

## Publisher's Note

Imagine no Internet.  
No Facebook.  
No TikTok.  
No algorithm, no AI.

Year 2000. The world was gripped by the Y2K panic, The Millennium Bug that many feared would wreck global computer networks. The US waged punitive wars following 9/11. Google was launched in 1998, and its search engine and Gmail soon overtook AOL, Hotmail and Yahoo! The EU floated the Euro, and China was asserting itself on the world stage.

Nepal was still a monarchy. The country's population was only 23 million. Most people got their news on community radio. Evening news bulletins on tv channels had higher ratings than entertainment. Amidst political turmoil, readers bought national daily broadsheets at news-stands.

Content was politically top-heavy. The Maoist conflict was entering its fifth year, and there was sporadic news of the government's Kilo Sierra 2 operation which killed more civilians than guerrillas, adding fuel to the insurgency.

The Nepali Congress (NC) and the UML were at each other's throats, calling for national shutdowns and squandering the hopes of renewal from a democracy their leaders fought to restore in the 1990 People's Movement. Hardliners in the royal family were getting restless.

Scientific proof about global warming, erratic weather and media coverage spread public

awareness about climate breakdown. Dire predictions about what was going to happen during the course of the century proved to be optimistic -- we are already seeing today what climatologists said would happen in 2100.

Back then, facts still mattered, the mainstream press swayed opinion, investigative journalism exposed wrongdoing and held power to account. In Nepal, editors and foreign correspondents were opinion-makers, some as well-known as political figures, and sometimes as powerful.

### Nepali Times

Himalmedia Pvt Ltd was launched in 1998 with the flagship fortnightly Himal Khabarpatrika, and Nepali Times started in April 2000 with online content hosted on nepalnews.com. A practice issue was printed in May, and the #1 edition debuted in the week 19-25 July 2000 at the dawn of a new century and new millennium.

We chose the 'midi' size between broadsheet and tabloid, also called the Berliner format. Indian graphic artist Rustam Vania did the design of a paper convenient to hold and read, an easy and visually rich digest of happenings around the country in lively, stylish English.

But why English? We explained in the very first Editorial:

'In the heyday of the Panchayat in the early 1980s, we were often asked why we worked for The Rising Nepal. Our stock reply: "Because His Majesty reads it." Those were the days when few outside the charmed circle of Kathmandu expatriates and local elite read English. So what changed? First, the number of people who read English has grown ... English is a global lingua franca. There is a class of Nepalis who want more than just make-do English, they want to be fluent in it. English has another advantage: it is easier to be rational in it. One is expressive and effusive in one's mother tongue, feelings are stronger in the colloquial ... In a language that is learnt formally and among readers of an international language, there is less tolerance or intolerance.'

Today in the age of trolling and hate speech, maybe English is not so 'rational' after all. The social web has changed so much: readers are drawn to entertainment on digital platforms that mine their personal data and preferences, the political views of users are entrenched and radicalised by algorithms, there is less space for coherent give-and-take to find the middle ground in disputes.

The media's business model has failed under the predatory onslaught of Big Tech. At a time when a free and independent press is needed more than ever to counter populism, resolve wars, or find solutions to the climate crisis, the media is on mute. There is overt political and corporate control of content, and intolerance of tolerance is increasing. Journalism has had to reinvent itself to balance disinformation and falsehoods in cybersphere.

At the moment Nepal is a relatively open society, with one of the freest environments in Asia for media. There are efforts to curb that freedom by the other three branches of the state, but solidarity among journalists is strong.

Nepali Times itself survived the digital transition with an agile strategy that straddles both print and online for content dissemination and revenue. Those who started reading Nepali Times straight out of university when they were



25, are now 50 years old. We have kept a loyal readership, while welcoming a new generation of users -- some of them, surprisingly, preferring the print edition.

We have emphasised multimedia content, preferring to show rather than tell through interactive digital infographics and a well-visited YouTube channel. The hardcopy and online editions complement each other.

Nepali Times has 150,000 unique visitors per month on its website, and over 38% of you come in through the front door in organic searches, 39% through search engines, and the rest click links to stories on our social media posts. The average duration a reader spends on a Nepali Times article is relatively high compared to other media: 2 minutes. Despite the perception that the content is read by older people, it is still mostly popular in the 25-40 age group. Readers of the online pages are divided roughly 30:70 between Nepal and the rest of the world.

In an age of mobile phone saturation, endless scrolling on a small screen, there is still something to be said about the impact of high quality photographs on a 30 inch spread in the centerfold on this paper.

Which may be why despite print media worldwide either shutting down or in crisis, the number of subscribers buying the print edition delivered to their homes or offices every Friday morning in Kathmandu has been constant over the past 25 years.

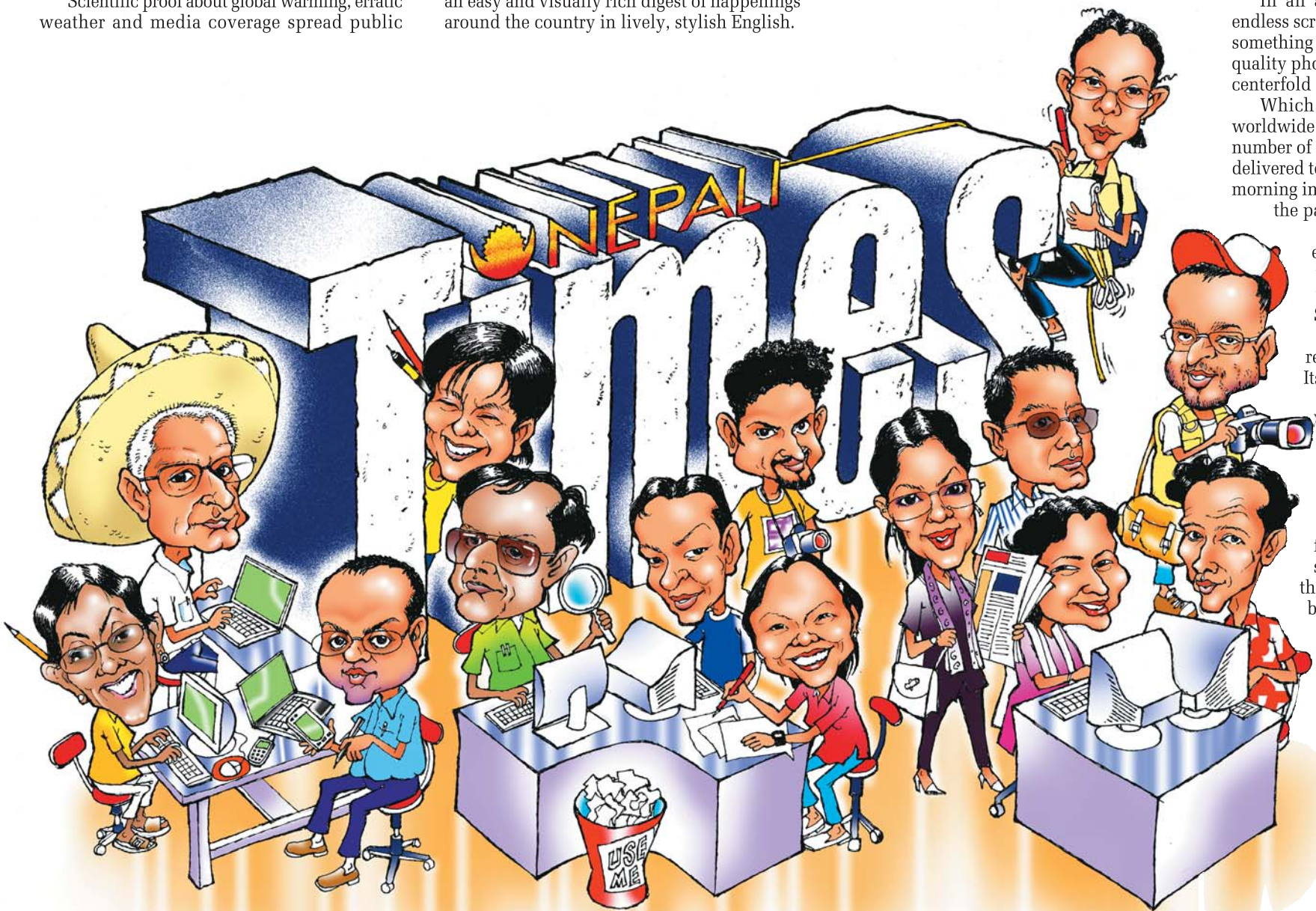
Nepali Times is also available as an e-paper on [www.nepalitimes.com](http://www.nepalitimes.com) as well as a weekly newsletter emailed to about 4,000 subscribers through Substack every Sunday.

Himalmedia has now been repurposed as a non-profit company. Its Himal Khabar magazine and Nepali Times will remain dedicated to fostering a national conversation of issues before they become problems.

Media consumption is shifting, readers are fragmented by algorithm and devices, but it is good, old-fashioned reporting that keeps society informed of trends affecting their lives. Journalism that is fair and balanced provides perspective to make sense of the cacophony.

We thank all readers, partners and well-wishers in Nepal and the rest of the world for being with us for the last 25 years. We look forward to the next 25 with a fresh and youthful newsroom team.

**Kunda Dixit**  
Former Editor, and Publisher



SUBHAS RAI'S RENDITION OF THE NEPALI TIMES NEWSROOM FOR THE PAPER'S FIRST ANNIVERSARY IN 2001. FROM L-R: ANAGHA NEELKANTAN, KUNDA DIXIT, BINOD BHATTARAI, SUBHAS RAI, C K LAL, ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY, HEMLATA RAI, SALIL SUBEDI, SUNAINA SHAH, ANUP BARAL, SWASTI RAJBHANDARI, KIRAN MAHARJAN, MIN BAJRACHARYA, RAMYATA LUMBU.



## 2000

Nepali Times was born at the dawn of the new millennium. It started publishing online in May 2000 before the #1 print edition in the week of 19-25 July 2000. But a month before that, there was a practice #0 which had a Publisher's Note titled 'The Freedom To Be Fair' on page 1. Here is an excerpt:

'It was a journalist who once said that journalists are people without any ideas, but with an ability to express them. These are cynical times, and it is people in media who are most cynical about the media. For too long journalists have taken objectivity as our main mantra, forgetting fairness.

Objectivity is not having to make up your mind about anything, fairness is hearing all sides. Globally, and within countries society's balance of justice is heavily skewed by the weight of the powerful. Objectivity perpetuates this status quo, fairness tries to set things right.

We at Nepali Times and other publications of the Himalmedia group are committed to professionalism and high-quality journalism ... upholding the freedom to be fair.'

These were heady times for Nepal's mainstream press during the constitutional monarchy days. One had to use dialup through a modem and phone line to access the Internet. Nepal Telecom had just started its GSM mobile service, and we all proudly carried around Nokia 3310s with tiny LCD displays.

It would be six years before Twitter started. YouTube was launched in 2005 after its former

PayPal founders were caught up in the Asian Tsunami in Thailand, and found there was no platform for sharing videos. It would be another eight years before algorithms began pushing cat videos to users.

The masthead of the #1 print edition of Nepali Times of 19-25 July 2000 carried the ambitious 'Nepal's Top Newspaper'. The Editorial titled 'A Sign of the Times' said in part:

'Newspapers do more than hold the mirror to society. They are the mirror. Journalism is called history in a hurry. It is also culture, sociology, anthropology, philology, and philosophy in a hurry. Nepali Times will aspire to be a true reflection of our times...'

Indian graphic designer Rustam Vania was invited to Kathmandu in April 2000 and designed a newspaper with a fresh, modern look.

His rendition of the masthead and the page template has not changed in 25 years, though much has changed in Nepal, even while a lot has remained the same. Reports and op-eds about air pollution, hydropower exports, investment, political back-stabbing from two decades ago are as relevant today as they were then. Most of the protagonists are the same people, just a little greyer and chubbier.

In the first of his many thoughtful columns 'State of the State', C K Lal lamented the cynicism in Nepali society: 'Nepal's nabobs of negativism hold forth in their nay-saying nooks. Cynicism is at least a reflection of exaggerated self-worth. Despair is much worse, it is a state of having lost all hope.' Sounds familiar?

Water resources expert Dipak Gyawali argued in a commentary that it made more sense for private power producers to build reservoir projects not for export, but to make up for the dry season power shortfall.

A debate even more prescient today.

Manjushree Thapa's Nepal literature column profiled Nepali writers with translated excerpts. The paper serialised chapters from Desmond Doig's book *In the Kingdom of the Gods*. The Backside satire column featured 'Under My Hat' and 'The Ass'. Nepali Times even carried a weekly horoscope, cigarette and alcohol advertisements.

Journalism is indeed history in a hurry. Those who do not learn from it are doomed to repeat it. Browse the past 25 years of Nepali Times through the online archive on HTML and the ePaper through Archive Nepal. 📄

<https://www.archivenepal.org/nepalitimes>

## 2001

As the Maoist conflict intensified, a demoralised Nepal Police fought with 303 rifles. It launched 'Romeo' and 'Kilo Sierra 2' Operations to hunt Maoists, but killed and tortured a whole lot of civilians whose families then joined the guerrillas. ('Kilo Sierra' seemed to be accurately named because it was all about 'killing'.)

Girija Prasad Koirala of the Nepali Congress (NC) was prime minister, trying to keep both his party and the country from splintering. The opposition UML was shutting down Kathmandu every other week, forcing people off the streets by terrorising them with arson on vehicles that defied strikes.

Koirala himself was under pressure to resign after the CIAA implicated his party's top figures of taking kickbacks in the lease of a Boeing 767 from Austria's Lauda Air. He also wanted to form a separate Armed Police Force (APF) to fight the Maoists with heavier weapons.

A worried King Birendra watched warily as feckless, corrupt politicians squabbled and the Maoist violence spread. As constitutional monarch, he was under pressure from hardliners in his family to be more decisive, and take control of the country.

On the morning of Friday 1 June 2001, the Editorial in Nepali Times was titled 'Long Live the King'. On page 14 was a translation of a piece from Naya Sadak newspaper by Kishore Nepal titled 'A Suitable Prince' about Crown Prince Dipendra's marriage prospects. It read: 'Crown Prince Dipendra turns 31 on 27 June. It is high time he got married.'

Both articles turned out to be bizarrely prescient because that evening at 8:45PM Dipendra opened fire at a royal family dinner with several automatic weapons, killing his father the king, his mother the queen, his brother and sister, two aunts and



an uncle before turning the gun on himself.

The dead and wounded were rushed to the Military Hospital in Chhauni, from where Nepali Times carried an eye-witness account by the surgeon, Upendra Devkota, who tried to save their lives.

Dipendra was in a coma for four days despite a bullet through his head. Nepal erupted in grief, shock and anger. Conspiracy theories flew faster than the truth. Nepali Times reported this like it would any crime story: speaking to eye witnesses, corroborating their testimonies, triple checking the facts.

The 6 June issue headlined 'The Kings Are Dead, Long Live the King', on 15 June was a banner headline that many did not want to believe: 'It Was Dipendra.' (with a fullstop) and on 22 June the paper pieced together all the evidence with a 3D diagram of the scene of the massacre in Narayanhiti with the headline 'Three Kings in Four Days'.

By November, the Maoists pounced on the palace massacre to take the insurgency to the next level by attacking Royal Nepal Army bases and capturing heavy weapons, dragging the military into the war.

While the war intensified in Nepal, the United States suffered the 9/11 attacks which was featured on page 1 with the headline 'Kamikaze'. 🇺🇸

## 2002

On midnight 16 February 2002, on the sixth anniversary of the beginning of the insurgency, the Maoists launched the biggest attack till then against the state. Some 2,500 Maoist guerrillas stormed the town of Mangalsen in Achham in far west Nepal and went about strategically bombing government buildings and executing officials and security personnel.

All 57 soldiers in the Mangalsen garrison, along with 77 policemen and five civilians were killed while many government buildings and Sanfegabar airport were destroyed. Up until that point, the Mangalsen raid was the single most damaging strike by the Maoists.

Many heavy weapons were looted. Thirty-six civilian workers building an airfield were killed in Kalikot when the Army in hot pursuit mistook them for guerrillas.

The Royal Nepal Army was now in the war, and more people were killed in the next 12 months than in the previous six years of conflict.

The page 1 story *Nation in Grief* was by Umid Bagchand. Narendra Shrestha's photograph showed an army honour guard saluting fallen comrades at Pashupati cremation site as a grandmother looked on, capturing the sombre mood of the nation in mourning.



The story read:

'Twenty of the dead soldiers had execution-style bullet wounds in the head. Other bodies were severely charred. One injured soldier had his hand blown off when he picked up a Maoist grenade and tried to throw it back to them.

He survived because the Maoists gave him up for dead. We were not allowed to speak to the other survivor, who was in a state of shock. In a simultaneous attack, the Maoists also destroyed the airfield at Sanfegabar 20 km to the north, killing another 27 policemen.

With the barracks razed and nearly everyone killed, the Maoists had a run of the district headquarters. The policemen put up a brave defence, fighting almost to the last man, but they were overwhelmed by numbers and the Maoists' better weapons.

The attackers used automatic rifles, mortars and rocket-propelled grenades captured during the Ghorahi raid on 23 November. The Maoists looted another 55 automatic weapons and five machine guns from the Mangalsen barracks.'

The country was shaken to its core by the devastating scale of the attack, but it was also a tragic tale of warnings not heeded.



As Bagchand reported for Nepali Times the week following the attack, the Maoists had distributed pamphlets, pasted posters, organised rallies warning of an impending attack on the district headquarters, and sent threatening letters to the district administration which was passed on to Kathmandu.

The Chief District Officer Mohan Singh Khatri, who was killed in the attack, had said at an all-party meeting a few weeks prior that Kathmandu would likely send reinforcements only for their funerals, and as it turned out, the first army helicopters from the capital landed at 10AM on 12 February, just to pick up the corpses.

In an editorial that week titled *Coming out of Slaughter*, we said that this cannot continue any longer and a real solution was in non-violent struggle, democracy, and social progress.

'We have a situation here: democracy is threatened by an ultra-violent group that does not believe in it. Their reach has widened dramatically in the past six years, and they have used brutal violence to cleverly fill the vacuum left by the state.

And as the threat to our democracy and freedoms get more and more serious, our parliamentary parties and factions within them continue to use that threat to bring each other down.

Successive rulers since 1996 have squandered the political option: the civil police couldn't fight the war so an armed police force was set up, the laws of the land were not enough and the anti-terrorism act was needed, constitutional provisions did not suffice and so an emergency was declared and the army unleashed. And the problem is still there. If anything, it is getting bigger.'

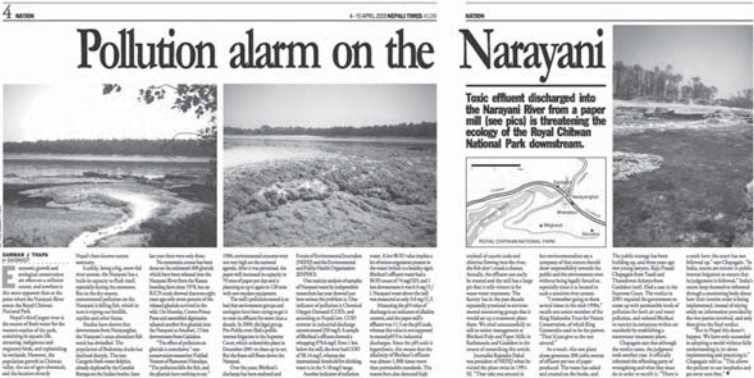
And bigger it did get. The Maoist war had already cost 3,200 lives until then, but would go on to claim more than five times that number by the time the peace accord was signed in 2006, and the former rebels were brought to mainstream politics.

But the absence of war didn't mean peace, as we found out in the years since. 🇳🇵



# 2003

The beginning of 2003 was marked by a ceasefire agreement between the government and the Maoists on 29 January. But it was short-lived and collapsed on 27 August following three rounds of failed peace talks. The country went back to violence, and journalist Gyanendra Khadka was beheaded in Sindhupalchok. Young children were used as pawns with private school shutdowns as well as kidnapping and murders. Subsequently,



more and more people were fleeing for the comparative safety of Kathmandu, adding to the capital's unsustainable urban sprawl. While the war waged in the countryside, Kathmandu was becoming unlivable in other ways. The quality of air was worsening by the day. The Supreme Court banned vehicles older than 20 years from plying, but that was not the answer. A page 1 headline 'Gasp' on issue #137 drew attention to the unbreathable air. Twenty-two years later, things have changed -- but for the worse. We doubled down on the crisis with another spread 'Breathing is Harmful to Health' on

issue #156 where environmentalist Bhushan Tuladhar looked into how the concentration of particulate matter from newly set up monitoring stations showed that people were breathing air with pollutants several times higher than the WHO standard. The main culprit: vehicular emission made worse by adulterated fuel, and soot particles from the brick kilns. That year we also exposed toxic effluent being discharged into the Narayani River by a paper mill (pictured), threatening the ecology of Chitwan National Park downstream. The investigation showed toxicity analyses of Narayani water: 'One indicator of pollution is Chemical Oxygen Demand (COD), and according to Nepali law, COD content in industrial discharge cannot exceed 250 mg/l. A sample of Bhrikuti's effluent showed a whopping 979.6 mg/l...' Measuring the pH value of discharge is an indicator of alkaline content, and the paper mill's effluent was 11.5 on the pH scale, whereas this value is not supposed to exceed pH 9 in industrial discharges. Since the pH scale is logarithmic, this means that the alkalinity of Bhrikuti's effluent was almost 1,000 times more than permissible standards. The researchers also detected high concentrations of ammonium nitrate and nitrite.' Back in 2003 we were already reporting on a ban on Nepali women going to work in the Gulf following the death by suicide of Kani Sherpa who was sexually abused by her employer in Qatar. We said the restriction was a serious violation of freedom of mobility, livelihood and self-determination rights, especially as the ban was arbitrary and implemented haphazardly at Kathmandu airport. Interestingly, in issue #156, Shiva Gaule exposed Kathmandu airport for being a global centre for human trafficking: 'Kathmandu airport is not just where Nepalis use fake documents to get out of their country, it is also getting the reputation among the international human smuggling networks as an easy airport to transit. Our lax controls, immigration desks with inadequate counterfeit detection equipment, rampant corruption, and a huge domestic demand for fake travel documents from Nepalis desperate to migrate for a better life make it an ideal jump-off point.'

# 2004

The Maoist war was at its peak, the rebels were attacking one district headquarters after another, people were being disappeared, Nepalis were killing fellow Nepalis. King Gyanendra had dismissed Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba for failing to hold elections and negotiate with the insurgents. By this point, the Maoists were also organised into the People's Liberation Army (PLA), a centralised military force with battalion-level formations. The eastern division was led by Nanda Kishor Pun (later vice president), and the western division by Barshaman Pun (later finance minister). The night of terror which has since been dubbed the Battle of Beni started at 10:30PM on Saturday, 20 March, and the fighting continued until 6AM the next day. Soldiers and police guarding the police station fought until ammunition ran out, the CDO building next door was reduced to rubble, and the army camp was the only government building standing, albeit barely. Thomas Bell, a Kathmandu-based correspondent for the Daily Telegraph, was one of the first foreign journalists on the scene, and had a dramatic eyewitness account in Nepali Times issue #189: 'Lt Col Ragu Nepali's office with its sandbagged windows is a wreck. He estimates there were at least 5,000 Maoists involved in the attack: frontline fighters, militia and porters. "They came in waves, like the sea, one after another, one after another," said Lt Col Nepali, looking exhausted after two

nights without sleep. "There were more women than men. And many, many child soldiers, below 14. I saw them while I was shooting back." There were six Maoist bodies inside the army base and Nepali points them out: "They are all young children, this one is a girl."... After the sun came up, they were walking here like they were coming home from a movie. Singing, joking, showing no fear." Accompanying the piece was a photograph by Bell of Jamila Khatun washing blood from her shopfront in Beni while her three-year-old daughter Sajita watched. The picture would go on to become an iconic image of the war and was included in Nepali Times' publisher Kunda Dixit's The People's War trilogy, a pictorial documentation of the armed conflict in Nepal. In total, 19 civilians, 17 police and 14 soldiers were killed in the Beni attack, while at least 90 Maoists were slain. There were prisoners on both sides including Matrika Yadav from the Maoists. The Battle of Beni was one of the biggest attacks on a district headquarters, and a turning point in the conflict. Following Beni, the Army bolstered the defence of its garrisons, and the Maoists shifted to ambushing security convoys along the highways. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan who had been to Nepal in 2001 expressed serious concern and offered to help find a solution. In our editorial that week, we said: 'Kofi Annan has echoed the sentiments of nearly all Nepalis: that there is no military solution to the conflict.' The United Nations went on to set up the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) in 2007 to support the peace process following the end of the war. But the body was largely criticised for overstepping its mandate, disagreements over exit strategy, and perceived bias towards the Maoists, among others. Maoist supremo Pushpa Kamal Dahal in a leaked 2009 video even boasted of deceiving the UNMIN about the actual number of their fighters to 35,000 when the real figure was closer to 7,000-8,000.



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# 2005

1 February, 2005. 10AM. King Gyanendra went on Nepal Television with a Royal Proclamation saying he was taking over. He criticised the political parties, condemned the Maoists, and sacked Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba. Telephone, mobile, and internet lines went dead and the airport was closed. Civil society activists, politicians and others were arrested from their homes. A State of Emergency was declared and the king took up emergency powers, declaring that he would chair a handpicked council of ministers for up to 3 years (pictured).

The declaration included the suspension of the freedom of speech, assembly, the right to property, information and against preventive detention.

‘His Majesty’s Government has banned for six months any interview, article, news, notice,

## New ministers

Samsay, 4-11 February

As per Article 137 of the 1990 constitution, King Gyanendra has formed a new cabinet under his chairmanship. The king appointed 18 ministers from different ethnic backgrounds: Newar, Brahmin, Chhettri and Thakali who hail from the hills, Terai and Kathmandu Valley. Seven of the ministers are new faces in the public arena:

**Rameshwath Pandey, Foreign Affairs**  
Was repeatedly appointed minister during the Panchayat era and twice as member of the National Assembly. Served as minister for information, population and environment and tourism.  
Elected minister during the NC-UMS government in 1990, he was also a member of the 2002 Chandra cabinet.

**Rudra Krishna Mainali, Education and Sports**  
Founding member of Nepal Communist Party (M). Unable to get membership in the permanent committee of the UML after the Janapratik Convention in 2003, he has distanced himself from the party. Served as chairman of the United Left Front and was elected minister during the nine month NC-UMS coalition government.

**Krishna Lal Thakali, General Administration**  
Minister for General Administration in the first Devkota cabinet, little known politician but created own identity by taking a strong stance against UML's frequent and random transfer of government officials. Appointed member of the National Assembly and member secretary of the Development Committee of Mustang.

**Building Bajracharya, Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation**  
Former mayor of Lalitpur, also served as postman janaki during the Panchayat era. Bajracharya says he will continue on culture. Elected mayor of Patan under a UML ticket and is a member of the Raj Prasad.

**Khadga Bahadur GC, Local Development**  
From the Maoist-affected Pychow district, served as zonal commissioner and was known as a hardliner. Began in politics with the leftist students' union.

**Tanka Shrestha, Information and Communication**  
Twice appointed to the Rastriya Panchayat, used to be general secretary of Nepal Nationalist Independent Students' Council, never before been appointed to an executive post.

**Don Bahadur Shrestha, Home and Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs**  
Former secretary of the Civil Service Commission and Ministry of Agriculture, Zonal Commissioner of Kosi during Panchayat.

**Mathur Shrestha Rana, Finance**  
Development economist, was special economic adviser at the Ministry of Finance, served as adviser to Finance Minister Prakash Chandra Lohani during the Thapa government. Founded CEDA at Tribhuvan University, president of Nepal Organisation, training adviser at UNDP, Geneva.

**Durga Shrestha, Women, Children and Social Welfare**  
RPP central member, also served as member of the Rastriya Panchayat in the old days.

**Ram Narayan Singh, Minister for Labour and Transport Management**  
Former CDO.



The sudden epidemic of tree-felling along Kathmandu's streets is drastic, misguided and not consonant with the needs of the population...The role of trees is to introduce oxygen into the atmosphere and to ingest the carbon dioxide that human and mechanical activity spews into our enclosed airspace.

They provide shade to the pedestrian, a demographic category which today is highly neglected by our increasingly motorised urban

populace. Tree-lined boulevards and parks are the mark of any civilised society and the colour of leaves and bark have associations in the human mind with the very evolution of the species. Take away the trees from our sight and senses and our very existence suffers.'

The Nepali Times masthead started to carry a fuel gauge to indicate to readers the degree of censorship of that edition. An 'Empty' gauge signified that the issue was relatively free of censorship.

The royal-military coup was not altogether a surprise, and there was some support for it because people were fed up with the shenanigans of the political parties, and the violence unleashed by the Maoists.

Reader Ranjit Rauniyar wrote:

'It is easy to decry the overthrow of an elected government and express concern about the suspension of civil liberties. I, like all Nepalis, will be watching closely to see how King Gyanendra wields the sweeping powers he has assumed.

But I hope the rest of the world, before rushing to instant judgement, will pause to consider how far Nepal had gone down the path towards becoming a failed state, before the king resorted to such desperate measures.'

# 2006

After 10 years of agonising war, and three weeks of expanding street protests, by the stroke of the midnight hour on 24 April 2006, king Gyanendra finally restored Parliament. Girija Prasad Koirala was reappointed prime minister and mobile phone service was restored, FM radio stations could broadcast news again. It would take three more days for the Maoists to declare a ceasefire with a mammoth victory rally at Tundikhel.

The page 1 foldout of a Nepali Times Special Edition that week (right) carried an iconic photo by Ajay Joshi of a student protester wearing a paper crown and ridiculing Gyanendra with an impersonation.

Such an act would have surely meant imprisonment a day previously, but the laughing faces in the crowd were proof that the fear was gone. Gyanendra's time was up.

But Nepal's politicians being who they are delayed the formation of the interim cabinet because of competing demands for powerful portfolios among the SPAM (Seven Party Alliance + Maoists). The following months of 2006 showed that the People's Movement had changed the regime without changing the mindset of the leadership to show vision and action.

By the end of 2006, there were ominous signs of things to come. As Nepali Times wrote in an editorial printed on 22-28 December:

'The euphoria over the ceasefire of the past nine months is now being replaced by a worrying sense of foreboding about ethnic, separatist, and religious fissures that are opening up. Part of this is caused by reaction and resentment that was welling up after the restoration of democracy. Partly it is also identity politics where the radical fringes of the Maoist and other parties have taken to extreme and militant rhetoric to leapfrog into the political arena.'

The Maoists needed to be demobilised, disarmed and reintegrated, and the United Nations was called upon (with New Delhi's blessing) to form UNMIN to supervise the process.

Ian Martin, who was with the OHCHR office in Kathmandu was deputed to head the team that grew to carry out the mammoth task of arms management in camps for the former guerrillas across the country.

This cartoon (right) about the peace process by Rabin Sayami from page 1 of the 8-14 December 2006 edition showed Girija Prasad Koirala scrubbing the dirt of corruption, and Prachanda washing blood from his hands at a spout from which the water of peace flowed out.

Between 2002-2006 the paper carried the syndicated comic strip, Yak Yeti Yak by Miku. It starred a talkative Yak and a Yeti with an existential crisis. Often absurd and sometimes deeply philosophical, the strip had a cult following among readers, who chuckled briefly



every Friday morning. The toons are in storage at Nepali Times Archives.

2006 also saw the monumental tragedy in which the pioneers of Nepal's internationally-acclaimed conservationists were killed in a helicopter crash in Ghunsa.

The chopper was carrying 24 passengers including Chandra Gurung, Harka Gurung, Mingma Sherpa, Dawa Tsering, Yeshe Lama. The headline of issue #317 simply said in big bold letters: VOID. The editorial 'Still Among Us', urged the need to carry on:

'In a country where there is so little to celebrate, it is a cruel blow to take away the little that stood out. The people who boarded the helicopter in Ghunsa on Saturday morning were all enormously talented, experienced, and dedicated. We owe it to them to continue their work, to innovate and prove by doing that nature conservation and economic progress can go hand in hand.'

A week before the crash, the Times ran an article on how the conflict was affecting conservation. As the Maoists had stepped up their activities, forest guard posts had been abandoned, game scouts had been killed by landmines, and abduction, ambushes and extortion had forced conservationists to stop their work. Poaching had intensified.

The Comprehensive Peace Accord was signed on 21 November, 2006 codifying the ceasefire, bringing an end to the decade long conflict that cost 17,000 Nepali lives.

While it is easy to be frustrated with Nepali politics, looking back with the benefit of 25 years of hindsight leads to the realisation that progress, while slow, is taking place.

Peace has reigned for the most part, and the vision of multiparty democracy and federalism has been realised even if they need major tweaks. History also warns about hastily bringing the king back, look at what it cost to get him out in the first place. 🇳🇵



## 2007

After a jam packed 2006, Nepal's nascent democracy cautiously inched forward under an interim constitution and eight parties going into government. However, there were concerns that the alliance were making no effort to listen to the needs of the Madhesi, Dalit, and indigenuos communities.

The Madhesi were in particular incensed, because they felt that the new political system was not being fair to them.

'Discriminated against by governments in the past, the Madhes saw that it would be denied political representation in proportion to its numbers by the interim constitution too,' wrote Kunda Dixit on the front page of issue #333.

Five people had been killed in unrest in Lahan, and there had been violence and looting in Birganj, Biratnagar, and Janakpur.

The Maoists found they could not control the genie they let out of the bottle with their ethnic-based politics. The radical Janatantrik Tarai Mukti Morcha (JTMM) had splintered from the Maoists and was demanding an independent Madhes, and there were other groups that were willing to hold talks with the alliance in Kathmandu.

Generally, the three main Madhesi demands were: a federal state, proportional representation, and re-demarcation of electoral constituencies to take into account population density in the Tarai.

Yet there was speculation that dismissed the violence, as a plot by royalists to subvert CA elections, or Maoists inciting hatred between hill and plains and pahadis to keep themselves in power.

Beyond political demands, there also was a deeper feeling of alienation from the Nepali identity that was driving the protests in the plains. "Most importantly what Madhesi people need is acceptance and confidence in them as people of Nepal," wrote a blogger in the active blog-space of the time.



The protests ended in late August, with the government striking a deal with the Mashas Janadhikar Forum leader Upendra Yadav promising to change the country into a federal state with autonomy, and ensured proportional representation of Madhesis in all state organs.

Talking to columnist Prashant Jha, Yadav saw these terms as the "maximum achievement possible under the present situation," a compromise so polls could take place. But comrades saw it as a betrayal.

The week of the deal, bombs went off in Kathmandu, the first violence since the conflict ended. They were claimed by an unknown group called Tarai Army. In his Plain Speaking column in #380, Prashant Jha called 2007 The Year of the Madhes:

'Nepal is not the same country anymore. Nepal can never be described as just a country of mountains, even in a tourist brochure. Any party that ignores Madhesi sentiments cannot remain a national entity for long.'

## 2008

Two years after the conflict ended, the country prepared for the first election to the Constituent Assembly which under the peace agreement was to draft the new Constitution. Campaigning was fierce, with sporadic residual violence from the war. Everyone was predicting a win for the NC and UML, the two established parties at the time, but when the results came out it was a near landslide for the Maoists.

Even Pushpa Kamal Dahal could not believe it. Analysts scrambled to explain the surprise win, and the conclusion was that it was a protest vote against the NC and UML that had taken turns to rule since 1990, their constant infighting and corruption and lack of accountability to the people.



Even those who had suffered from Maoist violence voted for the party. Many of the votes were therefore not for the Maoists, but for peace – make them win so they do not go back to the mountains and become guerrillas.

Chairman Prachanda went on to become Prime Minister Dahal, and the first act of the Constituent Assembly was to abolish the monarchy and declare Nepal a republic.

That very evening in June, king Gyanendra held a chaotic Narayanhiti Palace news conference, and said "Bye bye I'm off", and drove away in his Jaguar to Nagarjun.

Nepal was in a no war no peace situation. There was prolonged wrangling about who would be president to replace the king, and the Maoist vanguard YCL was back to its old ways of extorting businesses. In government, the Maoists developed a thin skin against criticism, and started attacking the media.

Dahal told a Maoist mass meeting in Tundikhel in September: "I have told the editor of Kantipur that if he keeps on criticising us he will have to face the consequences because the people have now made us victorious."

The very next week, the YCL attacked the van carrying copies of that week's edition of Himal Khabarpatrika that was critical of such activities and made a bonfire out of the magazines.

And on 28 December, the former guerrillas dismantled the offices of Himal and Nepali Times and assaulted the CEO, editor and other staff.

C K Lal wrote in his weekly Nepali Times column State of the State:

'Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal lacks the moral authority to rein in groups that challenge the authority of the state. After all, he owes his political ascendancy to those who defied prevailing laws by force of arms under his direction. Welcome to the world of the post insurgency, moral-legal vacuum, where brute force is the only law.'

The Maoist-led government's inability to prevent the attack at Himal Khabarpatrika sends out a message that the media is not able to exercise their freedom. Unless the Maoists plan to go back to war, they need to understand that maintaining a peaceful society is their primary responsibility.'

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CONSTITUTION 2010

Times 2-8 JANUARY 2009 #432 7

## One country two armies

Continued from page 6  
Koirala and Pushpa Kamal Dahal mean that plan, including the 12-point agreement, is not being implemented. This has caused a rift in the peace process. The integration of the PLA through dialogue and consensus is urgently needed if this country is to achieve any semblance of political stability. The Maoists are pushing integration whereas the other parties are not willing to accept it so easily.

COMMENT  
Dhrub Kumar

The opposition NC, as well as coalition partners UML and CP, are against the integration of Maoist guerrillas. The Maoists blame the NC for the stalemate. The UML has formed its own special committee because the terms of reference stated that decisions should be made by majority and not consensus, which it said was against the peace accord.

The other parties argue that mass integration would be detrimental to the integrity of the national army. The Maoists do little to further the process when they seek support and consent from other parties in political forums and then had mouth them publicly.

Prime Minister P. Dahal, who labelled the NC as 'reactionary', UML as 'opportunistic', and Maoist parties as 'foreign lackeys', seemed to have forgotten they are running a coalition government together.

The document in which he stated this also mentioned the final battle was not to be fought, affecting that the Maoists' need to integrate the PLA into the national army is not an ideal power PLA political indoctrination and UML, and military structure and its untested activities make any integration of the Maoists impossible.

All political parties agree on the inclusive structure and demobilisation of the Nepal Army. A timeline to any mass narrowing the existing gap between the

The peace process and constitution-writing will be in danger as long as we have two armies



army and society, in which people, irrespective of caste, creed and ethnicity, would join the army based on their ability alone. But the army is an institution where a person has to rise up the ranks to be commander-in-chief. One can't just plunk someone there as one would do in the civil service corporations.

When Gorkh Aliya formed the national army in 1944, the number of recruits was expected to be around 130,000. There were 80,000 national army soldiers, 32,000 ANC combatants, 6,000 CP, 4,000 Congress combatants and about 15,000 paramilitary.

But only 15,000 of the 38,000 paramilitary were integrated. When Maoists made General Mungli the chief of the army, which prevented auxiliary and comp. Rakesh Magar in Kathmandu was a revolutionary leader but he doesn't know how to integrate army post conflict. The integration of ANA, CPRA and the then Khokhona Army was intended to make the number of soldiers and make it efficient, but it was never political during the integration process.

The Maoists fought an election and

came to power. But when its supreme leader who had led the government criticised the parliamentary system and follow leaders, he cannot expect a positive response. The people would not follow the policy of the Maoists through which it wants to capture state power. The main danger to this change in the Nepal Army, which is why this has become the main target of the Maoists. There is a PLA integration into the national army is the only legal and bloodless means of doing so.

As long as there are two armies, the peace process and constitution-writing will be in danger. The responsibility lies with the

**New recruits**  
It is against the peace agreement to recruit personnel into the Nepal Army and the Maoist force. The Nepal Army has carried out two recruitment drives in the past two years for vacancies for the post of Second Lieutenant. At that time, there was no reaction to this. But two months ago, when the army received Defence Ministry clearance to recruit non-combatants there was a protest from the Maoists and even UNMIN issued a statement. If this was a threat to the peace process, why was there no reaction to the previous recruitment of combatants?

the Maoists and the head of government to continue the reconciliation process and the opposition through a negotiation process by first building trust. In the present situation, the Maoists can't do much on their own. They have to work with the other parties and for this they must make the others trust them.

All the Maoists need to do is to establish with whom and in what situation it signed the 12-point agreement. There is a lesson there.

Dhrub Kumar is a political scientist and security analyst.

## 2009

After the Maoists came to power, reintegration of the Maoist combatants and moving ahead with the peace process became a priority. But most of these remained neglected as underlying issues of ethnicity, gender and struggle for power persisted.

The leading political parties: NC and UML were against the integration of Maoists into the Nepal Army. Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal accused the opposition of the lack of support. Analyst Dhrub Kumar in his column (left) for issue #432 wrote:

'As long as there are two armies, the peace process and constitution-writing will be in danger. The responsibility lies with the Maoists and the head of government to convince the coalition partners and the opposition through a negotiation process by first building trust. In the present situation, the Maoists can't do much on their own. They have to work with the other parties and for this they must make the others trust them.'



### Narrowing the digital divide



laptops were put in packets of Wai Wai noodles.

Arun Sighaniya, chairman of Janakpur Today, was shot on 1 March spreading concern about on safety of media personnel and journalists. Janakpur Today was the first local newspaper to get a top category classification from the Press Council of Nepal.

In response, CK Lal in his column State of the State in #506 wrote:

'The media stands to play an even greater role in the political contestations of the future. This could be why investors are willing to bear huge losses and hold on to their niches. With the increasing complexity of the cutthroat competition within the media, the responsibility of media watchdogs will only grow heavier.'

The community FM culture thrived, but faced a midlife crisis as stations started being bought by people with local and national political affiliations. Many radio stations such as Gandaki FM established themselves as television and print media to tackle the increased competition. Commentaries and featured content were broadcast through donor channels, which further reduced listeners' brand loyalty.

Direct-to-home (DTH) Dish TV connection entered Nepal, with the government granting permissions to six companies to operate the

connections. DTH subscribers could choose channels and receive satellite data through their own personal dish, putting an end to the cable tv technology in Nepal. The DTH used set top boxes, and used digital instead of analogue signals, bringing clarity in both the television quality and shifting the way subscribers used to view tv.

The energy sector suffered a crisis with black-outs and electricity shortfall. The Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) tried to promote the '20-80 scheme' for communities to bear 20% of the total cost while the government invested the remaining 80%.

Electrification in southern Lalitpur through a cooperative managed to significantly reduce electricity pilferage and loss. Many rural areas faced darkness, but could get light through the scheme. Villagers managed to cut down on diesel usage, and increasingly used electricity to transport their daily utilities via a ropeway.

The telecommunications sector was poised for takeoff as mobile usage grew, and Nepal was in the cusp of the digital revolution that would transform the economy, politics and society with the advent of smart phones only a year or two away.

## 2011

Chief Maoist ideologue Baburam Bhattarai was elected Prime Minister on 29 August 2011 as the leader of the Maoist party which got the Madhesi Alliance vote to reach a majority in Parliament through a controversial four-point agreement. This promised half the ministerial portfolios to the Alliance, declaring general amnesty for wartime atrocities, and a federal state with ethnic provinces that would be fully autonomous.

The editorial in #570, titled 'Gajanan to Baburam' (right), referred to Bhattarai's ancestor who had helped King Drabya Shah to lay the foundations for what came to become the Kingdom of Nepal.

The piece pointed out that all the elements of the agreement were unlikely to be implemented as it did not involve the NC or the UML, and that Madhesi leaders were only trying to prove to their voters that they were sticking to their principles of a Madhes state.

The general feeling was one of



### GAJANAN TO BABURAM

Three hundred years ago, Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai's ancestor Gajanan Bhattarai helped King Drabya Shah of Gorkha to lay the groundwork for the nation state that came to be known as Nepal. The monarchy is now gone. The republic that replaced it is torn by competing demands for autonomy within a proposed federal structure that Bhattarai is the co-architect of.

Privately, some Maoist leaders admit that their federalism formula is unworkable and they need a face-saving exit strategy. But they can't say so in public since the whole rationale for the war and their populist platform in the 2008 elections used identity politics for recruitment and votes. Bhattarai now needs all the negotiating acumen he is supposed to have to prevent the break up of a Nepal his ancestors helped forge.

The reason this issue has come up now is because of the murky, ambiguous and reckless four-point agreement that installed Bhattarai as prime minister. The Madhesi Front extracted its pound of flesh by not just grabbing half the portfolios for tainted netas from the past, but also getting the Maoists to agree to a fully-autonomous federal state with ethnically-defined provinces.

Then there are the clauses in the agreement that provide blanket amnesty for wartime atrocities by all sides,

which has set off a chorus of outrage from human rights organisations.

The only silver lining we see in all this is that neither the Madhesi parties nor the Maoists probably intend to stick to their pact: this is nothing new, signed agreements have rarely been implemented in the past. Madhesi leaders just want to show their constituency in the Tarai that they are sticking to their principles and are not obsessed about getting into Singha Darbar. The Maoists, for their part, were willing to sign anything away as long as it got them to power.

An agreement on something as momentous as autonomous ethnic federal provinces that doesn't rope in the second and third largest parties in the house can only have been driven by political expediency. The field report by Rameswor Bohara on page 12-13 shows that Madhesi anger is now directed at the leaders they elected to go to Kathmandu who never bothered to address their grievances.

And the people of the Tarai seem to doubt that a single Madhes will ever deliver them prosperity. Academics and civil society leaders in Janakpur and Rajbiraj are convinced future provinces must encompass the plains, hills and mountains to be economically viable and politically sustainable. When will the sloganeering politicians listen to these voices?

That said, of all the alternatives for prime minister available

MIN RATNA BARACHARYA

two weeks ago to form a new government, Baburam Bhattarai presented the better option. The NC squandered its chance by foolishly putting up two candidates, and the UML had really nothing left to show for itself. The public rates Bhattarai's intelligence, diligence and honesty highly. He has started well with populist, yet popular, decisions. And he would have moved even faster on the peace process if the Baidya faction hadn't tried to put a spanner in the works.

However, having made it to the top job by aligning with a party with which it has little in common, Bhattarai risks being tainted by his proximity to crooks. He will need all the support he can get from his coalition partners, the opposition and the bureaucracy. And, watch your back, Doc.

Mustang jeep. Some liked what they saw, others saw it as a publicity stunt.

Diwakar Chhetri's front-page toon in #569 showed Bhattarai seething in his Mustang as it was stripped for parts by Madhesi leaders who grabbed the seats, steering wheel, and wheels.

Dewan Rai's 'Getting Down to

Prime Minister Dahal had his own plans, he tried to remove Army Chief Rookmangud Katuwal and replace him with a pro-Maoist general. President Ram Baran Yadav overturned that decision, and with a nod from New Delhi got Dahal to resign.

Civilians are the primary victims in most wars, and in the Maoist conflict it is Nepali women who suffered sexual violence. Female guerrillas made up a third of the Maoist militia, but many of them became single mothers after their ex-guerrilla husbands divorced them following the end of the war.

Around 15,000 cases remain unresolved in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons (CIEDP).

The transitional justice process remains flawed, with women having to bear the repercussions of the war at the extreme end.

There were reportedly 1,000 young mothers in the seven UNMIN-supervised camps and 21 sub-camps all over the country. Many women warriors gave birth in camp, and

instead of carrying assault rifles were cradling babies.

In issue #439, 'Children of the Revolution' revealed a former guerilla giving birth to her second child in an UNMIN demobilisation camp, where her first child was born malnourished. Lack of medical facilities made it more difficult for expecting and new mothers.

Many Nepali women were widowed and had to restart their lives post conflict. But, the government in its 2009-10 budget made a proposal to provide Rs50,000 'reward' to a man if he married a war widow.

In response, Mallika Aryal in #470 wrote:

'This is one of the most callous, thoughtless and rash decisions the government of Nepal has taken in recent years. As if women didn't already have enough to struggle against. Marriage is a deeply personal decision, and linking that decision to money demeans women.'

As it turned out, when a war that was fought to liberate women ended, so did the promise of emancipation. Women were fighting for their rights then, and they are still fighting for their rights now.

🇳🇵

THE DOCTOR'S CHECKLIST  
Prime Minister Bhattarai has his work cut out. Here is his check list in order of priority:

1. Complete the cabinet
2. Complete peace process in 45 days as promised
3. Keep NC and UML happy so they don't throw spanner in works
4. Hand over keys as a symbolic step. But regrouping and compromises on integration will be more difficult to push through
5. Keep one eye on Chairman Dahal, so he doesn't wreck things
6. Back track on amnesty provision on 4-point deal, this will be a major stumbling block with opposition and international community
7. Constitution, take the bull by the horns on ethnic federalism and state structure
8. Show the presence of the state, tackle law and order
9. Improve investment climate, tame unions
10. Hunker down for 18-hour power cuts this winter'

The Ass in the Backside Column saw what was really going on behind the scenes, and had some advice:

'It is becoming clearer by the day why the Madhesi and the Dhotighaut Cluster decided to back the govt. The main bone of contention is not really about portfolios, it's more about who gets to be Deputy Prime Minister. There are so many aspirants for the post that it looks set to be a cabinet with more deputy prime ministers than ministers. To break the deadlock, the Ass would like to make a humble suggestion:

- Deputy Prime Minister-in-Chief
- Assistant Chief Deputy Prime Minister
- Associate Deputy Prime Minister
- Senior Assistant Deputy Prime Minister
- Joint Deputy Prime Minister
- Senior Assistant Joint Deputy Chief Prime Minister'



# 2012

2012 was declared ‘Invest in Nepal Year’ and it followed Tourism Year in 2011 which increased visitor numbers by 20%. Tourism was the largest contributor of FDI inflow in Nepal occupying nearly one-third of all investments.

It was followed by the service and manufacturing industry. A Guest Column by Siddhant Raj Pandey in #585 put forward a global glance of investments in Nepal, and highlighted the importance of clear policies and its implementation in Nepal.

Tourist arrivals by air in Nepal increased by 10% from 2011, totaling 598,204. The only international airport was deemed to be congested, indicating potential of a new international airport for Nepal. In 2012, there were 28 international airlines connecting Kathmandu with the world, with other carriers seeking slots.

There were issues of poor quality and expensive ground handling, raising concerns from international airlines. International airline operators raised issues of traffic congestion, landing slots, the shabby condition of the terminal among others.

‘Nepal by air’ in issue #625 (pictured) noted the government should have attracted new carriers and retained existing ones by consistent policies and rational pricing.

‘Eye in the Sky’ in #604 highlighted the important role of pilots in spotting natural disasters from the sky. The story elaborated on how Captain Alexander Maximov managed to spot the rock fall on Annapurna IV that set off a flashflood on the Seti River and warned Pokhara airport which flashed it to FM radio stations – allowing many people to flee to higher ground.

Still, 70 people were killed, among them seven foreign tourists. The flood was ascribed to permafrost melting on the west face of Annapurna IV, and plummeting the rock face to the glacier below. Our report warned that with global warming, such disasters would be more common in the coming decades.



After a year of Baburam Bhattarai’s prime ministership, there was ennui setting in, as we wrote in this Editorial:

‘We have been arguing here against replacing Baburam Bhattarai as prime minister mainly because he seems the least incompetent of the politicians on offer. Pushpa Kamal Dahal has a track record for being super-ambitious and highly unpredictable. The UML and NC may have democratic minded candidates, but they have been tried and tested, and found wanting.

In the public perception, Bhattarai still has the aura of being someone with intellect and integrity despite the thoroughly kleptocratic coalition he leads. None of the sleaze seems to rub off on the Teflon Man, though.

His overnight trips to stay and eat with Dalit families in Jumla and Chepang families in Chitwan are expensive populist stunts, but seem to go down well with the public. His demolition of half of Kathmandu has raised hackles, but also bolstered the perception that he is a doer, because he has sent bulldozers tearing through even the property of the rich and powerful.

Prime Minister Dr Baburam Bhattarai, PhD, is obviously a genius. But we wish he had used his considerable intellect to control this haemorrhage of the treasury, and invest the funds in cost-effective social welfare. Instead, he is presiding over the plunder of the state.’

# 2013

By 2013, the optimism after the ceasefire seven years earlier had more or less disappeared. It was clear that the trust the Nepali people had put in the Maoists in 2008 to lead the country to a new direction had not been realised.

Mohan Baidya breaking away from the Maoists the previous year had weakened the party. In March, results of the annual Himalmedia Public Opinion Poll showed that the apathy, indifference, disenchantment, and cynicism with political parties and their leaders had grown, with more than half the respondents saying they did not trust the crop of political leaders at the time.

That same month, when it became clear that then Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai’s government could not hold the second Constituent Assembly elections on time, the parties handed over power to a transitional government led by Chief Justice Khil Raj Regmi, who became the Chairman of the Interim Election Council of Ministers.

With the pesky problem of governance out of the way, Nepal’s leaders set their sights on the 2013 race. We wrote that the election would be a referendum on federalism. Indeed, while the Maoists and fringe parties campaigned on ethnicity-based federalism, the NC and UML were against the idea.

Public opinion polls over the years had also shown that Nepalis in general were against the idea of ethnicity-based federalism. Our Editorial after the election in 2013:



‘The people are interested more in bread and butter issues like health, education, jobs, and roads. They want accountable leaders with integrity, they are less than enthusiastic about secularism, and they think federalism based on single ethnicity is a bad idea. Even people from the indigenous communities and the Tarai felt that way, but the Maoists and the Madhesi parties went ahead and made those issues their main plank showing just how out of touch they were.’

Meanwhile, leaders engaged with voters amid a changing media landscape: it was the first election in which they used social media to campaign with various degrees of success.

Six months after assuming power, Regmi’s bureaucratic government conducted the election on 19 November, during which almost 80% of registered voters cast their ballots to elect a new Constituent Assembly. We wrote in our editorial as the results of the 2013 polls began to trickle in:

‘Nepal’s silent majority has spoken, it has rejected violence and given moderate centrist parties one more chance to prove themselves. The high turnout was a strong message to the boycotting CPN-M and support for the traditional moderate parties was an unequivocal rejection of the politics of ethnicity of the non-performing UCPN (M) and Madhesi parties.’

The Maoists, who had won in a landslide in 2008 trailed far behind the NC and the UML. The Maoists lost races in crucial constituencies like Pushpa Kamal Dahal in Kathmandu-10, to which they responded by crying foul.

By year-end, the NC and the UML were tasked with sharing power and writing a new constitution.

We wrote:

‘In their euphoria of victory and overblown vermillion rallies, the NC and UML may think that the table has turned and they can go back to their winner-takes- all behaviour..The first test of whether they turned a new leaf will be if they resort to their dog-eat-dog rivalry in the formation of a new government in the coming weeks.’

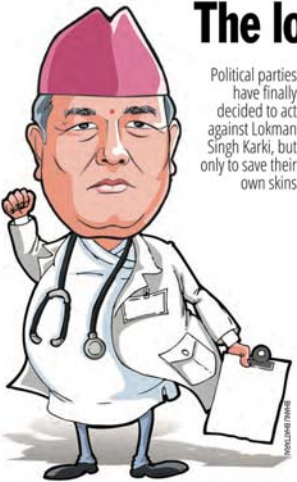
And that is exactly what happened.

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Yet, there is no sign of overt panic, people gathered water bottles and sleeping bags and helped each other.' 





## The lonely struggle against tyranny

Political parties have finally decided to act against Lokman Singh Karki, but only to save their own skins

In December last year, social and political activists, journalists, lawyers and a few politicians started meeting regularly in Kathmandu to discuss the new parallel power centre that had emerged in Nepal. They strategised over coffee about how to deal with the Commission on the Investigation for the Abuse of Authority (CIAA) and its chief, Lokman Singh Karki, who seemed to be an unstoppable force threatening the basic tenets of democracy.

At that time, people spoke his name in hushed tones, the walls had ears and there was the threat that Karki would slap his 'tera-pane' (the 13-page asset declaration form) that was used to persecute opponents. On Aryal's case for Karki's impeachment had been dismissed by the court and while Aryal

stood fearless in filing an appeal, there was a palpable feeling of dread. Other efforts, like Sunam Shrestha's appeal under the Right to Information Act to release property details of the CIAA chief went some way in garnering media attention and breaking the culture of silence on Karki's regime.

But matters only came to head after May. While Kanak Mani Dixit's arrest energised sections of civil society to overcome its fear, a welcome change of guard at the Supreme Court propelled Chief Justice Sushila Karki as the most integral protagonist in this saga.

Then Govinda KC began his eighth fast unto death demanding Karki's impeachment. The street movement around the crusading physician increased pressure on Parliament and politicians to act. An alliance coalesced around KC's demands bringing together activists like Jivan Chhetri, Jagannath Lamichane, members of Bibekshori Nepali party and medical students at TUH.

The role of investigative journalists Krishna Gyawali, Deepak Dahal, Shiva Gaunle and Hari Babohar Thapa were central to exposing malpractices of the CIAA chief, providing fodder for daily headlines. For a couple of weeks, the media, courts and the street supported each other to highlight the CIAA's excesses. But one by one, the media was silenced into submission through pressure on publishers. *Setopati* and other digital portals stood their ground at great risk to themselves.

But it was the search for three members of parliament to register an impeachment motion that exposed the real character of Nepal's political class. It was difficult to find even three MPs out of 595 to take a stand against Karki and challenge their party whips. Like everything else in Nepal, a 'consensus' among party honchos was necessary. Despite our door-to-door lobbying with 200 MPs over a two month period, it was futile. When 200 MPs confirmed they would attend interventions to brainstorm about impeachment, only 15 would

## 2016

In January, the blockade was lifted much to the relief of Nepalis. Pushpa Kamal Dahal, prime minister for the second time, travelled to India to patch up relations with Narendra Modi.

2016 was also the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of the Maoist conflict in 1996, and it was ten years after the end of the war. Nepali Times marked the anniversaries throughout the year with coverage of those who were caught up in the conflict to find out what had become of them: photographer Dinesh Shrestha published pictures of the Long March of Maoist leaders during the conflict, an editorial looked back at Maoist ideologue Baburam Bhattarai photoshopping his own revolutionary past, how survivors and families of the victims coped with the grief, bereavement and suffering.

The year was also one in which Nepal took a Great Leap Forward in inclusive leadership: the country's President, Chief Justice and Speaker of Parliament were all women. We have regressed since then, and former President Bidya Devi Bhandari has ignored critics to rejoin the political

## 2018

The year 2018 marked a disastrous year for air safety with the US-Bangla crash at Kathmandu airport on 12 March. The tragedy pinpointed concerns about aviation safety and governance in Nepal, even though this particular accident was blamed on a mentally disturbed captain. The crash killed 51 people, most of them recent medical graduate students. The air crash tarnished Nepal's aviation industry and its international image even more, with the European Union

(EU) continuing to blacklist the country's airlines.

Migrant workers frequently travel to and from Nepal, and many migrants faced difficulties in traveling, due to expensive tickets, and cheating by middlemen and manpower companies among others. The safety of migrant workers could be ensured by airlines creating a favourable environment for Nepali workers through alliances and corporate social responsibility. Upasana Khadka in #907 wrote:

'Airlines could set aside some tickets every week for stranded migrants, provide last minute unsold tickets for those who are in dire need of help. These could be based on referrals from embassies and rescue organisations.

Airlines can be an important and natural partner in efforts to promote safe migration by moving from a transactional relationship towards social responsibility.'



Kathmandu hosted the XII World Congress on Mountain Medicine 21-24 November. The Himalayan Rescue Association (HRA) established an aid post in Pheriche in the 1970s,

which helped save people suffering from altitude sickness. Mountain medicine expert Peter Hackett in #935 emphasised the importance of mountain medicine and the role of medical personnel, researchers and aid posts in preventing fatalities.

Before the advent of modern transportation, no one could travel high enough fast enough to get into much trouble. Altitude illness is therefore mainly a problem of modern times. Nepal has now developed a large cadre of young physicians specialising in high-altitude medicine.

Mentored by Buddha Basnyat, these young doctors are carrying on the tradition of quality care of victims of altitude illness, research on causes and treatments, and developing systems of administering care to diverse populations.

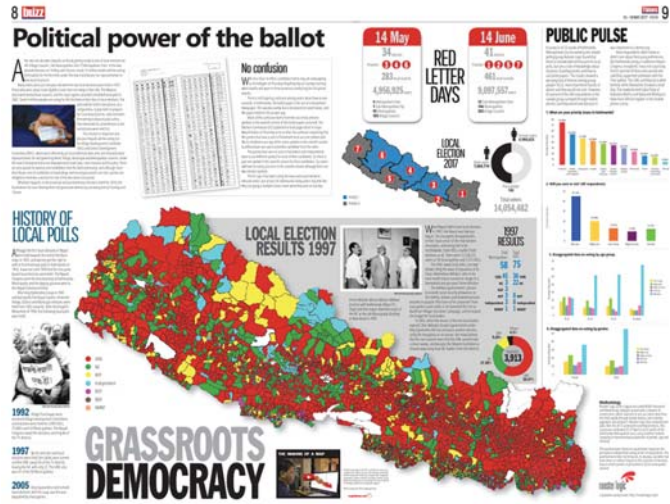
Altitude sickness also became a concern for Indian pilgrims travelling to Mansorovar. Nepalganj became the gateway for Indian pilgrims travelling to Kailash Mansarovar in Tibet via Hilsa. Many of them use the Nepalganj route to visit Kailash, boosting the hospitality and aviation sector in Nepalganj.

The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) meeting was hosted by Nepal in August 2018. The fourth edition of the international convention witnessed the member countries visit Nepal and encourage economic cooperation and connectivity. Matters of hydropower and joint military exercises were discussed, and member countries agreed to cooperate regionally beyond bilateralism. 🇳🇵

## 2017

The first local-level election after the promulgation of the 2015 Constitution was held under a Sher Bahadur Deuba-led government in three phases on 14 May, 28 June and 18 September.

Nepal's first party-based local elections were held in 1959, and the last successful local election before the federal system was in 1997, soon after the armed Maoist insurgency began.



Ahead of the first phase of the polls in May 2017, Nepali Times traced the history of local level elections in Nepal, and prepared a Village Development Committee map of the 1997 local election results (above).

From May to September, municipal and ward- level leaders were elected to 753 local units. Nepal has had one more election after 2017, and the general consensus has been that the performance of municipalities has exceeded expectations, but the same cannot be said of provincial governments.

Dasain in 2017 fell between the end of the local election and the upcoming general election. We wrote:

'We are now finally nearing the end of a two-decade-long political transition. The peace process has dragged on, and we waited years haggling over the kind of federalism and the names of provinces and their borders, only to find out now that all the people wanted were jobs at home.. affordable education and medical facilities, electricity and fuel, and to be left alone to pursue their own happiness.'

Provincial and parliamentary elections were held on 26 November and 7 December. The UML and Maoists had formed an electoral alliance with the intention of merging after the polls, which the NC, RPP and Madhes-based parties countered with their own 'democratic alliance'.

The UML and Maoists combined to form Nepal's largest party, the Nepal Communist Party, in 2018 but the merger would be short-lived. The UML consequently swept the polls, and K P Oli went on to be the prime minister in a left-led government. The end of the election operationalised a federal, secular, democratic Nepal.

The work was then cut out for the newly-elected leadership to govern properly. An excerpt from a column after the election in December 2017:

'There is a Constitution to implement, hundreds of new laws and regulations to enact under it, constitutional principles of local government to be defended, inter-community relations to be normalised, inter-relationships within the new state structure to be defined and rationalised, and a confident new foreign policy put in place, especially to tackle the two ascendant neighbours.'

Nepal also elected leaders to the seven provincial assemblies for the first time in 2017. However, despite Nepalis by and large welcoming a federal system, some felt that federalism was wasteful and should be scrapped, a sentiment that pro-monarchist parties and the RSP have now capitalised on.

Various studies and surveys however show that Nepalis understand the ineffectiveness of the provinces lies in the federal leadership reluctant to devolve power and decentralise. 🇳🇵

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मुसलधारे वर्षाबाट जोगाउँछ  
१० वर्ष वारेन्दी



## 2019

Geopolitics took a front seat in 2019. Leaders of both of Nepal's neighbours paid high level visit in the same year. S Jaishankar, the minister for foreign affairs of India, visited in August 2019, for the Nepal-India joint commission meeting. His visit was considered crucial in improving ties between both Nepal and India, which were strained after his previous visit in 2015 which led to the border blockade.

Editorial in #974:  
'Nepal's strategy in dealing with its larger neighbour should be guided by pragmatism, and not petulant stubbornness. We should do our homework before negotiations and work in the spirit of give and take.'

Chinese President Xi Jinping



visited Kathmandu in October 2019, the first by a Chinese president in 23 years. The visit was considered of great importance with projects including BRI discussed. Twenty agreements were signed, including 18 MoUs and two letters of exchange. Six years later, there has not been much progress on

any of these – largely due to political instability and lethargy in Nepal.

Bhaskar Koirala in #981 wrote:  
'One of the issues that loomed large for Nepal during this historic Xi visit (and will continue to reverberate) is how the country is going to navigate between the two large overarching geopolitical constructs of the day-the BRI and the Indo-Pacific

Strategy. How will Nepal balance BRI and IPS?'

Nepal does have a non-alignment policy, but the movement is moot. Balancing between the two large neighbours has always seemed a difficult task for Nepal, and depending on the ruling party in Kathmandu, was seen to be leaning towards one or the other.

Relations with India took a dip in 2019 after India published a map including the east side of the Kali river, which has historically been a part of Nepal. Nationalist outrage spread like wildfire in Nepal, and PM Oli cashed in on this by making the map that included Limpiyadhura official. Not to be outdone, the NC, which was in opposition then, also mobilised its student union to protest outside the Indian Embassy.

The editorial in #984 conceded that India was acting like a Big Brother, but advised Nepalis to be more concerned and care about their boundaries, only then will the neighbours will respect it.

A rare protest against China also erupted when the India-China joint communique on Lipu Lekh



was released in 2015. Meanwhile, Nepal's remote border districts bordering China were finally being connected to the highway network. Although this brought relief to locals, there were concerns about how it would impact the fragile culture and ecology of highlands like Dolpo (pictured).

Nepali Times also carried the popular Miss Moti cartoon series by Kripa Joshi every week with a message against body shaming, for tolerance, and respect for nature. 🇳🇵

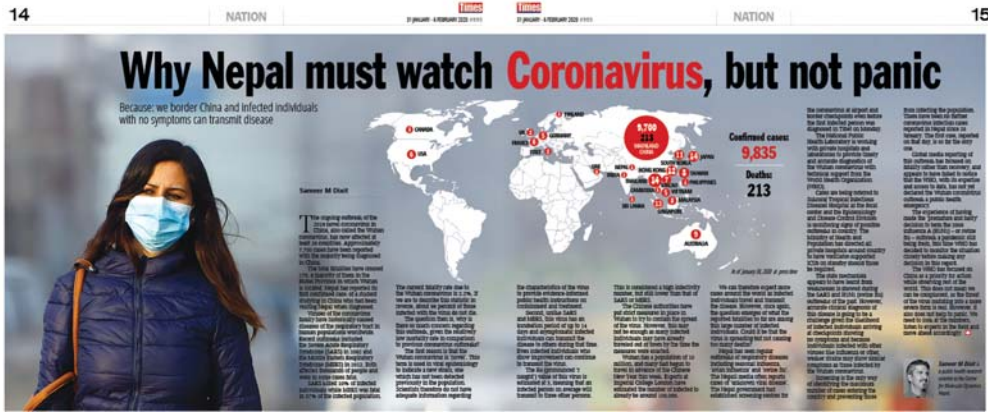
## 2020

The world before and after Covid-19 are two different realities. The pandemic was a Hollywood dystopian nightmare and changed how people live and work, what we eat, and how we travel, our social dynamics and technological leaps. It also exposed or, in some cases, aggravated pre-existing inequalities.

While the exact origin of the virus, which was first reported on a small scale in November 2019 from Wuhan remains contentious, Covid-19 was the latest in a long line of infections that jumped from animals to people, establishing the connection between new and emerging diseases with the relentless extraction of natural resources. It also widened the gap between the rich and poor countries.

Countries sealed their borders and locked their citizens in the confines of their homes, but they could not do the same to the novel coronavirus. The world is a global village, a wily virus detected in one part of the world rapidly spread to every known corner in a matter of days. It continues to this day with a new sub-variant of the Covid-19 being detected every couple of months.

After the shutdowns, the repatriation of



Nepali migrant workers became a priority (right). They had lost their jobs in destination countries and had no way of coming back.

There were some Nepali embassies in West Asia which worked overtime to bring workers back home safely. Migrants from India walked for days only to be stopped at the border. Desperate, some even swam across the Mahakali River to get home.

Before long, hospitals were overflowing with patients and there were not enough supplies or staff. The Nepali diaspora sent home money in record numbers, they also flew equipment including medical supplies such as oxygen cylinders.

The poorest were the hardest hit. The lockdowns meant they had no source of income, and their health and nutrition were directly compromised. This was even more acute during the second wave caused by the more aggressive Delta variant. Even younger



people were hospitalised, and the need for a vaccine, especially for the elderly and people with comorbidities, was at its peak.

Improved hygiene and mask wearing saved many lives. With no vehicular or industrial

pollution across the Subcontinent, Nepal's air was clean again. Mt Everest was visible from Kathmandu, Abhushan Gautam's iconic photograph was on Nepali Times #1011.

Vaccine diplomacy came into play. COVAX, a global vaccine initiative, was at least able to deliver the first batch of vials to the neediest, showing that multilateralism was still relevant. Even so, some are more equal than others.

Our very first coverage of the Covid-19 pandemic (pictured) by research scientist Sameer Mani Dixit was dated 29 January 2020, when the global death toll was at 213 and a little over 9,000 cases. By the end of the pandemic, it had claimed at least 7,010,681 lives.

Covid-19 has had other insidious impacts on society, ranging from undermining previous gains on public health and poverty to societal breakdown, mental health, and racism. The pandemic touched every corner of public and private life and reshaped the world.

Covid-19 also brought the world together. Never before had there been a quicker breakthrough in terms of vaccine development as countries with the most resources facilitated the process. Nepal became one of the biggest contributors to the Covid recovery trial which found that a cheap steroid dexamethasone was the most effective drug for the treatment of hospitalised Covid patients.

Just five years later, the world is more polarised than ever before, Covid is still lurking amidst vaccine denial in the US, people are more intolerant towards differences, countries are pouring money into wars and moving away from humanitarian causes.

We have forgotten how the pandemic turned the world upside down, and that it can happen again. 🇳🇵

## 2021

On midnight 22 May 2021, then-president Bidya Devi Bhandari dissolved Parliament at the behest of UML Chair K P Sharma Oli after he failed to be reappointed prime minister.

Oli had previously also dissolved Parliament in December 2020, but the Supreme Court overturned his decision, calling it unconstitutional. The short-lived Nepal Communist Party that merged the UML and Maoists thus split, creating an irreconcilable rift within UML bigwigs Oli and Madhav Kumar Nepal.

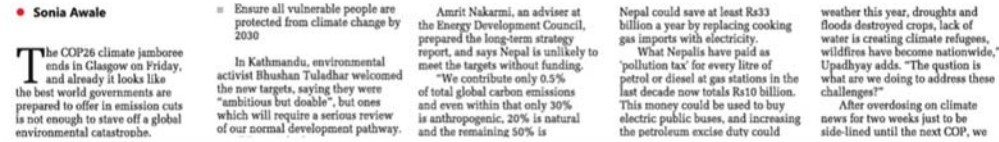
All of this happened while Nepal was in the throes of the deadly Delta variant, and 150 Nepalis were dying every day. We wrote in 2021:

'The reshuffle highlighted the government's inability to focus attention on protecting Nepalis with vaccines while the virus is ravaging the countryside, and addressing the loss of jobs during the lockdown.'

NC president Sher Bahadur Deuba



## COPOUT at COP26



consequently led a five-party alliance of 149 MPs -- from the NC, the Maoist Centre as well breakaway factions of the JSP and the UML -- to file a writ petition after President Bhandari thwarted claims from both Oli and and an opposition alliance of a House majority to form the next government.

In July, the Supreme Court once again overturned Oli's decision and reinstated the House of Representatives, ordering Deuba be installed as prime minister. The Maoist Centre backed Deuba, making way for a new coalition

government which Deuba would be in charge of until the next general election.

Meanwhile, UML's Nepal faction backed Deuba for prime minister, which became the straw that broke the camel's back for Oli and Nepal's relationship. By August, the Nepal faction had broken away from Oli to form its own CPN-Unified Socialists. Mahanta Thakur also split from the Janta Samajwadi Party to form his Loktantrik Samajwadi Party (LSP).

In the months that followed, the major parties began to prepare for their general conventions



and the upcoming election, as the Unified Socialists and Maoists — which had become smaller parties — struggled to find their footing in the new political landscape.

Meanwhile, political infighting and reshuffling of power in government had brought governance to a standstill amidst an ongoing pandemic. This post break-up era of politics was the beginning of the musical chairs of coalition governments and premiership between K P Oli, Sher Bahadur Deuba, and Pushpa Kamal Dahal that we are still going through in 2025. 🇳🇵



# 2022

The 2022 election year began with the Deubaled coalition government ratifying the much-delayed \$500 million MCC grant for transmission lines to distribute and export power across Nepal despite fierce opposition from the Maoist Centre and the Unified Socialists.

The row threatened the Deuba-Dahal-Nepal alliance. Dahal and Nepal ultimately agreed to support its ratification on condition that it be accompanied by an ‘interpretative declaration’ addressing concerns about the project, the viability of which was questioned by experts:

‘..even as the declaration seems to have kept the governing coalition intact and ratified the MCC, experts have questioned the validity of such a document. Others have called the document redundant, and that it is merely a face-saving exercise for the Maoists and Unified Socialist leadership.’

Then the three main parties began wheeling and dealing to make and break alliances in preparation of the upcoming local and federal elections. In May, as Nepal’s established parties battled it out in local elections, independent candidates won the mayor races in major cities like rapper-turned-politician Balen Shah in Kathmandu.

A collective of young professionals came together to form the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) under the leadership of former tv personality Rabi Lamichhane, who contested the November 2022 election on a platform of anti-establishment and anti-corruption.

The NC led in the polls with the UML second, the Maoists came a distant third, while Madhav Kumar Nepal’s Unified Socialists was unable to scrape together enough votes to be recognised as a national party. The RSP emerged as the fourth largest party in Parliament with 21 MPs, and Lamichhane would go on to become Home Minister.

Numerous independents also bagged direct seats. We reported as the votes were being counted:



‘Although these numbers may look like the big parties are still in control, the electorate has sent a clear message by elevating the independent RSP as a national party in Parliament with more than 1 million votes. With its 7 change-minded MPs, the RSP will have clout in the federal Parliament — a remarkable feat considering the party was only formed six months ago.’

The RSP’s success was a reflection of the expectations of Nepali voters in young technocrats to change the nature of politics and governance of the country.

Three years after the 2022 election, Lamichhane is in custody for his involvement in a cooperatives scam , and the technocratic party seems to be bogged down in the same swamp it vowed to clean up.

Meanwhile, the same could not be said about the inclusion of women and minority communities in governance. Top leadership once again denied female leaders tickets to contest direct elections, preferring to fulfil the 33% Constitutional quota by nominating women through the PR list.

After the results came in, the pre-election Deuba-Dahal alliance fell apart, and Dahal formed a coalition government with UML and RSP as his biggest partners — even though the NC had emerged as the largest party in Parliament. But that was before Oli pulled the rug from under the coalition barely a year later.

# 2023

2023 was the year of scandals. A new scam was exposed by investigative journalists seemingly almost every week.

In March, investigative reporter Devendra Bhattarai broke the story in Kantipur that linked bureaucrats and politicians to human traffickers in a scam to provide false papers to Nepalis so they could migrate to the United States as Bhutan refugees.

Former home minister Bal Krishna Khand of the NC and former deputy prime minister Top Bahadur Rayamajhi of the UML were among those arrested for their role in the scam. They implicated other senior NC leaders.

Elsewhere, the CIB recommended that the government prosecute those implicated in parcelling out nationalised real estate in Baluwatar. Those involved included land revenue officials, party leaders, bureaucrats, ministers, as well as former prime ministers Babauram Bhattarai and Madhav Kumar Nepal.

Notable Nepali figures including Bhatbhateni Supermarket owner Min Bahadur Gurung, as well as officials of the Land Revenue Office were arrested for their involvement in the scam, but Bhattarai and Nepal were spared.

Then in July, the Department of Revenue raided the cargo terminal at Kathmandu airport and seized 61kg of gold being smuggled in from Hong Kong hidden inside brake shoes



Investigative journalists then uncovered

Mahara pressuring officials to release the gold for auction. Mahara, who evaded police, would be arrested from Kapilvastu in March 2024.

In October, arrest warrants were issued for numerous individuals embezzling deposits from cooperatives across the country to fund business ventures. Then Home Minister Rabi Lamichhane was among those accused of defrauding Nepalis of millions by diverting deposits to fund Galaxy TV, of which he was co-founder before he entered politics.

Lamichhane initially transferred the CIB chief investigating the case. His party eventually exited the coalition government, and Lamichhane has at present been stripped of his lawmaker status, and remains in custody pending investigation.

The scandals exposed systemic corruption and rot at the top of Nepali politics, bureaucracy, and business, but also spotlighted the role

of investigative journalists and a free press in holding truth to power.

We wrote after the fake refugee scam and details of the Lalita Niwas land grab emerged in 2023:

‘It was the media that first exposed the fake refugee scam and has been uncovering some of the sordid details in the Baluwatar land scam. The Nepal Police and the CIB also appear to have been given a free hand in pursuing the cases..it could also be argued that the scandals have been exposed and investigated precisely because Nepal has a free media, functioning rule of law and independent investigations.’

# 2024

Times 29 NOVEMBER - 5 DECEMBER 2024 #1237

## NEPAL'S WOMEN EXCEL IN SPORTS IN 2024

Female athletes represented Nepal on the world stage this year despite lack of investment and government support

Shresthi Karki

At the head of the final SAFF Women's Championship game between Nepal and Bangladesh in October, the All Nepal Football Association (ANFA) had to take most of the day off to attend the stadium's 15,000 capacity. Thousands queued up for hours to see the match, and more than 1 million people tuned in to watch the game live on YouTube, marking most viewership ever recorded in Nepal's sports history.

The women's team lost that final match to Bangladesh, but the spirit and skill the Nepalis displayed shined a belated spotlight on Nepal's female athletes.

In 2024, efforts in other sports besides football showed notable performance on the world stage, and fans attended the events in record numbers to cheer them on.

In March, para-taekwondo player Palesha Govardhan made gold during the Asian Paralympics qualification rounds, advancing to the 2024 women's Paralympics games in Paris, where she won the bronze in September.

Govardhan is Nepal's first ever

Paralympic medalist, and the first athlete ever from Nepal to bring home a competitive medal in the history of the Olympic Games.

In August, Nepal hosted the 2024 CAVA Women's Volleyball Challenge Cup where the national volleyball team was placed second, losing the final match to India.

Then in November, the Nepal U-19 women's cricket team defeated the UAE at the Asia Qualifiers, advancing to their first ever ICC U-19 Women's T20 World Cup beginning in January next year.

This year, after months of setbacks (India won seven more, most recently placing first among women at the 19th Asia Cup in November (page 12).

Nepali women have been performing marginally well across many sports events both individually and as teams, and national volleyball player Sacchani Chaudhary. "And as our games get better, our quality of life has also begun to improve."

Most Nepali athletes attribute their success to teamwork, dedication and drive that government support. The Ministry of Youth and Sports in the last elected parliament allocated a mere government in 2023 because it is



Bangladesh won 3-1 against Nepal to claim the SAFF Women's Championship title in Kathmandu in October.



Para-taekwondo player Palesha Govardhan (left) and her coach (right) celebrate after winning bronze at the 2024 Paris Paralympics.

million of which was not used for the National Games.

While sports in general gets the short end of the stick, female athletes are even more left out. Some of Nepal's notable athletes in cricket, football, volleyball, and karate came together to a panel to talk about the state of women's sport in Nepal at the Kantipur Centre last month.

They discussed what has prevented women from performing better. Regardless of the sport, their concerns were similar: lack of infrastructure, investment, and training for female athletes. While the men's teams have leagues, clubs, and other domestic games and tournaments, the women do not.

The Nepal women's football team ranks 149th in the world, much higher than the men's national football team,

which is ranked on Instagram 174th. Even so, the women footballers do not get the opportunities their male counterparts have to participate in competitive domestic leagues and club games to gain exposure.

The same is the case for women's cricket. Nepal's national women's team captain Isha Bhatta has commented on the lack of domestic matches and league tournaments for female cricketers in the country, even as men can now play in the upcoming Nepal Premier League (see below).

This comes as other South Asian nations expand investment in sports, and women's sports in particular. After Nepal lost the SAFF Women's cup, striker Preeti Rai highlighted the difference between training regimes in Nepal

and neighbouring countries.

"I travelled to Pakistan they have months of intensive training, and even get homework. We did not even know you could get homework in football," Rai mused on to.

A silver lining, especially for Nepali women footballers, is that this has led them to play for international clubs, where they are getting income and experience they would not get at home.

Currently, 10 players from the national women's football team, seven play for international clubs, Striker Sabina Khaderi (18) has joined the French Division 1 club FC Annecy Gapainne playing her first match for the team in February.

Tears captain Anjali Tamrakar has signed up with the Greek club A Division Women's football club

Nees Atkinson in September. Seven more national team members play for Indian clubs, and one for club in Abu Dhabi.

Rai's impassioned post on social media after the team's loss, in which she implored to her team's performance, her future in the sport, as well as the future of young Nepali girls who hope to become footballers, generated much attention on social media, and opened discussions about the state of women's sports in the country.

What also makes women athletes in discrimination with their male counterparts over the issue of pay.

Male football players used to earn more than twice the amount than their female counterparts before ANFA decided to introduce

equal pay in 2021. At present, contracted players from both the men's and women's teams receive a monthly salary of Rs8,000 per month.

When the Cricket Association of Nepal (CAN) announced its contract in 2020, male players earned more than twice the female cricketers. A new annual contract was announced this year for 20 male and 19 female cricketers, with players divided into five 'grades' including a category for emerging players.

But although salaries for players were increased, female cricketers still earn half of what their male counterparts make.

The Nepal national women's volleyball team salaries at Rs25,000 monthly salary, that too not from the government but from former players hand overed who have taken the initiative to contribute.

Money for sports tends to come only in the form of requests and cash prizes when athletes, especially women, fail to meet expectations in crucial matches.

"We've heard claims that the Nepal women's team is going to play the 2027 World Cup," Anjali Tamrakar Sabina, captain of the Nepal women's national football team, remarked indignantly at the Kantipur panel. "It's might as well say that our team is going to play on the moon next."

And as with most career paths for women, there are several caveats. Many national female athletes say they are discouraged from playing because "it's something boys do."

As women athletes begin to peak in their sport, there is pressure to settle down and get married, and discontinue their career," said Sacchani Chaudhary. "There are very few girls who have been successful overseas because of this."

On purely results, Nepal had a terrible tournament. Defeats against the Netherlands, South Africa and Bangladesh. A game against Sri Lanka abandoned due to rain, making for a grand total of one point. Yet, Nepal's performance was anything but embarrassing. In fact, the team played underdog so well that it became local fan favorites.

Against Bangladesh, Nepal fought right to the end, with only 30 needed off the last four overs. Friendly pitches helped the strong Nepali attack against South Africa which was held to only 115. They chased that score steadily, losing eventually by only one run. And against the Netherlands, dropped catches cost the match but the Dutch were still pushed to 18.4 overs.

The theme seemed to be inexperienced batters getting carried

away in the moment, swinging wildly for boundaries instead of keeping the score moving along with ones and twos. Yet for the frenzied Nepali fans, the low scoring thrillers were as enjoyable as the high-scoring bonanzas in the boundary-happy Indian Premier League.

Six months later, in late November, cricket buzz reignited with the first edition of the Nepal Premier League. While domestic cricket tournaments had been happening for some while now, this was the first one at this scale and this level of organisation.

Eight teams: Karnali Yaks, Biratnagar Kings, Chitwan Rhinos, Janakpur Bolts, Kathmandu Gurkhas, Lumbini Lions, Pokhara Avengers, and Sudurpaschim Royals all played each other, after which the top four progressed to playoffs.



Teams were captained by a ‘marquee’ player, such as Dipendra Singh Airee and Sompal Kami, and some had international cricketers like Shikhar Dhawan and Martin Gupthill, albeit in the dusk of their careers. The games were covered on YouTube and on Star Sports, making for high visibility.

All the matches were held in Kathmandu to manage logistics. In the final, a strong chase from the Janakpur Yaks helped them beat the Sudurpaschim Royals, who had been the best team over the tournament.

Hardly anybody had anything bad to say about the tournament. It was an excellent example of taking stock of the resources at hand and doing the best job possible. Holding games across the country would have been excellent, but unrealistic

and over ambitious. Instead the planners kept it all in the capital, and executed, providing a strong foundation for future tournaments and improvements.

Elsewhere in sports, para-taekwondo player Palesha Govardhan won bronze at the 2024 Paris Paralympics, becoming the first Nepali athlete ever to medal at the games. And Nepalis also turned out in big numbers to watch the SAFF Women's Championship, with 1 million watching the final between Nepal and Bangladesh - although Nepal ended up losing.

The semi-final had been most interesting as well, with fans protesting so raucously what they saw as blatant refereeing mistakes that there were 72 minutes where play had to be stopped.



2025

Twenty-five years later, where are we? Exactly where we said we would be: with the impact of climate breakdown increasingly visible, good governance still a challenge, and the same politicians still playing musical chairs.

Four hydropower plants were damaged in the Rasuwa flood on the Nepal-China border in the first week of July, knocking out 230MW of Nepal's power supply – 8% of the total. The September flood last year was worse: the damage caused by three days of rain in central and eastern Nepal slashed Nepal's generation by 1,700MW, nearly half of the total capacity at the time.

Hydropower, while highly efficient, is unreliable in the fragile Himalayan landscape, vulnerable to earthquakes and cloudbursts. Still, Nepal continues to invest in mega hydropower plants without a proper environmental assessment. In fact, the goal is to generate 28,500MW in the next 10 years.

India has strategically removed China from all the hydropower projects in Nepal, with investments in multiple projects that give them 80% of the power generated before they officially hand them over to the country in 25 years. As it is, India is not after our hydropower, but water to regulate monsoon flow.

Diversification of the energy sector is of utmost importance. Apart from its vast hydropower potential, Nepal gets 300 days of sunlight on average for 6-8 hours per day. And

**Nepal urgently needs to be more proactive in reducing glacier hazards**

Photo: The Himalayan region has been hit by a series of glacial hazards, including landslides, avalanches, and glacial lake outbursts (GLOFs). The impact of climate change is making these hazards more frequent and severe. Nepal needs to take proactive measures to reduce the risks and protect its people and infrastructure.

**MELTPOOLS**

Mapping Glaciers in Real Time

**Rasuwa flood likely a GLOF**

Deadly Nepal-China border flood could have been glacial lake(s) burst in Tibet


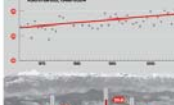


yet, solar power has hardly been explored, even when the price of solar panels has fallen.

Some experts have also suggested promoting smaller infrastructure and decentralising them. One cannot help but think back to the 'small is beautiful' model that Nepal championed in the 70s and 80s with biogas, trolley buses, solar plants, windmills and micro hydro. In many ways, Nepal was way ahead of its time but couldn't keep up when the demand soared. Among the other energy options Nepali Times covered in 2025 was Pump Storage Hydro (PSH) in tandem with solar PV as an ideal solution that will give hydro development a new and more productive life in the years ahead, as well as increasing electricity quality. 'Water is pumped from a lower reservoir or the side of river to a higher pond using cheap off-peak grid electricity or surplus solar PV power, and the stored water is then used to generate electricity during peak or no-sunlight periods,' wrote energy expert Dipak Gyawali in Nepali Times issue #1247.


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Regardless, Nepal now has surplus power, but much of it is spilled, especially during the monsoon. Geopolitical tension limits the export market for Nepal's electricity but we must increase domestic demand, electrify transport, industries, agriculture, tourism. This also means the focus should now shift to transmission and distribution.

Transport, in particular, is considered a low-hanging fruit in regards to electricity use. Nepal is only behind Norway when it comes to the sales of electric cars which is 82% of the total four-wheeler imports. But unless the public transport is electrified, that won't account for much.

Meanwhile, another prevailing infrastructure challenge continues to be roads and highways. Road accidents kill seven people every day in the country, higher than most 'natural' disasters. Nijgad airport continues to be the national pride project of highest priority in every budget. However, it is not an airport project but a logging concession.

Meanwhile, trains made headlines in 2025. On one hand, we have the ambitious Kerung-Kathmandu railway, part of China's Trans-Himalayan Multi-Dimensional Connectivity Network. Not to be outdone, India has a final local survey ongoing for the Raxual-Kathmandu railway. But Nepal's own East-West Railway, first conceived in 2007, is still stuck on the tracks due to issues with land acquisition and environmental concerns.

What has really taken off this year is artificial intelligence. Generative AI, such as ChatGPT and DeepSeek (which come with their own biases), in just a few months since their inception, has seen rapid advancement, aided by the vast data we are feeding the system. Meanwhile, AI bots realising they are both AI, are talking with each other in a mysterious code language that only they understand.

These advancements are bound to impact Nepal, including the \$900 million we made by exporting backend IT services to the US and Europe. In the same breath, the government's digital infrastructure is so outdated and archaic that citizens have to shuttle between windows to get their documentation for ID cards or licenses for which we need multiple biometrics. 🇳🇵

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