

**EVENT REPORT**

**IIDS** | Institute for Integrated  
Development Studies • 1979

# **IIDS DAY**

# **2025**

**NEPAL AT THE CROSSROAD:**

**POLITICAL ECONOMY  
POST-GEN Z MOVEMENT**

**NOVEMBER  
2025**

Prepared by  
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**1**

**THEME  
NOTE**

**2**

**EVENT  
OVERVIEW**

**3**

**EVENT  
TEAM**

**4**

**OPENING  
REMARKS**

**5**

**KEYNOTE  
PRESENTATION**

**7**

**REFLECTION:  
KUNDA DIXIT**

**9**

**REFLECTION:  
RAM GURUNG**

**11**

**REFLECTION:  
TASHI LHAZOM**

**13**

**Q&A  
SESSION**

**19**

**CLOSING  
REMARKS**





# THEME NOTE

## **Nepal at the Crossroad: Political Economy Post-Gen Z Movement**

The 46th anniversary of IIDS convened at a pivotal moment in Nepal's history, characterized by a "new normal" where digital natives are redefining civic engagement.

The theme acknowledges a shift from traditional ideological battles to a demand for tangible economic opportunities and governance accountability. This "Post-Gen Z Movement" is not merely about age; it represents a structural challenge to the status quo driven by the immediacy, speed, and spread of digital communication.

The theme explores the intersection of economic stagnation and political awakening, asking how Nepal can pivot from a "Complacency Trap" toward a functional, inclusive, and knowledge-based economy before the demographic dividend expires.

# EVENT OVERVIEW

## DATE

November 25, 2025

## VENUE

IIDS Campus, Kathmandu

## OCCASION

46th Anniversary of the Institute for Integrated Development Studies (Est. 1979)

## AGENDA

### OPENING REMARKS

Dr. Yamuna Ghale, Policy Lead, IIDS

### KEYNOTE PRESENTATION

Dr. Biswas Gauchan, Executive Director, IIDS

### REFLECTION - GUEST SPEAKER

Mr. Kunda Dixit, Publisher, Nepali Times

### REFLECTION - GUEST SPEAKER

Mr. Ram Gurung, Sr. Researcher, Samin Research Institute

### REFLECTION - GUEST SPEAKER

Ms. Tashi Lhazom, Gen-Z Leader

### AUDIENCE Q&A

Moderated by Mr. Dharmendra Lekhak, Program Specialist (Survey and Statistics), IIDS

### CLOSING REMARKS

Dr. Swarnim Wagle, Chairperson, IIDS Governing Council

# EVENT TEAM

## MASTERS OF CEREMONY



**SUBIN  
ADHIKARI**

Jr. Research Assistant,  
Center for Economic Policy, IIDS



**SIMRAN  
SHERCHAN**

Jr. Operation Assistant  
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The success of the 46th Anniversary celebration would not have been possible without the dedicated support of the entire IIDS family. We extend our deepest gratitude to you all making this milestone event a resounding success.

# OPENING REMARKS



## DR. YAMUNA GHALE

Dr. Yamuna Ghale opened the 46th anniversary celebration with a warm welcome, framing the event as a moment to honor a long journey of evidence-based research that began in 1979. She spoke with pride about how IIDS has not only sustained its legacy but has also expanded its credibility beyond Nepal's borders, evolving to remain relevant and competent in facing 21st-century challenges.

A central theme of her message was the "golden era" of youth in Nepal. She noted that while young people make up 42% of the population, there is a difficult reality where many are leaving the country for better opportunities. She connected this to the day's theme - "Nepal at the Crossroad" - urging the audience to look closely at the political economy, specifically how power and resources are distributed. She argued that as Nepal prepares to graduate to a Middle-Income Country by 2026, the country must create an environment where youth can find meaningful engagement and leadership roles at home.

On a hopeful note, Dr. Ghale shared her excitement about how the institute is actively fostering this new generation. She highlighted the work of interns and young researchers (at IIDS) who are now drafting important policy briefs on topics like the green economy, a practice that wasn't common in the past but is now flourishing. She also noted that IIDS has further scope to expand studies, discourse, and research on systemic issues in the context of globalization, climate change, and youth out-migration. Dr. Ghale concluded by emphasizing "coexistence," reminding everyone that building a prosperous, resilient nation requires collaboration between the government, private sectors, and international networks to create space for youth voices.

It was a particularly special occasion as Dr. Ghale actually shares her birthday with the founding anniversary of IIDS. The event served as a double celebration, honoring both the 46-year legacy of the institute and Dr. Ghale's personal milestone.

# KEYNOTE PRESENTATION

## DR. BISWAS GAUCHAN

Dr. Biswas Gauchan began his address by reflecting on the resilience of IIDS as it marks its 46th anniversary. He honored the founders - Dr. Bhekh Bahadur Thapa, Dr. Prakash Chandra Lohani, and the late Kul Shekhar Sharma - while acknowledging the rough terrain think-tanks face in Nepal. He noted that unlike in other countries where policy institutes are valued, they are often undermined in Nepal, forcing IIDS to rely on development partners for survival while fiercely maintaining its independence. He welcomed an audience that spanned five generations, from the "Silent Generation" to Gen Z, setting the stage for a conversation about the deep structural issues facing the country.



Dr. Gauchan introduced the concept of the "Complacency Trap" to explain why Nepal remains stuck despite political changes. He argued that the country has achieved a false sense of stability by "exporting discontent," meaning the most frustrated and rebellious youth leave the country, while their remittances keep the economy afloat. He highlighted a staggering statistic: by the time the event concluded, Nepal would have received 1 billion Rupees in remittance in just four hours, a flow of money that masks deep economic failures. He also pointed to a "Great Demand Collapse" over the last three years, where investment has dried up and the economy has shrunk in a way never seen before in Nepal's history.

.A significant portion of his talk analyzed the social and cultural roots of Nepal's stagnation. He observed that power and wealth distribution still largely follow historical caste hierarchies, where a transition occurred after 1990 from traditional rulers to a new elite without fundamentally changing the power structure. He also critiqued the culture of "Chaso," an excessive interest in meddling in others' lives rather than improving one's own, and the politicization of daily life, where party affiliation has become a status symbol. He touched upon the "sleeping giant" of the youth population, noting that they finally woke up, like the mythical Kumbhakarna, only when their personal digital lives were disrupted by the government's ban on social media platforms.

Looking toward solutions, Dr. Gauchan called for a unique "Nepalbaad" (Nepal Path) rather than copying foreign ideologies like those of Marx or Lenin. He criticized populist policies, such as the massive spending on senior citizen allowances, arguing that the state is spending on the elderly at the expense of investing in children and the youth. Instead of relying on failed public-private partnerships, he proposed a "Public-Public Partnership," suggesting the government mobilize its massive foreign exchange reserves and idle retirement funds to drive innovation. He concluded by urging a shift away from textbook theories toward evidence-based innovation and pragmatic strategies anchored in the basic commonsense that has too often been missing in Nepal's development planning.



**Actually, no one has written a playbook for Nepal. Until now we quote... theories... principles... literature... precedents... what any country did... We are stuck there. What about contextualization? What about local knowledge, local institutions... What about our own innovations? We haven't gone there... I think what we need is a "Nepalbaad." A different, very unique, organic... suiting us... A different kind of thinking is needed for us to address our uniqueness.**

# GUEST SPEAKER



## MR. KUNDA DIXIT

Kunda Dixit began his address with the humility of a seasoned journalist, describing himself as a "generalist" among specialists, someone who usually asks the questions rather than standing at the podium to answer them. He opened with a striking anecdote from a recent trip to Manila, Philippines. While stuck in traffic during a flood, a local taxi driver showed him TikTok videos of burning buildings in Nepal, expressing a wish that Filipinos would do the same to their own parliament. Dixit used this encounter to illustrate that the "Gen Z" phenomenon is not isolated to Nepal; it is a globally interconnected wave fueled by the immediate, visual power of social media.

He contextualized the current unrest by looking back at history, arguing that student-led uprisings are not new. He cited the 1968 Prague Spring, the 1988 uprising in Myanmar, and Nepal's own movements in 1979 and 1990 as precedents. However, he noted a key difference: unlike the past, where students were often wings of political parties, today's youth are driven by raw, independent frustration. He described the current generation as "young and angry," fueled by a stifling environment of inflation, unemployment, and systemic corruption where one must pay a bribe just to get a passport or a labor permit.

Dixit offered a sharp analysis of Nepal's unique political landscape. Unlike recent movements in Bangladesh or Sri Lanka that fought against tyrants, he observed that Nepal's youth are fighting against a "functioning but flawed democracy." He contrasted this with India, suggesting that the neighboring state avoids similar youth explosions by directing public rage toward religious...



**But in human history, when there is tyranny, or when press freedom is curbed, the youth are the first to come out. They have energy, they have rage, and their hopes and aspirations for the future are crushed.**

**Meaning, inside the youth, that rage was so stifled (ukus mukus), it was just waiting to boil over... And their outlet was going abroad. We were exporting our outrage.**

...nationalism and manufactured external enemies. He argued that in Nepal, the pressure inside the youth was so intense, "ukus mukus," that it was just waiting to boil over, but for years, the country managed to avoid this explosion by simply "exporting our outrage" through mass migration.

Looking to the future, Dixit saw a glimmer of hope in the upcoming elections, provided that new voices who understand Gen Z sentiments are given space. Economically, he agreed with previous speakers that Nepal must pivot toward a "knowledge economy" and global services exports to survive. He concluded with a defense of the mainstream media, often criticized as the "12 Brothers," reminding the audience that the public's awareness of the very corruption scandals fueling today's anger was originally brought to light by investigative journalists.

# GUEST SPEAKER

## MR. RAM GURUNG

Mr. Ram Gurung began his address by candidly admitting that the recent Gen Z movement made him question the completeness of his own PhD work on social movements. Feeling like he had "missed out" by finishing his research too early, he started collecting data from September 7 to September 14, gathering pamphlets and newspaper clippings to understand why this explosion of youth anger occurred. While media narratives often focused on "corruption," Gurung's own data analysis revealed a deeper, more specific trigger: "unfair opportunity"



He titled his talk "Screen to Street," describing how this movement bypassed traditional methods of committee formations and alliances, moving rapidly from digital platforms like Discord and Instagram directly to street protests. He argued that this generation, whom he calls "Nava-Yuwa" (New Youth) or "Autonomous Individuals," is challenging the old political syndicates not out of ideology, but out of a desperate need for opportunity and certainty. He described their daily reality as one of constant uncertainty, whether it's not knowing how long a government recommendation will take, when university admission will happen, or even the price of a bottle of water.

Gurung's sociological lens offered a sharp critique of the state's failure to manage the massive transition of the population away from agriculture. He noted that over the last 30 years, nearly 60% of the population left farming, but the state failed to integrate them into new professions. Instead, this displaced population was either forced into migration, absorbed into the orbit of contractors, or turned into "Jhole" (blind cadres) for political parties. He poignantly asked why even the children of...

...these loyal party workers joined the Gen Z movement, suggesting that the betrayal of opportunity runs deep, even within the political machinery itself.

He concluded with a warning that the current movement is likely just the beginning. Gurung argued that unless the state addresses the fundamental desire of youth to be treated as true citizens, rather than subjects who must bribe peons just to get basic services, another revolt is inevitable. He predicted this next eruption could happen in as little as six months to a year and a half, fueled by the continuing question of whether diverse citizens like "Tashi" or "Ram Gurung" truly belong.



**But in my Atlas, I found the phrase 'unfair opportunity' to be massively repeated... Corruption might be the tip of the iceberg... And looking for where that 'unfair opportunity' is... the 'A-class' licenses distributed by the rural municipality... the boys who flock there for economic [reasons], and those excluded from it... In these small things, that 'unfair opportunity' has been injected somewhere there.**

**I am pretty sure another revolt will happen... Until we take this down to the ground level and connect it with the top... another Gen Z revolt can happen. I don't know the timeframe. It could be 1.5 years or 6 months.**

# GUEST SPEAKER

## MS. TASHI LHAZOM



Ms. Tashi Lhazom, a climate justice activist and filmmaker representing the Gen Z voice, began her address by recounting a mix of pride and fear she felt at a recent international conference. When a delegate from South Africa approached her with deep respect, saying "It's an honor to meet you," she realized the global weight of Nepal's youth movement.

However, this recognition came with a "scary" realization: while the movement fought to deepen democracy and demand transparency, it also found itself battling internal threats from those who wanted to scrap the constitution entirely.

Responding directly to Dr. Gauchan's earlier comment about youth being like "Kumbhakarna" waking up from hibernation, Ms. Lhazom firmly disagreed. She argued that the youth were never asleep; their resistance simply took different forms, such as leaving the country. She described mass migration not as abandonment, but as an act of resistance against a state that offered no opportunities. She criticized the government for scolding youth for leaving ("who will build the country?") without ever creating an environment where they could build it.

Ms. Lhazom painted a stark picture of the "futile, fruitless democracy" her generation has grown up in. Unlike previous generations, Gen Z has never lived under a non-democratic regime, yet the democracy they experience is one of "Partytantra" (party rule) and kleptocracy (rule by thieves). She argued that the state has become the property of political parties rather than the people, where power is accessible only to those with party affiliations. This "unconditional loyalty" demanded by parties has eroded critical thinking, prompting the youth to take to the streets because they know they deserve better...



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# Q&A WITH AUDIENCE



## QUESTIONS

1

**Audience Member (Dikshya Chudhal):**

Hello everyone, my name is Dikshya Chudhal, and I am currently studying Development Studies. My question is for Dr. Biswash Gauchan sir. Nepali youth today are more politically conscious than ever. We are questioning corruption and engaging in movements. We are trying to hold power accountable. However, at the same time, we have to face a lot of unemployment, limited opportunities, and the cost of living is very high. So, how can Nepal prevent this political awakening among Gen Z from turning into frustration and disappointment? Because hope also needs some assurance or evidence, not just promises. Especially when our economy is not so certain. So, how do you address that?

2

**Audience Member (Abhishek Basnet):**

Namaste, my name is Abhishek Basnet. My question is to all speakers and panelists. And by the way, thank you for your presentations, I learned a lot from it. My question is about a pretty specific contemporary issue which I have been puzzled by. So I am hoping you can help shed more light and insight into it. That issue is recently our Durga Prasai jyu was arrested by the government. They kept him for a few days, I think court orders have released him now, but the police incarcerated him for a few days. And the charge was spreading anarchy, giving aggressive expressions, basically public disorder was the charge against him. Now the reason I am puzzled about this is, similarly, another individual of ours is Mahesh Basnet. By the way, no relation of mine, thankfully. So, he has also spoken equally aggressively, even more frighteningly in my view. Because Mahesh Basnet, his boss, and his party... Regarding this revolution that happened... he gave expressions invalidating it, calling it an unconstitutional government, calling for reinstating parliament, calling the activists rioters and to jail them... and "we will go burn their houses"... such frightening expressions he has given. Which is kind of invalidating this revolution.

Durga Prasai's [campaign] has been going on for two-three years, and I don't think he is against this revolution or against this government. Yet, the government found it wise to put Mr. Prasai in custody, but Mr. Basnet is still walking free. So this dichotomy... My question is what are your views on this dichotomy and how do you think the Nepali people should view this? Can you help us understand it? And lastly, what suggestions if any do you have to the government on this matter? Thank you.

3

**Audience Member (Arjun Thapa):**

Namaste, I am Arjun Thapa. Previously, what Dr. Gauchan said about the "sleeping generation"... I think rather than the Gen Z generation, he meant millennials. I felt like we were actually in hibernation. You guys [Gen Z] rise on time.

My question is also for Tashi ji. After your uprising, different new political parties are being registered, it's very scattered. For example, according to our Political Parties Act, after the election, a 3% threshold needs to be crossed to become a national-level political party. Even as an MP, one must belong to that party. In that situation... the established political parties, if they go into pre-election alliances again... and the new parties go scattered... How do you see the next election? The next five years, Nepal's future... how hopeful are you? I personally doubt, that what we hoped for might not happen, because new parties are sitting scattered, and if old parties do a pre-election alliance, then how much can we hope for in our next election? My question is this. Thank you.

4

**Audience Member (Sagar Bishwokarma):**

Hello everyone, Namaste. My name is Sagar Bishwokarma, and I am from the Central Department of Economics. My question is for Dr. Gauchan sir. Sir spoke about aggregate demand in the beginning. He mentioned aggregate demand has decreased over the past three years. I feel aggregate demand in Nepal decreased right after COVID-19. And in the last three years, it has decreased a bit aggressively. But in these four-five years, our macroeconomic policy, under which monetary policy and fiscal policy come, is somewhat liberalized or supportive to the private sector. Policies promoting investment have come... even then, what do you think is the reason for aggregate demand not increasing? And in the short term, in these coming three-four years, if we need to increase aggregate demand, what kind of fiscal policy and monetary policy should come? I would like to request you to shed light on this subject. Thank you.



**Dr. Biswas Gauchan:**

Thank you. I would like to start from the last question, regarding aggregate demand.

Rather than from COVID, the major difference in trajectory in aggregate demand was actually from this inflection year, which is 2021-22. If you look at the trend up to 2021-22, one year of COVID affected it significantly, 19-20. But in the subsequent two years before this inflection point, it recovered immediately. The indicator for that is credit and import. If you look at both, the slowdown that happened in the COVID year was compensated in the next two years. But because of structural issues, after that, it is going down. We have to distinguish that. I have said this repeatedly. And the great aggregate demand collapse was coming from the investment side. Investment has shrunk massively. It's not only that growth is low, but it is negative. Last year, I think it was more than 2%. Now, again... we are already in the "new normal." New normal means it's going to stay there for years.

Therefore, we cannot address this overnight. Structural issues always take time. And serious structural reform should happen. That's where IIDS is championing. We have been saying for a long time, now is the time for second-generation reform. All these inefficiencies, misallocation of resources... which the political economy has allocated... inefficient allocation, wrong projects, too many projects... all those things... have negatively impacted our economic growth and job employment. And to address this structurally... that means on the fiscal side, monetary side, on all sides... we need a serious reform. Now regarding monetary policy... I didn't say monetary policy because it's more about interest rate monetary policy... that influences demand. But in our case, the policy rate doesn't work. It's actually neutral. It doesn't work.

Therefore, regarding credit policy... I have a slight grievance that at this time when we need to push forward structural reform, we are stopping that. Especially with the new Governor coming... I think it's very easy to be popular... a bit difficult decisions... no one wants to take... probably no one wants to take that risk. But we need serious reform, that means the current credit policy... actually, to a large extent, Nepal's current problem coming is from the banking side. Even with 20% credit growth over three decades, there is no economic growth and no employment. Because the banking sector itself was the key factor for misallocation of resources. Therefore, reform must happen on the monetary or credit side as well. Somehow that has stalled. We need to address that.

And regarding the first question... what for the youth?

We said it earlier... Nepal cannot develop from just two sectors. Tourism creates employment, yes... but tourism also has a limitation in Nepal's context. Then, if we export hydropower, there won't be local value addition. It goes only as export, and won't generate [jobs]. If we use our electricity, it can create... it'll have a subsequent impact. Without that... if we only export... there won't be value addition, we will only have export earnings...

...Therefore, our economy is only 44 billion dollars. If we only cater to internal production demand... how much will it be? Maybe 80... it might double. Double means only 3000 per capita. Therefore, we have to be part of the global value chain. And in the context of current digitalization, Nepali youth sitting here can be part of the global value chain. And our study done two years ago has already shown that. We are doing a refresher 2.0 regarding that... that is one path. Similarly, we need to identify many other sectors, opportunities, and engage youth in them for employment. Okay?

**Moderator (Dharmendra Lekhak):**

Thank you. Regarding the question about Durga ji's arrest and Mahesh ji... I request our three guests to give their views on this.

**Kunda Dixit:**

I am the oldest here. I am Gen O. O for Old. That is a question to be asked to Om Aryal. But there is double standards there, you can see that clearly. What must have happened now is... The Prime Minister has met journalists and she has said, my single-minded focus is elections. I won't step back even a day from holding the election and handing over. So that's her main focus and that's what she wants to achieve. Any kind of protest on the streets by Mahesh Basnet or UML or whoever... is going to disrupt it. And if it escalates, the election might have to be postponed or maybe it won't happen. And that is unthinkable because it will mean that we go back 20 years. So to prevent that, maybe he hasn't been arrested yet, I feel. So why are they speaking aggressively? Because they don't want their leader, the party leader, to be arrested for the September 8 massacre. Twenty people were killed, right? Someone has to take responsibility. To avoid taking that responsibility... being taken to court, convicted, and sent to jail... to prevent that, they are speaking aggressively now. And perhaps understanding that, maybe he hasn't been arrested. In my opinion. Regarding Durga Prasai... because of his old links with the royalists... that might be a bit more... and regarding the Chaitra (March/April) protest too, his activities should be looked at in context.

**Ram Gurung:**

Kunda Sir has already spoken, but my observation is... it makes a difference based on the aggressive speech including the political party vs. the aggressive speech outside the political party. Mahesh Basnet truly... based on our social culture... the way he is speaking cannot be accepted politically either. socially it's something that incites riots, so it's not acceptable at all. Despite that, the government not arresting him... because he has a large party organization, giving advice from inside, scolding, inciting... everything is within that. In that sense, because of the structural possibility of controlling him when needed... Mahesh Basnet, despite being so anarchic socially and culturally, doesn't seem that strong politically to me. In that sense, arresting Durga Prasai might be good because his way of operating is not organized... and his destination is not well-thought-out... arresting him might be better... and let's hope this doesn't have a political meaning. Thank you.

**Moderator (Dharmendra Lekhak):**

Considering the time limit, now lastly, Tashi ji has two questions. This one question, plus the one Arjun ji asked about political party registration, 3% vote threshold, Gen Z being divided... how do you ensure that? I request you to address both.

**Tashi Lhazom:**

Thank you. Regarding Mahesh Basnet-related things, that's what you should ask Om Aryal Sir. We are also asking him the same thing. And from Gen Z's perspective on the election... the election is something neither sought nor asked for, but it has become something we have to do. We didn't aim to topple the government or make it collapse. We wanted more democracy. But when Sushila [likely referring to a political figure/official]... Prime Minister... Speaker... Prime Minister said that... it felt like, "Eh, election is the top priority for us, and Gen Z is a secondary mandate, secondary." When saying that... it felt slightly... "Because we are ready to become Prime Minister but not ready to fulfill our mandate"... that feeling is coming to us. That shouldn't be the case. Equally important... and it is necessary to have it during election time. Because again, we fought for more democracy. And if there is no election in democracy, what happens? It's difficult. And regarding the question he raised... about Gen Z registering a new party every day... or such things are happening. Initially, I want to say that Gen Z are politically not homogeneous. Thinking is not the same. But just because of that, we don't have to be fragmented. It's okay to have different political parties, but we need to go forward building an alliance, united in one place, I say.

I say again, we are not thinking the same politically. Because we grew up differently, our exposure, our political thinking itself is shaped by our experiences. Experiences are not the same. So that is why we are different-different products today. We are Gen Z in terms of age. So we need to be united because our goal is to take down the old legacy parties, which feel like political bullying in the Nepali political environment. Because in my 25 years of existence, I have been seeing the faces of 3-4 people repeatedly. Is that a democracy for me? That my option is only four people? Or only three people? That is not it...

So that's why we need to defeat them. To defeat them, we have to find a common ground, somehow... new forces and those with new thoughts need to unite. The reason that some of the Gen Z political leaders we haven't taken our political alliance right now is because we are strategically negotiating that... you have to lose. If you lose, it becomes easier for us to go to whichever party. So we are trying our best to do that. Because the goal is, as you asked... why let the old party come again? But this is not to say that Gen Z is against the old political parties. Gen Z is against the way in which old political parties are functioning within themselves and the way they function the nation. So that's what I wanted to say.

**Moderator (Dharmendra Lekhak):**

Thank you. Due to time constraints, we wanted to do three more rounds, but that doesn't seem possible. We have lunch hour. I thank the guests.

# CLOSING REMARKS

## DR. SWARNIM WAGLE

Dr. Swarnim Wagle began by urging the audience to view the current "Gen Z" movement with humility and historical perspective. Quoting Isaac Newton's famous line, "If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants," he warned against the dangerous "Year Zero" mentality, similar to Pol Pot's disastrous regime in Cambodia, where history is erased to start fresh. He reminded the youth that today's establishment figures were once the radical "Gen Z" of their time. He pointed out that Nepal's first Communist Prime Minister, Manmohan Adhikari, was a student rebel during the Quit India Movement, and that leaders like Sher Bahadur Deuba and K.P. Oli began as fiery student activists.



Dr. Wagle shared fascinating, humanizing anecdotes about Nepal's current leaders to illustrate this cycle. He recounted how Sher Bahadur Deuba spent two years at the London School of Economics (LSE) under the mentorship of the famous professor Fred Halliday. Wagle shared a humorous story from a lady in the audience about Halliday recalling Deuba as a shy student who had to be encouraged to "find a girlfriend" and whose main qualification for being in the UK was his time spent in Nepali prisons.

Turning to the other side of the political spectrum, Wagle spoke of the "superiority complex" or perhaps "megalomania" that comes from self-study in prison, referring to...

...K.P. Oli's 14 years of incarceration 4. He also humorously noted that he once fact-checked President Ram Chandra Paudel's claim of spending 14 years in jail by analyzing his CV, calculating it closer to 12 years.

Dr. Wagle reflected on his own experience as a "Gen Z" during the 1990 People's Movement. He vividly described being a 15-year-old student, walking through the pitch-black streets of Budhanilkantha during blackout protests, chanting the "Saraswati Bandana" prayer out of fear. He recalled the visceral thrill of tuning into the BBC on shortwave radio, amidst static and "wheee-wheee" sounds, to hear reports of protests and casualties because the state media was censored 7. He used this memory to validate the current youth's anger while reminding them that previous generations also fought for change, only to lose their way later - a fate he warned today's youth to avoid.

Transitioning to a hard-hitting economic analysis, Dr. Wagle introduced the concept of "Missing GDP." He argued that after the restoration of democracy in the early 90s, Nepal saw growth rates of 6-8%. Had that momentum been sustained, Nepal's economy today would be worth \$100 billion with a per capita income of over \$3,000. Instead, due to bad governance and instability, the economy is stuck at \$45 billion. He declared that \$50 billion has essentially "gone missing" - the direct cost of political failure...

### He framed Nepal's current challenges through the "Three E's":

**Exclusion:** The internal divide based on caste, gender, and geography.

**Existence:** The geopolitical challenge of surviving between rising powers like India and China.

**Extraction:** An economic model defined by exploitation, rent-seeking, and "cabals and cartels."

...

Dr. Wagle expanded the discussion to include a "Judicial Angle," arguing that justice in Nepal requires "setting" (connections) and that the innocent often rot in jail. He shared an insight from a recent visit to Ravi Lamichhane in prison, noting that the prison was run efficiently by the prisoners themselves, convicts of murder and rape managing a disciplined "jail economy" that the police could not encroach upon...

He also diagnosed the stagnation in Nepal's bureaucracy as a cultural hangover from history, where a "Jagir" (job/land) was given as a reward for fighting wars. This has created a mindset where public office is viewed as a reward rather than a service. He added that bureaucrats from rural backgrounds often suffer from extreme risk aversion,

Finally, Dr. Wagle offered concrete solutions. He argued that democracy in Nepal isn't failing because there is too much of it, but because it is incomplete - limited to periodic elections ("Ek thaan chunab") without the true rule of law. To address deep-rooted inequality, he proposed flipping the current political focus on old-age allowances to "infant allowances." He argued that investing in nutrition and care during the "First 1000 Days" of a child's life is the only way to ensure that a Dalit child in Dailekh has the same cognitive and physical foundation as a child born in an aristocratic Kathmandu family. He concluded by pointing to the "Knowledge Economy" and digitalization as Nepal's salvation. Because digital services are "weightless and distance-less," they allow Nepal to bypass its landlocked geography and connect directly to the global market.



**Democracy isn't failing because of too much democracy. It's because democracy wasn't enough. It was an 'incomplete democracy' that was fought against... But the 'Life and Soul' of democracy we must seek is Rule of Law. Nobody is above the law.**

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