Troubled transition

Interim government in Nepal must resist illegitimate demands

fter violent protests that left 74 dead, Nepal's elected government has fallen, with its Parliament dissolved and former jurist Sushila Karki leading an interim government until the 2026 elections. While the Gen Z protesters had legitimate grievances including poor governance, entrenched corruption and intolerance of critical views, seen in the ousted CPN-UML-led government's banning of 23 social media websites – the transition itself was blatantly unconstitutional, violating Article 76 of Nepal's 2015 Constitution which permits dissolution only after failed Prime Minister appointments. Yet, considering the exigent circumstances, there is little purchase for judicial review of the steps taken last week. Notably, the President did not dissolve the upper house, the National Assembly. More troubling were the protesters' egregious actions which included burning Parliament and the Supreme Court (destroying vital documents). Nepal is expected to suffer severe economic losses besides governance issues due to the destruction of property and documents. The targeting of democratic institutions suggests an assault on Nepal's post-Constitutional order - institutions established after the painstaking constitution-writing process that followed the much-needed ending of a decade-long civil war in 2006, overcoming an anachronistic and discredited monarchy and which included marginalised sections beyond Kathmandu valley's power structures – even if there was half-hearted or ineffective implementation of the Constitution's spirit and letter.

The interim government must bring the criminals to justice as any inaction will lead to a normalisation of violence threatening all institutions that were set up to fulfil the promises of deeper democratisation and Nepal's transformation into a republic. Even if Gen Z protesters claim that impostors carried out the violence, their continued reliance on online forums, such as Discord, for decision-making reveals immaturity and an unrepresentative nature. The reliance on online forums, which feature anonymity, frivolity and impersonation, and the fact that there is no guarantee that these views are representative of the many marginalised groups suggest that giving into the demands from these unaccountable groups uncritically could be hazardous. The failures of mainstream leaders – the K.P. Sharma Oli-Sher Bahadur Deuba-Pushpa Kamal Dahal troika and their coteries – cannot justify discrediting democracy or the polity itself, as some protesters have made it out to be, echoing anti-social and destructive pro-monarchic elements. One outcome is that the entrenched leadership of mainstream parties could be compelled by party members to give way to fresh blood. Meanwhile, the interim government must protect Nepal's institutions and constitutional achievements while building the stage for free and fair elections – this is the surest path to safeguarding the promise of a democratic, plural and republican "Naya Nepal".

Holistic approach

India needs a multi-pronged strategy to deal with stubble burning

he Supreme Court of India has broached the possibility of prosecuting farmers, caught setting fire to their fields, to prepare for winter sowing or rabi crop. 'Stubble burning' is a major contributor to air pollution in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Haryana, particularly in October and November, when the southwest monsoon has receded and adverse meteorological conditions trap toxic particulate matter emissions from vehicles, industry, garbage burning and agricultural waste. While the causes and the ways to reduce particulate matter pollution from agriculture are known, the efforts by the Centre to tackle the long-standing problem have been half-hearted. The creation of the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM), a central body with the power to reach out across the borders of Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, was a positive step and an acknowledgement that air pollution in one State cannot be tackled without the cooperation of others. However, the four-year-old statutory body has failed to exercise its powers in a manner that is independent of political pressure. Take the example of its recent order to ban the sale of petrol and diesel in the National Capital Region to 'end-of-life' vehicles, from July 1. A public outcry in Delhi and its political leaders - largely on technical grounds - and the Court's intervention. forced its implementation to November this year, that too beginning with parts of the NCR that are not a part of the Delhi municipalities. In stubble burning too, the CAQM has not been able to impress upon the judiciary that stubble burning was due to recalcitrant farmers, limited enforcement by Punjab and Haryana and the structure of agricultural economics that left the average, debtridden farmer with little choice. In recent years, it has emerged that Punjab has been claiming a reduction in farm fires when it was in fact increasing. The CAQM chose not to disclose this.

In the absence of a transparent mechanism to evaluate and address an issue and being cowed down by imagined political repercussions, it is not surprising that suggestions such as to "jail farmers" to act as a deterrent to others are being bandied about. While no section of citizens – farmer or industrialist – can be considered to be above the law, creating better incentives, enforcing existing laws and being transparent about what is realistically achievable are more advisable steps than 'carrot and stick' approaches.

Equalising primary food consumption in India

he publication, in February 2024, of a household consumption survey by the National Sample Survey (NSS) Office, after a gap of over a decade, has made it possible to estimate the poverty rate in India. One such estimate, released by the World Bank in April 2025, has received the most attention. It points to the poverty rate being very low by now. To quote the World Bank, "Over the past decade, India has significantly reduced poverty. Extreme poverty (living on less than \$2.15 per day) fell from 16.2 percent in 2011-12 to 2.3 percent in 2022-23...." ('Poverty and Equity Brief: INDIA', 2025). If this is indeed an accurate description, it would be a source of satisfaction, for it suggests that extreme poverty has virtually disappeared from the country.

The 'thali meal' as a consumption metric

The conventional approach to poverty measurement, pioneered by the Government of India over half a century ago, entails first determining the income that would enable food intake of a specified calorific value, and then classifying those with less as poor. This is a physiological approach, and has some merit. But there could be other approaches, based on the consumption of goods, for instance. One such approach would recognise that humans are likely to approach food from an angle wider than just its calorie content, taking into account the energy it provides, which calories measure, nourishment, and the satisfaction it gives. We believe the thali meal reflects this thinking, making it a natural choice to measure food consumption in real terms.

As a combination of carbohydrates, protein and vitamins, the thali is a balanced and self-contained unit of food consumption in south Asia. even if the nomenclature may vary across it. With this in mind, we have estimated the number of thalis the monthly expenditure reported in the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey of 2024 would translate into. The rating agency, Crisil, has estimated the cost of a home-cooked thali, comprising rice, dal, vegetables, roti, curd and salad, as ₹30. Adopting this price, we found that in 2023-24, up to 50% of the rural population and up to 20% of the urban population could not have afforded two thalis per day at the food expenditure recorded. If two thalis a day is taken as the minimum acceptable standard of food consumption, our estimates point to much greater food deprivation in India than conveyed by the poverty figures from the World Bank.

A crucial reason why our findings differ is that



<u>Pulapre</u> <u>Balakrishnan</u>

is Honorary Visiting Professor, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram



<u>Aman Raj</u>

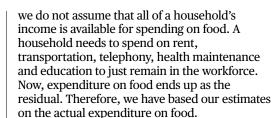
is an independent economist based in Patna, Bihar

Expanding the Public Distribution System to ensure desirable levels of consumption of pulses by eliminating subsidies for those whose food consumption exceeds a

reasonable

ideal step

norm will be an



It tends to be assumed that the Public Distribution System (PDS) deals effectively with food deprivation. To assess this, we have computed the value of food consumption including the imputed value of supplies received via the PDS – both purchased and free of cost. With the value of consumption thus adjusted, the proportion of the population that cannot afford two *thalis* declines to 40% in rural areas and 10% in urban areas. Notably, food deprivation remains very high in the former even with subsidised food.

The role of PDS

To understand how the PDS can be leveraged to alleviate food deprivation, we estimated the subsidy per person across expenditure classes. What is interesting is that both PDS purchases and free food availed of by sections of the population that can afford more than two thalis a day are high. For instance, in rural India, the subsidy received by an individual in the 90%-95% fractile is 88% of the subsidy received by an individual in 0%-5% fractile, even as the first has a consumption expenditure more than three times greater, and going by our own thali index does not require further support. By contrast, in urban India, the subsidy regime is strongly progressive. But here too about 80% receive subsidised sales from the PDS and also free food, even when they too can afford more than two thalis per day.

Based on the data on food deprivation and the structuring of the food subsidy regime we make a proposal on how policy should evolve. This data point to what needs to be done and how it can be achieved. First, there is scope for restructuring the food subsidy, raising it at the lower end of the distribution and eliminating it altogether at the upper. However, we learn from the most recent consumption survey that there is a constraint to be faced: cereals consumption is almost identical for individuals in the 0%-5% fractile and the 95%-100% fractile.

This suggests that the desired level of consumption of cereals, both rice and wheat, has been reached, for the richest can afford to purchase all the cereals that they desire. While it points to the success of the PDS, in that it has

equalised the consumption of a staple food, at the same time, it points to the limits to using the PDS in its present form to end food deprivation. Not only has cereals consumption very likely reached its desired level across the population but also it constitutes only 10% of the average household's expenditure.

It is unreasonable, from considerations of both logistics and expense, to expect that a government can distribute the entire food basket to any section. There is a middle path though, and that is to expand the distribution of pulses through the PDS. In a further comparison of the consumption patterns at the two ends of the distribution, we find that unlike in the case of the cereals, the per capita consumption of pulses in the 0%-5% fractile is exactly half of that in the 95%-100% fractile.

Pulses consumption

The PDS can be leveraged to equalise the primary food consumption across the population. The expansion of the PDS to ensure desirable levels of consumption of pulses – for many Indians, the only source of protein and a very costly food item – is both desirable and feasible. The financial aspect can be addressed by restructuring the PDS. The per capita consumption of rice and wheat in the 0%-5% fractile implies that the PDS entitlement of rice and wheat is well above what is necessary for a significant number.

Expanding the subsidy regime to supply cereal to 80 crore people, as done by the central government in January 2024 and the particularly large entitlement of rice given to those below the poverty line in some States, do not reflect need. Also, they come at a cost to the economy, given the alternative uses of public funds. Trimming the current entitlement of cereals to levels indicated as needed by the recent consumption survey at the lower end of the distribution and eliminating it altogether at the upper end would also require lower stocking requirements for the Food Corporation of India, with substantial gains.

We have proposed an expansion of the PDS in the direction of the food most needed by the least well-off, namely pulses, accompanied by the elimination of subsidies for those whose food consumption exceeds a reasonable norm, such as two *thalis* a day. Right now, the PDS is both unwieldy and ineffective, as it spreads resources thin. Our proposal will render it compact, enabling the equalisation of primary food consumption in India by raising that of the poorest household to the highest level observed in the economy, a globally significant outcome.

India needs more focus to reach SDG 3, a crucial goal

n June this year, India secured its best-ever position in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Index, ranking 99 out of 167 nations in the 2025 edition of the SDG Report. This marked a significant improvement from its rank of 109 rank in 2024, reflecting steady progress since 2021. India has demonstrated advancement in areas such as access to basic services and infrastructure. Yet, the report also flagged pressing challenges in key sectors, particularly health and nutrition, where progress has been uneven, especially in rural and tribal communities.

There is still ground to be covered

In this backdrop, it is critical to ponder over SDG 3. Its goal is to "ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages", and is one of the most crucial, yet demanding, goals in India's SDG journey. It encompasses specific targets that India has committed to achieve by 2030. Despite gains in some areas, the overall trajectory indicates that India is not on track in most targets. For example, the Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) – the number of mothers dying after childbirth per 100,000 live births – stands at 97 deaths per 100,000 live births, higher than the 2030 target of 70.

Even the under-five mortality rate remains at 32 deaths per 1,000 live births against the target of 25. In developed countries, it ranges between two and six deaths. Life expectancy now is only 70 years, falling short of the target of 73.63 years. Out-of-pocket health-care expenditure continues to burden families at 13% of total consumption, nearly double the targeted 7.83%. Even immunisation coverage, though commendably high at 93.23%, has not yet reached the universal target of 100%.

There are multiple reasons for these gaps.

They include, first, lack of access to quality health care partially due to poor infrastructure and economic factors; second, non-economic factors such as poor nutrition, hygiene and sanitation and other lifestyle choices and, third, cultural



Rahul Mehra

is National Representative of India, UNESCO Chair for Global Health and Education, and Executive Chairman, Tarang Health Alliance

Compulsory

measure that

the gap

can help close

health education

in schools is one

practices and stigma around physical and mental health. These cultural practices and limited awareness often prevent communities from accessing even the health-care services available to them.

If India is to accelerate progress on SDG Goal 3, a three-pronged approach is essential and one that focuses on treatment and prevention of diseases. The first is providing Universal Health Insurance to the population. World Bank studies show that countries with robust insurance systems have lowered catastrophic health-care expenditure while ensuring greater equity in access. The second is to have high-quality primary health centres across the country and coordination of primary, secondary and tertiary care.

The World Health Statistics 2022 by the World Health Organization highlights that strong primary systems help in detecting diseases earlier, reducing hospitalisation costs, and achieving better long-term outcomes. This will also require harnessing the transformative potential of digital health tools. Telemedicine and integrated digital health records can bridge access gaps, especially in rural and underserved regions. Evidence from the Lancet Digital Health Commission shows how digital platforms have improved maternal health care and vaccination tracking in several low and middle-income countries, offering lessons that India can adapt.

Health education at the school level

Prevention of diseases is more cost-effective than treating them. To prevent diseases, we need to provide health education to all schoolchildren. Children need to be educated about healthy nutrition, good hygiene and sanitation, reproductive health, road safety, and on mental health topics.

At this young age, they need to improve their health behaviour and not just their knowledge. The health habits they develop at this age will be maintained as they grow to be adults. When girls

become mothers, they will be more educated about their health and advocate this for themselves and their family. Over the long term, the school health education initiative has the potential to reduce MMR ratio, under-five mortality and deaths due to road accidents. At the same time, it can increase life expectancy and immunisation rates.

Finland's school-based health reforms in the 1970s, which wove lessons on nutrition, hygiene and lifestyle into the curricula, played a central role in reducing cardiovascular disease rates in the decades that followed. In Japan, compulsory health education has been linked to improved hygiene practices and longer life expectancy. A structured and progressive curriculum in India can achieve similar results.

Need for concerted actions

Therefore, closing the SDG gap requires action by policymakers to individual actions. Policymakers need to embed health education in school curricula while simultaneously investing in universal health coverage and primary health care.

All parents have an important role to play in the health education of youth. They can review their child's school curriculum and determine whether topics on physical, mental and social health are being covered. If not, they should push for it by communicating this to the department of education.

India's improved SDG ranking is encouraging. But it should not obscure the reality that only 17% of global SDG targets are currently on track to be achieved by 2030. Educating its youth about healthy behaviour, supported by stronger health-care systems, can act as the foundation for sustainable progress. And while 2030 is an important milestone to reach, the true vision lies further ahead – building a healthier and stronger India. A government that devotes its attention to embedding health education in school curricula can help achieve the goal of a Viksit Bharat 2047.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Jews and Israel today

The Jews have been the most persecuted race — the Holocaust is the darkest chapter in human history. Therefore, one would expect that the Jews would inherently imbibe qualities of empathy and tolerance, given their sufferings in the past. However, it seems that the oppressed have turned oppressor with renewed force. How else can one explain the atrocities that Israel is perpetrating in Gaza? Even today, German children are taught about

the shameful role that the Germans played in the annihilation of Jews during the World War, lest they forget. Similarly, let the people of Israel pause for a moment and rethink on how history will judge them for the genocide in Gaza. They may soon have to contend with the possibility that their victimisation during the Second World War will be relegated to the last pages of history in the aftermath of their actions. Sharada Sivaram, Kochi, Kerala

India's inexplicable and continued silence on the genocide in Gaza reflects its narrow-mindedness, and its strange unwillingness to challenge executive decisions on foreign policy. As the world grapples with the mounting toll of the Gaza conflict, India's role as a silent bystander is growing increasingly untenable. The Prime Minister of India and the External Affairs Minister may frame their diplomacy as pragmatic, but history will judge them as moral

failures. The cost of complicity — both for Palestine and for India's global standing — is far too high to ignore. The question now is whether India will continue down this path of strategic expediency or rediscover the courage to condemn the genocide in Gaza — which it ought to do

The answer will shape not only the fate of Palestine but also India's legacy in the global order. **R. Sivakumar,**Chappai

A loyal BSNL customer

I have been a long-standing BSNL customer, for nearly 20 years. The only reason my family and I (nearly 75 members) have continued with BSNL is out of our conviction to support a Government of India enterprise and promote its services. We have encouraged others in our circle to use BSNL despite its known limitations. Although BSNL has officially launched eSIM, it is still not available in Kerala. Even

explanation by customer-care representatives — that eSIM facilities are not available for long-standing customers. This policy shows a disregard for loyal customers. In the absence of BSNL's rollout of eSIM services, I am left with no choice but to consider porting my number to another operator.

Akhil S. Karun, Kochi, Kerala

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the postal address.

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THE HINDU

Should India overlook boundary issues while normalising ties with China?







Ghosal Singh Fellow, Observer

Research

Foundation

PARLEY

arlier this month, Prime Minister Narendra Modi concluded his much-anticipated visit to China. Mr. Modi attended the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit and also held talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the summit. The two leaders decided to restart bilateral trade and air connectivity, and underlined the importance of peace and tranquility along the border. These decisions were significant as they were made five years after the deadly border clashes between the two neighbours in the Galwan Valley in Ladakh; and months after India launched Operation Sindoor against Pakistan (at the time, China supported the Pakistani military forces). Both leaders reaffirmed that the two countries were "development partners and not rivals, and their differences should not turn to disputes," the Ministry of External Affairs said in a statement after the meeting. Should India overlook boundary issues while normalising ties with China? Vivek Katju and Antara Ghosal Singh discuss the question in a conversation moderated by **Kallol Bhattacherjee**. Excerpts:

Is it possible for India to normalise ties with China without resolving the boundary issue?

Vivek Katju: In 1988, during Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's visit to China, India and China decided to normalise ties in other sectors even as they attempted to resolve the border issue. In a way, this constituted a departure from the past. The crucial point was that peace and tranquility had to be maintained along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). While India wanted the border issue to be resolved (as part of normalising ties), China was more reluctant to do so (and wanted to set the issue aside for the time being). In the 1990s too, both countries agreed to maintain peace and tranquility (along the LAC). In 2020, the Galwan incident, which demonstrated China's aggressive approach, upset this arrangement. That didn't mean that there weren't previous incidents which constituted serious setbacks to the normalisation process, but those paled in comparison to what happened in 2020. In the last five years, both sides, through diplomatic and military arrangements, have tried to restore the system that prevailed in the 1990s. So, when you ask whether the border issue is holding us back, I think we had moved past that in 1988 and in the 1990s. And one last point: if you see the Indian and Chinese readouts of the Modi-Xi Jinping meeting at the SCO margins, you will find a distinct difference in how the two sides describe the salience of the border issue.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping shake hands during a bilateral meeting on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit in Tianjin. AFP

Antara Ghosal Singh: My understanding is that it is not an either-or situation. The overall positive turn in China-India ties is not really a sudden development or a knee-jerk reaction to the current turmoil in international politics or the recent downturn in India-U.S. ties. India-China relations have been showing signs of improvement since early last year. Both sides have been sending some positive signals towards each other. As I gather from Chinese sources, the 2024 Border Patrol Agreement was a key icebreaker. Since the Galwan clash of 2020, India has been consistently demanding that the Chinese Army withdraw to the pre-April 2020 positions and restore India's patrol rights in the disputed areas. From that perspective, India sees the restoration of patrolling points, even in Demchok and Depsang, as a diplomatic victory. Many Indian strategists have acknowledged this fact. Importantly, the Chinese side feels that they have not really suffered any loss in this agreement because it is a border patrol agreement and has nothing to do with the demarcation of sovereignty. The agreement means that two years after achieving disengagement at four places through the creation of non-patrolled buffer zones, now two more places, as demanded by the Indian side, are being disengaged through cross-patrolled buffer zones. That is the Chinese understanding from what I read.

Do you see a situation where the normalisation of relations could be disrupted by, say, a Galwan-2 in the distant

VK: Of course, that will disrupt relations - and disrupt them badly. In the Indian strategic community, China now looms large. China has always loomed large, but I think for historical



Despite all our differences, I have always argued that good workable ties between China and India are good for both sides. ANTARA GHOSAL SINGH

reasons, Pakistan occupied a principal place. But today, I do believe, despite Pakistani terror and despite China's consistent support for Pakistan, there is a realisation that China is India's main threat and will continue to be so. Now, there are new formulations that suggest that India and China can be partners and not rivals. What I understand is that China is aspiring for primacy in the world. It no longer considers India to be on par with it. It believes that India is just another South Asian country it has to deal with. If you see (Chinese Foreign Minister) Wang Yi's remarks, after his meeting with (Deputy Prime Minister of Pakistan) Ishaq Dar, that part is made clear. A journalist noted that Pakistan was the Minister's final stop after visiting three countries. Mr. Wang said it was the final stop – and the most important one. That speaks volumes.

There has been a shift in India's appreciation of China. But we cannot overlook the enormous infrastructure development, especially in the military area of the Tibetan Plateau. Why is this being done? And what will that lead to? It will lead to India having to spend a fair amount of its own financial resources in ensuring that the LAC infrastructure is fortified and that the LAC is well garrisoned throughout the year. I think that is also a Chinese objective.

I don't think it will be wrong for me to say that China shows no interest in really resolving the border issue. Yes, the special representatives are going to meet, but are they going to make any headway? What does the history of the last 30 years show? And why did Galwan happen? No one has been able to come up with an authoritative reason for why it happened.

AGS: If you look at Chinese sources, you will find many theories (behind what prompted China's action in Galwan). The most popular one is the dilution of Article 370 (of Jammu and Kashmir; China protested against the move). Another argument is the competition between China and India in terms of manufacturing.It was during COVID-19 that the first round of the China-U.S. trade war took place and there was this feeling on the Chinese side that India was collaborating with the U.S. to take away China's position in the global supply chains. That caused a lot of panic within Chinese strategic circles. Ambassador Katju also mentioned that India is

often looked down upon by China; that is true. For a long time, China has chosen to believe that India is a retreating image in its rear view mirror. But it was during that time in 2020 when they started to realise that things can change and that India, a country with 1.4 billion people, can be a competitor. There is this weird 'India is a threat' theory. If you look at Chinese discussions on various platforms, you can see how they are concerned about India's economic growth and India's demographic dividend, particularly at a time when China is facing a population crisis. There is also a prevailing mood in China that it should not let Chinese industries invest in India; that it should impose various export controls; and that it should not let India develop and be a competitor to China. So, there is a change in perception within China as well, on the India issue. All these insecurities played a role in what happened in 2020.

Can the two tracks of the normalisation of India-China relations, and China's plans for South Asia, as seen in the recent Kunming trilateral featuring Pakistan, China and Bangladesh, be in harmony with each other?

VK: Of course not. I have reached the conclusion that China believes that India, if not now, then in later years, can be a rival and that it must be tackled. The way China is moving in South Asia establishes that too. Earlier, they were entering into bilateral ties. Now there are trilateral mechanisms. There is an Afghanistan, Pakistan, China mechanism. They are trying for a Bangladesh, Pakistan, China mechanism. Soon, I think they would want a mechanism involving all South Asian countries, including us. They will know that we might not take part in it.

AGS: They have their cards against us and we have our cards against them. But despite all our differences, I have always argued that good workable ties between China and India are good for both sides. We are aware of China's manufacturing prowess and how dependent India and the world is on Chinese manufacturing. The Economic Survey 2024-25 highlighted China's overwhelming manufacturing dominance in various sectors, including electric vehicles and critical minerals. It also stated how China's overall manufacturing output, which is nearly 45% of the global total, is at a level never seen before since the U.S.'s or the U.K.'s at their industrial peak.



To listen to the full interview Scan the code or go to the link

NOTEBOOK

Landing in the midst of a *'revolution*

Journalists tend to go to the midst of rage-filled streets to report and record events, even if they are not there on work

Ramya Kannan

hat are the chances of landing in the lap of a "revolution", completely unintentionally? In the Indian subcontinent, there is a pretty high chance, given what we have seen in recent years. After the uprising in Sri Lanka against the fall in the island nation's economic fortunes, and the protests in Bangladesh against the job quota system, the guarantee of peace in the region is shaky. The possibility of flights getting disrupted, arson and looting on the streets, curfews shutting down cities for days on end, and a palpable fear everywhere is not that remote.

For a journalist, there is also a measure of headiness. As vulgar as it may sound, even an unintended encounter with chaos counts as ecstasy for a reporter – to be amidst such a crisis and report on it. Something in our DNA takes us to the midst of rage-filled streets to report and record events, even if the purpose of visiting the place is different.

Who could have imagined that in the five-odd hours that it took to hop on to a flight in Chennai and hop off - first in New Delhi and then in Kathmandu – that things would fall apart so rapidly in Nepal? Protesters had initially turned up with flowers and books. They sang songs, demanding that the ban on social media be lifted. However, the situation deteriorated after reports of deaths began trickling in. The first few reports from the Himalayan kingdom stated that the number of dead stood at 19, and included a child.

Despite this, there is no panic among those who were already on the ground in Kathmandu and not part of the protests. Conference mates in the city lend assurance, recording how other people had arrived by air without any issues and how there are no disruptions on their side of

On the first evening (September 8), everything seems fine. The airport is milling with people walking about normally. That the quotidian routine went on undisrupted is falsely calming. There are never-ending traffic jams on the way from the airport. This changes drastically

The next morning dawns with the smell of smoke. Thick, grey columns rise to blur the blue of the distant Himalayas. Protesters have set government buildings, institutions, and homes of politicians on fire. They have occupied a couple of media houses. The youth burn property in the middle of the road, unnerved by shoot-at-sight orders. On the sidelines of the "revolution", and roads, people stand fearlessly, watching the burning piles. As can be expected during such a mass upheaval, bystanders mutter: "This government needs to go." There is no fear on the main roads, but no cheering either. Pictures shot then tell the ambivalent side story of this South Asian equivalent of the Arab Spring.

That changes that evening: the youth cheer and give each other high fives and take out a victory march, a show of mostly testosterone. They sit on bikes, waving flags, sticks, even a rifle, yelling "victory". It seems to some that the protests

have quickly ended. The next day dawns in sharp contrast. There is a calm and a curfew in place. The annoying hoots of pigeons holed in the eaves of buildings replace the sounds of the previous day's raucous victory cries. Every shop is shut, and army pickets are within viewing distance on both sides of the winding roads. Army trucks whizz past, their sirens blaring. Hotels lock their gates and gently warn visitors against venturing out.

But that is for everyone else to follow. The journalist DNA drags one by the nose to the empty streets, the army pickets, into the centre of action. A video shot on an empty street seems disquieting. But for a journalist responding to the news, there are adrenaline hits with every photo and video recording history being rewritten, mostly in swirls of smoke.

ramya.kannan@thehindu.co.in

PICTURE OF THE WEEK

Moving slowly in a fast-paced city



An aerial view of traffic snarls at the Dadar TT junction, a bustling centre in Mumbai, as demolition work on the century-old Elphinstone Road overbridge — a key east-west connector between Parel (East) and Prabhadevi (West) — commenced last Saturday. EMMANUAL YOGINI

FROM THE ARCHIVES



FIFTY YEARS AGO SEPTEMBER 19, 1975

Proposal for flood relief stamp to raise Rs. 100 crores

New Delhi, Sept. 18: The Government is examining a proposal to raise Rs. 100 crores for flood relief in Bihar, Orissa and Uttar Pradesh from the issue of a special stamp, the use of which will be obligatory while posting letters. Such special stamps were issued at the time of the Bangladesh crisis to augment resources.

Since the issue of special stamps alone may not net in the projected Rs. 100 crores, it is proposed to ask the State Governments to introduce certain additional levies on stamp papers for registration of documents, motor vehicles taxation, etc.

The Centre, deeply perturbed over the extensive damage caused by the floods, particularly in Bihar, is examining various proposals for effectively coming to the rescue of the flood-affected States. The special stamp and additional levies proposal is, however, likely to face some resistance from the other State Governments, though they did not object to the issue of the Bangladesh stamp.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO SEPT. 19, 1925

Wire-nail industry

Calcutta, Sept. 18: Giving evidence before the Tariff Board to-day, Mr. Khusiram, proprietor of the Punjab Wire-nail Factory, Amritsar, said that they could not run their factory at a profit nor compete with the foreign-made articles unless protection was granted. He pointed out that many of the articles made by them, such as panel pins, tacks, etc., were already subject to a duty of 10 per cent whilst they paid about 35 per cent customs duty on the wires imported for manufacturing such articles in India.