



■ Shristi Karki

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal has had an unenviable job. He needed to balance the aspirations and ambitions of seven coalition partners and rival interests within them for ministerial posts in his government.

He had to appease not just his coalition members, but also the Nepali Congress (NC) which wanted a quid-pro-quo for its support of the government in Parliament.

After weeks of haggling and give-and-take, Dahal added 12 new ministers, three new state ministers and one deputy prime minister to his Cabinet on Tuesday. He filled 23 positions, of which 16 are first-time ministers. The country now has four deputy prime ministers.

He has retained the Ministry of Forests and Environment as well as the Ministry of Youth and Sports for himself as stop gap in case he needs to distribute more favours to malcontent partners.

The UML now has eight ministers, while the Maoist Centre has six cabinet members. Meanwhile, the independent RSP and the right-royal RPP have four ministers each.

As soon as the new Cabinet positions were announced, however, there was discontent

CONFLICTING INTERESTS

within Dahal's seven-party governing alliance.

Janamat received just one portfolio, with its lawmaker Abdul Khan appointed the Minister of Water Supply. But Khan refused to take the oath of office on Tuesday over his party's dissatisfaction with having been denied the more attractive Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies as previously promised by Dahal.

Meanwhile, the JSP also refused ministerial positions offered over the distribution of cabinet as well as constitutional appointments. The party had wanted three ministerial portfolios, including the Ministry of Urban Development.

Most media commentators have been outraged about the conflict of interest of the new appointees.

RPP lawmaker Minister of Urban Development Bikram Pandey, for instance, is Chairman and Managing Director at a construction company with ongoing government infrastructure contracts.

Labour Minister Dol Prasad Aryal of the RSP is the International Marketing Director at a recruitment agency. Shishir Khanal, the new Education Minister, is also founder of Teach for Nepal.

The RSP was already blamed for conflict of interest when Rabi Lamichhane was appointed Home Minister and Deputy Prime Minister by Prime Minister Dahal even as he was being investigated over his Nepali and US citizenship.

Defenders of the appointments have said

that the business interest of the ministers in their portfolios need not be a negative thing, since it gives them inside knowledge of the sector. The worry is that they may have insider interests in policy decisions as well.

On Tuesday, the Prime Minister presided over an all-party meeting during which he floated a trial balloon of the NC being given constitutional appointments like the posts of President and/or Speaker.

Coalition partners were not happy, since they thought who gets what was already decided. The UML was supposed to have the president and the post of speaker. The RSP was getting deputy speaker and the Maoist Centre would keep vice-presidency.

An angry K P Oli of the UML walked out of the meeting. For his part, Deuba said coyly that his party was "open to receiving" constitutional positions.

As of press time on Thursday, Parliament was in session to decide on the new speaker. The UML fielded senior leader Devraj Ghimire, while the NC put forward lawmaker Ishwari Devi Neupane. The Speaker is voted in by a simple majority in Parliament.

The big question now is which of the two biggest parties (NC or UML) will get to appoint the new president to succeed Bidya Devi Bhandari, who was nominated by the UML after 2017. 🇳🇵

NEPAL'S
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DEMOCRACY
EDITORIAL
PAGE 2

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Nepal's illiberal democracy

On 10 January, Nepal's Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal received an almost unanimous vote of confidence in Parliament, including from the Nepali Congress (NC), which is the biggest party in the House and is not part of Dahal's seven-member coalition.

In defence of his decision, Deuba proclaimed that his party had decided to give Dahal vote of confidence to protect the Constitution from the coalition itself -- hinting at coalition partner K P Oli who had dissolved Parliament in 2021 to protect himself. But in doing so, Deuba has made a mockery of the democratic process, creating a legislature without opposition to hold the government accountable.

A national consensus on government formation is expected only in situations of common national interest, such as war or disaster, but clearly personal ambition and partisan interest has taken precedence over the national interest in Nepal.

Prime Minister Dahal dangled the presidency before the NC and top leadership took the bait, obliterating the opposition and endangering democracy. Deuba made it clear he wants to have his cake and eat it too, stating that his party will remain in the opposition but is "open to accepting" positions of President, Vice President, Speaker or Deputy Speaker. Is that all, Mr Deuba?

Even Shekhar Koirala and Gagan Thapa, the leaders of a rival faction within the NC, approved Deuba's platform despite initial criticism.

The NC had an opportunity to be a strong opposition, strengthen its organisation without encumbrance from and obligations to other parties, and re-establish itself as the country's oldest democratic power. As the party with the strongest mandate in Parliament, it could have used public sympathy for being kept out of power due to political manoeuvring to gain back the trust of the people.

However, Deuba's refusal to give up his premiership which consequently cost his party the government, and his inability to be an effective opposition has meant that the NC is now worse off in the eyes of the Nepali people.

As it is, people's trust in the establishment has eroded progressively due to historical political mismanagement and most recently during the Covid-19 pandemic when both

the NC and K P Oli's UML were too busy with their power struggle to care for public health.

Frustrated Nepalis voted in droves for new, young candidates within former tv anchor Rabi Lamichhane's Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), especially in the urban centres, and for CK Raut's Janamat in the Tarai and Nagarik Unmukti in the far west. Meanwhile, the general election also saw a re-emergence of the royalist-right Rastriya Prajatantra Party.

There is still time for the NC to undo the mistake it made by giving the vote of confidence to Dahal. It would do well to remember that Nepali voters trusted the party enough that it is the largest party in Parliament. NC lawmakers can uphold that

trust by safeguarding the Constitution and democracy. Instead of being a lapdog of the government, they can be the loyal opposition to make the government accountable.

Analysts have also pointed out the possibility of geopolitical manoeuvring and interference preventing NC from becoming a strong opposition. If this is the case and Nepal's top political leadership has become pawns of neighbouring nations, our democracy is in an even bigger trouble than we thought.

A government with unconditional backing makes for an extremist kleptocracy that abuses its power and a kakistocracy that exploits citizens and plunders state resources. And even parties that historically fought for democracy, republic and federalism can drift to extremism.

In the absence of a strong opposition, there is a danger that the ruling coalition will call all the shots. This argument has even more basis, given that the government is led by Dahal who is still proud of the 10 years of armed struggle that propelled him to power under a multi-party parliamentary system.

Nepal's mixed electoral system makes it difficult for any one party to establish a majority. And while abolishing Proportional Representation (PR) elections would be a step towards building a stable government, this will not be possible until political parties ensure inclusivity in choosing election candidates, and Nepal has a diverse Parliament without it being a constitutional requirement.

Until such a time, Nepal will inevitably (and sadly) go through one shaky coalition government after another.

Rabin Giri



GOPEN RAI

A government with unconditional backing perpetuates its kleptocracy and kakistocracy.

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Collateral Damage

It has been 17 years since the Maoist insurgency ended. Nepal now has a prime minister who led that very rebellion, for the third time. But a whole new generation has grown up without any knowledge about the war.

Between 1996-2006, the Maoists targeted schools across the country, indirectly affecting the lives of millions of children. But most of all, many of the 17,000 casualties were young children. Whoever killed their parents, they sometimes ended up in the same orphanage. Elsewhere, children forcibly conscripted became collateral damage.

Excerpts of the report published in *Nepali Times* on issue #128, 17-28 January 2003, 20 years ago this week:

Sangita Yadav's father was a farmer in Banke district. The Maoists came while he was eating, dragged him out of his house, beat and tortured him in front of his family, and killed him. Sarala Dahal's father was a teacher in the same district. He was killed after surrendering to the security forces.

Sarala and Sangita are both being raised in a child shelter which has just opened in Nepalganj by the charity group, Sahara. With a capacity of taking care of 50 children, shelters like Sahara are just addressing the tip of the mountain of misery affecting Nepali children.



Nine-year-old Hira Bahadur Pariyar and his 13-year-old brother Nar Bahadur from Rolpa have become symbols of this lack of care for the children who have been affected by the violence of the past seven years. Their father was killed by police, probably one of the first dozen casualties after the Maoists launched their "peoples' war" on 13 February, 1996. Unable to take care of the

boys by herself, Hira and Nar Bahadur's mother abandoned them. Last week, the boys walked up bravely to the district administrator in Libang and demanded that the state raise them.

No one is even keeping count of thousands of children like Sangita, Sarala, Hira and Nar Bahadur. Besides orphans and the destitute, there has been a sudden spurt in the past month in children being abducted from schools across Nepal, forced to take part in military training, attend Maoist mass meetings or do portering for the rebels. Many have since been released unharmed, but the spreading panic has made many parents send their children to the safety of the district towns.

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

ONLINE PACKAGES



LIVES ON THE LINE

Amidst the Nepal plane crash, let us look at another big cause of fatalities in Nepal, road traffic accidents. More Nepalis die in highway accidents every year than in all natural disasters combined. Watch the video on *Nepali Times* YouTube channel. Subscribe for more original multimedia content.



ON A SHAKY GROUND

Nepal marked the 25th National Earthquake Safety Day on 16 January this week. *Nepali Times* delves into why quakes are so devastating in Nepal, infrastructure that stand high-intensity tremors, and how retrofitting can be a cost-effective approach against the disaster. Watch the video and read story on *Page 10-11*.

POKHARA CRASH

A very sad day for Nepal's civil aviation ("Pokhara bound flight crashes in Nepal", nepalitimes.com, read analysis on *Page 4-5*). Speculation is easy but we must all demand and require a credible investigation of the best international caliber.

Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge

■ We are deeply saddened but not shocked because of the system of Nepal aviation and laws. It'll happen again if the Nepal government doesn't enforce strict laws in aviation, especially on domestic flights.

Sherabb Studio

■ Nothing will change. Politicians will simply offer compensation and condolences. But they won't change the system, safety standards or regulations.

Anmol Pandey

■ May the candlelight vigil held in memory of the lives lost be a reminder to the government that it has now a responsibility to impartially and honestly look into what led to the crash and what steps to take to bring an end to air accidents.

Krishna Kumar Limboo

■ The catastrophic hull loss disaster of Yeti Airlines 9N-ANC which crashed 1NM from final touchdown claiming the lives of all aboard is yet another devastating confirmation of the inadequacy of the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal and the airline operators as well as the Rapid Response, Emergency and Disaster Management of the relevant authorities, particularly for accidents occurring near an airport facility. The ATR appears to have stalled at a low altitude on approach, leaving pilots with no chance to recover. The cause of every crash ultimately leads to human error, whether in the air or on the ground. The investigation of the FDR/CVR will hopefully yield conclusive results and a permanent correction of prevailing standards, investigation of operators' airworthiness and enforcement of revised air safety standards.

Rufus Phobendra Shrestha

PARLIAMENT SANS OPPOSITION

In times when there is a weak opposition or none at all, it is the duty of the bureaucracy, judiciary, media and common people to be the strong opposition ('Nepal's opposition-less Parliament', Shristi Karki, #1144). But, in Nepal's case, even the public isn't bothered or any of the agencies mentioned above. This will no doubt give rise to a multi-party dictatorship as well as anarchy.

Samaya Upadhyaya

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING

In a disastrous state

by Sonia Awale

2015 was just a warning, a mega-quake is overdue in western Nepal, and we better start preparing for it. Visit nepalitimes.com to find out how. Story also on *Page 10-11*.

f Most reached and shared on Facebook

Knowing our mountains

Only if we can identify individual peaks will we value and respect the Himalaya. Get a refresher like no other in this spread-out identifying individual mountains as seen from Sunakothi on the southern outskirts of Kathmandu Valley.

t Most popular on Twitter



Pokhara bound flight crashes in Nepal

A Yeti Airlines ATR72 crash in Pokhara this week is the worst disaster in Nepal's domestic aviation. All 72 people on board were killed in the accident. *Page 4-5* for an analysis of the crash and join the discussion online.

“ ” Most commented

Japanese Yen, Made in Nepal

by Maheshwar Acharya

Money may not grow on trees, but it grows on bushes in Nepal that are used to print Japanese currency notes. Read the story on our website for details.

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

A mega-quake is overdue in western #Nepal. 15 million people will be directly affected. There will be more than 100,000 casualties and over 1.5 million buildings will collapse. We better start preparing for it.



Mark Pickett @DrMarkPickett

Truly sobering stat.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Pokhara bound flight crashes in #Nepal 32 bodies recovered so far but rescue hampered by spectators.



Navita Srikant @NavitaSrikant

Heartbroken to hear about deadly plane crash in #Nepal. Heartiest condolences to the victims' families and society as a whole aggrieved by this mishap. Prayers for all.



rupa joshi @rupajoshi

there'll be many lessons learned from this crash but one of them should be management on the ground during accidents, of any kind. everyone wants to report firsthand... hampering rescue & relief. citizens must be educated & asked to imagine that their loved ones' life is at stake



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Money may not grow on trees, but it grows on bushes in #Nepal that are used to print Japanese currency notes.



Akhilesh Upadhyay @akhileshU

LOVE THIS STORY #Nepal's unique ecological diversity and topography gives the country many CASH crops, but there is one crop that is actually turned into CASH

1,000 WORDS



GOPEN RAI



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Un-centralising the federal structure

Kathmandu’s rulers have yet to learn the ABC’s of devolving power to provinces

Nepal’s 2015 Constitution took two elections and more than a decade to write. Even then, it did not address a groundswell of identity consciousness and demands for autonomy.

Some of these were overlapping claims for ethnic, linguistic, religious, cultural and geographical belonging. During this sometimes-volatile process, the one factor that moderated the discord was the move towards inclusivity.



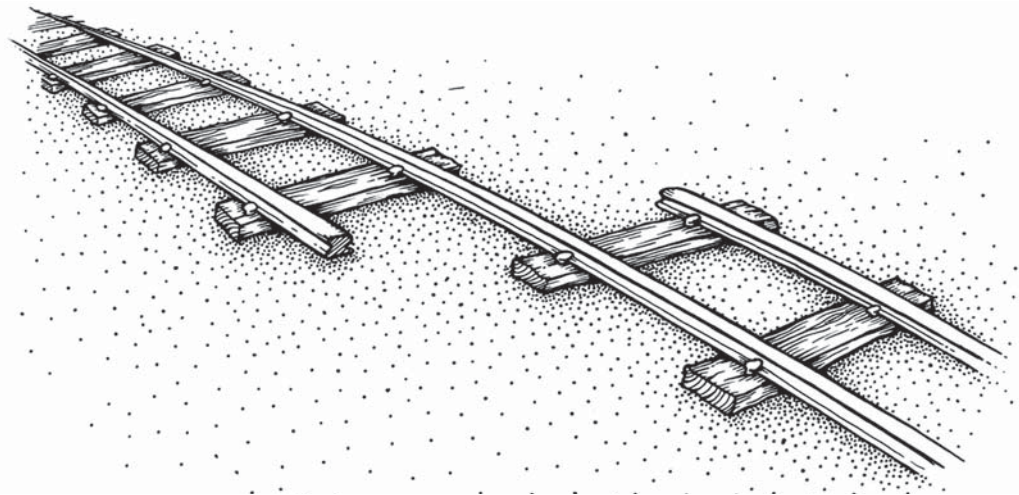
There is a Maithili saying in Nepal’s plains “चले थे हरि भजन को, ओटन लागे कपास”. It means ‘No matter how lofty your goals, keep yourself busy with the small details.’

Eight years after the Constitution was promulgated, and after the second elections under the federal system, we are still trying to make federalism work. It is a work-in-progress.

It is not enough for Nepal to be declared a ‘federal’ republic. The essence of federalism is to include Nepalis who have historically been excluded in the political process. The people want devolution that grants their province autonomy to make their own decisions.

Yet, even after the November 2022 elections in which a sizeable section of the electorate cast protest votes against established parties — and despite affirmative action provisions in the Constitution — provincial governments are anything but inclusive. All seven provinces recently nominated Chief Ministers, but where are the women? Where are the Dalits and the Indigenous people?

The movers and shakers in the provinces already have access to the corridors of power at party headquarters in Kathmandu. It is



the people at ground level, those kept out, and those without connections who want grassroots government.

The process of putting together provincial governments directly reflects the wheeling dealing and patronage at the centre. This means governance will once more be a challenge, and without it there is no hope for the neglected and left-behind.

It is not just the Madhes that needs federalism. Having an autonomous local government brings representatives closer to the people — no matter which province. Party cadre also get to practice the exercise of power and show accountability.

But by far the most important function of federalism is that it is effective in delivering appropriate and locally relevant development with accountability.

But November’s election threw up people’s representatives who do not like federalism, and some who want to abolish it. One cannot just turn federalism on or off with the flick of a switch. It does not work like that.

The exclusionists reject principles and ideas of devolving decision-making to local governments, and want a shortcut to political

power for themselves and their cabal by trying to make a self-fulfilling prophecy that federalism is an expensive white elephant.

Rejecting devolution is rejecting democracy. After all, democracy is not just a state governing mechanism, it is a social ideology, even a philosophy of national life.

The Constitution has tried to put the country on track to true devolution to provinces, but dog-eat-dog politics has been derailing this exercise.

This week is the anniversary of the Madhes Movement that allowed Nepal to move towards federalism. The second Movement was mediated by India, and in the third, it started showing who is boss.

Indeed, India’s role in Nepal’s political evolution is hardly hidden. But lately, one sees a drop in interest in Madhesi sentiments not just in New Delhi but even in Patna or Lucknow.

Recent political undercurrents are eroding the gains of the Madhes Movement. The relationship between Madhesi leaders and their electorate is being eroded fast, and unless there is new commitment to the cause, it could see a complete reversal.

That is because there is now no relation between what is promised at election time and what is accomplished. An anti-incumbent wave is also sweeping the plains. Those who espoused extremist views, took up arms, or were separatists have decided that a middle political path is a better alternative.

Those who used to be moderates have therefore had the rug pulled from under them. There is now only one kind of politics in the Tarai: one that reflects the interests and aspirations of citizens.

Conservative forces are trying their best to roll back the gains of the Movement, and within the Madhes the big national parties are also elbowing their way into the fray. Both will ultimately undermine the Madhes agenda.

What the Madhes wants is respect for its language and culture, genuine inclusiveness, sustainable development, streamlined access to state services. But the comforts of power have made Madhesi politicians status quo-ists, they are wallowing in the political muck of their own creation.

In the coming decade, Madhesi politics is set to change. A new post-1990 generation is coming of age which has seen both struggle, and its futility. The new generation is aware of the factors keeping the region back, it has understood the geography of Nepal and the place of the plains in it.

This new generation has a very clear idea about the political-economy of the borderlands. Their slogans are different, and so is the way they look at politics.

The Nepali nation state is now at the crossroads. It cannot look back, it must forge a more progressive path ahead. For that, friends of federalism must work to make the provincial political structure deliver. And the pre-requisites are inclusiveness and good governance. 🇳🇵

Chandra Kishore is a Birganj-based political commentator. This is his second monthly column BORDERLINES in Nepali Times. @kishore_chandra

LAND CRUISER

SHINE A LIGHT ON THE PATH FORWARD









The Pokhara crash was an outlier, but underscored deeper regulatory failure



The end was swift, a video live-

target of Rs 1.43 trillion. Due to low revenue, regular expenditure and developmental works can be delayed and at risk. On the other hand, government expenditure is at Rs53.45 billion, only 14% of the annual target, while salaries and allowances so far is Rs455 billion.



streamed by an Indian tourist of the final moments shows there were only seconds between the plane rolling left and impact. Bodies of 71 of the 72 passengers and four crew have been found. Rescue and recovery were hampered

by gawkers and selfie takers, although there were heroic efforts by local youth to pull some passengers out of the flaming wreckage. The actual reason for the crash will have to await analysis of the Flight Data Recorder (Black Box)

and Cockpit Voice Recorder by an investigation committee that has been formed. But it is clear from the videos that the plane stalled on the final turn. The question is why? A plane suffers a wing stall when there is insufficient lift either due to multiple engine failure, steep bank turn or angle of attack and/or failure to maintain air speed. Captain Kamal KC was a veteran with nearly 22,000 hours, with much of it on BA Jetstreams and ATR72s. Co-pilot Anju Khatiwada had logged 6,500 hours, and was sitting on the left cockpit seat on a final clearance flight to earn her captain's wings, which she would have got upon landing YT691 that day. Ironically, Khatiwada's husband had died in a crash of a Yeti Airlines Twin Otter in Jumla in 2006, when that plane also stalled while making a tight turn on finals.

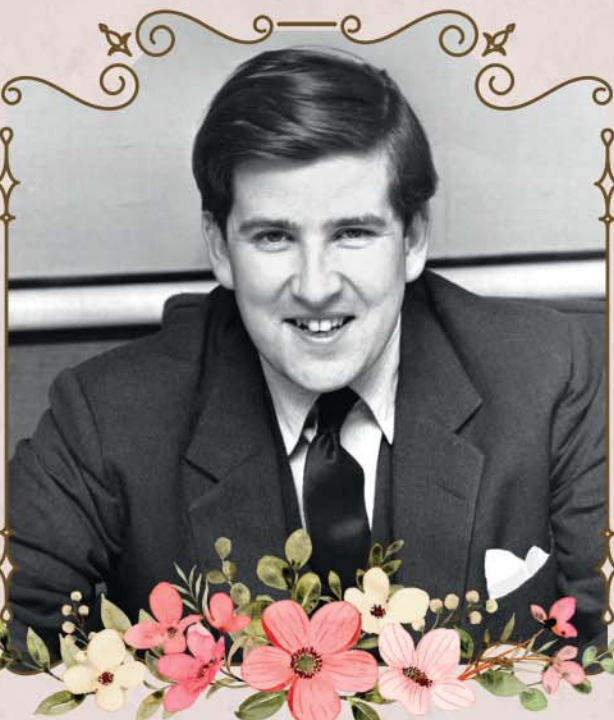


The Pokhara crash is expected to complicate Nepal's effort to extricate itself from the European Union's safety list which has banned Nepal's carriers from flying to or through Europe since 2013. The EU wanted the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) to be split into regulatory and operational agencies, and make several procedural reforms. After a 2017 audit by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) gave a passing score, CAAN officials had been optimistic that Nepal would be removed from the EU Aviation Safety Agency blacklist.

But the Tara Air crash in June 2022, and the Yeti Airlines disaster this week could further delay European certification. Tara is a subsidiary of Yeti Airlines and the group's founder, Ang Tshering Sherpa himself died in a crash in Taplejung in 2019 in one of his own helicopters, along with Tourism and Civil Aviation Minister Rabindra Adhikari. Adhikari, who was also MP from Kaski, had been instrumental in expediting the delayed construction of Pokhara's new airport that was finally inaugurated on 1 January this year -- just two weeks before this tragic crash. 🇳🇵

IN LOVING MEMORY

16 April 1940



4 January 2023

Ralph Thomas Stonor, 7th Lord Camoys

Always a source of inspiration, he has left behind a rich harvest of memories to cherish, honour and emulate. He will be dearly missed by our family and friends in Nepal, a country he was deeply associated with for many decades.

Siddhartha SJB Rana, Nilima, Amara, Savya

■ Reshu Bashyal

There are about 30,000 species of orchids found in the world, and of them 500 are found in Nepal. There are different types of orchids: they are called epiphytes if they cling to trees, lithophytes if they grow on rocks, terrestrial if on the ground, and there are even saprophytes which are orchids found underground.

The unusually-shaped Foxtail (*Rhynchostylis*) grows on trees in the Nepal Himalaya, as do the highly-protected Pachaule (*Dactylorhiza hatagirea*) orchid known for its medicinal properties. The Himalayan Slipper (*Cypripedium himalaicum*) are collected for their shoe-shaped flowers.

These and other 100 orchids are believed to have medicinal value in Chinese, Ayurvedic and *Amchi* traditional medicine to treat everything from pain relief to serving as aphrodisiacs.

Many are also harvested as ornamental plants and as fodder for livestock. Nepal has a long history of harvesting and trading wild orchids: supplying a significant amount of raw material to meet local and international demand both through legal and illegal channels.

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) lists orchids as an endangered flora. In fact, among its listed species of plants and animals, around 70% are orchids, and apart from a couple species of *Paphiopedilum*, also known as Venus Slippers, all orchids are listed under Schedule 2.

As Nepal is a signatory party to CITES, it is responsible for stopping the illicit trade, collection and export of these flowers. Nepal's own CITES Act 2017, which follows the Convention, states that there must be necessary plans in place before the orchids listed can be harvested.

Yet, in practice plant conservation is neglected. Orchids have made it into legislation, but only on paper. All harvesting of orchids is illegal in Nepal. While attention is paid to identifying orchid habitats, detailed research into their trade and conservation is still lacking.

Our relationship with plants is often different from that with animals. Endangered species of animals, such as the tiger and rhino, are protected strictly by law, but the same commitment is not extended to plants.

In Nepal, flora connoisseurs consider orchids special for their kaleidoscopic colour patterns and shape. Beyond the aesthetics, many Nepalis consume orchid petals to alleviate stomach cramps, as tonic, and even against cancer, often without identifying the plant and its properties.

Noting serious concern about the sustainability and legality of commercial harvesting and the collapse of some populations, Nepal banned the harvest of Pachaule orchids as far back as 1993. Further regulations were introduced, through monitoring of quotas and revenue payments to control harvest and trade of other species of orchid and their bulbs.

Yet, smuggling continues. In 2017, 75kg of the highly prized *Dactylorhiza hatagirea* were apprehended in Gorkha. There have been over 35 seizures of wild orchids in the last decade, nearly half of them bound for China.

Yet, only a few are caught. And if they are, it is by chance in police spot-checking a truck or bus and finding wild plants in them. Further, harvesters have also been selling orchids under different names, for instance: *Pleione* orchid bulbs are often smuggled as Himalayan gooseberries.

The pressing challenge to orchids has been its illegal harvesting and trade, that too in huge amounts done especially without proper training. This has raised concerns regarding the conditions of harvesting and collecting as well.

In Nepal orchids are found in remote areas and present regulations look primarily at their types and shapes. Regulations that explore their trade are separate, few and are not readily available.

Besides smuggling, e-commerce and sales through social media sites has made it more difficult to control. A few months ago, we found the *Dactylorhiza hatagirea* being sold online at £394/kg.

In addition, it is also necessary to conduct regular monitoring and baseline research into the socio-economic benefits of the plant, seeing as we have surprisingly little information on them, about their trade and distribution, and their numbers in the wild.

There are still questions about the effects of climate change on wild orchids, and its cultivation has to be made more sustainable and profitable for local communities, as it is central to their culture, rural livelihoods and exports, while stopping smuggling.

Nepal has made progress in recent years to conserve its charismatic mammals like tigers and rhinos, but similar attention now needs to be paid to orchid conservation. Otherwise, we may soon find that these flowers will only exist in pictures. 🇳🇵

Orchid conservationist Reshu Basyal is a Research Fellow at Greenhood Nepal.



SAVE NEPAL'S ORCHIDS

Himalayan orchids need urgent protection before they are smuggled to extinction



Dendrobium fimbriatum



Dactylorhiza hatagirea



Dendrobium emoinem



Pleione praecox



Satyrium nepalense

EVENTS



Collective Expressions
Contemporary artists' guild, Pagoda Group bring you an exhibit of paintings by Kishor Nakarmi, Mala Shrestha, Pradhumna Shrestha, Roshan Pradhan and Rudra Bahadur Pun.
19 January -17 February, 11pm-5pm, Baber Mahal Revisited, Kathmandu

Cottage festival
Enjoy local products from Nepali industries at the Cottage Festival. Learn more about the people and crafts bringing your favourite goods to life.
20-21 January, 11pm-6pm, Lalitpur Municipality premise, Pulchok

Monsoon Printmaking
Siddhartha Art Gallery with Bindu has a new exhibition open in town of woodcut prints by various artists working in Nepal at present.
18 January-18 February, 11pm-5pm, Baber Mahal Revisited, Kathmandu

The Visual Harmony
Dalai-la art space in Thamel features 10 contemporary artists in its latest exhibition of paintings and sculptures.
Till 10 February, 11am-6pm, Dalai-La Art Space, Thamel



Manakamana hike
Join the overnight Manakamana hike organised by Hike for Nepal and enjoy the mesmerising view of one of Nepal's jewels. Call for more details.
21-22 January, Rs5900, 9846190957/9828054244

DINING



European Bakery
Is a loved one's birthday coming up, or need a just-because cake? Order from Baker's Den. Or get freshly baked doughnut, muffins, and bread.
6:45am-8pm, Baluwatar, (01) 4422047

ONLINE ARCHIVE

Boardgame Arena
This is a top platform to play board games online. Brush up your board game skills, or learn new ones with the thousand choices available at <https://en.boardgamearena.com/>.



Aji's Podcast
Listen to inspiring and extraordinary life stories from Nepal's elderly community. Find Aji's Podcasts on YouTube, Apple Podcasts or Stitcher.

TED-Ed
Find hundreds of animated lessons on topics ranging from visual arts to mathematics. Go to the website for details, or go directly to TED-Ed's YouTube channel and start watching.



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

Kahoot!
Join Kahoot!, a free game-based learning platform that brings fun and learning to any subject. Log in from work, school or home.



Taza Treats
Taza has the perfect Syrian treats and delicacies for your sweet tooth. Don't miss out on the baklavas.
10am-6pm, Bakhundol, 9801114002

The Fun Café
From Authentic Nepali Thali to international grill, enjoy a variety of Multi-Cuisine food and drink options at The Fun Café. Call for reservations.
Radisson Hotel, Kathmandu, (01) 4411818

GETAWAY




Hotel Barahi
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 for a relaxing and rejuvenating stay.
Lakeside, Pokhara, (61)460617

Bandipur Kaushi Inn
Here's a cosy place in the idyllic village of Bandipur, replete with cultural diversity and traditional architecture.
Bandipur, Tanahu, (65) 520083

Kasara Resort
Immerse in the lush greenery at the heart of Chitwan's National Park. With activities for everyone, from cycling to wildlife viewing, Kasara Resort is a fantastic getaway for families.
Patihani, Chitwan National Park, Chitwan, (01)4437571

Peacock Guest House
Housed in a World Heritage Site, this 3-storeyed Newa-style building provides splendid views of the Dattatreya Square and the Bhimsenthana temple, topped with great food and accommodation.
Bhaktapur, (01) 6611829




Mystic Mountain
Situating amidst the forest of Nagarkot, the beehive-looking Mystic Mountain is exquisitely built using ultra modern designs and world-class comfort.
Nagarkot, (01) 6200646

Kunga
Head to Kunga Hotel for one of the best Chinese cuisine in the city. Don't miss out on the hotpot, peanut chicken and shredded potatoes.
8am-9pm, Booudha, (01) 4915117






Achaar Ghar
Craving pickles? Head to Achaar Ghar. Here, you will find the best assortment of pickles prepared from recipes handed down generations.
10:30am-9:30pm, Jhamsikhel, Pulchok, (01) 5541952

WEEKEND WEATHER



Warmer next week
The current cold wave is expected to persist into the weekend with clear skies above the smog. The colder the air, the more it intensifies the effect of the inversion layer trapping pollutants at ground level in Kathmandu Valley. This is why the city's air has been at hazardous levels all week, with the smog barely clearing during the day. There is a westerly disturbance approaching, and will be over central Nepal early next week, with chances of some much-needed precipitation in the mountains and foothills. This will take temperatures above 20°C next week, but with partly cloudy skies.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
 19° 4°	 19° 3°	 19° 3°

OUR PICK



This three-series philosophical fantasy drama based on Philip Pullman's modern-day classic *His Dark Materials* is set in a multi-world reality, with the action moving from one world to another. It begins in a world, governed by the Magisterium, a religious and political body, where all humans' souls manifest as animal companions called daemons, following a young girl named Lyra. She discovers a dangerous secret that involves the mysterious substance called Dust, which leads her on a journey of epic proportions and ultimately to other worlds. Her destiny is linked to Will Parry, a teenager from our world, who is being pursued by figures connected to his long-lost father. Concerned with matters of free will, sin and consciousness, the series, in part, responds to Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI




Try to be a rainbow in someone else's cloud
-Maya Angelou



Miss Moti-vation
©Kripa Joshi 2023

सामाजिक सञ्जाल प्रयोगमा सचेतता अपनाऔं

- सामाजिक सञ्जालमा अपरिचित व्यक्तिको साथी बन्ने अनुरोधलाई विश्वस्त भएर मात्र प्रतिक्रिया जनाऔं ।
- अपरिचित व्यक्तिलाई जथाभावी साथी बन्न अनुरोध नपठाऔं ।
- सामाजिक सञ्जाल तथा अन्य विद्युतीय माध्यमबाट चिन्ना पुरस्कार जस्ता आर्थिक प्रलोभनका प्रस्तावको भरमा नपर्ौ ।
- आफूले प्रवाह गरेका सन्देश वा सूचनाबाट समाजमा पर्नसक्ने नकारात्मक प्रभावको ख्याल गरौं ।
- आफ्नो सन्देशले कुनै व्यक्ति वा अन्य कुनै समुदायको आत्मसम्मानमा चोट नपुऱ्याऔं ।



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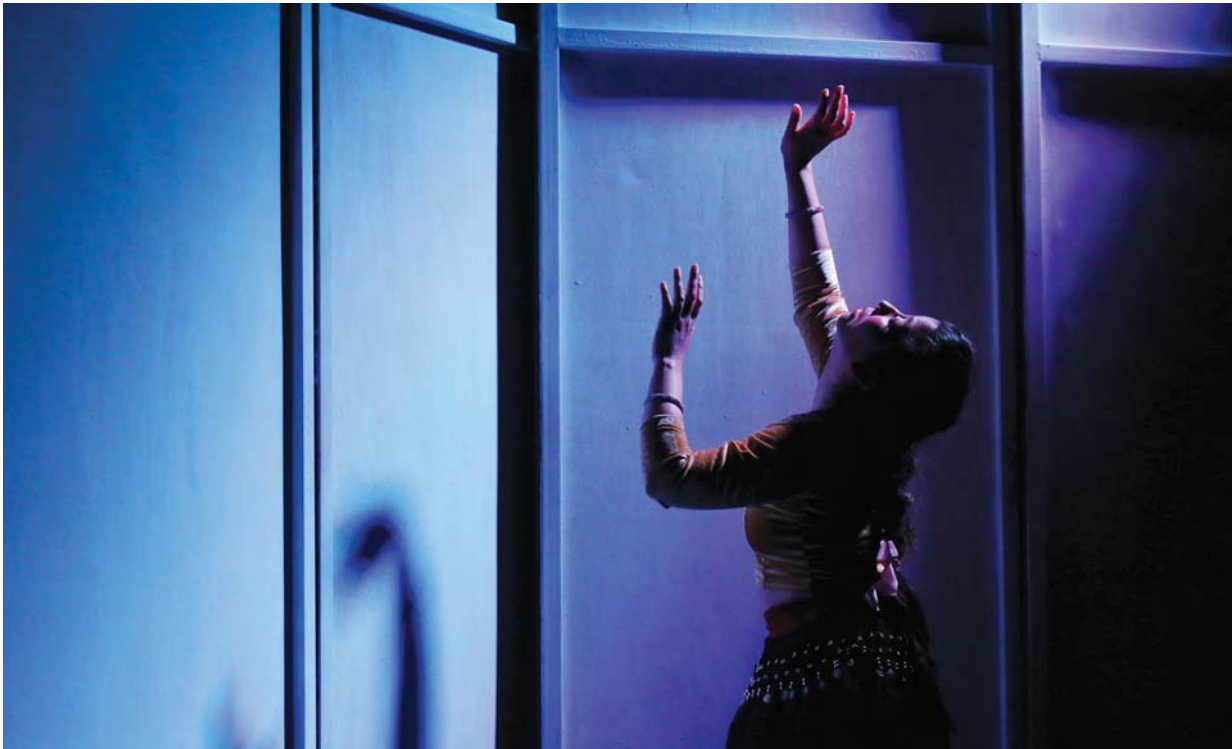
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Between sand and a hard place

New play addresses Nepal’s labour out-migration and a vanishing traditional way of life



PHOTOS: SUMAN NEPALI

■ Ashish Dhakal

There is darkness, except for the faint trace of a white tree at one corner, dancing ripples (or golden flames?) at another. Light pours downward like the first rays of creation upon four figures lying on the ground. Sound of the madal drum fills the air.

The women rise, fluid to the music of nature. Their expressions dart from sombre to elated, reflecting the beat. One raises her hand high in the air while another reaches deep into the earth. They go around in circles, and behold: a child is born.

Meanwhile, a shadow surrounded by cool blue light dances in perfect sync with the women on stage -- Reflecting them? Guiding them? There is a sense of womanhood, motherhood, as life is created. The child grows into a girl who now learns the dance from the women who came before her. This is a form of storytelling that bridges the past and present, future, preparing and shaping expectations.

One World Theatre’s latest play *Deurali Daandi*, in collaboration with Actor’s Studio Nepal, begins in a kind of a musical trance, almost wordless, with a Genesis narrative of its own. And the audience immediately feels as though it has always been living in the fabric of its history and cosmology.

When the prelude ends and a new movement begins, the audience already knows the world: its hills and its mountains, the sounds of choppers and planes in the air that announce the arrival of goods and bodies. This village is, after all, already branded into our collective psyche through the media. We may not all live there, but we have heard of it and its people.

There are no men left here. A strange epidemic that manifests itself as parched and coarse sand made them all leave. The audience is not surprised -- there are repercussions now that are more biting and terrible.

Drawing from the elements of Sati Ghatu folk dance of the Gurung community of Nepal and performed mainly on the full moon of Baisakh Purnima, the play examines Nepal’s labour migration practices and its fallout. It explores a world of deafening absences, and how cultures, traditions and life are affected.

Springs dry up, birds do not sing, a baby deer dies in the forest, and the women are also getting sick. What is this disease? ask the characters, sometimes staring at the audience. We know this disease of

the sand: we feel it in our bones, and are unsettled by this revelation.

For director Rose Schwietz, the metaphor is pretty direct and apparent. “The way labour migration spreads in Nepal is like an epidemic, through contact,” she says. “What we have is a bit of a poeticism and magic realism approach to the idea. And a part of what we are trying to do in the play is bringing the stories that are not heard or told.”

Indeed, the majority of the stories one hears about labour migration in Nepal centre on the men who either return or do not at all. “These stories are obviously very important,” Schwietz adds, “but I also wondered about their trickle-down effect.”

Schwietz noticed this effect during a Fulbright stint studying Ghatu at Nalma in Lamjung in 2014. She found that every family in the village had someone abroad, or planning to leave.

“I was really interested in this idea of people who are here and what they experience,” she says. “And, for the most part, it’s the women who are left behind.”

The women adjust their lives in this world, but what happens when the ‘epidemic’ resurges, like a new variant? The women realise they have to respond differently to it and take action to save themselves and their way of life from disappearing. But what actions can they take?

It is a desperate path, beset by nightmares and abuse. The city lights are alluring promises seen from a distance, but even mobile telephones may not fully reconcile the gulf in reality. Nevertheless, there is hope too, which is most visible in how the women come together, to support one another, to discuss, decide, and dance.

The all-women cast, largely unheard of in Nepali and global theatre, is effortless and impeccable. Their fierce and emotionally-charged performance is the core of the play. Working closely with Bir Kashi Gurung, a Sati Ghatu performer from Nalma, the actors portray elegant and moving gestures to dramatic perfection, especially as they deliver their lines, giving an ethereal touch to *Deurali Daandi*.

“We listen to each other,” explains actor Deeya Maskey. “It has been easy to communicate, understand and form lasting rapport with each other. We learn new perspectives, become more sensible as people.”

Says actor Pashupati Rai, “We have been able to relate to our

characters, to the many layers of womanhood, friendships, how society views us. All of this has made teamwork easier and possible.”

Saraswati Chaudhary adds, “Perhaps it would have been a different experience with male actors, but we also sit together to eat together and call each other by our character’s name.” In fact, eating and sitting together encouraged the actors to share their joys and sorrows, which is reflected in the play.

This powerful collaboration is what makes *Deurali Daandi* a stunning

production. While there is no consensus as to when and how the Ghatu dance originated, its tradition, moves and spirit have been passed down through generations. This, in turn, directs the play which also looks at the idea of transference and how traditions hit a roadblock when there is hardly anyone left to receive and propagate them.

“The play does not recreate Ghatu absolutely,” explains playwright Sahalesh, “We are using it as a form to tell a contemporary story and explore the idea of skills, culture being passed down from mothers to daughters, and how a way of life is intrinsically tied to people and traditions, how they co-exist.”

This is important to consider in times when we may become desensitised to news. Thousands lost their lives in Qatar alone during the construction of World Cup infrastructure. Such statistics have

a numbing effect. But Schwietz believes poetry and theatre can give people a different angle to examine this issue, and preserve its ambiguity for the viewer to analyse.

“The whole situation cannot be portrayed wholly as evil,” she remarks. “For individuals, foreign employment can be hugely beneficial, but perhaps not so much for the community or the country as a whole. We have tried to reflect this complexity in the play.”

Deurali Daandi
Ranjana Bhattarai, Saraswati Chaudhary, Deeya Maskey, Menuka Pradhan, Pashupati Rai and Binita Thapa Magar
Written by Sahalesh
Directed by Rose Schwietz
Staged at Actor’s Studio Theatre, Pingalasthan, Kathmandu
Runtime: 1h45m without intermission
Until 29 January 2023
5:00pm (Matinees on Saturdays 1:00pm)
Tickets: Students: Rs300 General: Rs500 VIP: Rs1000







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IN A DISASTROUS STATE

2015 was just a warning, a mega-quake is overdue in western Nepal, and we better start preparing for it



SUMAN NEPALI

■ Sonia Awale

As Nepal prepared to mark National Earthquake Safety Day on 16 January to commemorate the 8.3 magnitude disaster that hit Kathmandu in 1934, the country went into mourning for the air crash in Pokhara.

All 72 people on board were killed in the crash. This was the

worst disaster in Nepal’s domestic aviation, and the highest number of casualties after two crashes of international flights one-after-another in Kathmandu in 1992.

The message from these tragedies is that Nepal is a disaster-prone country — either human induced or natural. But even though earthquakes, landslides or floods may be ‘natural phenomena’ the disasters are more destructive because of manmade causes.

Social media posts condemned the coalition government’s decision to mark the crash with a day off on Monday. Most said it should have been taken as a day of reckoning about preventing and being prepared for all kinds of disasters.

The 1934 earthquake was epicentred in eastern Nepal and killed at least 16,000 people in Nepal and India. Historical records show that a temblor of that magnitude hits Nepal at least once

every 100 years, while smaller quakes are more frequent.

“2015 was not a mega earthquake, the big one is still due,” warns Surya Narayan Shrestha of the National Society for Earthquake Technology (NSET).

He adds that there is a large seismic gap in western Nepal where there has not been a big earthquake since 1505, meaning that so much tectonic energy has accumulated that the region is overdue for a

disaster of more than 8 magnitude.

The Indian Plate is converging towards the Eurasian Plate at an average rate of 25mm a year, which is what makes Nepal and the region an active seismic zone.

“We have been lucky that we haven’t had a mega-quake yet in the seismic gap between Pokhara all the way to Dadeldhura but this also means we could witness the biggest one yet, given the stress accumulated,” says Anil

Nepal’s school gets roof to play in

School prototype for seismic Nepal is this sustainable roofscape design

■ Sapana Shakya in Makwanpur

When schools reopened in June 2015 two months after the earthquake, students attended classes in tents or temporary classrooms. They used untreated bamboo, plywood panels, razor-sharp corrugated steel sheets that were dangerous and offered no protection against the elements.

One of the 8,000 schools destroyed seven years ago was the Janasewa Primary School and its two classrooms in Makaldamar of Makwanpur district south of Kathmandu. After schools reopened, local Chepang children attended classes in a makeshift shed.

The Sustainable Mountain Architecture (SMA) team in Kathmandu surveyed the Makwanpur site to see if a larger school with four classrooms, a staff room and kitchen could be built. The major challenge was that with the steep slope on three sides and the mountain on the other, there was not enough space for the children to run and play. The team decided to use the roof.

The school design is inspired by the Open Air School concept in Europe in the 1920s, which were airy, bright and less cramped. The most famous example of this is the school designed by Dutch architect Johannes Duiker in Amsterdam in 1930, which is still running.



Schools and kindergartens all over the world are being designed with purposeful roofs. Be it the Fuji kindergarten (2007) by Tezuka Architects in Japan, where the gigantic oval shaped roof deck allows unfettered learning and play for children, or Skanderborggade (2005) in Denmark by architect Dorte Mandrup, where she had to be creative with the given small plot.

In the Makwanpur school, SMA designed the four classrooms in the shape of a trapezium arranged like a bow tie. This shape

allowed the functional need for more entry-exit space towards the courtyard and partly in the need for good acoustics inside the classroom.

The design is earthquake-resistant, comfortable and takes the climate and seasons into account — different from all the hurriedly made schools in 2015 or the standard design which do not address context, orientation and weather.

The two interior curved corners use local river stones that contrast with the unique

colour for each of the four classrooms. Bright hues of pink, green, blue and yellow promote playfulness and stimulate learning.

Playing steps of different heights can be used for seating during a group congregation or a theatre performance. Once at the level of the roof, children can actually run around via metal bridges that connect the rooftops of their classrooms.

To reduce heat gain during the warmest months, the two classroom blocks are placed on the northwest and the northeast of the site. The 350mm thick stone masonry walls work efficiently as natural thermal mass and keep the buildings warm in the winter and cooler in the summer. The large sal tree on the southwest of the site shields the sun in summer. The design invites cross ventilation, the rounded corners allow free flow of the wind across the courtyard and help cross ventilation naturally. In the shaded open centre of the school, a newly planted jacaranda parasol will cover the children sitting around the stepped-down courtyard.

Movement of the children and the air were two important starting points for the design. Due to the airflow, the school is comfortable during the hot months, and the playful roof circuit is used by the children every day. 🇳🇵

Sapana Shakya is an architect with Sustainable Mountain Architecture, a Nepali non-profit founded by Anne Feenstra to promote innovative pro-people, pro-ecology, pro-local building techniques.



BIKRAM RAIN/NEPALITIMES ARCHIVE

Pokhrel of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority (NDRRMA). “In fact, it will be catastrophic,” Pokhrel warns. “The 1505 earthquake killed one-third of Nepal’s population even back then.”

An 8M+ earthquake in faraway western Nepal will not spare Kathmandu either, and half of Nepal’s population will be directly affected. Experts estimate that there will be more than 100,000 casualties and over 1.5 million buildings will collapse across the country. Large parts of northern India will also be hit.

“This is the level of disaster the whole country needs to be prepared



for, not just western Nepal,” warns NSET’s Shrestha.

There is therefore no time to waste reinforcing infrastructure, but that is a tall order since a survey showed that two-thirds of all the buildings in Nepal will collapse in a major earthquake.

The 7.8M quake in 2015 was a warning, and it has had some effect in increasing preparedness. But similar levels of preparedness is needed now for the Next Big One.

There is also a general misconception that concrete buildings are safer because they survived the 2015 earthquake. But experts say if the shaking had lasted just a few seconds longer and if the intensity of the tremor was a bit higher, most reinforced concrete buildings in Kathmandu would have also collapsed.

Cement buildings are safer only when they do not flout building standards. Otherwise they are death traps because Nepal just does not have enough rescue equipment and skills required for search and rescue from concrete structures.

“Concrete is among the most complex of construction materials and requires stringent quality control,” says Anil Pokhrel. “The quality of some of these do not meet the standards.”

Substandard cement means weak concrete, not just in urban centres but across Nepal as cement construction spreads to even remote parts of the country due to road

expansion.

Most recently, the 8 November 2022 6.6M earthquake in Doti killed 6 people while nearly 15,000 houses and 215 public buildings were damaged in four districts in the far west. A post-mortem of the disaster found that not even 5% of buildings in the affected areas followed even the most basic building codes.

This means very low awareness among the public as well as municipal authorities about enforcing building codes. This points to an urgent need to capacitate engineers to design earthquake-resistant structures, and masons who can build them accordingly. But most important is monitoring building compliance.

“Knowledge alone is not enough to save lives, we need people to change their attitude and practice,” says Shrestha. “As it is, we have already forgotten the destruction post-2015 earthquake and people are now building back the way they used to.”

Engineers say it costs only 10% more to make a traditional building earthquake resistant. This means the building will not suffer major damage in moderate tremors, and even if it collapses with bigger shaking it gives people time to escape. Even if 100% earthquake proof buildings were possible to make, they would be too expensive.

For existing buildings, however, there is an option of retrofitting

them. This should not cost more than one-third of what a new building does.

Retrofitting can be a lifesaver. In the 2015 earthquakes, none of the school buildings in and around Kathmandu Valley retrofitted by the NSET suffered damage, and in fact served as shelters in the aftermath.

As it is, green and open spaces which acted as shelters from earthquakes in the past are being traded for residential and commercial buildings across cities. But NSET with support from various municipalities and Kathmandu Valley Development Authority have recently mapped 1,000 open spaces, most of them in Kathmandu Valley which can be viewed at bipadportal.gov.np.

Close to 8,000 schools and 30,000 classrooms were damaged or destroyed in 2015. The fact that it struck on a Saturday saved the lives of thousands of students, which should be taken as a sign to reinforce school buildings all over Nepal with topmost priority.

“If the 2015 earthquake had happened on any other day than Saturday, we estimate that at least 30,000 students could have been killed,” says Shrestha.

NSET has managed to retrofit 2,000 schools across Nepal in a joint collaboration with the government, but there are 32,000 government schools in Nepal with 80,000 school buildings between them. More than half of them are vulnerable to future quakes.

It is not only the school infrastructure that needs to be reinforced, but their curriculum has to be designed in such a way that students and teachers alike know the dangers and how to protect themselves. The schools need to be prepared at all times with frequent emergency drills and training about earthquake safety.

While preparedness is the key to reducing the damage, efficient response in the aftermath can save the most lives in the ‘golden hour’. With the spread of concrete buildings, Nepal needs to immediately invest in equipment for collapsed structure search and rescue like snake-eye and robo-worm cameras, acoustic, thermal and motion sensors to detect human life under the rubble.

Another urgent measure is to plan stockpiling of immediate digging and relief material for which the government is building provincial as well as district warehouses, many of which are under construction.

A recent study undertaken by NDRRMA titled ‘Emergency Preparedness and Response Assessment 2022-2030’ found that Nepal needs nearly \$200 million in the next seven years to prepare for future disasters like the one projected for western Nepal.

“Given the sheer scale of the overdue earthquake in the west, we need to invest a lot more in disaster preparedness, from constructing stronger structures and retrofitting our homes, schools and hospitals, to developing a better response mechanism,” says Anil Pokhrel.

With the understanding that financing disaster risk reduction is more effective and economical than a post-disaster response like search, rescue, relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and recovery, the government has developed the Nepal Disaster Risk Financing Strategy such that the state provides insurance for all the public and private buildings in an event of a major earthquake.

NSET’s Surya Narayan Shrestha agrees: “Given how disaster-prone we know Nepal is, we must seriously put our efforts and money into reducing the risks.” 🇳🇵



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Cut from a different cloth

Former migrant worker now provides jobs for fellow Nepalis

■ Krishna Timalisina

I grew up in Ramechhap, where I walked 12 hours to take my SLC exam. This was during the Maoist era and it was dangerous. Risking our lives was only one of the obstacles we faced to complete our studies. Of the 106 students in my batch, only 10 passed. I went to Kathmandu for higher studies and remember travelling on top of a public bus. I did not have the support of my family in the city and had to work hard. I got a job in a clothing store that earned me Rs1,200 a month, and the longer I worked there, the more I wanted to set up my own clothing business. But I did not have the start-up capital, and no one from my family

or circle of friends was willing to lend me money. I was just 18, and they thought it was a risky proposition. So, I did what every Nepali my age did then and still does: in 2008, I packed my bags and migrated overseas for work. I got a job at a factory in Malaysia, loading boxes full of surgical gloves on to shipping containers. It used to be so hot and humid inside the metal containers that I would be drenched in sweat. I had to stop to squeeze the sweat out of my wet t-shirt every half an hour or so. After that, I got a job at a remittance company which was physically less taxing. In 2010, I returned

to Nepal with about Rs700,000 to start my own clothing store which did well, and as the business expanded I opened six more outlets. But I used to always be curious where the clothes I sold came from, how they were made. I travelled to India, Bangladesh and China to source the garments for my store, and I used to visit the factories of my suppliers. I finally mustered the courage to purchase seven sewing machines and started making clothes in my apartment. Before long, my garment brand Thread Garment became a full-fledged clothing supplier. We produce men's wear and supply to outlets all over Nepal, even

selling tracksuits, sleeping bags and thermocots, which previously used to be imported, to the Nepal Police and Nepal Army. My clothes with the 'Made in Nepal' tag are now sold in Malaysia, Qatar and Dubai, the very countries where Nepalis work. All that most people need is a platform to work hard, a break to demonstrate what they can do. That is all foreign employment is for many Nepalis who leave the country. I am trying to give that opportunity to Nepalis here at Thread Garment — I have 600 employees in Kathmandu and 250 in my Itahari branch. I am just 34, but I feel like a guardian to the workers and their families. When a mother is sick or a child's school fees need to be paid, I am there for them. My humble roots

and struggle mean I understand what they are going through. It is a big responsibility to be the centre of hope for so many people. But when I do well, we all do well. They know this and have become a solid pillar of support. I was never trained in running a business. I don't have a degree, and only completed high school. But I know how to persevere. I am learning as I go. I believe that if I can do it, so can others. Many Nepalis return from overseas with some savings. They try to invest in a business, but are disconnected to Nepal and are impatient. They re-migrate, and this can be an unending vicious cycle. Sometimes what they invest in is not at all related to the field they have an expertise in. Perhaps I would not have reached here if I had invested in a business I was unfamiliar with. It takes years to understand the market and build a brand. 🇳🇵

Diaspora Diaries is a regular column in Nepali Times providing a platform for Nepalis to share their experiences of living, working, studying abroad.



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