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RSS

Common minimum performance

■ Shristi Karki

An all-male task force of the UML-NC coalition presented its Common Minimum Program (CMP) to Prime Minister K P Oli on Wednesday (pictured) reaffirming the deal Nepal's two largest parties made in July to amend the Constitution.

Nepal's top politicians want to douse rising public discontent by blaming the 2015 Constitution for governance failures.

On Constitution Day Thursday, Kathmandu's mainstream press carried sharply critical editorials saying public disillusionment was turning into disgust, then outrage.

'It's Governance, not the Constitution' was a headline in Kantipur. 'Ten Years after the Constitution, No Cheer for the People', was a banner in Nagarik.

Nepal's social media platforms are also bursting with anger and abuse against the main parties. Oli and others seem to know that newer political entrants could ride the anti-incumbent wave.

Oli has been lashing out on all fronts: against Kathmandu Mayor Balen Shah, the independent RSP,

opposition Maoist-Centre, Deputy Speaker Indira Ranamagar, his old nemesis Madhav Nepal, and the monarchists. Mayor Shah for his part is goading Oli, while his legion of followers cheer him on in cyberspace.

Oli's reaction has been to insist that the Constitution is flawed, and not to kickstart the government machinery so citizens can see visible signs of better delivery and performance. The proposed amendment is seen as a gerrymandering strategy for the 2027 election by abolishing inclusion provisions.

Mayor Balen Shah, meanwhile, has been trying to prove that he is a can-do man. He is repainting bridges, lighting up streets, and laying down colourful sidewalks.

During this week's Indra Jatra, police detained a dozen young people just because they wore t-shirts with the visage of Balen Shah, citing 'risk to security'. Last week, Oli publicly urged his cadre to repulse anti-UML trolls on social media.

In August, police arrested three

people for chanting slogans against Oli and Sher Bahadur Deuba during Gaura Parva celebrations.

Most observers believe that the NC and UML ousted the Maoist government to protect their own top leaders from scandals involving fake citizenship and the landgrab of a state-owned tea estate in Jhapa.

Balen Shah is using his social media handles to needle Oli about the tea estate scam. Oli and the mayor have also been going after each other about widening river corridors, and Shah bringing to public notice alleged abuse of a child worker at the house of Lumbini province UML MP Rekha Sharma.

Oli is known for delivering scathing rebuttals, but Balen Shah's relentless attacks appear to have rattled him. The

UML is convinced the Kathmandu mayor and other independents have national ambitions and are exploiting anti-incumbent public opinion.

In Parliament, the UML and the Maoists have been at each other's throats over the word 'violence' referring to the armed insurgency in which 17,000 Nepalis were killed.

Vociferous Maoist protests actually are a sign that the former rebels want to airbrush history.

Maoist Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal on a grassroots tour to rebuild his support base predicted that Nepal could turn into the "next Sri Lanka or Bangladesh". He is also striking while the iron is hot.

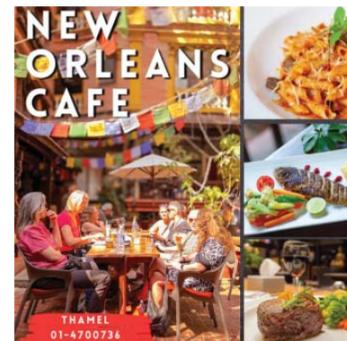
The UML-NC coalition sees a potential challenge from the RSP, and is cornering its chair, former Home Minister Rabi Lamichhane, over allegations that he stole deposits from cooperatives.

"This is a moral crisis for the RSP, a party that promised to be different," says political analyst Indra Adhikari.

Despite this, other RSP leaders like Swarnim Wagle and Manish Jha have interpreted the House probe findings on the cooperatives scam as giving him a 'clean-chit'. The RSP's future will now be determined by the role played by its other leaders.

"It remains to be seen whether the RSP will cover up the deeds of its leader," Adhikari added. "But if this had happened in a country with rule of law, he would already have been relieved of his post."

The taxman
looteth
EDITORIAL
PAGE 2



changing
winds

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NATUREKNIT

The taxman looteth

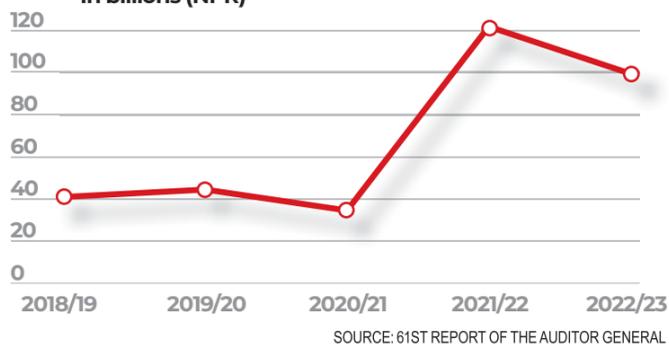
Three years ago, the Auditor General's Office asked for justification for the government's revenue exemption on vehicle assembly plants. That year, Bajaj, which assembles two-wheelers in Nepal, received an exemption worth Rs767 million in excise duty and VAT on imported spares.

Since then, Yamaha, Hero, Honda, and TVS have all set up two-wheeler assembly plants in Nepal, and most motorcycles now sold in the country are assembled here. The distributor of Hyundai vehicles Laxmi Intercontinental is even assembling cars in Nepal.

These companies get a 50% rebate on excise duty but there is no value addition, they do not use local materials or resources, rendering the tax exemption they enjoy rewarding the captains of industry, and not citizens. The cost savings are not passed down to the consumers, instead two-wheelers assembled in Nepal are as expensive as imported ones.

Tax Cuts on Customs Duty

In billions (NPR)



An advisory committee on tax system reform last year recommended gradually doing away with the Rs200 billion in revenue exemptions that the government provides every year that does little to boost the economy or generate employment.

"Year after year, we have a different finance minister who hands out tax exemptions to cronies. This is disastrous and should be abolished," says one of the members of the committee, Ram Prasad Gyanwaly, a professor of economics at Tribhuvan University.

Every year around budget time, there is a big debate about taxing electric vehicles. On one side are environmentally conscious groups in favour of tax rebates, while others consider it a luxury that needs to be taxed. But rebates on private EVs and battery-powered buses would reduce the petroleum import bill and clean up the air-- an argument that is lost in the annual cacophony.

One in every five Nepalis (6 million people) live in poverty, which means they earn Rs200 or less daily. They can barely make a living, let alone afford education or regular healthcare. Most are forced to migrate.

This monsoon was deadly on Nepal's roads because taxpayers' money did not get to where it could save lives. It is not fair

to award large tax rebates to individuals so they can drive their SUVs on potholed highways.

Seventeen years ago, the government announced that it would give a 50% VAT refund to businesses importing mobile phones, the argument being that it would control the theft of mobile phones and reduce the market price. Two years later, this figure was increased to 60%. But a task force three years since has concluded that this tax exemption worth billions has nothing to do with consumers but only goes to benefit powerful importers with political connections.

The number of goods and services with VAT exemptions should be decreasing every year, but it has been increasing annually. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has also reminded the government that the current system of VAT refunds and tax exemptions is not working. If concessions must be given, it says, that should be a subsidy through the budget.

Then there is the whole question of transparency in announcing these exemptions at budget time every year. Two years ago, nearly Rs100 billion in tax exemptions were handed out through the Economic Act and the Customs Act, even though such exceptions are only allowed for certain items like foreign loans and diplomatic facilities.

Nepal's airlines are also exempted from paying customs duty on spare parts, even though the same exception is not made for surface public transport companies that may need it more.

Even more anomalous was a budget two years ago during when Finance

Minister Janardan Sharma allowed the import of 10 buses at 1% customs duty for under construction five-star hotels. Such irregularities are widespread in other sectors including oil, jute, private healthcare as well as LPG. Tax exemptions in Nepal are essentially making the rich richer and the poor poorer.

The Auditor General's report goes on to state that there is no record of the basis on which these exemptions were made, and an analysis about how it would benefit the economy. There is no attempt to correlate the tax cuts and rebates with encouraging manufacturing, creating jobs, and attracting investment. It is not difficult to see that it is you-scratch-my-back-I-scratch-yours.

India is doing away with tax exemptions to stamp our political cronyism, even though it has been only partly successful.

Committee member Laxman Aryal put it simply: "If tax exemptions do not help in job creation, economic expansion and growth in manufacturing, it is ill-gotten." **Ramesh Kumar**

Tax exemptions in Nepal are making the few rich much richer, and the poor even poorer.

ONLINE PACKAGES



STRUGGLE FOR NEPALI IDENTITY

Born to a Nepali immigrant family in Japan, eight-year-old Ayan Dallakoti was brought to Nepal so he could receive better English-medium education. Learn about the challenges children like Ayan go through as they integrate back in Nepali society. Read the story on page 10-11, and watch the video on Nepali Times' YouTube channel.



A DESIGNER BY DESIGN

Growing up in Rupendehi, Keshar Kala Thapa was fascinated by the dresses in fashion magazines. After completing high school, she enrolled in a fashion designing course and then did a Master's in Business Studies. Now, she has a business and training centre for women. Watch the video on our YouTube channel and subscribe for multimedia content.

NATIONAL PARK ACT

The primary purpose of the creation of national parks and reserves is to preserve biodiversity ('Not out of the woods yet in Nepal', Santa Gaha Magar, #1229). Therefore, economic goals should not be in conflict with this.

Krishna Prasad Pandey

I condemn the government's decision to amend Nepal's national park and wildlife conservation Act. This has to be challenged on constitutional and legal grounds as soon as possible.

Amulya Sir

LHAKPA SHERPA

It's worthwhile to watch the Mountain Queen documentary, which has everything from Lhakpa Sherpa's difficult family life, domestic violence, climbing stamina and extreme determination ('Daughter of Chomolungma', Pinki Sris Rana, #1229).

Ben-Erik Ness

MIN BAHADUR BHAM

Huge congratulations to Min Bahadur Bham for showcasing courage, discipline, unwavering confidence, dignity, and human decency in his film Shambhala ('Min Bahadur Bham's cinematic quest', Abishek Budhathoki, #1229). Actor Thinley Lhamo has given a superb performance. I will be waiting for Bham's next masterpiece.

Rita Thapa

PERMAFROST

Identifying and mapping growing lakes and siphoning them at an early stage is cost effective and doable ('The not-so-permanent frost', Wilfried Haeblerl and Alton C Byers, #1228). As more lakes are bound to emerge due to rapid thawing of ice, a dedicated mechanism comprising of local Palika, DHM and NA should deal with these hazards.

Khatri Top

AIR POLLUTION

These reports on air pollution mean that an energy transformation is long overdue in Nepal ('Bad air and polluted politics', Sonia Awale, #1227).

David Seddon

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING



Daughter of Chomolungma

by Pinki Sris Rana
Mountain Queen: Summits of Lhakpa Sherpa is as much about 10-time Everest summiteer's skill and stamina as a high altitude climber, as about her courage to stand up to an abusive husband and the strength to raise three children. Visit nepalitimes.com for the full story.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Shrinking Forests

by Ramu Sapkota
Community forestry is considered Nepal's biggest conservation success story. But while communities have better managed forests in the mountains, it has been less successful in the Tarai because of the abundance of expensive hardwood timber and proximity to India. Read the story on our website.

Most popular on X

Not out of the woods yet

by Santa Gaha Magar
A new amendment to Nepal's 1973 National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act now allows private sector investment in infrastructure construction within protected areas, threatening to undo decades-long success in nature protection. Join the discussion online.

Most commented

MASK

by Sonia Awale
In his new Nepali children's book London Lakhey, author Ojesh Singh weaves a layered tale that delves into the universal themes of migration, diaspora, mental health, racism, heritage and identity with vibrant illustrations by Sahanshil Dangol. Go online to get more details.

Most visited online page

QUOTES



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

In 2017, the government imposed a blanket ban on female migration, following cases of abuse. This misguided decision drove recruitment underground, forcing women to take unauthorised channels, increasing the risk of trafficking en route.



ShreeZna SinGh @intoxicatedmice

The government limits us in the name of security.

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

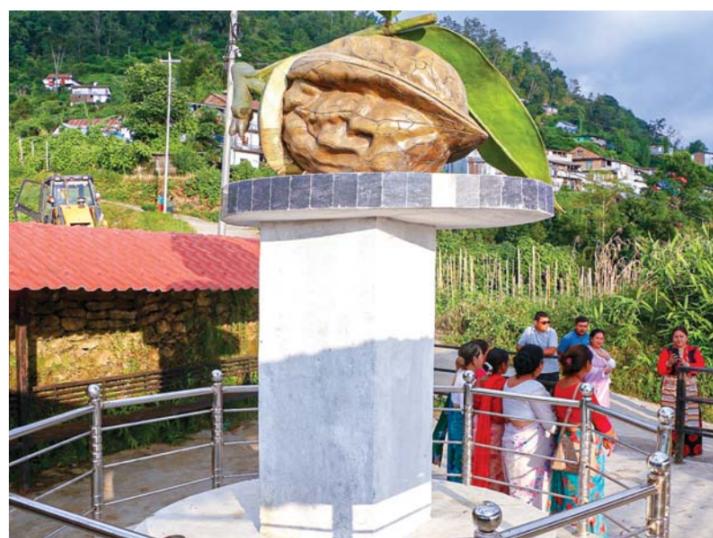
"Infrastructure, expansion of settlements and timber smuggling are destroying our trees. If this continues there will be no forest left outside national parks in the Tarai."



Hem Sagar Baral @WorshipNature

While we celebrate the increase of forest cover citing those in the midhills, critically important lowland forests continue to be fragmented, encroached and destroyed in the name of building community houses, temples, schools, football grounds, landless and so on.

1,000 WORDS



SUJAN BAJRACHARYA / RSS

NUT JOB: Continuing the nationwide epidemic of local governments building view towers and concrete renditions of local products, Madi Municipality Ward 4 Okharbote of Sankhuwasabha district has inaugurated a statue of the biggest cement walnut in the world.

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Never too late

The Maoists launched their armed struggle in 1996, barely five years after the pro-democracy People's Movement. They reasoned that the revolution needed to be taken to its logical conclusion with violence. Despite that, the opposition Maoist-Centre party today wants the word 'violence' struck off Parliament records.

This Nepali Times editorial published 20 years ago this week on issue #214 17-23 September 2004 might as well have been written today. And the ruling UML-NC coalition wants to amend the 2015 Constitution. The Maoist insurgency is over but the end of war has not meant peace. Excerpts:



our polity. Not to go back to the absolutism of Panchayat or a Maoist dystopia, but to make the necessary changes so that rulers are accountable and democracy can deliver.

The extreme left and right both want to drastically rewrite the constitution, and the centrists are going along with it because they are competing to sound more radical. Rather than throw the book out, politicians would do well to analyse what made them so unaccountable when they were in power, and fix that first.

It is this country's tragedy that for far too long, we have had the wrong people at the right places. Conflict resolution is about compromise and sharing power, and it is never too late to start doing that.

How can we ensure accountability when tainted figures seem to have no problem returning to public office through the ballot? The resolution of the current conflict offers us the opportunity to address this defect in

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Times

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World Bank flip-flops on Upper Arun

30 years after pulling out of Arun III, the global lender goes quiet on another hydropower project in Nepal

■ Ramesh Kumar

Last October, upon returning from the annual meetings of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank Group in Morocco, Finance Minister Prakash Sharan Mahat announced that the World Bank would be the primary financier to develop Upper Arun.

This would be Nepal's largest hydropower project so far with an estimated cost of \$1.8 billion. The site is 15km from where the Arun River enters Nepal from China, cutting between Mt Everest and Kangchenjunga.

Nepal decided to develop the 1,061MW project six years ago and set up Upper Arun Hydropower Limited, a subsidiary of the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA), and oked its feasibility study in 2021.

There is a certain déjà vu here because in 1995, the World Bank abruptly pulled out of the Arun III project in 1995 after James Wolfensohn took over as Bank president. The project has now been upgraded to 900MW, and is in its final stages of completion by India's state-owned SJVN Limited.

The Bank's readiness to back the Upper Arun, upstream from Arun III was greeted with enthusiasm in Kathmandu. The financial package included 70% through loans and 30% in equity, with the World Bank committing to \$750 million and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) possibly joining.

World Bank Managing Director Anna Bjerde flew to the project site last November with Finance Minister Mahat and ADB Director Ramesh Subramaniam. In April, an agreement 'in principle' was reached between Nepal's next Finance Minister Barsaman Pun and World Bank Vice President for South Asia Martin Raiser to develop Upper Arun.

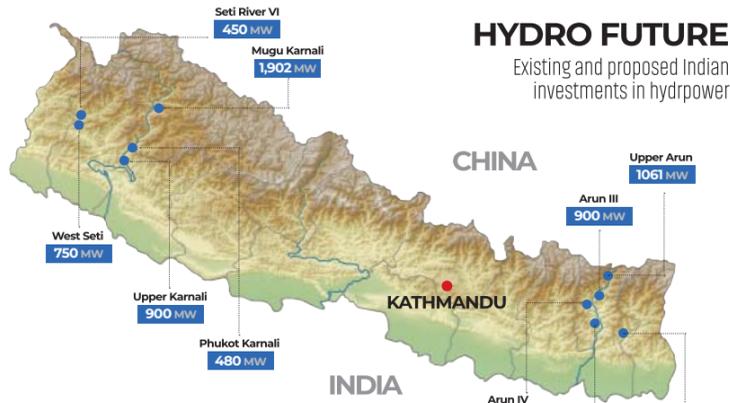
A concessional loan agreement during an investment summit later that month did not happen due to 'lack of preparation'. Now, the World Bank appears to have developed cold feet.

Bank officials reportedly told the Nepali side a final decision would be taken at its board meeting last month after the proposal failed to gain traction during the Group's International Development Association (IDA) Replenishment Meeting in Nepal in June. But there is a deafening silence.

"The World Bank board did not get back to us in August, so we cannot conduct financial closure as planned by October," Fanendra Raj Joshi, Managing Director of Upper Arun Hydro-electric Limited, told Nepali Times.



BREAKTHROUGH: Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal at the ceremony in June marking final drilling of the tailrace tunnel of Arun III, the 900MW project being built by India's state-owned SJVN company.



For Nepali officials, this is reminiscent of 1995 and several said the Bank was reluctant to commit without a green light from New Delhi.

The World Bank, however, had communicated to both India and China about its intention to invest in Upper Arun. Beijing said go ahead, but New Delhi's response was that 'further discussions' were needed.

"India has not communicated this to us directly, but its displeasure at the World Bank's decision to invest in this project is well understood," an official at the Finance Ministry told us.

In fact, Indian officials directly expressed their interest in Upper Arun during Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal's visit to Delhi in June to attend Narendra Modi's swearing-in, under the same condition as Arun III: Nepal gets 21.9% of the electricity generated free for 25 years.

Dhani Ram Sharma of the Finance Ministry's International Economic Cooperation Division says negotiations are ongoing with the Bank on finalising the loan and financial package.

Finance Minister Bishnu Prasad Paudel is set to lead the Nepali delegation to the IMF Annual Meeting and the World Bank Group (WBG) on 21 October in Washington DC, and Upper Arun is

expected to figure prominently in discussions.

World Bank Group president is Ajay Banga, and he cancelled a visit to Nepal at the last moment during the IDA Replenishment Meeting in Kathmandu in June. Sources told Nepali Times that India has been urging the Bank to let it invest in Upper Arun.

Downstream from Upper Arun, India's state-owned SJVN is completing a cascade of big projects, including the 900MW Arun III. It has also got Nepal's approval to develop the 679MW Lower Arun and 490MW Arun IV projects (map).

With Upper Arun, India would be generating over 3,032MW of electricity from the Arun River alone, of which Nepal would get 21.9% free of charge.

Unlike the run-of-river projects downstream, Upper Arun is a semi-reservoir project that can generate electricity at full capacity for up to six hours during winter when demand in Nepal is highest. The project also has low social impact since it is in a relatively uninhabited area with only 22 households needing relocation.

However, Upper Arun is located directly downstream from numerous glacial lakes in Nepal and China, which have been expanding dangerously due to climate breakdown.

A glacier collapse in Sikkim

last year completely destroyed the Chungthang Dam with similar cost and capacity as Upper Arun. In 2021 the Chamoli disaster swept away an under-construction project in Uttarakhand.

India can connect power from Upper Arun to the 400kV transmission line that it is building to evacuate power from its other projects on the river.

Besides the Arun cascade, Indian is building projects in Nepal with a combined capacity of 8,000MW. SJVN Limited has also proposed taking over the 769MW Tamor project on a tributary of the Arun, which was earlier set to be built with Chinese investment.

Upper Arun shows every sign of being a geopolitical hot potato, since the Chinese would be averse to such a large Indian project so close to its border.

The Chinese had earlier pressured Nepal to cancel a major solar power project in Mustang with European investors, and Indian objections led to the cancellation of a 125MW Chinese solar project in the Tarai.

Another Indian public sector hydropower company NHPC Limited is developing the 750MW West Seti dam, the Seti VI and Phukot Karnali 480MW in partnership with NEA subsidiary Vidhyut Utpadan Company Limited. It also wants to develop the 1,902MW Mugu-Karnali.

Last week in Delhi, GMR signed up co-investors Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency (IREDA) and SJVN for Upper Karnali 900MW after repeatedly failing to meet Nepal's deadline on financial closure. Kathmandu was not kept in the loop.

India is playing hardball, and refuses to buy electricity from power projects in Nepal it deems to have involvement of China and other countries, like the 456MW Upper Tamakosi.

Currently, India buys only 1,000MW of electricity from Nepal. In January, Nepal and India finalised a long-term energy trade deal during Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar's visit to Nepal that set an export target of 10,000MW by 2034.

A writ petition filed against the deal by former government secretary Surya Nath Upadhyay is pending in Nepal's Supreme Court.

For now, uncertainty over the Upper Arun and the lack of a clear answer from the World Bank has thrown the future of Nepal's largest hydroelectric project into doubt.

Says Fanendra Raj Joshi of Upper Arun Hydro-electric Limited: "Nepal can find alternative sources of funding and we will go ahead with this project even if the World Bank decides not to provide the loan." 🇳🇵

Nepal's national electricity grid is supplied with power from a remarkably decentralised array of 162 hydropower projects and 14 solar photovoltaic schemes spread across 43 districts, supplying power over the grid to 30 million people.



PEOPLE POWER
Bikash Pandey

Another 249 hydropower projects and 14 solar projects are at different stages of construction, positioning 11 new districts to contribute power to the grid by 2030. Six of the country's seven provinces generate hydropower as their main energy source, while Madhes Province generates solar energy.

While NEA (Nepal Electricity Authority) and its subsidiaries own and operate 20 generation stations, the remaining are owned and operated by Independent Power Producers (IPP). All but two of the IPPs are Nepali companies that have successfully mobilised over \$2 billion in investment.

This investment has been spread widely across the country. Eleven districts generate more than 100MW each with Dolakha, Lamjung, Solukhumbu, and Ramechhap each exceeding 200MW (map). The average size of hydropower projects on Nepal's grid is 15.5MW, while the average solar project is 4.2MW.

The average size of projects under construction is larger -- 39.5MW for hydro and 6.9MW for solar respectively.

For most hill and mountain districts, hydropower is easily the largest investment, private or public, in their history.

This decentralised power generation model is a relatively recent development for Nepal. In 1995 when the World Bank withdrew (adjoining article) its planned investment from the 201MW Arun III project, NEA had not envisioned the entry of the private sector. In fact, its published strategy was to mobilise international aid for hydropower projects larger than Arun III.

The well-known cancellation of Arun III in 1995 and the availability of alternative models led to Nepal's decentralised power development. It matters that this distributed generation and storage of electricity is close to the point of use.

Centralised power stations have been the norm for industrialised and emerging economies to achieve rapid and cheap electrification, taking advantage of economies of scale of large power plants.



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Decentralising power in Nepal

The country's distributed generation strategy also reduces new risks from climate breakdown

Also in Nepal, when its vast hydropower potential was first quantified in the 1960s, plans were drawn up for mega hydropower projects with reservoirs such as Karnali, Kosi, and Pancheswar. None of these could be realised, however, due to lack of financing.

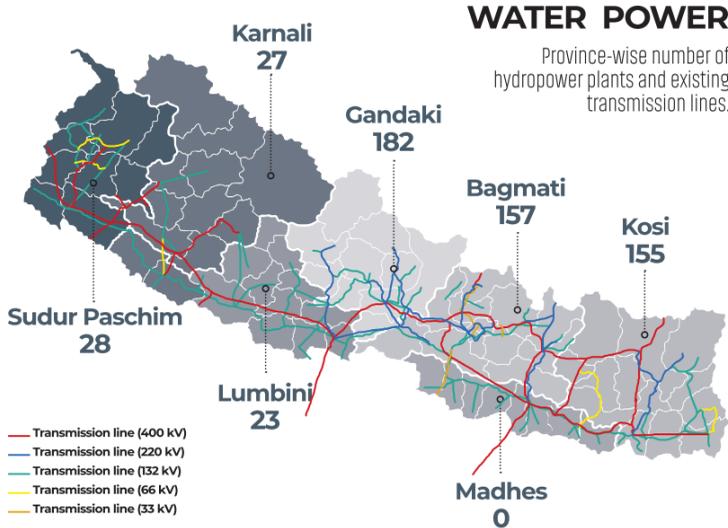
Donor funds could never be aggregated at the scale needed for the investments required, and the country was not attractive to the international private sector. Nepal opted not to invite India to construct its large hydropower projects to supply the Indian market the way Bhutan did.

It took the country 40 years to find its way -- generation led by private domestic investment supplemented by public sector involvement by the NEA.

The cancellation of Arun III resulted in the government signing expensive dollar-denominated power purchase agreements (PPA) with international producers like Khimti (60MW) and Bhote Kosi (45MW) to partially make up for the shortfall. These were against the wishes of NEA management.

It was in reaction to these expensive PPAs that engineers at NEA received permission to develop Chilime (20MW) with rupee-denominated PPA and the government at the time announced a standard tariff in NPR for power generated by IPPs.

Once NEA showed its



willingness to sign these PPAs, hundreds of companies sprang up to apply for licenses to survey and construct small hydropower plants throughout the country.

Decentralised power development contributes to construction jobs and infrastructure investment, especially in remote districts where many of the best hydropower sites are located.

Construction of an electricity generation station provides at one go the two most important infrastructure any district needs to generate jobs — power and a road.

Decentralised generation

provides energy security to load centres throughout the country since damage to power plants in one part of the country need not affect other areas that have their own generation. It also reduces transmission losses as large amounts of power do not have to be transported from one end of the country to another.

Nepal's strategy of decentralised power development is coming to maturity in the era of the climate crisis, when the global response has been a surge in renewable energy investments and grids all over the world pushing to become

decentralised.

Landslides, flooding and glacial lake outburst floods have always posed risks to infrastructure projects in the Himalaya, and climate breakdown has increased this risk with the severity and frequency of cloud bursts.

The 2024 monsoon has been particularly bad, temporarily shutting down NEA's 456MW Upper Tamakosi, 60MW Upper Trisuli 3A, 40MW Chameliya, and 10MW Sunkosi projects,

It also downed the 36MW Balefi, 20MW Lower Modi, 18MW Middle Modi, and 7.5 MW Indrawati III operated by IPPs.

Nonetheless, there has not been any increase in load shedding because power plants across other river basins continued to generate without interruption.

Having power plants spread across two thirds of the country rather than concentrated in a few river valleys distributes the risk to the country's entire power supply.

Adding solar energy to the generation mix diversifies the types of renewable energy available and contributes to power in the winter months. It also makes the grid more secure during periods of drought when hydropower production declines.

Solar energy is a perfect complement to hydro since by definition its production will peak during periods with low rainfall.

Distributed generation is shaping up to be an important component of Nepal's decentralised energy system. This increases energy security to users and reduces transmission losses.

The roughly 10MW of rooftop solar PV systems that have been installed in the past year by hotels, factories, medical colleges and flour mills to reduce their electricity bills is an example of how it is catching on.

Decentralised and distributed generation do have additional costs in the need for more extensive power networks. Extending high voltage transmission lines to evacuate power from smaller local projects adds cost.

However, every power plant and the transmission line to access it has aided Nepal in accelerating electrification and strengthening power infrastructure to the district where it is located.

As networks become more complex, utility-scale battery storage, and the availability of distributed storage in electric vehicles, the grid needs to be made smarter to better manage the tens of thousands of generation and storage points Nepal is likely to have in the coming years.

Bikash Pandey is Director of Clean Energy and Circular Economy at Winrock International. People Power is his new regular column in Nepali Times on global energy issues relevant to Nepal.

वर्षदिसि संगै

सम्बन्ध अर्कै घनिष्ठ अनि नाता अर्कै पुरानो बनेको छ हाम्रो सबैसँग, तपाईंका लागि रहिरहने छौं हामी सधैं सँगै

३ करोड नेपालीको न्यानो माया र आत्मीय साथ पाएर नै सुखद सहकार्य अनि सहयात्रा गर्दै एनसेलले सेवा सञ्चालनको १९ वर्ष सफलतापूर्वक पार गरेको छ । यस विशेष अवसरमा हामीलाई प्रेरणा र प्रोत्साहन प्रदान गर्दै निरन्तर प्रगतिको पथमा बढ्न हौसला प्रदान गर्नुहुने सम्पूर्ण प्रति हार्दिक आभार एवम् धन्यवाद प्रकट गर्दछौं । डिजिटल भविष्यका लागि नवीन र गुणस्तरीय सेवासहित सधैं ON रहने प्रतिबद्धता व्यक्त गर्दछौं ।

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हामी तपाईंका लागि

DRONES OVER NEPAL

UAVs are being used to count tigers, reforest mountains, collect TB samples, airlift litter, etc

■ Vishad Raj Onta

✈ Nepal's vertical topography has always made it difficult to get vaccines and medicines to hard-to-reach settlements. The road network is spreading, but there is serious concern about its quality and safety.

✈ The dense jungles of the Tarai are a refuge not just for wildlife, but also poachers. Foot or elephant patrols provide limited visibility, and census of predators and prey density tend to be estimates.

✈ The Melamchi and Thame flood disasters were caused by glacial collapse. Future infrastructure projects must map upstream risk.

✈ Popular peaks like Mt Everest and Manaslu get bad international press because of garbage piling up due to over-tourism. It is dangerous and expensive to bring down the trash for disposal.

There is now a solution to all these problems Nepal faces: drones.

First-person view (FPV) drones are changing the nature of warfare, as seen in Ukraine's defence against Russian invasion and conflicts in West Asia. But like all technology, military hardware always has peacetime applications.

Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) are already proving to be a great leap forward in simplifying connectivity and providing cheaper solutions to a vast array of problems in Nepal.

For example, when a massive debris flow on the Melamchi in June 2021 killed dozens and destroyed the headworks of Nepal's most expensive infrastructure project, UAVs were used to assess the damage.

The Nepali non-profit Nepal

Flying Labs could take high resolution images of the disaster zones even before relief teams could reach due to destroyed roads, cloud cover grounding helicopters and blocking out satellites.

Drones were also used to explore the upper reaches of the glacier-fed Melamchi and Pemdang rivulets to see where the flood originated. Similar drone footage helped locate the glacial lake overflows that unleashed the Thame flood last month.

Large scale deployment of UAVs in Nepal started after the April 2015 earthquake to assess damage, and in search and rescue in remote areas. Later, they proved invaluable to Kathmandu-based organisations like NSET (National Society for Earthquake Technology - Nepal) and International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) in planning reconstruction and relocation of damaged neighbourhoods. International media also used aerial shots of the destruction from drone cameras for their broadcasts.

In 2018, Mahabir Pun's National Innovation Centre got the Robotics Club of Pulchok Engineering Campus to test drones to deliver medicines to remote areas, and this application saw some promise.

In one of many recent examples of Nepal's laws being overtaken by technology, the government scrambled to formulate guidelines. And as usual, the response was to regulate and control rather than facilitate their legitimate use.

Officials worried about drones buzzing around heritage sites, near airports and over military areas. The Civil Aviation Authority of



Nepal (CAAN) and the Ministry of Home Affairs cited security and privacy threats, as well as concerns about drone signals disturbing communication channels.

Within a month of the earthquake, strict rules were drawn up. Drone operators needed permissions from a slew of ministries, as well as the Army, and to follow strict rules like not landing near people and flying out of sight of the operator.

This did not stop drones being used, especially as the devices became small enough to be held in the palm. Rules were relaxed in 2019 and made more comprehensive in 2021. (See box) This allowed Nepali companies to launch drone operations: Nepal Flying Lab, Dronepal, Geovation

Nepal, Madhukaa Drone Services, Airlift Technology, and others.

The companies offer various services, some of which overlap. All provide mapping and surveying options, such as high resolution images of municipalities, natural features like lakes and rivers, topo and contour mapping, and Digital Surface Models that precisely capture natural and man-made surface objects.

Dronepal and Airlift Technologies both specialise in 3D modelling, both of larger urban or mining sites and more detailed models of culturally important sites and monuments, like the Changu Narayan Temple.

Companies are able to turn drone images and footage into 3D models through softwares that

stitch aerial images and videos.

Drones can also be fitted with cameras that detect depth, or use LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) that bounces laser pulses off surfaces for detailed mapping.

"Most of our clients are construction companies, although there are some independent developers too," says Milan Karki of Dronepal.

"There are a lot of hydropower companies. We can give them access to information about what kind of progress is happening on their projects through our models."

Madhukaa Drone Services also provides surveying and inspection services as well as agricultural, delivery and rescue. Its drones can spray 'nano-urea' to fertilise maize fields. The company claims



Drone shot of Kathmandu's rapid urbanisation.



GOPEN RAI



RAMU SAPKOTA



UNDP

WHAT ARE THE RULES?

The Nepal government is trying to play catch-up with rapidly evolving drone technology. As drones get bigger, more powerful and have longer range, or can fly in formations of hundreds at a time, new categories and rules are being made as we go along. Given the bureaucratic labyrinth and arbitrary enforcement by local officials, and as Nepali companies upgrade to the latest UAVs, it may actually be less of a hassle to just hire drones when here.

Before flying a drone in Nepal, operators must go through a lengthy, vague, confusing process that involves submitting a lot of documentation and obtaining many permission letters. The one official process is for applying with the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) 'Unmanned Aircraft System Requirements' 2021 after which the 'Unique Identification Number' sticker must be attached to the drone.

1. A passport size colour photo of the applicant
2. Citizenship/Passport/Company Registration Certificate
3. Photograph of drone that shows its model and serial number.
4. Purpose of operation letter
5. Specifications of the drone, including the weight, the color, the payload type etc.
6. Copy of VAT bill if bought in Nepal, or Copy of Custom Clearance Certificate if imported
7. USD 10 + 13% VAT Registration fee



NEPAL ARMY

But that is just the beginning. Operators need a 'Remote Pilot License' from CAAN based on experience or equivalent certificates. And then permits from the District Administration Office, Ministry of Home Affairs, Department of Tourism, the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, etc. Further permits are based on what the drone is being used for from the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation--plus, just-in-case--letters from the Chief District Officer, the Nepal Police and Nepal Army.

Phew. The policy for getting caught flying an unauthorised drone is that CAAN can confiscate and auction the craft for revenue. But the fact that there are so many drones buzzing about trekking trails these days means people must have found ways to circumvent the rules.

that this method is not only five times faster, but also reduces the amount of chemical seeping into groundwater.

Drones have also been used to plant seeds to help with reforestation after wildfires. Last month, the Ministry of Forests and Environment tested broadcast seeding of uttis (Nepali alder) from drones over the watershed to reduce landslides that wash down stone, gravel and sand into the lake (pictured, upper right).

TB airlift

Drones have important applications in health. The Birat Nepal Medical Trust (BNMT) employed UAVs for an award-winning Drone Optimised Therapy System (DrOTS) experiment in 2019. It tested the

collection of sputum samples, and treated patients infected with tuberculosis in the remote mountains of Piuthan district.

Funded by the Nick Simons Institute (NSI), the drones carried the samples from remote homesteads in the mountains in bio-hazard safe containers (pictured, above) to Swargadwari District Hospital. The sputum was lab tested and patients who were positive were placed under the remote Directly Observed Treatment Short-course (DOTS) program that used smart pill boxes to keep track of if the medicine is being taken as prescribed.

DOTS was credited with reducing Nepal's TB infection rate in the 1990s, but there were remote areas of the country still out of

reach of the surveillance, diagnosis and treatment system.

"Getting the community to understand and trust in the project was very important to its success," recalls Maxine Caws, principal investigator of BNMT's IMPACT TB project that ran for a year. "People were quite proud that this new technology was being used where they live, and it even seemed to overcome their qualms about the stigma of being diagnosed with TB."

The program ran out of funding, but showed great potential. BNMT is now working on reducing costs and finding new sources for grants.

The main hurdle for drone operators in Nepal now is not range anxiety, but to negotiate the bureaucratic maze for permits from 12 different government agencies –

including five ministries and four local governments.

Caws adds, "Drones really seem to be optimal because they can zip between hills while health workers would have to walk long distances up and down to transport samples. That freed up their time to make an impact on the health of the locality in other ways."

Influencer drones

Drone filming by YouTubers, travel vloggers and influencers have been the single most important contribution to post-Covid revival of Nepal as a tourism destination.

Nepal's mountains, river valleys, trekking trails, heritage sites and tropical national parks are ideal for drone filming. Footage of expeditions making their way up

the Khumbu Icefall get millions of views around the world. Drones have also been used to promote Lumbini and provide an aerial view of Kenzo Tange's plan for the Buddha's birthplace.

But over-tourism along the Everest Trail and to a lesser extent other popular base camps like Manaslu and Annapurna have created a waste disposal crisis.

During the 2024 spring mountaineering season, Airlift Technologies collaborated with the local government to test Chinese drone company DJI's FlyCart 30 to haul trash to Base Camp. Heavier UAVs hold the potential to make it cheaper and safer to ferry garbage, and even bodies, from Nepal's high mountains.

One of the advantages about the drone scene is that it is still a relatively new technology and new applications seem to be coming up all the time. Worldwide, the more striking uses for drones include drone light shows, and drone-based whale monitoring where UAVs are flown through mist exhaled by the giant mammals for non-invasive study, and volcano monitoring.

In Nepal, drones have already proved themselves in agriculture, nature conservation and health services. The future holds other potentials as more powerful drones with heavier lift capability, longer range, higher operating ceiling and ability to work together are developing in swarms.

Given the critical importance of transmission lines in evacuating Nepal's hydropower, another potential application could be in laying, inspecting, and maintaining power lines in rural or hard to reach places, a technology already used in Canada and Norway. 🇨🇦



BIRAT NEPAL MEDICAL TRUST



Park rangers and army personnel learn to fly UAVs to monitor wildlife poaching.

WWF NEPAL

EVENTS

**Reimagine Himalayan Art**

Performance art rarely happens in Kathmandu, so take the chance to experience Amrit Karki's 'What you have given me, I set free forever' performance this weekend. *Until 21 September, 12pm-6pm, Nepal Art Council, Baber Mahal*

Lain Bangdel

Stop by the ongoing exhibition at the Takpa Gallery that explores the life and devotion to art of artist, novelist, and art historian Lain Singh Bangdel. *Until 22 September, 11am-7pm (Fridays to Sundays), 11am-6pm (Tuesdays to Thursdays), Takpa Gallery, Lazimpat, 9851326472*

**Agriculture workshop**

Walter Siegfried Hahn, noted leader in sustainable agriculture and social innovation, will conduct a workshop titled 'The Senses and the Earth Journey'. Join the event this October 11-13. *11-13 October, Admission fee: Rs12,000, Purna Yoga Retreat Center, Pokhara*

Karmarong

This exhibition of Dorjee Karmarong's paintings takes you deep into a hidden valley in the Himalaya. *24 September- 21 October, 11am-5pm (Sundays to Fridays), 12pm- 5pm (Saturdays), Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal*

**Otaku Jatra 2024**

Gear up for the yearly Otaku Jatra that celebrates pop culture and cosplay in Nepal. Witness jaw-dropping costumes and other dynamic panels, or participate in cosplay yourself. *21 September, 10am onwards, Silver Oak Banquets and Event Center, Gairidhara*

DINING

**Beer O' Clock**

Sip, relax, and unwind with Beer O'Clock's exclusive offer: three beers for the price of two. Bring some company and make it an unforgettable night. *Hotel Barahi, Naxal, 9851346873*

MUSIC

Sound Exhibition

The Sound Exhibition brings together music from local and international talent. Ankytrixx, B.P.M, Diploma and RI also join. *20 September, 7pm onwards, Ticket: Rs500, Level 3, Pulchowk*

**Leo Night**

Join this charity event where music, food, drinks and games create a perfect atmosphere to chill with friends and loved ones. Sushant Ra Raga will play live music. *21 September, 4:30pm onwards, Ticket: Rs500, Mamsa Banquet, Chyasal*

**Symphony of Art**

Experience this evening market with a musical performance by The Phoenix band. Kta Haru's 'Number 0' music video is premiering at the event. *20 September, 3pm onwards, Ticket: Rs500-Rs1,000, Ivory, Thamel*

**The Edge Band**

The Edge Band is set to play live music this weekend in Bhaktapur. Book tickets through Aafno Ticket and sing along with friends. *21 September, 1pm to 10:30pm, Heritage Palace, Radhe Radhe*

Gin Affairs

Try over 15 premium gins at this tasting event, while enjoying live performances from top-notch DJs. *21 September, 2pm onwards, Ticket: Rs500, Evoke, Jhamsikhel*

**Chez Caroline**

Experience authentic French and continental cuisine at Chez Caroline. Try their Profiteroles au Chocolat and Choux pastry filled with vanilla ice cream and hot chocolate sauce. *Baber Mahal Revisited (01) 5363070*

Alev Kebab Sultanate

Taste the unique flavours of the Middle Eastern cuisine, including meat kabab prepared in an open kitchen. The vegetarian course and desserts in the menu are equally delicious. *Tangalwood, 9802322125*

GETAWAYS

**Tiger Mountain**

Tiger Mountain Resort offers a rustic getaway in rural Pokhara. The spa offers relaxing treatments, and there are enough activities at the resort to fuel the adventurer in you. *Pokhara, 9765979937*

Atithi Resort & Spa

This resort is a quiet sanctuary that fuses Nepali tradition with modern amenities. Head over for a lovely weekend. *Lakeside, Pokhara (061) 1466760*

**Nana Jungle Resort**

The fusion of serene wilderness and the modern comforts awaits visitors at Nana Jungle Resort. Located near the Narayani River, this resort is a premium establishment that prioritises sustainable tourism. *Chitwan National Park, 9802000916*

Shambaling Boutique Hotel

This Tibetan-style boutique hotel offers cosy rooms, comfortable amenities and access to the heart of Boudha, and is ideal for Kathmandu-dwellers who do not want to stray too far from the city but do want to get away. *Boudha (01) 4916868*

**Dhulikhel Mountain Resort**

This resort seamlessly blends culture and comfort, with its well-designed bungalows and Newa accents visible throughout the premises. *Dhulikhel, 9801168962*

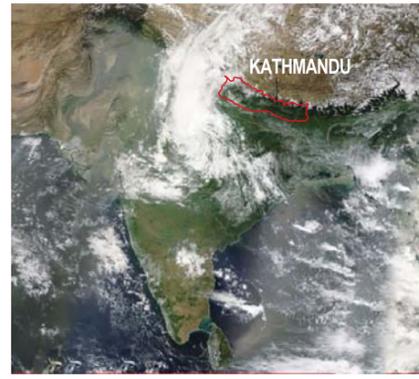
Ghangri

Head to Jhamsikhel's favourite eatery for mouth watering open sumai momos, home-style fried chicken and cheese balls that melt in your mouth. *Jhamsikhel (01) 5428703*

**Cafe Hessed**

Café Hessed has a focused menu that serves all kinds of cupcakes, doughnuts and Korean food. For those without a sweet tooth, the café's gimbab is a must-have. *Pulchowk (01) 5430933*

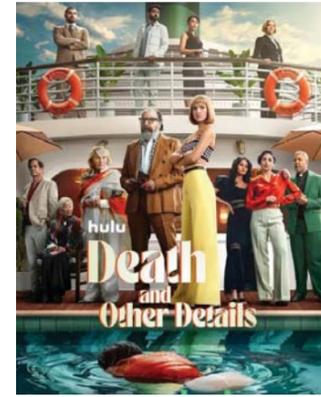
WEEKEND WEATHER

**Hot and humid**

The monsoon is now tapering off, but not before it gives us another pulse of rain midweek next week due a low pressure system over northern India that does not know whether it is coming or going. Saturday may get some short sharp localised showers, but otherwise we are looking at hot and sticky days ahead. The weekend, especially, will see unseasonably warm temperatures in Kathmandu's urban heat bubble with the mercury hitting up to 32° Celsius.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
31° 19°	30° 19°	32° 19°

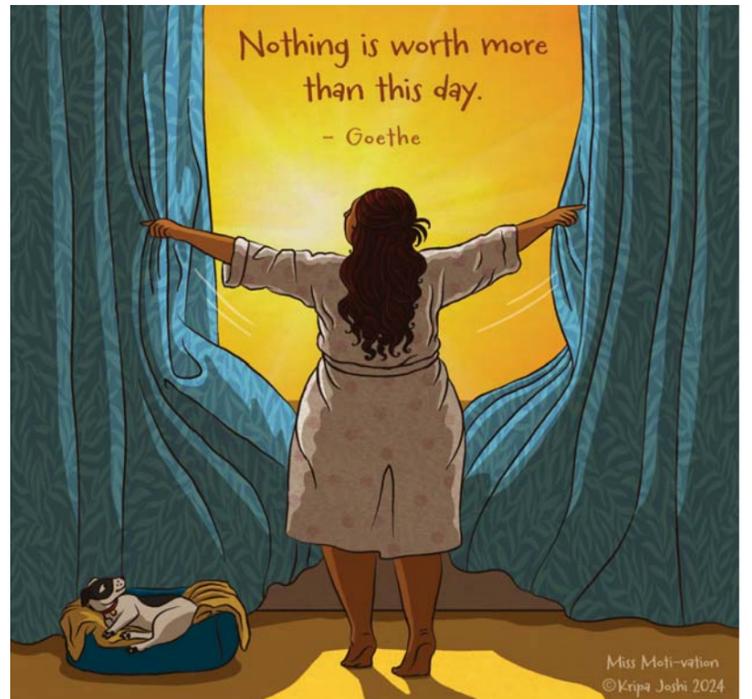
OUR PICK



In the 2024 mystery drama series *Death and Other Details*, Imogene Scott is haunted by memories of being witness to her mother's murder when she was a child. Years later, when a man is brutally killed aboard a luxury cruise liner that Imogene is also in, she is forced to relive her mother's killing. As bodies start piling up, Imogene must find the murderer by teaming up with the private investigator who abandoned her mother's case and let her down. *Stars Violet Beane, Lauren Patten, Rahul Kohli, Angela Zhou, Linda Emond and Mandy Patinkin.*

MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



गर्मी मौसममा संक्रामक रोगबाट बचाउ र बचाऔं

- गर्मी मौसममा मलेरिया, कालाजार, डेंगी, हैजालगायतका विभिन्न संक्रामक रोगहरू फैलिन सक्छन् ।
- संक्रामक रोग फैलाउने झिँगा, लामखुट्टे, भुसुना आदिको नियन्त्रण गरौं ।
- संक्रामक रोगबाट बच्न शुद्ध र उमालेको पानी पिऔं ।
- बासी तथा सडेगलेका खाना नखाऔं ।
- घरभित्र र वरपरको सरसफाइमा ध्यान दिऔं ।



नेपाल सरकार
विज्ञापन बोर्ड



Yem Yāh

Kathmandu's Great Autumnal Festival that celebrates the rain god for a bountiful rice harvest

Text and Photos by
Alok Siddhi Tuladhar

Yen Yaa has many popular myths associated with it. But popularity is shallow. Dig deeper, and we uncover layers through which history has evolved.

While we celebrate Yem Yāh with fervour for a week, ending Friday 20 September, we also lament how Indrāju, the chief deity and his consort Indrāni, have been globetrotting, leaving us devotees in a spiritual void.

The 38cm tall wooden image of Indrāju and Indrāni carved in Nepāl Maṇḍala in the 17th century, was up for auction on 28 September last year at Stallion Hill Gallery in Stamford, Connecticut — the same day Nepal declared a holiday in honour of Indrāju.

Legend goes that Indra, the lord of heaven, came down to Kathmandu to get a Parijāt (night-jasmine) which his mother needed to perform a sacred ritual. But the god was caught stealing the flower and people tied him up in a wooden pole. This shaming tradition continues today as effigies in street intersections.

“People worship Indra that night and offer him hard-to-chew roasted maize, wheat and beans as punishment. Indra is called khum dyah, thief god in Nepālbhāsā,” explains cultural documentarian Sandip Maharjan.

The older, and possibly original, interpretation of Indra Jatra is much more profound than the entertaining story of the thief god Indra, and is connected with the agrarian civilisation of Kathmandu Valley, and its seasons.

The Newāh people believe that ancestors are divinities with supernatural powers. Yem Yāh is celebrated in honour of one particular ancestral deity, Indrāju the conjunction of Indra the king of heaven and Āju the male ancestral divinity, in appreciation of his rainmaking capabilities.

Indrāju has blessed the valley with sufficient monsoon rains for



the past three months, enabling a bountiful harvest. Yem Yāh at the end of the monsoon honours him for the rain he sent down to earth from heaven.

Indrāju is the protagonist in this week-long gala. But of equal, if not

greater, importance is the exuberant display of Hāthu Dyah, venerated as Bhairava in recent centuries. Numerous images of Hāthu Dyah are brought out from storage and displayed atop special wooden platforms at street intersections.



RAIN MAKER: Ritual street performances are an integral part of the weeklong Yem Yāh festival (top).

Pulu Kisi, Indra's celestial elephant is paraded around Kathmandu, and the ceremonial Samaybaji, the food that represents the universe (above).

A masked Dagim, Indra's mother, is also taken around (left)

Sanskritist and scholar of Newāh heritage, Gautama Vajracharya, confirms that Hāthu Dyah is the ancestral sky god who bestows monsoon rains upon the earth. The cult of Hāthu Dyah existed before the arrival of the

Licchavis from northern India in 300 CE. At that time, Hāthu Dyah was venerated by Kathmandu Valley's farmers as the rain-giving sky god.

Carrying out the Hāthu Hāyeke ritual of pouring rice beer from behind its image is a way to thank him for the rains that helped paddy plantation. Drinking the holy beer is supposed to ensure good health for the rest of the year.

An elaborately decorated image of Hāthu Dyah is brought out from his temple at Vaṃghah (Indrachok today), and the Hāthu Hāyeke ritual takes place twice a day. Āju Dyah is also known as Yelam, derived from the archaic Nepāl Bhāsā ailam (sky). Hence, the modern name of Āju Dyah is Ākās Bhairava.

Hāthu Dyah, Āju Dyah and Bhairava are always depicted with abstract circular patterns in the eyebrows and around the mouth. These metaphysical shapes are water foliage, rain drops that make up clouds. Again, this connects Hāthu Dyah with the sky and rain.

Giving continuity to Hāthu Hāyeke by using the physical form of Bhairava instead of the primordial Hāthu Dyah took root in the post-Licchavi era (after 879 CE).

Yem Yāh is therefore Kathmandu Valley's unique autumn festival that celebrates the end of the rainy season by thanking the ancestral rainmaker deity who underwent transformation from pre-Licchavi Hāthu Dyah to the later Bhairava.

Explains Gautama Vajracharya, “During the Licchavi period, he was mostly venerated as Indrāju, the combined form or Vedic god of rain Indra and male ancestor Āju.”

Alok Siddhi Tuladhar (alokstuladhar@gmail.com) is a cultural preservation activist and documentary filmmaker.



For a longer version of this article and more photos of the festival this week, scan QR code to go to www.nepalintimes.com

Japan-born Nepali children

Children of Nepali parents working in Japan adjust to life and school back in Nepal



ALL PHOTOS: GOPEN RAI

■ Pinki Sris Rana

Ayan Dallakoti spent his childhood in Japan, speaking Japanese and for all intents and purposes, considered himself Japanese. It was only as he grew older that he realised he was actually from Nepal.

Ayan was eight years old when his mother Pratibha brought him and his younger brother Avan back to Nepal. Their father Anjay, who is still in Japan, had decided to send the boys home so they could “become Nepali”.

Ayan was somewhat familiar with the Nepali language and the country, but in Kathmandu, everything felt foreign, including the education system.

“Things were a little easier when he had a classmate who had also returned from Japan, but making Nepali friends did not come easily for them,” remembers Pratibha.

Japan is now a major destination for Nepali families like the Dallakotis. Officially, there are 180,000 Nepalis in Japan and 35,000 more left just in the past year – a 30% increase from the year before that.

Japanese embassy figures show that of those who left last year, 23,124 were on student visas, 8,566 were on working visas and 7,849 were dependents.

While most of the older generation of Nepalis in Japan are cooks who went as ‘skilled labour’, the new crop of migrants



are mostly on student visas, working part-time. For the Japanese government, a student visa is a carefully calibrated temporary migration system to fill the country’s labour shortage in the service sector.

Unlike the Gulf, Korea, Malaysia and other countries, Nepalis in Japan can also take along their families. Which is why Nepali schools have sprung up in large cities in Japan. These schools teach Nepali language, culture, and also English. But for families who work far away from those cities, the children have no option but to get a Japanese education.

Anjay Dallakoti initially went

to Japan as a student, but extended his stay with a working visa. Pratibha joined him a few years later as a dependent. Ayan was born in Japan, and six years later Avan. After 12 years, Pratibha is back in Nepal with both her boys.

In many Nepali families in Japan, it is the children who are having to adjust to being caught in between two worlds. Many have to cope with the double adjustment of first arriving in Japan, and then returning to school in Nepal.

According to Masako Tanaka, a professor at Tokyo’s Sophia University, nearly 20,000 Nepalis in Japan are minors. Tanaka has been working closely with Nepali

migrants in Japan, and says many mothers are bringing their children back to Nepal because of worries that they are losing touch with their identity and culture back home.

The other reason is that the children are not learning enough English, and the parents fear they will lose out in later life.

“Returning to Nepal and studying in schools here helps create an environment for the children to either stay and work in Nepal in future or go to a third country,” says Sapana Kharel, who also returned to Nepal with her two children.

For Nepali families who have not yet got permanent resident

status, staying on in Japan and continuing their children’s education is too uncertain. They worry that this could interrupt their children’s education if they have to leave Japan midway through school.

“There is fear that the children will neither have a place in Nepali schools nor there in Japan,” adds Kharel.

Others say that they would have returned to Nepal for the sake of the children no matter what, even if they got permanent residence in Japan. Indeed, there are Nepali mothers who are already permanent residents who have opted to return with their children.

Take the Subedi family who



struggle to 'be Nepali'



BACK IN NEPAL: Ayan Dallakoti and his brother Avan pose in kimono in Japan before they returned to Nepal (above).

Ayan, now 12, with his mother Pratibha and Avan looking through their family album at their home in Kirtipur (left).

Ayan catching up with his Nepali language homework from school (below, left).

have permanent resident status in Japan, but brought their daughter Shibika to Nepal after she completed Grade 1 in Japan.

Many migrant children like Shibika had to repeat grades they had already studied in Japan. She had to repeat Grade 1, and is now in Grade 9. Her mother Nitu Bista Subedi feels that repeating a year was necessary to strengthen her daughter's foundation in the Nepali curriculum.

"Shibika has fond memories of Japan and misses being together with the whole family there, and she worries that her Japanese classmates are getting ahead of her," says Subedi.

Ten-year-old Ahana Odari had her own struggles when she was brought to Nepal by her mother a year ago. She too had to repeat Grade 3. "She just wouldn't speak for the first few months because of the language problem," remembers her mother, Balika Odari. "Ahana took a whole year to adapt and adjust to Nepal and its ways. But this was necessary."

Like a lot of parents, Balika feels that although Japan's education system is one of the best in the world, children there are more reclusive and do not socialise as much. "We were worried our children would turn out the same way, and that is why we decided to bring them back and introduce them to their country and culture," she explains.

In more extreme cases, migration can hinder the psychosocial development of returning children.

"Early-age children are good at learning dual or multiple languages, but because of the limited vocabulary they are exposed to, they might not always have words to express how they are feeling. And that is where the problem lies," says Srijana Adhikari, a clinical psychologist at Happy Minds.

"For healthy development, the environment the child grows up in and the needs to be stable," she adds. "If not, this may lead to problems adjusting, separation anxiety and struggles in building relationships."

Sneha Khatri, now 14, oscillated between Nepal and Japan over the years. She was born in Japan but was brought to Nepal when she was six. She studied here until Grade 3 and then went to the

Nepali-run Everest International School in Tokyo.

Sneha came back to Nepal a month ago to appear for her Basic Level Examination (BLE) but is worried about her results. She is taking extra tutorials in mathematics.

Ayan is now in Grade 7, and is also worried about his BLE next year. He says in Japanese-accented English: "Social Studies is my first hardest subject, and Nepali is the second hardest."

Speaking Nepali with family and friends is not hard for the returnee migrant children, but Nepali as an academic subject is difficult.

Professor Tanaka says migrant children have fallen through the cracks between Japan and Nepal. She asks rhetorically, "Who will think about the welfare of the migrant children? Who is responsible for them?"

Tanaka was in Kathmandu recently for a workshop on Nepali language education for migrant children during which she presented research findings of her Migrant Children Language Education project.

Tanaka's conclusion is that mother tongue Nepali language education is the best way to help the reintegration of children returning from Japan.

"The government can start by developing Nepali language learning resources for online or home learners abroad, training teachers abroad, and organising and encouraging events for Nepali children overseas," Tanaka told Nepali Times.

"Nepal can learn from countries like Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam and Brazil which are working on national language education for their migrant children in Japan."

To be sure, there are also students who are doing well despite the culture shock of moving back and forth between Japan and Nepal.

Sapana Kharel's daughter, Saurya was born in Japan. She came to Nepal when she was six to study in Nepal. Soon after, she went to Japan. She came back when she was 12 to appear for the Nepali BLE. She initially struggled and had low confidence, but soon overcame it and did well.

"Now, I've realised the importance of learning my mother tongue and have taken up Nepali classes as part of my course," says Saurya, now 17, in flawless Nepali.

But for other migrant children whose parents do not speak enough Nepali when they were in Japan, mastering the mother tongue is still a big hurdle.

Ayan's mother looks at her two children playing at her home in Kirtipur, and says, "The sacrifice we made as a couple, living far from one another, is for our children, their education and for a better future." 🇳🇵



Born to a Nepali immigrant family in Japan, eight-year-old Ayan Dallakoti was brought to Nepal so he could receive better English-medium education. Learn about the challenges children like Ayan go through as they integrate back in Nepali society. Watch the video on Nepali Times' YouTube channel, and subscribe for multimedia content.

Nepali in Nippon

In June, when the SEE (Secondary Education Examination) results came out, one of the students who passed was a Zambian national student from Japan.

He was studying at the Everest International School Japan (EISJ) in Tokyo which follows the Nepali curriculum, and accommodates the need of families in Nepal and other countries in Japan to also learn English.

Initially started in 2013 by the Nepali community, this school came under Nepal's Ministry of Education (MoE) in 2015. EISJ is the only school in Japan that is certified to take Nepal's SEE in Japan.

Other schools that follow the Nepali curriculum have also opened up, over the years. But only two of them, Tokai Batika International School in Nagoya and Himalayan International Academy in Tokyo are certified to conduct Nepali curriculum as per Nepal's Ministry of Education. But both provide education only below Grade 10.

"As of now, the only country to have schools that follow Nepali curriculum is Japan," says Parshuram Tiwari, director at the Education Review Office at the MoE in Kathmandu.

The majority of Nepali families and a few non-Nepali families working in Japan decide to send their children to schools like EISJ because of the English medium. But these are private international schools, unlike the Japanese government schools which are free of cost.

And because these schools are not certified, the Japanese government provides no subsidy, no transportation discount among other privileges to these schools, says Professor Masako Tanaka at Sophia University in Tokyo.

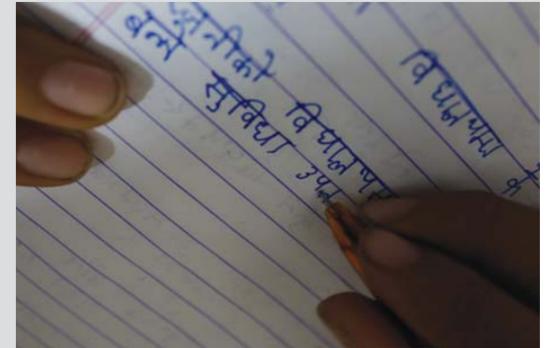
"Most importantly, graduates of EISJ cannot get visa status independently even after graduation from high school level, while the migrant students who graduate from Japanese schools are eligible."

Many Nepali families enrol their children to such schools without knowing this, adds Tanka. But even those who know about drawbacks want to provide their children with the

opportunity to get international exposure with English language skills.

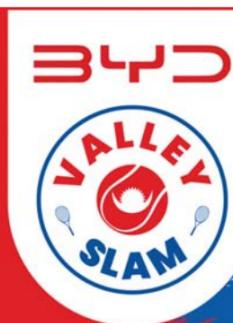
Nepali curriculum schools are mostly based in and around Tokyo, and many Nepali families who live in the suburbs of Japan opt to come to Nepal for their children's education. (Adjoining article)

"We lived in Niigata. It would take us six hours to travel to Everest International School in Tokyo. So, we came to Nepal to give our children English medium education," says Pratibha Dallakoti, who returned from Japan with her two sons in 2020.



While schools that follow the Nepali curriculum in Japan have been a relief for Nepali parents who want their children to pursue Nepali curriculum education, these schools getting certified by the Japanese government would be better.

"There are several other international schools in Japan that are certified by both Japanese and foreign dual standards like the Kyoto Kokusai School," wrote Professor Tanaka in an email interview. "It is for the better that these Nepali curriculum schools like EISJ become similar to KKS which makes it easier for the children as they can get a certificate from both the government."



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Turning legends into games

Ashim Shakya's upcoming video games are an interactive tribute to historical Kathmandu

■ Vishad Raj Onta

In the middle of a rainstorm, surrounded by forests and temples, Jung Bahadur faces off against the fearsome masked Lakhe Aju in a boss scene in the new Nepali video game, Jange.

Wild red hair thrashing about, eyes glowing, Lakhe Aju pursues Jung Bahadur, who is dressed in a red shirt, blue cape, and a bird of paradise shrike crown. Jung is trying to avoid taking damage, while getting some hits of his own on the mythical demon. The Lakhe hurls fireballs that have to be dodged.

The larger story at play here is a fictional, extrapolated historical Nepal where the country is under attack by infected aliens. Jung Bahadur, on horseback, wields a sword against the invaders.

This is digital artist Ashim Shakya's (pictured, right) newest video game project that uses interactive gaming visuals to bring alive Nepali history and culture.

It is a work in progress, and we find Shakya working solo in constructing the game, integrating his many interests and talents in digital art, 3D modelling, music, video, and game development. It has been six years since he started the Jange project, and he documents recent progress on his YouTube.

When he prepares a new aspect of the game, like vehicles, earthquakes or the Lakhe fight scene, Shakya uploads the sequence.

"As the protector of Kathmandu



Screenshot from Allare



Valley, Lakhe Aju is patrolling the borders of his domain and tests Jange's might to decide whether to bless or devour him," Shakya explains.

Even Jange is a detour from another more lengthy, complex project called Allare, which translates to 'directionless bum' or words to that effect.

Shakya explains: "Allare is about a young man who gets into a lot of trouble in his village and moves to old Kathmandu, where he must dabble in crime and struggle in order to shape up."

Allare is set in Kathmandu Valley in the 1960s, and has period visual elements like vintage blue jeeps, rattly buses, bicycles, and dirtbikes (pictured). Characters in

the game are clad in traditional wear, and will talk to the player in Nepali when approached.

A drunk character named Twake occasionally spews slurs, threats and starts fights. Shakya experimentally leveraged his YouTube audience to voice the drunk character, and received many enthusiastic submissions.

It is obvious from the gameplay that a lot of effort has gone into it, and this is even more striking because Shakya is working on it all by his lonely self.

"It is easier for me to do all the parts myself, instead of explaining what I want to someone else," says Shakya, who used to be better known as a Nepali pioneer in digital art.

Shakya puts in 16-18 hour days, breaking only to eat or to stretch. "Coffee helps, and if I hit a creative block I switch attention to making music, or to do client work."

Shakya is self-taught in skills and software tools in his workflow. He uses Maya and Nomad Sculpt to make the 3D models, then Photoshop and Procreate for their textures, and Unreal Engine and Blueprints for programming and game logic.

Shakya draws from his previous experience in game development, having published on Google Play Store for Android devices. One of them is titled Flight: The Valley, described as 'an offline meditative flying adventure' where a player can become a monk that turns into a raven in Kathmandu.

Two other games, Didi and Urban Legends - Survival, are also exploratory 3D games that feature models of Nepali buildings and objects. Urban Legends, in particular, is available for free, has registered over 100,000 downloads and has earned a 4.0 star rating.

Jange and Allare will be released first on PC and then perhaps adapted to console and mobile. Given Shakya's artistic skill set, his ability to integrate them, the time and effort he has put in, and his approach to story and community engagement means aficionados here and abroad can soon play exciting games that also pay tribute to the legends of old Kathmandu. 🇳🇵




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