678 by Bhara Bhagirath Bhaiya before it collapsed in 1934. It was then quickly rebuilt in the Mughal stucco dome style, which itself collapsed in 2015. It is now being restored to its pre-1934 design.

The conservation response of communities and activist groups after the 2015 earthquake was in many ways similar to the age-old traditions of the Valley, just like how their ancestors did after every previous disaster.

"Our ancestors were building these monuments knowing there would be earthquakes," says Tuladhar, "plans were in place to repair, restore and conserve the structures from time to time."

Such outlook appears to have been affected by building materials as well, such as the use of stone in the Lichhavi era versus bricks and wood in the Malla era.

Conservation architect Sudarshan Raj Tiwari suggests in his 2009 paper *Material Authenticity in Tradition of Conservation of Nepal* that the difference in the terms used – *pratisamskar* ('near to handed down from respected tradition') in the Lichhavi inscriptions and *jirnoddhar* ('renovation') or *navakam vara* ('new cover') in the Malla period – may be because 'the later conservation involved less of repair and re consecration of images and more of restoration, repair and reconstruction of buildings and building parts.'

He goes on to write: 'This also substantiates that the material nature of the ensemble of architecture had changed with development of comparatively tall temples

EVENTS



**Film Southasia**  
2022 edition of Film Southasia, noted documentary festival of the Subcontinent will feature 71 films from Nepal, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Burma.  
*Until 24 April, Yalamaya Kendra, Patan*

**Ulaar**  
Directed by Che Shankar and based on the novel by Nayan Raj Pandey, the new play 'Ulaar' at Kausi Theatre features artists Sarita Giri and Sabeer Churaute.  
*19 April-1 May, 5.30pm onwards, Kausi Theatre, Teku*

**Thangka Exhibition**  
'Kalpa: the timeless heritage of Himalayan Art' at Taragaon Museum organised by Heritage Circle, exhibits a collection of Thangka art by some of Nepal's most celebrated artists.  
*25 April, 11am-5pm, Taragaon Museum*

**Earth Day Hike**  
Join environmental activists and experts on a hike this weekend on the occasion of Earth Day. Register at <https://bit.ly/3vu4hAp> to participate.  
*23 April, Godavari*

**ASPHYXIA**  
Don't miss the performance of ASPHYXIA, a collaborative dance movement-theatre piece on environmental degradation between artists from Nepal and Belgium. Tickets at [inako.asbl@gmail.com](mailto:inako.asbl@gmail.com)  
*22-23 April, Shilpee Theatre, 9843163453*

DINING



**DanRan Restaurant**  
DanRan restaurant offers a large variety of authentic Japanese cuisine. Don't miss out on the soft tofu, pork cutlets and don varieties on the menu.  
*Jhamsikhel Road, (01) 5521027*

**Hermann Helmers**  
Relish in a wide range of pastries, cookies, biscuits and cakes with a favoured beverage served at Herman Helmers.  
*Jhamsikhel Road, (01) 5424900*

MUSIC

**Raithane Music**  
Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory's Raithane Music concert will feature artists Jhuma Limbu, Ser o Duo and others, who will play native instruments in a presentation of indigenous Nepali music fused with modern elements.  
*29 April, Moksh, 9813556945*

**Jazz Evening**  
Enjoy a jazzy evening with musicians Aarya Poudel and Niraj Tamang, as well as Janita Chettri and her band Time Dilation, as they play their original arrangements and compositions together.  
*28 April, 7pm, Three By Four Cafe & Bar, Sanepa*



**Gauley Bhai**  
Enjoy live Nepali folk rock music this weekend with the band Gauley Bhai performing their last show in Kathmandu Valley with guest Alex Nepali and band. Tickets on Ticketsansar.  
*22 April, 7pm, Beers N' Cheers, Jhamsikhel*

**Rock Fest**  
Created with the aim to revitalise rock music in the Nepali music scene, the upcoming Rock Fest will feature bands Sanned, Akathya, Dry Skunk, KoKaa and Kaalsis, who will pay their respect to the legendary rock bands that defined the genre.  
*22 April, Music City, Balkumari, 9849510805*

**Sweet Nightmare**  
Indonesian band Sweet Nightmare will give weekly live performances from Tuesdays to Sundays spanning the R&B, dance-pop, country, hip hop, blues rock, pop rock, grunge, alternative rock, psychedelic rock, glam rock and contemporary metal genres.  
*Until 9 June, 8pm onwards, Hard Rock Café, Darbar Marg*

GETAWAY



**Raniban Retreat**  
Located on a hillock of Raniban forest, this environmentally-friendly boutique hotel offers a spectacular view of the mountains.  
*Pokhara, (01) 5185435*

**Bandipur Safari Lodge**  
Bandipur is mainly known for its rich cultural heritage but it also offers rich wildlife. Go beyond the temples on a safari and explore the jungles of this quaint town.  
*Bandipur, 9449597880*

**Evergreen Eco-Lodge**  
Unwind in one of the rustic wooden tree-house cabins with thatched straw roofs and enjoy the tranquillity of Chitwan's surrounding forestry at the Evergreen Eco-lodge.  
*Sauraha, 9845693879*

**Hotel Heritage Bhaktapur**  
Looking for somewhere closer to spend the weekend? Visit Hotel Heritage Bhaktapur, the Newa-style boutique hotel that incorporates the rich art and architecture of the ancient city of Bhaktapur.  
*Suryabinayak, (01) 6611628*



**Gokarna Forest Resort**  
At the Gokarna Forest Resort, dine outside some great restaurants with the music of centuries-old trees rustling in the breeze.  
*Gokarna, (01) 4450002*



**Honacha**  
Honacha has been serving authentic Newa food since 1934. Originally formed to feed hungry farmers, this family owned restaurant is now open to all. Enjoy the welcoming spirit and warm dishes.  
*Mangal Bazar*

**Fire & Ice**  
One of the first pizzerias in town, Fire and Ice offers genuine Napoletana pizza and dozens of other pizza varieties. Try the paesana, a combination of mozzarella, spinach, courgette and bacon.  
*Thamel, (01) 4250210*

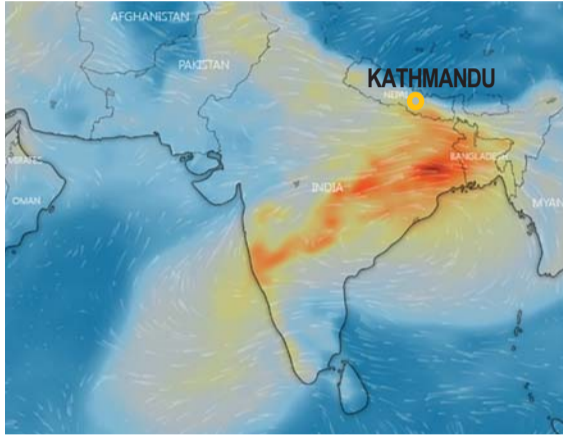
WEEKEND WEATHER



The wildfires are back, and they once more worsened visibility all over Nepal this week. The passing thunderstorms on Wednesday and Thursday did douse some of the fires, but the rain was not enough to extinguish them all. The undergrowth fires are mostly concentrated in the Central Tarai, and across the border in Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. Prevailing winds are also bringing in more smoke and dust from western India. This situation is not likely to improve unless there is a shift in wind direction, or there is more copious rainfall. The filtering action of haze will bring down temperature somewhat, although on Saturday and Sunday Kathmandu will hit 30 Celsius.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
 27° 16°	 29° 16°	 30° 16°

AIR QUALITY INDEX



The poor visibility will continue into the weekend. The reason for this is spreading fires in the central plains, parts of Nawalparasi and the western mountains. This is compounded by brush fires in India, as well as wind-blown sand from the Thar Desert. On top of that there is the pollution from vehicular emissions and smoke stacks inside Kathmandu Valley. This is the reason our eyes are stinging in Kathmandu, and the visibility is so poor that it has affected flights. The storms are too localised to put out the flames, so expect the Air Quality Index to stay in the Red 'Hazardous' Zone all week.

OUR PICK




Can beauty and progress be of any worth if people put it to terrible purpose? This is at the heart of the spectacular *The Wind Rises*, the 2013 Japanese animated historical drama by Hayao Miyazaki. Told as the fictionalised biography of Jiro Horikoshi, designer of the Mitsubishi A5M fighter aircraft and its successor, the Mitsubishi A6M Zero, which were used by the Empire of Japan during World War II, the film begins in 1918 as a young Horikoshi longs to become a pilot, only prevented by his nearsightedness. His idol, the Italian aircraft designer Giovanni Battista Caproni, tells him in his dream one night that building planes is better than flying them, which then inspires him to be an aeronautical engineer. But the world is changing and war brewing – it is only a matter of time before the beautiful designs become weapons of mass destruction. The film is a hopeful meditation on humanity's relationship with love, beauty and innovation, where our protagonist is undeterred by disasters and setbacks (the Great Kantō earthquake of 1923 forms an important backdrop). Featuring the voice of Hideaki Anno, Miori Takimoto, Hidetoshi Nishijima, Masahiko Nishimura, Morio Kazama and Keiko Takeshita.


### कोभिड-१९ विरुद्धको खोप सरकारले निःशुल्क लगाइरहेको छ ।


**अबैध रुपमा खोप बेच्ने र किनेर लगाउने दुवैलाई प्रचलित कानुन बमोजिम कडा कारवाही हुनेछ ।**


**कोरोना विरुद्धको खोप बेचबिखन भएको थाहा पाउने जो कोहीले स्थानीय प्रशासन, प्रहरी कार्यालय, पालिका वा स्वास्थ्य कार्यालयमा यथार्थ जानकारी गराउनु हुन अनुरोध छ ।**

बजारमा लुकिछिपी बेच्न राखिएका खोपहरु नक्कली हुन सक्छन् ।

 कोभिड-१९ खोप

 कोभिड-१९ खोप

 कोभिड-१९ खोप

 **नेपाल सरकार**  
**विज्ञापन बोर्ड**

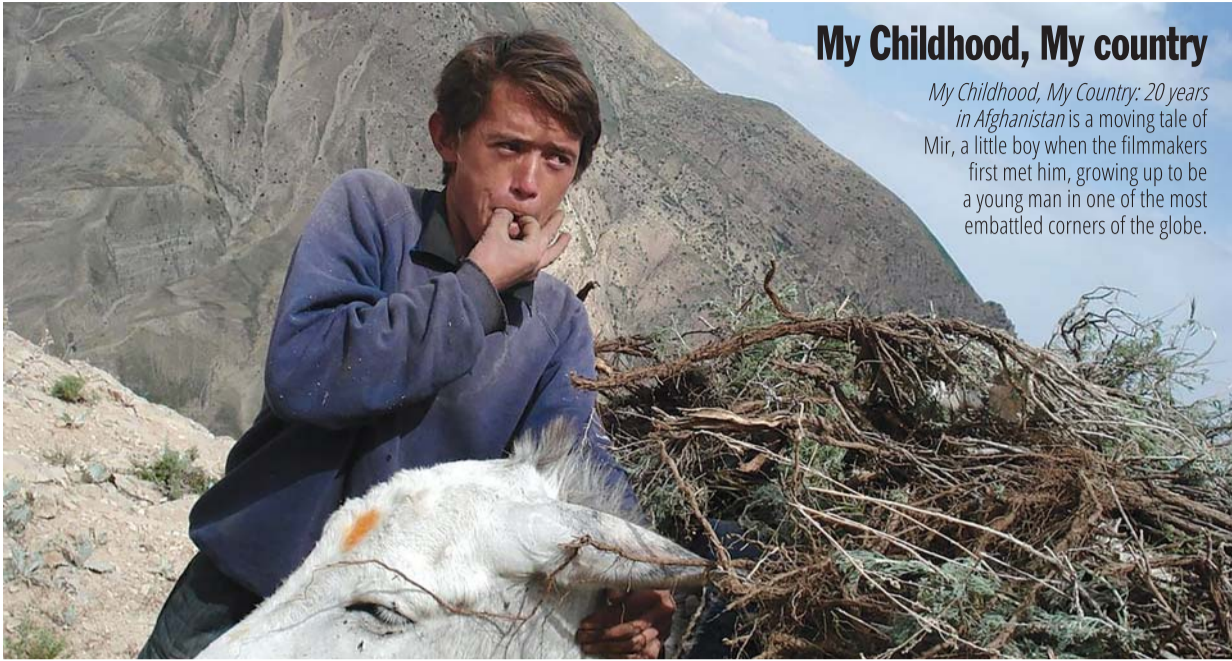


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My Childhood, My country

My Childhood, My Country: 20 years in Afghanistan is a moving tale of Mir, a little boy when the filmmakers first met him, growing up to be a young man in one of the most embattled corners of the globe.

● Aria Parasai

The biennial Film Southasia documentary festival is back in Kathmandu celebrating 25 years since its inception to promote documentary film-making in the Subcontinent.

Aside from film screenings, panel discussions, exhibitions, the event this week will be a hub for those interested in the power of documentary films for social reform.

When the first Film Southasia (FSA) was held in Kathmandu in 1997, the theatres were thinly attended by a dedicated audience. But soon, with better and more relevant selection of films, there were more and more viewers.

The festival has not only survived but thrived for a

generation, telling visual stories with honesty, showing the diversity of the region and exposing injustices and wrongdoings. Some of its alumni have moved on to become big names in filmmaking and even migrated to commercial movies.

Around the world, documentary series have now become an even more popular genre with streaming services screening films on everything from *Wild Wild Country* to *14 Peaks*.

This year, Film Southasia will be held from 21-24 April at Yalamaya Kendra in Patan, and will showcase 71 films from Nepal, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Burma.

The festival will start musically with *Shut up Sona* about Bollywood playback singer Sona Mohapatra, and her unrelenting fight for equal

space in modern India.

The festival will conclude with a documentary by Pa. Ranjith, *Gaana*, about Dalit percussionists who play at funerals.

Although the documentaries will focus on themes like partition, migration, changes time brings, the common thread running through them all is the humanity and tolerance that shines through.

“We always have films where people are fighting over each other, over borders, over lands. But we have films coming out that show what we have in common, where we can cooperate and move forward”, says Mitu Varma, director



# Documenting the Subcontinent for a generation

Film Southasia 2022 documentary festival celebrates silver jubilee with line up on climate change, migration and partition

of Film Southasia. “Our aim is to bring the region closer.”

The films show truth and emotion that mainstream media and feature films usually lack or overlook. This year there are films focused on partition such as *Longing* where a daughter traces her father’s journey when he was chosen in the first Indian hockey team that broke up after the partition.

Another, *Ghar ka Paata*, shows a girl tracing her roots to Kashmir after fleeing the 1990 insurgency. FSA also has climate migration stories such as a documentary on a shaman and a dead tree, and displacement of two locals after building the Baglihar dam.

While the audience for documentaries is growing, screening opportunities are still limited. And although filmmaking has become less expensive, making a profit is still difficult, and most documentary makers have to make commercials for a living.

“Non-fiction is something that needs a lot of encouragement,” says Varma, “because even today if youngsters are going into it as a

career, they need a lot of dedication because the money lies in either features or advertisements.”

The pandemic did not make it any easier for filmmakers. Many faced economic problems or were affected psychologically. Film Southasia mentored six filmmakers in their films themselves and tried to organise backup and support for the first time.

Compared to the past, platforms have slowly emerged for documentary makers. Stories can be marketed at OTT (Over-the-Top) services and filmmakers can receive money from it.

The films will vie for five awards. The Ram Bahadur Trophy will go to the best film, along with a cash prize of \$2,000, and the runner-up will be awarded \$1,000. The best debut film will merit the Tareque Masud Award and \$1,000, while the UNICEF Award will go to the Best Film on Children’s issues (\$1,000) and the award for Best Student Film will merit \$500.

The festival’s jury comprises of filmmakers Sumathy Sivamohan from Sri Lanka, Ayisha Abraham from India, and Tsering Rhtar Sherpa from Nepal. 🇳🇵



## Blues of Pink

Shot in Janakpur, *Blues of Pink* seeks to portray transgender culture and practices that are an integral part of their identity and work, linking them with the rest of the community

## Gaine

A man who wandered through towns with his Sarangi, spreading information through song. A journalist of the old days, with time, many Gandharvas have migrated and found new ways to sustain themselves, whereas others still maintain loyalty to their caste, to the occupation, and to the music of their Sarangi.

## The Riyalists

*The Riyalists* traces the trajectories of the four Nepali men who left their village for 12 years, illuminating the experiences of up to three million Nepalis who have been in the Gulf at any given time in the last three decades.



## God’s Buffalo

Homan Singh Shivabhakti ekes out a living, farming in the hills of Sindhupalchok district, east of Kathmandu. All is well till devastating floods ravage the area and Homan Singh’s buffalo disappear.



## Ghar Ka Pata

Six years old when her family had to leave the Kashmir Valley due to armed insurgency in 1990, *Ghar Ka Pata* is the director Madhulika Jalali’s personal account seeking to understand loss and identity, and to reconstruct a place and a time that exists in her and her family’s collective memories.

## Stories from the Second Floor

From the second floor of his coincidental new home, the filmmaker wonders whether there could be a space in the absence of stories or whether the camera forces spaces to create stories for its own survival.

## Family Going Live

The film follows two children of the Mahalle family, both very excited when online school starts, giving them all the freedom and time to explore new things. New problems arise with the new learning platforms and the family has to come together to respond to them.



## Human Cost of the Baglihar dam

This short character driven film explores the enormous human costs associated with the project while following the lives of two locals displaced by the dam caught in a web of poverty, debt and mental health issues.

TATA MOTORS  
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# Concrete lessons

Seven years after the 2015 earthquake, Nepal now needs to prepare to be prepared for the next disaster

● **Sonia Awale**

The reconstruction of private and public buildings damaged in the 2015 earthquake is nearly complete. Now it is time to also focus on being prepared for the next big disaster.

Himalayan seismologists have long warned that a megaquake is overdue in western Nepal. The last big earthquake to hit the region was in 1205, and it was so powerful that it killed a king in Kathmandu, and set off a cataclysmic avalanche to create Pokhara and its lakes.

So much tectonic tension has accumulated below western Nepal since that it is ready to snap. A 8+ magnitude earthquake there will also shake up the rest of the country as well as northern India. It is not a matter of if, but when.

“We have done a commendable job with reconstruction given the scale of the disaster in 2015, but outside of those 14 districts we are not prepared at all for the next big quake,” warns Surya Narayan Shrestha of the National Society for

Earthquake Technology (NSET).

The importance of preparedness was highlighted by the fact that schools retrofitted by NSET all survived the 2015 earthquake. They even served as shelters as aftershocks rocked the region.

Adds Shrestha: “Retrofitting public buildings should be the topmost priority now, it is the best cost-effective solution for a seismically active and resource limited country like ours. So in the next 10-15 years, we must take up a campaign to continually retrofit schools across Nepal.”

The fact that most reinforced concrete structures survived the 2015 earthquake convinced Nepalis that cement houses are stronger. As the road network expands, cement has now reached the remotest parts of Nepal – but experts warn that if the raw materials do not meet quality standards and proper construction methods are not followed, concrete structures can be even more dangerous in an earthquake.

“Cement and concrete have given people a false sense of security after 2015,” says Anil Pokhrel of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority (NDRRMA). “We have to enforce building codes through the



KUNDA DIXIT

## Falling through the cracks

● **Sahina Shrestha**

Harisiddhi in Kathmandu Valley is a microcosm of what earthquake survivors have had to endure

### Sita Kapali

When the earthquake struck on the day of 25 April 2015, little did Sita Kapali think she would be experiencing aftershocks even after seven years.

Sita, now 65, lives with her daughter Geeta and her grandson in a two-storey house outside the core area of Harisiddhi.

The family was lucky that their old family house did not fully collapse and no one was killed. But the family could not afford to tear down the damaged home and build a new one. They had hoped the Rs300,000 assistance from the government would at least

help in repairs.

Two years after the earthquake, the family got the ‘red book’ and the first tranche of the housing assistance after their home was assessed. But the money was not enough to demolish the house, let alone rebuild. Moreover, the family did not have land ownership papers, which delayed the process further.

“They said we did not qualify for the second tranche because we did not have land ownership papers. My brother made the rounds of government offices and finally got it made last year. But when the engineers came by again, they said we could not get the remaining money, they did not say why,” says Geeta.

As per the clauses for housing assistance, the second tranche is released only after the reconstruction process has started and assessed by engineers. But this family simply has no finance to do that or get a loan from anywhere.

Before the pandemic, Sita worked as a house help for families, but she has not been able to work since last year after her husband died, further straining the family’s finances.

For now, the three continue to live in the old house mending the cracks with a slurry of mud and water. Her son and daughter-in-law have been living separately in a rented room since the earthquake because there is not enough room in the house for them. Her other son is working outside Kathmandu Valley.

Says Sita: “It is ok for now but what will we do if there is another earthquake?”



### Babu Kaji Kapali and Hasina Kapali

Babu Kaji Kapali, 70, has three brothers. In theory the four brothers had separated, but they lived in the same house. When the earthquake occurred, the three-storey house collapsed and the roof caved in.

“When the government announced the assistance, we were hoping each family would get it but they said only one person from one house can get it,” says Babu Kaji. “But we were all living separately already.”

He sold a plot of his land and took out loans to build a four-room house in his farmland. He hopes the ownership papers of this house and land will qualify him for the grant. “We have to live somewhere. It will help repay debts,” says Babu Kaji.

The land ownership of the old family house is with his elder brother who is Hasina



Kapali’s father-in-law, but even they have not been able to get the money.

When Hasina’s father-in-law fell sick, they needed to move him from the temporary shelter. The family pooled in whatever money they had, and took loans from the bank and community center to rebuild the house. But they have only received the first tranche of government assistance. She does not know why they have not gotten the money despite having the land ownership paper.

“I have been to the government offices several times but I’ve lost hope now. Clearly they are not giving money to the poor, those with better economic conditions than ours got it already. Maybe because we are further away from the core Harisiddhi village they missed us,” says Hasina.



ALL PHOTOS: AMIT MACHAMASI

# of 2015



AMIT MACHAMASI

## SCENIC, BUT ALSO SEISMIC:

Kyanjin in Langtang Valley has resurrected after the 2015 earthquake (*left*), but even in this remote area, most of the rebuilt hotels are multistorey concrete structures. Cement and steel rods were lifted there by helicopter. The new buildings have also changed the cultural landscape of this ancient monastery village.

In Harisiddhi (*above*) a clay brick building destroyed in 2015 is still in ruins, with its owners having left. A new concrete beam structure has come up behind.



municipalities by giving them clear roles, technical know-how, and financial and human resources.”

Indeed, the Authority is getting ready for the next big earthquake by spending Rs350 million to buy rescue equipment for collapsed concrete structures, and training Armed Police Force (APF) and Nepal Army on how to use them.

Public misconception about concrete, coupled with people forgetting the horror of 25 April 2015, has led to haphazard growth and construction in Kathmandu Valley. It is not earthquakes that kill people, but poorly built houses.

The Gongabu neighbourhood of Kathmandu saw hundreds of casualties when concrete structures with weak foundations and illegally added floors flattened like pancakes seven years ago. In Dhapakhel, an eight-storey engineering college collapsed into a heap of rubble.

If it was not a Saturday, the death toll of 8,890 in the 2015 earthquake would have been several times higher. More than 7,000 schools were either destroyed or severely damaged in the quake.

“Public memory of a disaster usually lasts four years, and people now are a lot less careful about raw material and construction methods,” adds Pokhrel.

Increasing urban pressure has meant that people in Kathmandu and other cities have forgotten the lessons learned, and have gone back to constructing substandard structures flouting building codes.

Warns NSET’s Shrestha: “We are haphazardly building concrete structures again. The next earthquake above 8 magnitude probable in western Nepal could be a catastrophe.”

In Kathmandu Valley, the rebuilding of ancient towns like Sankhu, Bungamati, Harisiddhi

and Tokha that were destroyed in 2015 has been slower than that of the Darbar Squares of Patan or Bhaktapur. And here the challenge is to maintain the original architectural heritage of the historic towns.

Harisiddhi (*story, below*) was the first town to come up with a technical proposal to retain its traditional Newa skyline, but without much success, admits engineer Bijay Maharjan.

“A lot of people are now aware that they have to build safer houses and they also use higher quality construction materials, but we largely failed to maintain traditional architecture which are more costly,” he adds.

Harisiddhi Ward 29 chair Ganesh Kumar Maharjan is planning to recontest in the May local elections, and when asked if his town is prepared for the next big earthquake, he says, “In Nepal, we are always waiting for the next big one, and we can never be fully prepared. Our preparedness should not just be awareness but real work on the ground.”

Nearby, the chair of Harisiddhi’s Ward 28 Rajesh Maharjan wants to provide alternative income generation sources to prevent local communities from selling their ancestral land to developers.

Seven years after 2015, and despite successes in reconstruction, building standards are poor. Much more needs to be done to enforce seismic resistant structures, and invest in preparedness.

Says Surya Narayan Shrestha: “We are in the business of saving lives. All municipalities across Nepal need to mandatorily enforce building codes with strict monitoring. That is the only way we can prevent buildings from killing people in the next earthquake.”

## Shrawan Kumar Maharjan

Shrawan Kumar Maharjan has forgotten the number of times he has visited the ward office in the last seven years. In his latest visit last week, the 40-year-old craftsman returned empty handed yet again. He was there to see if the ward could help him claim the housing assistance.

After their house collapsed in 2015, Shrawan and his family lived in the temporary shelter for years, waiting for the government assistance. Two years ago, he took out a loan and sold a plot of his land to rebuild the house.

“This money is not enough to build a house in Kathmandu. And yet, I keep coming to the ward office to inquire about the government compensation because I would have at least paid off the interest on my loans,” says Shrawan.

Like many here, the family did not have land ownership papers, so he filed for those at the Land Revenue Office. He still has not



got the document.

Says Shrawan, “We have lived here for generations, but we don’t have the papers. I don’t know why they cannot give us the money. If it is only about the land titles, then there are others without it who have already got theirs. The government has forgotten about us earthquake survivors.”

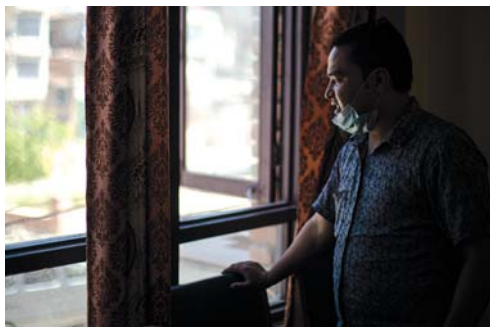
## Dinesh Maharjan

Dinesh Maharjan, 31, was in Dakshinkali with his family when the earthquake struck. Because the temple did not suffer any damage, he did not think the tremors were strong. But when he drove through the city towards Harisiddhi, he saw more and more damage. He knew then that his old mud house did not stand a chance.

For the next three years, the family lived in temporary shelters moving from one place to another. “We did not have land titles or building permits, so they did not initially give us the money,” says Dinesh, repeating a familiar plight.

The family decided to move to the core area and build a house there, but they did not have ownership papers for this land either. They took out loans and sold other property.

“We managed to get the first tranche after proving we have been living here for generations. We had to bring four witnesses for that, it was a lot of hassle,” says Dinesh.



The family received the first tranche in February 2020, and the rest of the amount only in July of last year.

He has submitted his application for the land ownership papers in the Land Revenue Office but doesn’t know how far the process has gone. “We have the compensation now, but my paperwork for land title is still stuck at the Land Revenue Office,” he says. “If I don’t get the papers, we will have to go through the entire process again the next time there is an earthquake.”

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