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Bank of the Year, Nepal  
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A Visa Platinum credit card is shown in the foreground, angled towards the right. The card is silver with a black NMB logo in the center. Text on the card includes "NMB BANK LIMITED", "PLATINUM", "4300", "NMB", "NMB BANK", "VISA", and "NMB BANK LIMITED". The background is a blurred image of a restaurant table with a red flower in a vase, glasses of water, and a view of a lake and mountains.



Vox Populi

For elections to reflect the national mood, they need to be free and fair. Candidates should not win based on caste, ethnic or religious vote banks. Money and lavish feasts should not determine the outcome.

Last week's elections for members of the federal and provincial assemblies could have been freer and fairer, but by Nepali standards they were clean with only sporadic incidents of violence. Most candidates and media adhered to the Election Commission (EC) guidelines.

This is the reason that the results declared so far have shown that many of the 10 million or so voters have been able to register their disappointment with the political parties and leaders who have ruled the roost since 1992.

Those parties and their leaders led the people astray, made outlandish promises they never kept, and yet they were re-elected time and time again. Not this time. They could not fool all the people all the time.

Nepal's voters said enough is enough. And they have used their adult franchise to give many leaders the boot, handing over the reigns to young and independent candidates a chance to set things right.

Till press time on Thursday, independent and Rastriya Swatantra Party candidates had won 7 seats, and were leading in 7 more. Popular rebel candidates who had been refused tickets by their parties managed to oust those who had.

To be sure, the governing NC and the opposition UML have still come out on top — repeating the scenario of much of the 1990s. The Maoists have been punished for bad behaviour, corruption, and incompetence, especially as part of the 5-party coalition since last year.

Candidates advocating a return to monarchy and those espousing an anti-secular stance have been mostly rejected by voters. The Madhes-based JSP and LSP have been penalised by Tarai voters for squandering the gains of the Madhes Movement and becoming offshoots of made-in-Kathmandu parties.

All this gives us hope that despite shortcomings, Nepal's federal democracy is on track. Nepalis have once more endorsed the ballot over the bullet, they have given fresh new candidates the chance, but most of all, they have punished non-performing, inept and corrupt leaders.

But this elections also exposed the need for urgent reforms that need to be planned

way in advance of the next polls five years from now.

Although voters are now much more savvy and are aware of their rights and choices, political parties still get away with manipulation, creating confusion among voters. Forming a coalition to share seats is a form of rigging. Coalitions are supposed to be formed after elections, not before.

The high proportion of invalid votes is proof that voter education needs improvement. It should be an ongoing process in the years between elections.

Nearly 5 million Nepalis are working, studying or living abroad. The Supreme Court ruled that they should be allowed to vote, but successive governments have dragged their feet because they fear those abroad are anti-incumbent — which they probably are.

Absentee balloting should be allowed. A quarter of voters are disenfranchised because they are abroad or cannot travel to home districts to vote.

In this day and age it should be a simple matter to allow voting by mail. Early voting should also be allowed, and public transport made to ply to make it easier on election day to get to voting booths. The whole country does not need to come to a standstill on E-Day.

This election showed that candidates and parties do not have to spend a whole lot of money to get votes. Those whose campaign spending was less than even the threshold stipulated by the EC have beaten those who spent tens of millions to buy votes. The quality of representation cannot depend on cash, and the time has come for political parties to be funded by public money.

The root of corruption in Nepal is campaign funding of candidates by big business. We have now got to the point where Nepal's richest men are themselves standing in elections, further blurring the lines between business and politics.

The infusion of new blood in this election does not guarantee that the stranglehold of discredited big parties in the country will be broken any time soon. Coalition politics is not necessarily bad, but horse-trading and pre-paid positions that it comes with may mean that not much will change.

The young independents will need a steep learning curve to adapt to parliamentary politics, being accountable and transparent and ensuring that all boats rise with the tide.



The people have spoken: they do not want business as usual in politics

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

The face of hunger

Western Nepal has always been food insecure, owing to the historical state neglect of the region. It is also why it is far behind the rest of Nepal in terms of economy, development, healthcare and education. Youths have been migrating as seasonal workers to India for decades but the region is now experiencing longer periods of drought, more intense flash floods and water shortages made worse by the climate crisis.

Back then and now, western Nepal has never been the focus of leaders in Kathmandu. As results of the recently concluded federal and provincial elections trickle in, it would be interesting to see who can change all this.

Excerpt of a report on food insecurity in western Nepal published on Nepali Times this week 20 years ago on issue #120 22-28 November 2002:

Hunger doesn't make headlines, war does. The deaths of over a hundred policemen and Maoists in the Jumla battle last week was big news for the papers in faraway Kathmandu. But here, in the remote hills of western Nepal and away from the glare of media, hundreds of thousands of Nepalis face an imminent food shortage. If nothing is done now, local officials warn, there will be famine by February across these hills.



There are many reasons: the food blockade by the security forces, the Maoists looting what little the farmers have, the worst drought in 50 years, roads and bridges not maintained regularly.

The effects of malnutrition can already be seen in the children. Able-bodied men have migrated to find work, to escape forced recruitment by the Maoists, and avoid being caught in security dragnets. Only the children, women, and elderly remain, and they are all hungry.

"We are all going to starve to death this year, that's for sure," 82-year-old Surya Prasad Giri at Kolti village tells visiting reporters. "Please take this message out, journalist sir." Officials in charge of the regional administrative offices in Dipayal and Surkhet seem oblivious of the looming calamity.

Locals say this year's meagre harvest of rice, *kodo* and *karu* will last them a few more months. When we ask Giri what will happen after that, he looks up to the sky and shrugs: "We will eat poison plants. There is plenty of that up in the mountains."

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

ONLINE PACKAGES



The dazzling beauty of Dolpo is confined mostly to the ink-blue waters of Phoksundo Lake. The remoter valleys of Nepal's most remote region hide the ancient monasteries and culture of the Bon faith which preaches worship of nature. Read the story in our archive and watch the video online. Subscribe our YouTube channel for more original multimedia content.

KATHMANDU WASTE

I watched the video ('Kathmandu's waste is making Nuwakot sick', Samrat Silwal, [nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com)). This is nothing short of state terrorism against the people of Sisdole. I express my solidarity with them.

Shyam Visvambhara Das

Way more rubbish could be recycled. I see households throwing out plastics, paper, compost materials—why? Separate them please. Recyclers want these valuable materials. Not landfill. The government should supply the means to collect waste separately.

Slow Trekking

What can be done with all this waste that makes people sick? Laxmi Support Foundation

We need governments invested in the long-term interests of Nepal.

Derek Ma

This was an eye-opening video. The people of Sisdole can show the world, and especially the residents of Kathmandu, what they are actually going through.

Chaoticmind\_shan

Great video that has brought the ground realities to the world. Very correctly said by one of the locals, that NGOs will come and go but it is the government's responsibility to look after its people and their health.

Preeti Chauhan

I didn't know Nepalis faced this problem. The government must hear these people.

Surendra Rana Magar

This was a real eye opener. The daily issues and problems of the workers and people living there is a description of living in hell.

apacheassassin2196

This is so disheartening and sad. It is always the powerless who suffer due to the ignorance of the powerful.

Sourabh Pradhan

NEPAL HERITAGE

It was refreshing to read this well-thought out piece ('Culture cannot be an afterthought', Alisha Sijapati, [nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com)). And the article is right on! Through my travels in all districts I have come across temples and small palaces overgrown with vines and foliage. When dropping in to any available district archeology office, the common complaint was that there was no budget for fuel to drive to particular locations, let alone for visiting, photo-recording and cataloguing finds and security for crumbling relics. So I am very happy that you have highlighted culture, and certainly hope that it would find traction within the new government and civil society.

Iván G. Somlai

BONPO

I was lucky enough to visit Dolpo in 2018, an incredible place ('Bon voyage', Sonam Choekeyi Lama, [nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com)).

Mari Turner

CLIMATE CHANGE

I visited Mustang in the early '90s. It's sad to see the impact of climate change here ('Climate migration is already happening', Nicole McCloskey, [nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com)). This is such a special area and people.

Connie

The time has come for Nepal's politicians to regard the climate crisis not as a problem, but an opportunity to cut back on fossil fuel imports. ('Election Climate in Nepal', Editorial, #1136)

Joshi Milan

AIR POLLUTION

As you report, dirty air is a combination of domestic and crossborder emissions. Is there any actionable solution available to avoid or minimise this recurring air pollution problem other than self-precaution?

Namindra Dahal

SUSPENSION BRIDGES

Oh great, something else to worry about in Nepal in addition to bus/jeep accidents, plane crashes, GLOF, killer air pollution, now unmaintained bridges ('How safe are Nepal's suspension bridges?', Anita Bhetwal, [nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com)). But this is Nepal.

Roger Ray

GENERAL ELECTION

I didn't really watch the political situation just before the election. It's difficult to predict outcomes. But the worst news would probably be if the new political cards were handed out without a clear winner, so that they would allow the formation of more different coalitions. This would mean the ministerial chairmen will once again be on and off as disparate coalitions will regroup and fall apart.

Michal Thoma

WHAT'S TRENDING



Expressing culture and nature in eco-art

by Tayama Rai

Contemporary artist Binod Pradhan illustrates the defunct, the immediate and the future of Nepal's heritage, returning after an eight-year hiatus. More about his artwork on [nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com).



Most reached and shared on Facebook



Culture cannot be an afterthought

by Alisha Sijapati

Heritage and culture have been shunted from one ministry to another for 40 years. If elected candidates do not assist us in preserving these heritages, there will no longer be the temples or the palaces that have been the emblem of our cultural and historical legacy for centuries.



Most popular on Twitter



Kathmandu's waste is making Nuwakot sick

by Samrat Silwal

For residents of Sisdole and surrounding villages, the smell of waste has been a constant companion for nearly two decades. And with the new landfill site in Banchare Danda just 2km away, they worry their health and livelihood will continue to suffer because of what Kathmandu disposes of. Join the discussion online and watch the video.



Most commented



The good doctor

by Lisa Choegyal

Medicine meets spiritualism in A Gentle Rain of Compassion, the award-winning memoir by David R Shlim, which provides recognition to Nepal. Read the full review on our website.



Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Given lax #safety oversight and #poor maintenance, disasters could be waiting to happen. How safe are #Nepal's suspension bridges? @BhetwalAnita writes:



Nepal Saliza @Saleeza

Nepal Government, as well as the archaeology and engineering departments must think about suspension bridges of remote areas that were built in 2020 B.S



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

"We accuse developed countries that injustice has been done due to their greenhouse emissions, but within Nepal we commit injustice to rural communities like Sisdole. If one day Pokhara decides to dump its waste in Kathmandu, would we allow it?"



Pranaya Rana @inkthink

An always important issue. The accompanying video really shows the scale of the problem. Mayor Balen Shah has promised much but there doesn't appear to be a solution anytime soon.







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# The Nepali people have spoken

Voters have made their dissatisfaction with the country's serial politicians clear: shape up or ship out

● **Sonia Awale**

While early outcomes of the federal and provincial elections show that the Nepali Congress (NC) and UML are set to retain their dominance, young and independent candidates are the new kingmakers.

This means the 30-year Congress-Communist polarisation that destabilised Nepal's politics is here to stay, but voters have made their outrage felt over the country's serial politicians and their parties.

The newly-minted independent Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) has won four out of 10 Kathmandu seats, and is leading in some major constituencies outside the Valley. Kathmandu has elected a lawyer, Lalitpur a doctor — both women under 35 from the RSP.

Even in urban constituencies where independents did not win, it is evident many voters have abandoned established parties that they used to be loyal to.

Heavyweights of established parties trail in several important constituencies. Top leaders of the NC and UML will win, but many of their second echelons leaders have lost.

The Maoist-Centre fared poorly everywhere, showing that voters are not impressed with their efforts to airbrush war crimes, and their past record. The Unified Socialists were punished for their opportunistic and unprincipled involvement in the 5-party coalition. Indeed, the big question now is if the coalition will even get enough seats to form a government.

Many supporters of the NC and Maoist-Centre voted for independents or rebel candidates, rejecting that alliance of convenience between the right and left-wing parties. Although the opposition UML has also lost a lot of its support base to new and independent candidates it appears to have been able to better ride out the storm.

"The general population is not satisfied with mainstream political parties fighting elections through alliances," says NC leader Minendra Rijal who was not given a ticket for the polls by his party. "The governing coalition is



unlikely to fare as well. There was disappointment before, but now people are even more bitter."

Until press time on Thursday, the NC had won 29 seats in Parliament and is leading in 27 constituencies. Gagan Thapa, Prakash Man Singh, Santosh Chalise, Pradip Paudel and Rajendra Kumar KC each won from Kathmandu constituencies while Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba has been elected for the seventh time from Dadeldhura and Uday

Shumsher Rana from Lalitpur.

Gagan Thapa, who is also NC General Secretary, has publicly declared that he would like to be the next prime minister and replace "those who have had many chances in the past to serve the country". But that will depend on the fate of NC and the governing coalition in the coming days, it is certain no one party is going to get a majority.

The opposition UML is leading in 29 constituencies and has locked in 18 seats with wins in Kathmandu,

Lalitpur, Taplejung, Udaypur, Gulmi and Jhapa where former PM K P Oli comfortably edged past his NC rival. The Maoist Centre is trailing far behind with just 8 seats including in Rukum, Baglung and Sindhuli, but leading in 9 constituencies.

Madhav Kumar Nepal's Unified Socialist has only seven seats, while the Rastriya Prajatantra Party and Loktantrik Samajbadi Party winning two each. Janata Samajbadi, Nagarik Unmukti, Rastriya Janamorchha,

Janamat and Nepal Majdur Kisan parties have each won one seat so far. In the far west Tarai, the Nagarik Unmukti party of Resham Chaudhary has come out strong.

The UML is doing even better than the NC in seats under the Proportional Representation (PR) mechanism, already raking up 547,860 votes. NC has received 512,606 votes so far. The Unified Socialists, which split from the UML, is not getting even one PR seat.



## Turkish with CNIYEF

Turkish Airlines has partnered with the Confederation of Nepalese Industries Young Entrepreneurs Forum (CNIYEF) to encourage entrepreneurship, industrial and youth-based partnerships between Türkiye and Nepal.

The Turkish flag carrier also received the LEED v4.certificate for its flight crew terminal becoming the first airline in Europe and only the third in the world to have a platinum standard. The terminal building in Istanbul airport



can accommodate 2,000 office workers and 1,000 cockpit and 4,500 cabin crew. The terminal features sustainable measures to reduce environmental impacts and with the LEED v4.1 O+M: EB Platinum Certificate, the airline aims to further improve its energy, water and interior quality performances.

Turkish Airlines has also introduced a gift card service which the passengers can now fill with flights for occasions like New Year, Mothers' Day and more for their loved ones.



## IME-Laxmi E-ties

Laxmi intercontinental, authorised distributor of Hyundai vehicles in Nepal, and Global IME Bank have agreed to extend financing options for electric vehicles. Customers can finance Hyundai EVs through the bank at 12.99% interest.

## DishHome Football

DishHome which has been broadcasting LIVE World Cup 2022 matches in Nepal has launched 'Feel the Magic of Football in DishHome' campaign. Post a video or photo of the magical moment on DishHome's Facebook page and win exciting prizes.

## NMB Manyajan Bachat

NMB Bank has announced the highest interest rate of 9.133% in its savings account Manyajan Bachat Khata which prioritises senior citizens.

## Toyota Electric

Toyota is planning to develop a line-up of electrified cars, including hybrid electric vehicles, plug-in hybrid electric vehicles, battery electric vehicles, and fuel cell engine vehicles. Toyota Nepal has added an 'Electrified' page to their website with details on their planned electric vehicles and other technology. Toyota will be launching 3.5 million electric vehicles by 2030.



## Fruit soaking

Radisson Hotel organised a fruit soaking event last week to prepare the Christmas cake for the upcoming festivities. The ingredients included dry fruits, spices, herbs, wine, beer, rum and whisky.

## WorldLink 700,000

WorldLink Communications has connected more than 700,000 households in Nepal to the Internet in 27 years of its set-up. The company provides its services in 73 districts and plans to expand to the rest in Darchula, Baitadi, Manang and Mustang. WorldLink Communications has more than 3 million Internet users.

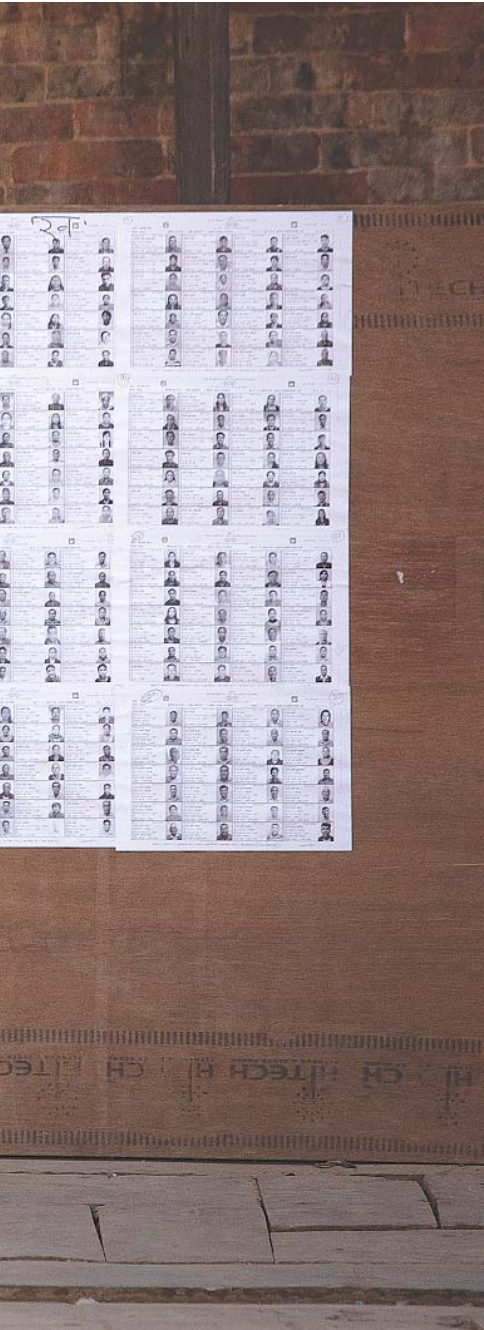
## HBL cards

Himalayan Bank has started accepting Discover®, Diners Club International® and network alliance cards under the Discover® Global Network. The bank has enabled POS terminals at various hotels, restaurants and stores. Merchants with Diners Club International and Discover logos will now accept these cards which will better facilitate tourists visiting Nepal.

## Ncell prepaid plan

Ncell has introduced three new prepaid plans costing Rs97, 98 and 99 each of which includes Rs10 main balance, 60 MB data, 40 minutes of on net calls and 20 on net SMS with a 7-day time limit. Customers recharging above Rs200 can receive a free 10% bonus of the amount for 3 days. Tourists visiting Nepal can also receive plans priced at Rs100, 500 and 1,000.





GOPEN RAI

The RSP is also forecast to add many more PR seats, perhaps even becoming the third-largest party ahead of the Maoist Centre in the new federal Parliament.

This is a dramatic rise for a party that was formed only six months ago by charismatic former tv anchor Rabi Lamichhane and who was joined by young and forceful candidates campaigning for good governance, accountability, better service delivery, and job-creation.

Lamichhane has himself won in Chitwan-2. The physician Toshima

Karki has won from Lalitpur-3, defeating Maoist Centre's Pampha Bhusal who is Energy Minister in the current coalition government. Former House Speaker Onsari Gharti of Maoist Centre lost to the lawyer Sobita Gautam in Kathmandu-2.

Manushi Bhattarai was unable to bank on coalition support and lost to the RSP in Kathmandu-7. Her father, former Maoist ideologue Baburam Bhattarai, had swapped his Gorkha constituency with Pushpa Kamal Dahal to be assured of Maoist support for Manushi.

"The coalition votes were split and scattered. The way I see it, losers this time are Maoist Centre, Unified Socialist, and the Mashes-based JSP and LSP," says political analyst Puranjan Acharya.

He adds that this is the direct result of the Maoist Centre and Unified Socialists (US) seeking more constituencies than their ability. "If the NC had a candidate in 25 more constituencies instead of distributing it to the Maoists and US, it would have ensured a bigger victory for the party," explains Acharya. "Except now, they have pretty much gifted their seats to the UML." The royal-right Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) chair Rajendra Prasad Lingden is expected to win in Jhapa-3, where the UML-backed leader is up against the coalition's Krishna Prasad Sitaula of the NC. The RPP's Dhawal Shumsher Rana, former mayor of Nepalganj, has already won a seat for the party from Banke-2.

But the RPP's Rabindra Mishra lost by a narrow margin in Kathmandu to NC's Prakash Man Singh. Other party veterans like Ishwor Pokhrel, Kamal Thapa, Upendra Yadav, Ramkumari Jhakri, and Shankar Pokharel have all lost their seats.

Meanwhile, erstwhile Madhes separatist C K Raut of the Janamat Party has won in Saptari-2. In fact, Nagarik Unmukti and Rastriya Janamorcha are ahead of the race in the Tarai, with more established Madhes-based parties struggling.

"We must congratulate Rabi Lamichhane for what he has achieved so far in this election but his road ahead is not easy. People had once chosen the Maoists frustrated with mainstream parties, but we all know what became of them," cautions Minendra Rijal.

He adds: "At the same time, I request my party mates to put a halt on their aspirations for prime ministership for now and instead focus on revamping Nepali Congress which will be in the interest of both the country and the party itself." 🇳🇵



SUMAN NEPALI

# When final results?

Five days after the general elections, less than half of the constituencies have had their votes counted and winners announced. In the lead up to the polls, the Election Commission has estimated all the results for First Past The Post candidates to come in a week's time, and by 1 December, announce the complete outcome.

Authorities had taken 13 days to count the votes following the local election in May, where 34,953 representatives were elected in 6 metropolitan cities, 11 sub-metropolitan cities, 276 municipalities and 460 rural municipalities.

The 20 November federal elections, however, had far fewer candidates at 11,543 and also fewer seats to fill in, 275 in the House of Representative and 550 in the Provincial Assembly.

Unlike in the local elections, this time one didn't have to vote for many posts in the ballot. In fact, there were four separate ballot boxes to make it easy for counting," says former Chief Election Commissioner Ayodhi Prasad Yadav. "Which is why we should get the results within a week."



Chief Election Commissioner Dinesh Kumar Thapaliya agrees: "By 8 December, we plan to publish the complete results including that of the Proportional Representation. If required we will fly the ballot in from the remote parts of the country."

Many Nepalis did not even bother to vote in the polls, recording the lowest turnout in recent years at only 61%. In Rolpa where the Maoist insurgency began in 1996, turnout was a mere 40% and it was similar in Gorkha from where Pushpa Kamal Dahal of the Maoist Centre is contesting.

Much of this is because of the people's disillusionment with mainstream parties. But Nepal's flawed electoral system is also to be blamed. There is no voting by mail despite a 2018 Supreme Court ruling meaning nearly 5 million Nepalis living and working abroad cannot exercise their rights.

The excuse for this is that mail voting could open up avenues for fraud, but the real reason is that it will allow for young, educated Nepalis to further undermine the establishment and vote for alternative candidates.

The government is also in no hurry to introduce electronic voting machines because the parties don't trust each other and fear that the other might cheat. Ironical, given that the Maoists got away with tearing up hardcopy ballot papers in Chitwan in 2017.

The fact that this is an election of alliances where parties of diametrically opposing ideologies have come together has made it that much more confusing for voters. This could have meant that the large proportion of ballot papers were disqualified, skewing the outcome itself.

The good news is that learning from the May local election, the Election Commission has this time made four separate ballot papers for different seats.

Even so, Nepal needs a more reliable vote counting system in place which as of now is as archaic as they come. And contrary to what our leaders believe, it would make the counting fairer and faster.

The longer counting takes, the higher the temptation for the losing side to disrupt the process, perhaps cheat and even resort to violence. Some of this is happening in constituencies where established leaders are trailing.

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# KATHMANDU FROM SPACE

## 60 years apart

● Kunda Dixit

From ground level, residents of Kathmandu Valley know how crowded the city has become. Many remember the terrace rice fields before they were covered over by concrete terraces.

Now, this rampant and haphazard urbanisation is visible in satellite images thanks to the declassification of American spy satellite imagery from 60 years ago.

The Corona strategic surveillance satellites were launched by the CIA and the US Air Force between 1959-1972 to gather intelligence on the Soviet and Chinese ballistic missile and nuclear weapons programs.

This became especially important after an American U-2 spy plane was shot down over the Soviet Union in 1960. The Corona satellite is code named Keyhole and would snap pictures from 150km in orbit, and return a capsule to earth to be retrieved by special planes with hooks, and the film developed in the CIA darkrooms.

In all, 144 satellites were launched and many of them failed. But there are enough high resolution photographs of the earth's surface. The images are now in the public domain after being declassified by President Clinton in 1992.

The images have been useful for anthropologists to study ancient aboriginal settlements in Australia, and uncover hidden Mesopotamian migration routes before they were obliterated by modern infrastructure.

Kathmandu Valley, obviously, has

changed a lot. The Valley floor is now wall-to-wall buildings, the broad floodplains of the Vishnumati, Manahara and Bagmati are now choked with buildings, the Budanilkantha alluvial fan below Shivapuri, which used to be wrinkled with terrace farms are now built-up.

There are also things that have not changed. The Gokarna forests and the wooded areas of the British and Indian Embassies are still there. The ancient palace complexes of Hanuman Dhoka and Mangal Bazar are more or less intact.

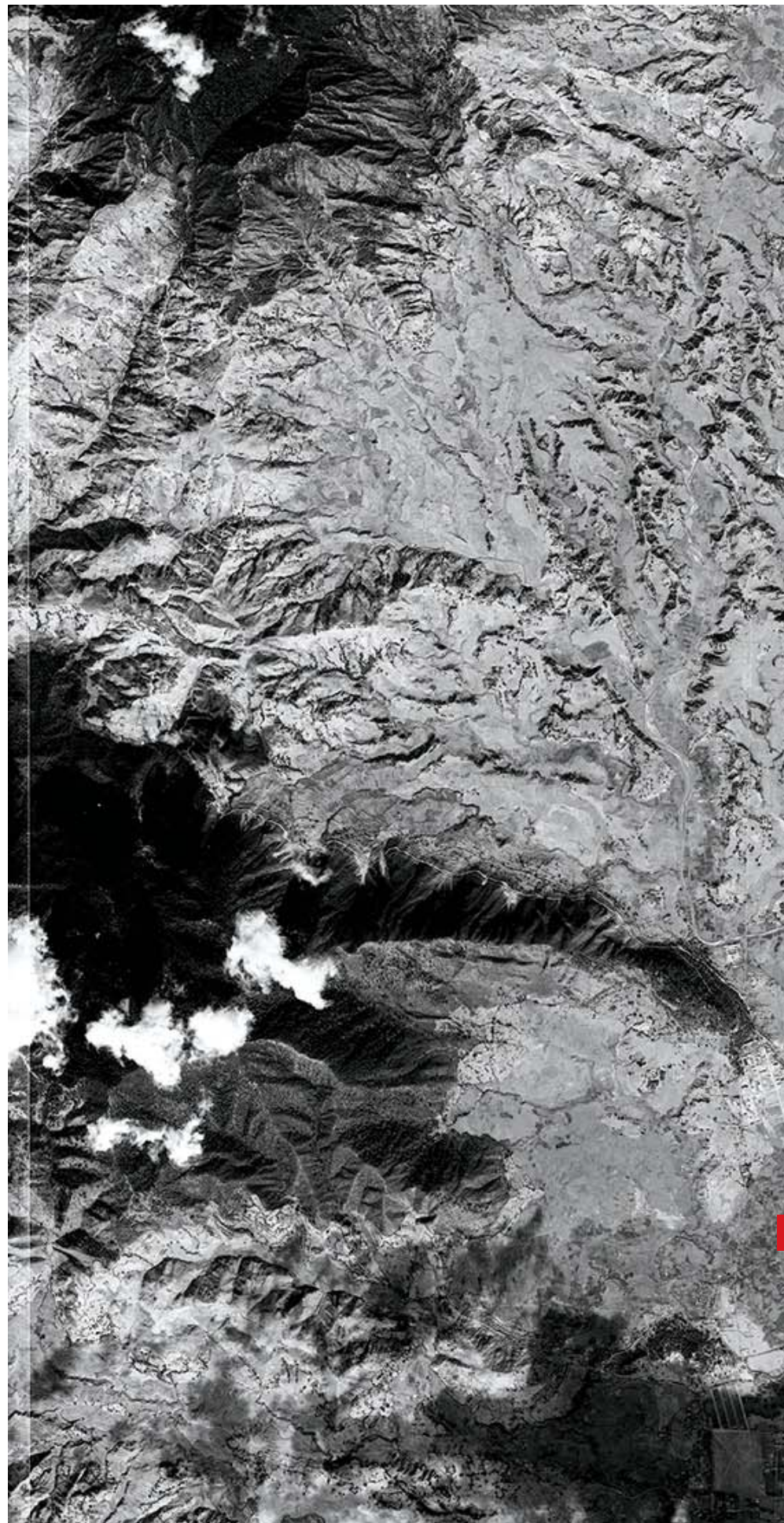
And while the photographs from 1967 show denuded hills on the Valley rim, these slopes now have thick forest cover when compared to Google Map images taken earlier this year. Partly this is because of community forests and also the establishment of the Shivapuri-Nagarjun National Park.

The Keyhole satellites are of such high resolution that DC-3 aircraft parked at the the newly-expanded airport at Gauchar can easily be spotted. And just like the Corona images were used to study ancient camel caravan routes in North Africa and West Asia, the paths used by residents of Thimi to cross the runway to Pashupati can be made out in closeups. 🇳🇵



[nepalitimes.com](https://nepalitimes.com)

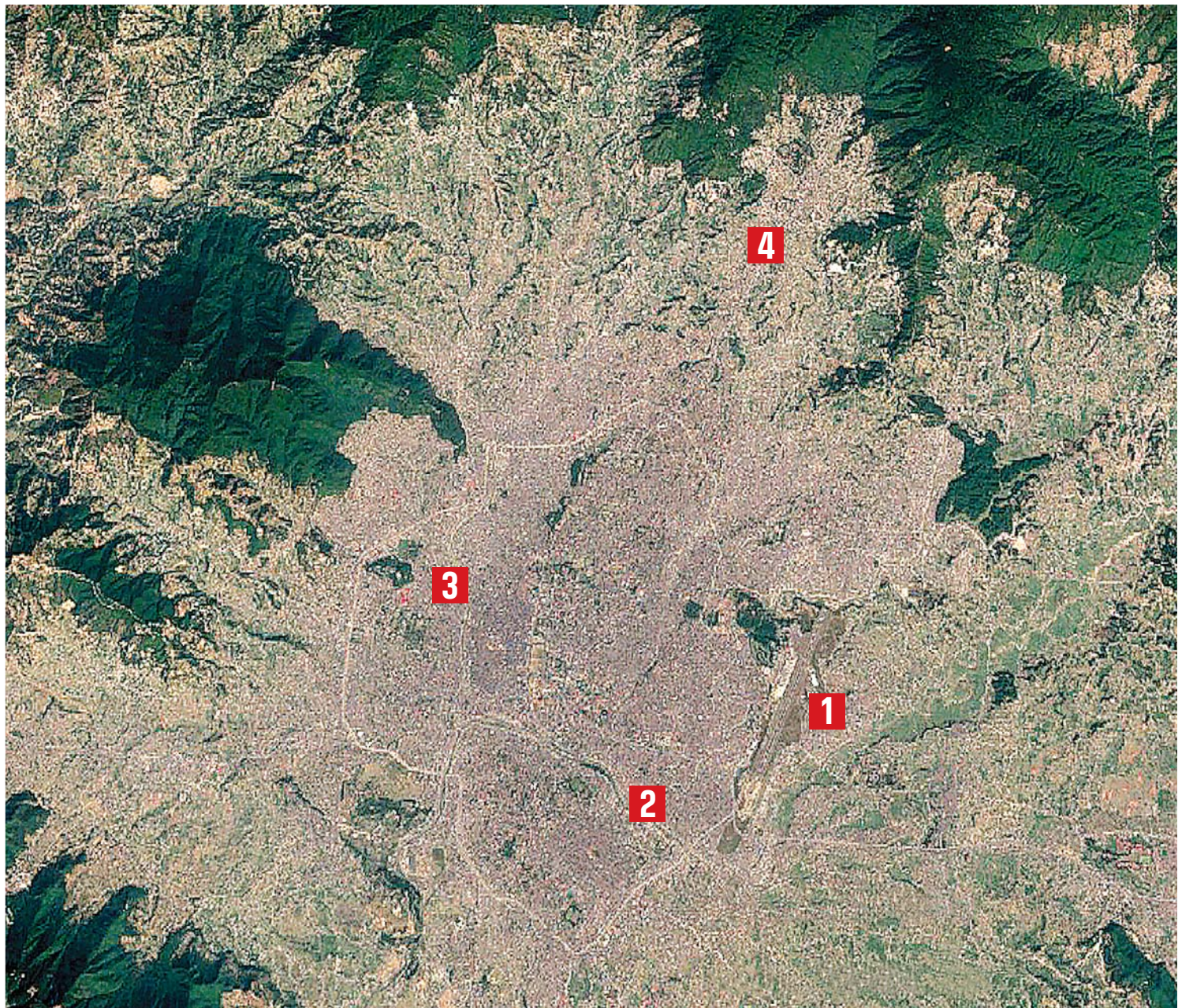
More before-and-after images online.



### Then and now

The Corona surveillance satellite image taken on 5 February 1967 shows the broad floodplains of the rivers flowing through Valley floor, Rana palaces, and the inner city of Patan and Kathmandu (right, above).

The Google Earth Map taken on 20 April 2022, shows how much Kathmandu Valley has urbanised (inset). ▶



#### 1 Kathmandu Airport

The newly constructed runway at Kathmandu Airport 60 years ago. The then-Royal Nepal Airlines' two Dakota aircrafts are visible, parked in the old settlement.

#### 2 Bagmati and Manahara

The new settlement of Baneswor and Buddhanagar, and the Bagmati River shrunk by the burgeoning urban landscape.

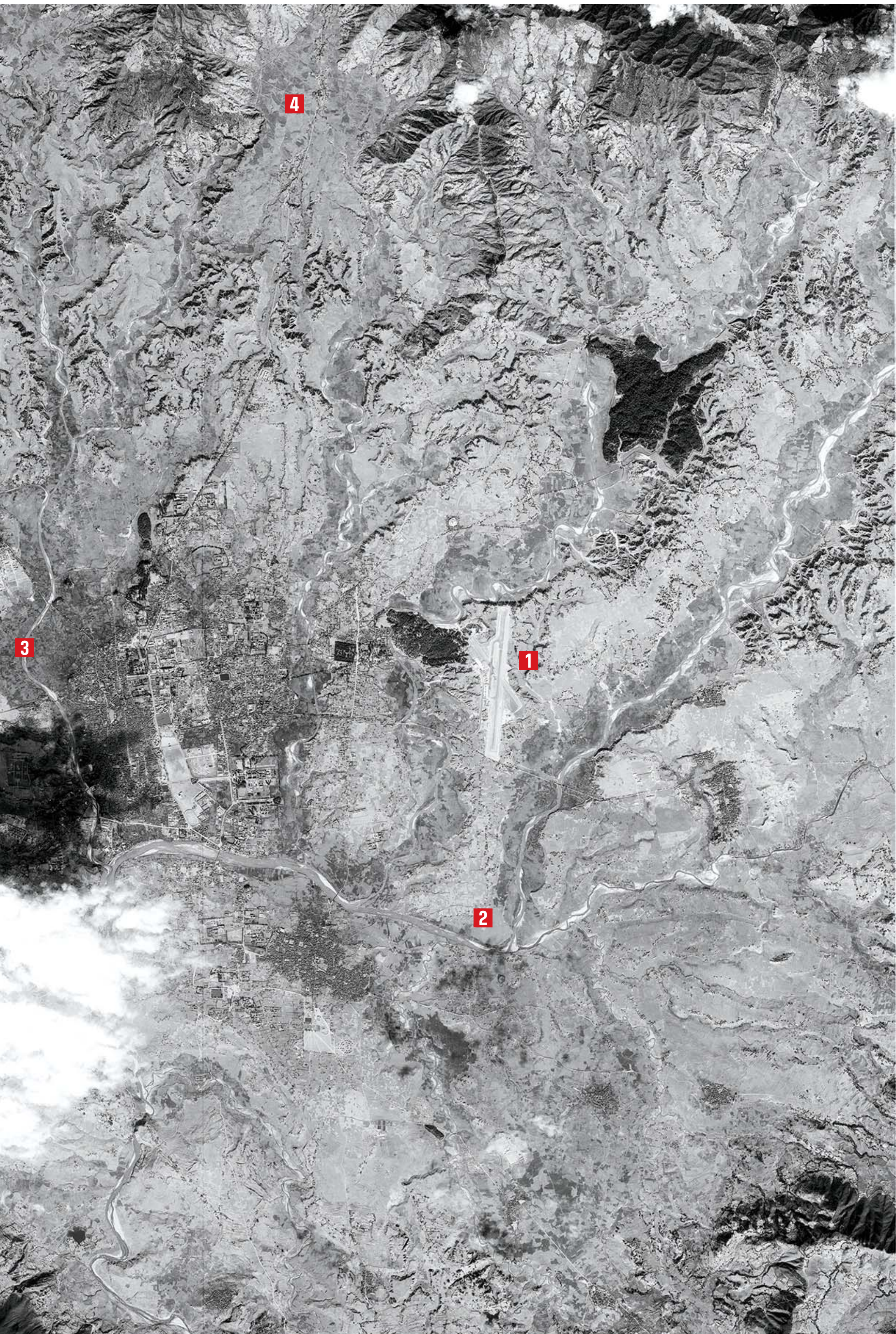
#### 3 Vishnumati plains

Balaju Industrial Area was just being set up six decades ago. Today, much of the forest in the area is gone, with only a few trees remaining inside the British and Indian embassies across the river.

#### 4 Budanilkantha and Nagarjun

The paddy fields of Budanilkantha have been replaced by residential buildings, but the mostly denuded Nagarjun hills from 60 years ago is now reforested.







EVENTS

Melting Paradise

Wind Horse Gallery presents a new photo exhibition by Tashi R Ghale, curated by Ujen Norbu Gurung.

26 November-25 December, 11am-6pm, Wind Horse Gallery, Jhamsikhel, 9823494957



Yoga hike

Hike up to Namo Buddha and participate in yoga asana practices, topped with a healthy organic lunch. Register now.

26 November, 6.30am onwards, Patalekhet (01) 4446358

Ranjana lipi and Aila

Learn the beautiful Ranjana lipi, accompanied by delicious traditional Newa cuisine. Register now.

26 November, 1pm-4pm, Traditional Stay, Swotha, Patan



Frame within frame

Join photography and culture enthusiasts, and take a walk around Basnatapur and Hanumandhoka Darbar Square. Open to anyone with a free morning and desire to learn or teach camera skills. Don't forget necessary tools and gears.

26 November, 7:00am, Mama's Tea, Basantapur, 9843957479 / 9843650327

Memories, soil

Bidhyaman Tamang's new exhibition of prints, 'My memories of the soil', opens at Siddhartha Art Gallery.

27 November-11 December, 11am-5pm, Siddhartha Art Gallery (01) 4218048

DINING



Momotarou Restaurant

Enjoy Momotarou's delicious Japanese menu. Try the soft tofu, pork cutlets, don varieties and the mouthwatering bento box for a truly delectable experience.

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ONLINE GAMES



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Located just beyond the banks of Phewa Lake, Hotel Barahi offers stunning views and luxury rooms decorated with rustic pieces, earthy tones and a clean design that will leave one with a relaxed and rejuvenated feeling.

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Tiger Palace Resort


Regarded as one of the most dynamic, exciting and luxurious resorts in Nepal, Tiger Palace Resort offers a wide variety of entertainment and activities. From an international Casino to six different eateries, this getaway is a must visit for travellers venturing south of Kathmandu Valley.

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Hotel Country Villa

From the top of Nagarkot, Hotel Country Villa offers the best view of the surrounding hills and mountain range, with scrumptious Indian and international delicacies. Head over for the weekend.

Naldum Road, Nagarkot (01) 6680127



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Bandipur, 9449597880



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Naldum Road, Nagarkot (01) 6680127

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WEEKEND WEATHER

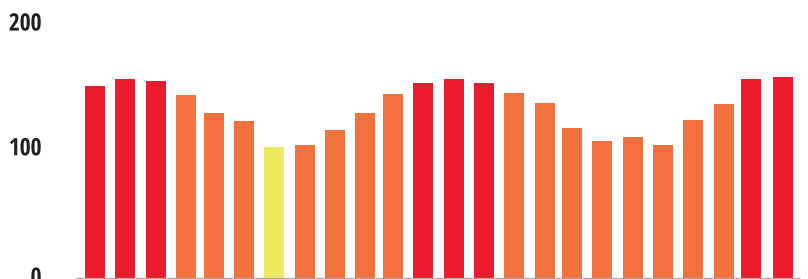


Clear and Sunny

Kathmandu will have clear sunny days over the weekend, with nothing by way of a westerly system moving in. Without the insulating effect of clouds, the night-time temperature in the Valley will fall further to 8°C, while the maximum temperature will be slightly higher in the 23°-24° range, which is normal for this time of year. Morning fog in the Trisuli Valley and Chitwan. In the higher trekking areas, the weather will be glorious for the coming days, with night-time frost and nights with below-freezing temperatures. Afternoons will be windy.

FRIDAY 23° 8° SATURDAY 22° 8° SUNDAY 23° 8°

AIR QUALITY INDEX



10AM 23 November to 9AM 24 November measured at US Embassy, Phora Darbar

The smoke from crop fires in India now subsiding, however the bad news is that with the onset of winter, industrial and vehicular emissions in the Indo-Gangetic plains, the Tarai, and Kathmandu Valley will increase due to night-time inversion that will concentrate suspended particulates. Air Quality Index in Kathmandu valley will deteriorate further, peaking in early morning and later evenings.

OUR PICK




Tyler and his companion Margot Mills travel by boat to Hawthorne, an exclusive restaurant owned and operated by celebrity chef Julian Slowik, located on a private island. The other guests attending the dinner are Lilian, a food critic, her editor Ted; wealthy couple Richard and Anne; George, a post-prime movie star and his personal assistant Felicity; and business partners Soren, Dave and Bryce. Over the full course, the line between serf and nobleman slowly disappears in a shockingly dark and humorous turn, and the evening descends into a dazzling madness. Powered by a witty script and engrossing performances, *The Menu* asks how best to serve revenge against the ultra-rich. Perhaps it is a dish best served over a naked flame. Stars Ralph Fiennes, Anya Taylor-Joy, Nicholas Hoult, Hong Chau, Janet McTeer and John Leguizamo.

दूषित पानीका कारण हुने रोगप्रति सजग रहौं


फोहोर पानीले झाडापखाला, हैजा, टाइफाइड, आउँ, जन्डिस जस्ता रोगहरू लाग्न सक्छन् ।

त्यसैले;

- खोला, धारा वा मूलको पानी सीधै नपिऔं ।
- पानी उमालेर वा शुद्धीकरण गरेर मात्र पिऔं ।
- पानीलाई पीयूष, अक्वाट्याब्स वा अन्य क्लोरिनजन्य कुराहरू हालेर शुद्धीकरण गरौं ।
- पिउने पानीलाई सफा भाँडामा छोपेर राखौं र सफा भाँडाले पानी झिक्ने गरौं ।




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# Art as a call to action

Street artist Green Brain's latest murals turn attention to migrant workers who built Qatar's World Cup stadiums

● Ashish Dhakal

Sameer Gurung, 30, who goes by the alias Green Brain, believes in the uniting power of football, and will be watching the matches in the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar with the rest of the world. But knowing about the abuse and death of migrant workers, including from Nepal, the artist in him was bursting to come out.

Gurung felt that a world infatuated with the 'beautiful game' does not know enough of what went on behind the scenes in building the stadiums in the desert.

"The 90 minutes of a match breaks barriers, brings players from various backgrounds, nationalities, race and ethnicity together on the same field, playing for the same goal," explains Gurung. "But people have no idea what it took to have those games. We pretend not to notice and go on with our lives."

Gurung expresses this frustration through gigantic wall murals in Kathmandu under the title *Chyatiyeko Yathartha* ('torn reality') in which the artist uses torn clippings, with song lyrics and three-storey high messages addressing government apathy. It is at once discomforting and revealing.

"The abuse faced by migrant workers is intolerable, but I am neither a public speaker, nor do I protest in the streets," he says. "All I have as a medium of expression is art and, this way, sitting in my room, I can give voice to my discontent."

*Chyatiyeko Yathartha* is Green Brain and his team's second solo project. With it, he wanted to raise concern through gigantic street graffiti to reach the public, especially Nepal's youth.

His first series, *Buda Paka*, in February drew attention to preserving the heritage and culture of Nepal. Drawn on the wall of a building in Asan, the artwork showed a man carrying a *kharpan* on his shoulders as he walks through an old street as brick walls, carved windows, doors and shop fronts curve before him. The idea here was to remind the youth to preserve and promote the hard work of the older generation, so that the culture and heritage may survive into the future.

His affinity to layers of meanings, that viewers slowly



RABIN NGHEMA LAMA

unravel one at a time, is reflected also in his chosen name, which he picked in 2017. For him, green is more than just the colour of nature. "Green is life and positivity which I relate to," he explains. A fluorescent green hue is present in all his work, which also relate to the local heritage, culture and activism.

"As for the Brain in my name," he adds, "that's because I am fascinated by people's thoughts, and how we become our thought."

Gurung's love for art goes all the way back to Grade 2 in school when he would draw patterns on the margins of notebooks, often competing with friends to see who would draw better, faster.

"I always had an inkling for art," he recalls, and when he completed his SLC, he went to a tattoo artist to see if he could train under them for three months before +2 classes kicked in.

"But the artist said I was a little too young then," Gurung adds, "saying I should wait until I had completed high school."

He realised he was not made

for jobs, and entertained the idea of leaving Nepal. His brothers are based in France and he has friends in Australia, Europe and the USA, and he thought he ought to do the same. Go somewhere, just anywhere.

But because he did not have the grades, he did not want to limit himself to menial jobs just for survival abroad. So he returned to open a tattoo shop with a friend. At first he practiced on close friends who allowed him to gain some practice on their skin.

When his friend left for Australia two years later, Gurung closed the shop and started teaching himself other different forms of art, including digital.

"I did not want to rush overseas because it was evident that I would not get the space and freedom to be creative, as I would have to worry about working hard just for survival," he explains. "At least here in Nepal I have my family for support. More importantly, Nepal is quite magical, so I threw myself into art."

He participated in various commercial art projects in this time, and volunteered in the work of French-Tunisian artist eL Seed, who is famous for championing the art of 'calligraffiti', a mixture of Arabic calligraphy and graffiti. Titled 'Like Her', the project in Giranchaur in Sindhupalchok was unveiled in 2021 and depicted the words of Yogmaya Neupane ("There is nothing between us, nothing at all. Your eyes have tears, just like my own."), a pioneer poet and revolutionary who spoke against the Rana regime and committed *jal-samadhi* by jumping together with 67 disciples into the Arun River in 1941.

'Like Her' explored the role of women in rebuilding villages destroyed by the 2015 earthquake. The 170m long installation covered the rooftops and connected each house to another, linking the voices of the women, sharing their wisdom, strength and resilience.

*Chyatiyeko Yathartha* too is richly detailed, and a call to attention. The centre-piece is the World Cup trophy and Lusail

Stadium, where the final match will take place on 18 December. They drip at one corner under the scorching desert heat, like beads of sweat and tears of the tens of thousands of migrant workers who toiled to build them.

"The Government also hopefully will take this more seriously and ensure their protection such that abuses are minimised in the future," he adds. "If we don't raise our voices for our fellow citizens, what incentive will there be for the host country governments to act?"

While Human Rights Watch (HRW) and other activist groups launched a global campaign #PayUpFIFA in May, calling on FIFA to compensate migrant workers involved in building stadiums and other infrastructure and to avoid the legacy of what they call a 'World Cup of Shame', Qatari Labour Minister on 2 November rejected such calls, calling them publicity stunts and accusing Qatar's critics of racism.

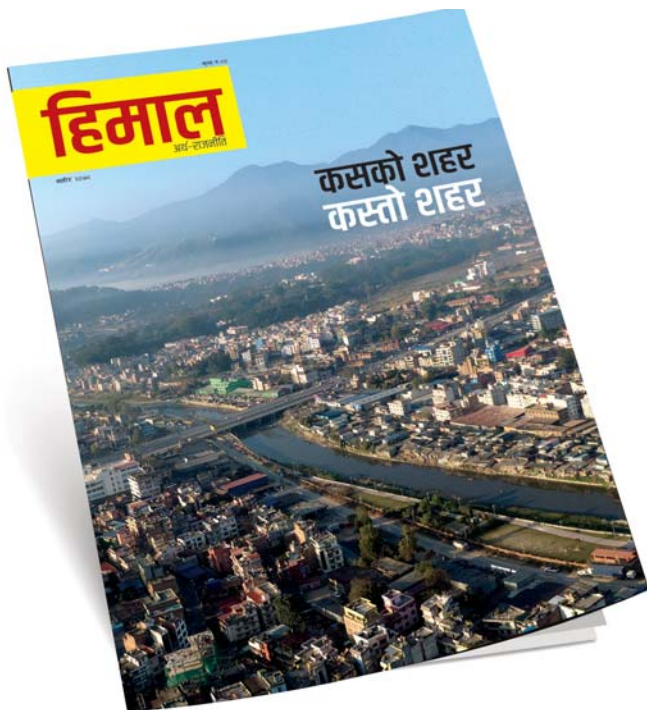
*Chyatiyeko Yathartha* is Gurung's way of protesting abuse and deaths of workers in Qatar and how the families are still not compensated, and he is working with a Scottish colleague on a 8x10m art piece that has taken six months to complete.

He says, "This is how we channel our rage. What has happened cannot be undone, but in the future, hopefully, migrant workers can have a better experience abroad."

The project was not without hiccups. Gurung initially wanted to set up the artwork at the busy Sorhakhutte junction near Thamel. But the neighbour of a multi-storeyed building refused the graffiti to be painted. A friend in Lalitpur offered the wall of their house.

A documentary on the painting process, launched on Green Brain's YouTube channel on 18 November, will take the mural to a wider audience and raise awareness of the reality of migrant workers.

"Imagine if a worker from the West had died in Qatar, the outrage it would spark, the investigations that would take place," says Gurung. "So many Asians have died over the years in Qatar but no one cares. I am not sure what my art will do, but at least I did my small bit." 🇳🇵



## हिमालको मंसीर अंक बजारमा



हिमालमिडिया प्रा. लि.  
पाटनढोका, ललितपुर



# COST OF LIVING IN A BIG CITY

Unplanned urbanisation and lack of affordable housing have made Nepal's urban centres uninhabitable

● Ramesh Kumar

Over the last decades, Nepal's socio-political transformation has led the country from an agriculturally-dependent rural nation to a country with expanding urban spaces.

Although rural Nepalis are still dependent on farming, the contribution of agriculture to the country's economy has shrunk to 25%, while the expansion of banking, telecommunication, trade and other service sectors has been rapid.

The Kathmandu Valley has nurtured 2,000 years of civilisation and culture, and is among the oldest and largest cities south of the Himalaya. Its thriving non-agricultural economic activity remained the one true Nepali urban centre for much of the country's history -- to the extent that citizens outside of the city called it 'Nepal' in the past, considering the city a nation unto itself.

The evolution of most cities outside the valley has emerged as a relatively new trend, after the expansion of trading centres along Nepal's southern border following the extension of railway lines in north India by the British towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Subsequently, cities in the hills — like Tansen, Dhankuta and Pokhara — emerged after the establishment of state administrations.

However, access to road infrastructure like the East-West highway — which facilitated an increase in economic activity as well as migration from the central hills to the fertile southern plains—played a significant role in the establishment of major cities like Hetauda, Narayangad, Damak and Mahendranagar.

But as many cities as there are now, most of them share similar characteristics: unorganised settlements, improperly managed urban infrastructure, and unequal access to opportunities. Urban planner Jagdish Chandra Pokharel says, "Nepal's cities are chaotic because an adequate inclusive blueprint to make them liveable does not exist, and cities have little urban character to them because expansion often takes place without planning."

Rather than urbanisation, Pokharel adds, there has been a "ruralisation of cities".

In the 2017 Nepal Labor Force Survey conducted by the Central Bureau of Statistics, 36.2% of respondents said that their residence was different from their place of birth, showing an increasing trend of internal migration. There were only 16 urban centres across the country according to the 1971 census, and Nepal's urban population was

3.6%. Kathmandu was the only city with a population of more than 100,000, while only five other cities recorded a population of more than 20,000.

But migration to the Tarai expanded in the 1970s, and more cities formed. By the time Nepal became a democracy in 1990, the market centres of the Madhes were connected to the hills, and the urban population expanded rapidly.

Nepal's urban population growth rate grew almost three times in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and beyond. Fifty years after the 1971 census, data from the 2021 census puts the number of cities with a population of more than 100,000 at 39, most of them in the Tarai where urbanisation is concentrated.

Even as internal migration has impacted the evolution of cities in Nepal, foreign employment has also had a hand on where Nepalis have settled. Nepal's *lahure*, who returned from the British Army, began to resettle in cities in the 1970s, leading to an increase in population density in cities like Dharan, Pokhara, Bhairawa and Kathmandu.

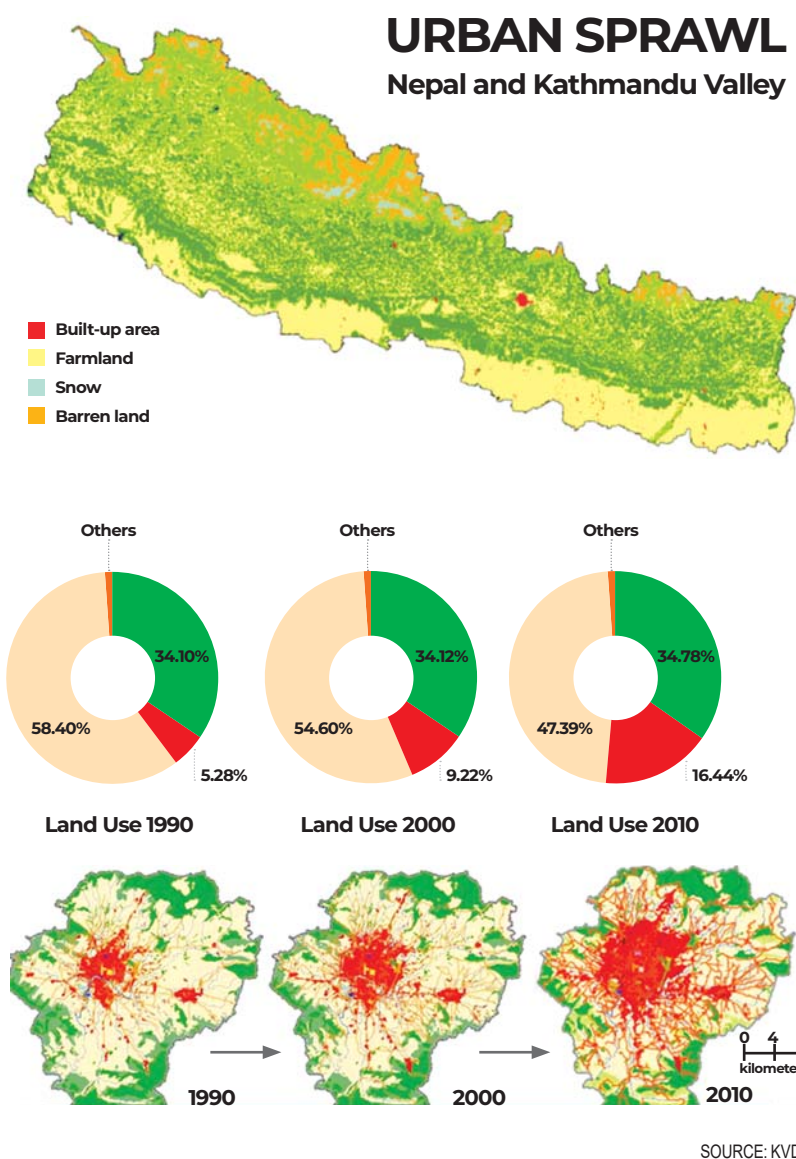
In the 1990s, Nepalis began leaving in droves to work in foreign countries other than India, changing the socio-economic dynamic of the country. This resulted in remittance income changing production, consumption and lifestyle of Nepalis, enabling rural families to migrate to urban hubs in search of better education and healthcare.

Moreover, the decade-long armed insurgency also contributed to in-migration as Nepalis began to move away from rural Nepal—mostly to district headquarters and to Kathmandu. Subsequently, the second People's Movement centralised Kathmandu's power.

The World Bank's 2016 *Moving Up the Ladder, Poverty Reduction and Social Mobility in Nepal* report states that Nepal's urbanisation is the fastest in South Asia, with the urban population expansion outpacing its 4% increase in annual GDP growth in the last few decades.

The federal restructuring turned many of Nepal's villages into municipalities without any clarity as to the economic criteria for changing the status of local administrative units. This means that 66% of Nepalis now live in cities, according to the 2021 National Census, and a significant number of the municipalities do not have urban characteristics.

Across the world, cities are defined on the basis of population density, access to infrastructure, and the existence of a non-agriculture economy. Indeed,



even Nepal's National Urban Policy, 2007, stipulates that in order to be declared an 'urban area', the population density must be at least 10 people per hectare with more than half of the population engaged in non-agricultural activities. However, most of Nepal's new cities do not meet that criteria.

Urban planner Mahendra Subba argues that in Nepal,

cities are declared on the basis of political decisions rather than any scientific procedure, and the policies are as ambiguous as they come. The National Urban Development Strategy 2017, states that the urban system in Nepal is imbalanced, with poor urban infrastructure, and inadequate standards.

Adds Subba: "Water supply management, safe roads, quality

housing, clean air, sufficient open space and waste management are important challenges to address."

### Ruralisation of Kathmandu

There is no better example to observe the flaws of urbanisation in Nepal than Kathmandu. Unsafe roads, polluted air, unmanaged traffic, inconvenient public transport, insufficient drinking water, garbage, and sewage mismanagement have become characteristic to the concrete jungle that is the capital.

This disorganisation has not only taken away from the aesthetic of the city, but also increased disaster risks of earthquakes, floods and fire. Kathmandu is a city of villages.

Access to water is at the top of Kathmandu's problems. While global standards stipulate an individual have access to 120 litres of water daily, Kathmandu residents have less than half

that amount. In fact, Kathmandu's population needs more than 450 million litres of water a day, but the supply does not amount to even a quarter of that. Even the Melamchi water supply project, which will bring 170 million litres of water per day, will not be enough to address Kathmandu's water shortage. The capital's traditional Malla-era stone spouts have dried up due to haphazard urbanisation.

Access to infrastructure is another problem. The city has become a maze of hazards navigable only by the rich and the able-bodied. Kathmandu has no organised roads for pedestrians, nor does it have disability-friendly structures. Even basic requirements like zebra-crossings are not maintained, leading to the deaths of dozens of pedestrians, including that of a Nepali





GOPEN RAI

diplomat right in front of the Singha Darbar recently.

On the other hand, uncontrolled increase in the price of real estate is reducing access to housing for middle and low income citizens in urban centres. The nexus of banks, land dealers, investors and the government have monopolised land ownership in Kathmandu as well as cities across Nepal. Urban poverty and squatter settlements have increased.

Urban planner Upendra Sapkota says that if affordable housing is not provided by the government and non-government sectors in cities including Kathmandu, squatter settlements will increase in the future. "Private housing companies should set aside at least 20% of their construction for affordable housing for the poor," he adds.

#### Moving to the city

The transformation of villages to cities is happening worldwide, and people have been leaving villages for cities for ages. The urbanisation of Nepal is therefore not a surprise, and may even be essential to raise living standards.

"Urbanisation is not bad, but it is important to pay attention to what kind of urbanisation is taking place," says urban planner Jagdish Chandra Pokharel.

Increasing greenery and electric vehicles to reduce pollution, managing accessible and disaster-friendly housing to low-income Nepalis, and ensuring an inclusive space for Nepalis of all socio-economic backgrounds could be immediate steps to make cities more liveable.

Systematic urban development also increases the ties of cities to villages, facilitating development in


rural areas. Experts add that urban expansion is the right path to increasing access to infrastructure and socio-economic services in Nepal's villages, which will go on to create opportunities and curb migration.

"We should think about how to connect urban centres with villages so that facilities are extended to rural Nepal as well," says another urban planner, Saroj Basnet.

In recent years, discussions about urbanisation have extended to 'Smart Cities' and 'Satellite Cities'. However, there is no clear blueprint for building such a city, and discourse remains limited to political announcements.

The National Urban Development Strategy has pointed out the need for additional investment of more than Rs12 trillion to build infrastructure in just 217 municipalities. By the year 2031, this need will reach Rs36 trillion.

Mahendra Subba adds: "Although municipalities are legally entrusted with the responsibility of urban expansion, the technical, administrative and financial capacity of local units is not up to par." Indeed, even though the government has announced the creation of 10 big cities, there has been no real discussion or preparation regarding investment, availability of resources, or need.

"Our urban policies have failed to address how to mobilise and distribute available resources to build smart cities," says geographer and regional planning expert Pitambar Sharma, adding that cities cannot be built on political pronouncements alone. 

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# Relocating Kathmandu

There is no question that Kathmandu has now become unliveable, and we need to think about moving. There is a proposal to relocate the capital so that we can make another part of the country unliveable.

Over the years, there have been various proposals about where to relocate. Chitwan was the most obvious choice, given its central location along the East-West Highway, and the possibility of having rhinos roaming the streets instead of cows.

Some geographers have proposed Pokhara as the new capital, since it now has an international airport. The only problem being that Pokhara's urban chaos already resembles Kathmandu's, and the capital may have to be moved again if we relocate it there.

Like Brasilia and Naypyitaw, Nepal could also find a completely new place and build another capital from scratch. We have made some preliminary inquiries, and it looks like the Khumbu Glacier may not be such a bad place. With the climate crisis, it will no longer be too cold up there, and Nepal can go into the Guinness Book as having the capital with the highest elevation in the world. (New tourism slogan: 'Go To Nepal, Get High')

There are other options:

- Since the people of the landfill site at Banchara Danda do not want Kathmandu's trash and have refused our refuse, we can move Kathmandu to Banchara Danda. It is close by, and no one will notice because both places are already garbage dumps.
- One of Kathmandu's problems is that we have run out of water. Instead of bringing water from

- Melanchi through an expensive tunnel that could be knocked out of action again, how about we move Kathmandu to Melanchi, right to the source of the water?
- Manang. Since the trans-Himalayan district is now a bastion of the ruling Nepali Congress, it makes perfect political sense to locate the capital in a place with friends in high places. Ministers commute by mule.
  - Shifting Kathmandu to Kalapani would allow us to legitimise our claim to the East Bank of the Kali River, and we could also be so far from everything that no one will bother us anymore.
  - Relocate Nepal's capital to New Delhi since everything's being decided there anyway.

If we do move Kathmandu away from Kathmandu, the question then arises what do we do with the Kathmandu we have? Good point. Luckily for you The Ass already has a clever plan: build a high dam at Chobhar and return Kathmandu Valley to what it was before Manjushree hastily cleft the mountain with his mighty sword without conducting a proper Environment Impact Assessment.

The reservoir thus formed would meet all of Nepal's power needs, and have enough leftover to export to India. Just have to make sure we don't involve any Chinese contractors.

This plan has other benefits: it would solve Kathmandu Metropolitan City's problems of overcrowding, air pollution and garbage by completely submerging the city. We would also be solving the problem of government corruption because Singha Darbar would go underwater.



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