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# No oil for Oli

In the 60 years since Nepal and China established diplomatic relations, 12 Nepali prime ministers, three kings and a president have visited China. On Sunday, Prime Minister K P Oli will be the 13th.

Oli is meeting Chinese President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang before heading to

Hainan to attend the Boao Forum for Asia. In Beijing, he will sign new deals on trade, transit, banking and road connectivity. But the much-hyped petroleum deal under which Nepal is expecting to import one-third of its oil needs from China is not looking possible.

A highly-placed source at

the Ministry of Foreign Affairs told Nepali Times: "We will discuss the memorandum of understanding that Foreign Affairs Minister Kamal Thapa signed with China to import fuel, but an agreement to this effect is not in the PM's agenda."

However, we have learnt that the petroleum agreement had been on the list of talking points of all meetings that Oli held to prepare for his China visit until a few days ago. "I don't know why it is suddenly no longer on the list," an Oli aide told us.

After India's crippling five-month blockade, there is pressure on Oli to diversify energy imports, and reduce Nepal's overwhelming dependence on India. Madan Regmi of the Kathmandu-based China Study Centre says: "We must strengthen our relations with China and have alternatives against future blockades."

Oli has shown that he understands realpolitik. He visited New Delhi last month and his government has also gone out of its way to assure India that Nepal is not playing 'the China card'. And now, he is no longer interested in a deal which he himself fervently pushed.

Coincidentally, Oli met the Indian Minister of External Affairs Sushma Swaraj and Foreign Secretary S Jaishankar in Pokhara on Wednesday at a SAARC event two days before leaving for China.

Meanwhile, Laxman Lal Karna of the Tarai Madhes Democratic Party told Nepali Times: "We are meeting the Chinese ambassador on Friday to explain why we are fighting the Nepali state." Madhesi protesters had burnt Chinese flags to protest Beijing's gift of 1,000 tons of petroleum during the height of the blockade last year.

Most analysts believe that the sudden suspension of the petroleum deal is less because of logistics and lack of infrastructure and more because of Indian pressure. And it looks like the bruising blockade means that Nepal's leaders have got the message and there is little they can do.

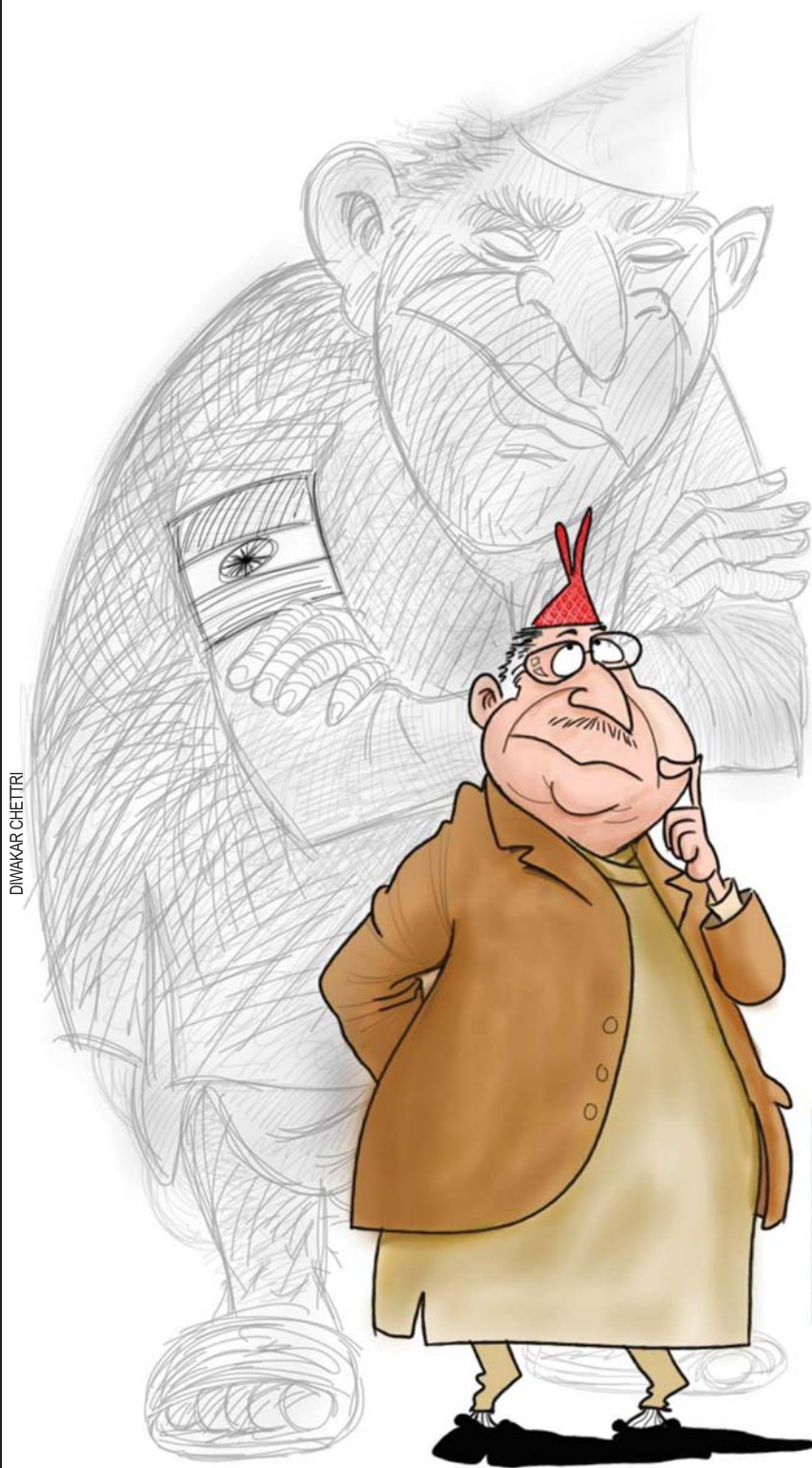
Former ambassador Bhekh Bahadur Thapa says that although the blockade has ended, Nepal-India relations will take time to normalise. "We are at a point where it is not

warm enough to take off our winter clothes and it is not cool enough to take off our summer clothes," he quipped.

Thapa thinks it would be too much to expect a great leap forward in Nepal-China relations during the Oli visit. He added: "Beijing can take advantage of Nepal's increased distance from India, but is unlikely to help us at the cost of angering New Delhi."

Om Astha Rai

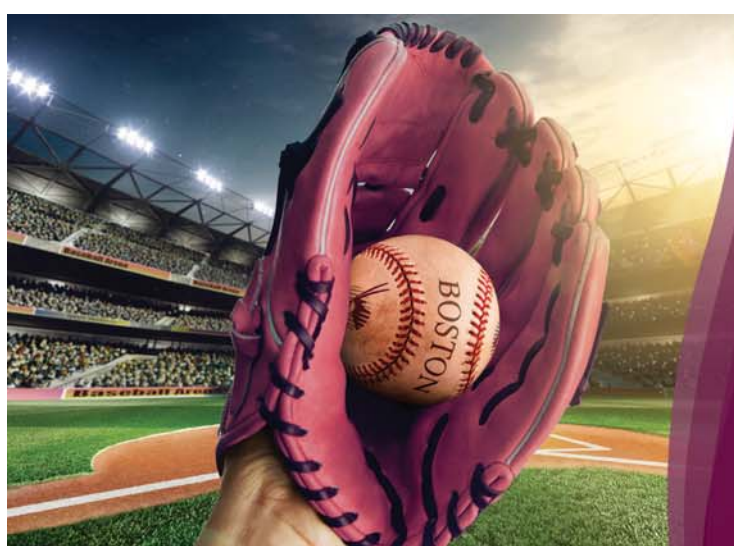
**THE CHINA SYNDROME**  
EDITORIAL  
PAGE 2



**NEWAR MUSLIMS**  
of KATHMANDU

BY SEULKI LEE

PAGE 14-15



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GOING PLACES TOGETHER



# THE CHINA SYNDROME

Prime Minister Oli’s main task is to restore China’s trust in Nepal’s future stability

After his fence-mending visit to India last month, Prime Minister K P Oli embarks on an official visit to China this weekend during which he will also attend the Boao Forum for Asia in Hainan.

Although he bungled the fast-track constitution that led to a breakout of violence in the Tarai, and he was unable (or unwilling) to get the Indians to lift their five-month blockade, we have to give the man credit -- somewhat grudgingly -- for being an astute politician. He has pulled it off.

First, he wangled an invitation to New Delhi (where to say that he wasn’t particularly liked would be an understatement), craftily exploiting the Narendra Modi government’s need to find a face-saving exit from a purposeless and counterproductive blockade. To the domestic gallery, Oli projected himself as a Nepali leader who, for once, went to New Delhi on his own terms and gave nothing away.

The fact that the visit was largely symbolic and the agreements signed were merely for delayed and pending projects seemed not to matter. The deal to buy an extra 80MW of power from India was no breakthrough, but the PMO spinmeisters presented it as such. Oli played the nationalism card to the hilt, and although the blockade hit Nepal hard economically, it bolstered the prime minister’s domestic standing.

It is therefore a much more confident Oli who on Sunday is getting on board a plane that the Chinese government is reportedly sending out to Kathmandu to fetch him. He will meet President Xi Jinping, extend an invitation for him to visit Nepal later this year and discuss deals on trade, transit and development.

There will be those who will be tempted to make much more out of this visit than is warranted. This is not the time for Nepal’s leader to thumb his nose at India. New Delhi’s paranoid nationalists would also do well not to take the visit as proof of Chinese inroads into Nepal. Even if the Chinese were making inroads into Nepal, New Delhi has only itself



to blame. What is a blockaded Nepal to do?

Even so, Prime Minister Oli would be well-advised not to play the China card. It hasn’t worked since King Mahendra used it in the early 1960s soon after the Sino-India War to chart a path of geostrategic equidistance between China and India.

Much water has flowed down the Tsang Po since then, and the doctrine that prevails today is a clear demarcation

by New Delhi and Beijing of their spheres of influence along the Himalayan arc. The two Asian giants may be aligned to opposite global strategic alliances, but they see advantages to keeping their Himalayan border disputes in deep freeze and not competing for supremacy here. In fact, since Chairman Mao’s time, the Chinese have told visiting Nepali leaders to be smart in dealing with India and not let tensions escalate.

Which is why successive rulers in Kathmandu who have tried to play China off against India have all come to grief. Chinese and Indian leaders are known to consult each other regularly over political developments in Nepal, and President Xi and visiting Prime Minister Modi even went to the extent of deciding by themselves on the Lipu Lekh border trijunction dispute without consulting Nepal in Beijing last year. And despite gifting 1,000 tons of petroleum to Nepal in October, it was clear that Beijing was not going to jeopardise its trade ties with India over the latter’s blockade of Nepal. China did not venture beyond symbolism in rushing to Nepal’s rescue.

And it looks like the much-touted petroleum import agreement that would have met one-third of Nepal’s oil needs is doomed. An MoU to that effect has apparently been struck off the agenda at the last moment. No prizes for guesing why. Prime Minister Oli has probably figured out by now that there are limits to how far China can, or will, go with Nepal. And he seems to have understood New Delhi’s sensitivities, by first visiting New Delhi and also sending Foreign Minister Kamal Thapa to assuage the Indians that he is not going to use the China card against India. New Delhi, for its part, has to be less insecure, and not get all worked up about every Nepal-China dealing.

If PM Oli wants to be seen as a statesman, he must first restore China’s trust in a coherent leadership in Nepal, convince Beijing about ensuring political stability, and pitch for Chinese trade, tourism and investment for growth.

Times

THIS WEEK

OMASTHARAI

**Most reached on Facebook**  
No relief by Sahina Shrestha  
2.5 million earthquake survivors have waited one year for help while the Reconstruction Authority discusses procedures and guidelines. (11,796 people reached)

**Most shared on Facebook**  
No relief by Sahina Shrestha  
(110 shares)

**Most popular on Twitter**  
Birganj for beginners by Dambar K Shrestha  
(43 retweets, 90 favourites)

**Most visited online page**  
No relief by Sahina Shrestha  
(1,344 views)

**Most commented**  
No relief by Sahina Shrestha

YOUR SAY

www.nepalitimes.com

**NO RELIEF**

If you cannot work, you should not stop others from working ('No relief', Sahina Shrestha, #799). But our National Reconstruction Authority, led by a henchman of the Prime Minister, is neither working nor allowing others to work.

Namita Lamichhane

**MONEY MIND**

The key element this article does not touch upon is how Nepalis have been indifferent to what the leaders are doing. ('Money mind', Bidushi Dhungel, #799). We are the ones who let these rats out and ruin the country. So why blame them?

Abhishek Bhandari

**JUDICIAL MATCH-FIXING**

Binata Dahal's lament on the Supreme Court judicial nominations ('Judicial match fixing', Binata Dahal, #798) for pure, Brahmanesque intellectual nominations to the SC fails to acknowledge the realities of the 30-year context in which the nominees have spent their careers: a barely-functioning structure of civil society, dysfunctional governance during Maoist insurgency, and the lengthy CA process. The lawmakers need to be assessed primarily on the record of their past actions and achievements, not on abstract speculations of ideological allegiances. This pragmatic approach to select capable law makers with a proven track record of public service has hopefully been the primary drive behind Chief Justice Kalyan Shrestha's nominations,

Stephan Kocher

**WHAT NEXT IN MADHES?**

Madhesi leaders must listen to Madhesi people before announcing a new agitation ('What next in Madhes', Jiyalal Sah, #799). People in the Tarai region suffered the most from the strike and blockade that dragged on for half a year. If Madhesi parties ignore the voices of their own people, they will face the consequences in the next elections.

Ravi Sharma

and if so reinforces the integrity of the judiciary rather than weakens it.

LT Sherpa

**NATIONAL HOLIDAY INDEX**

The Ass is right that our civil services, schools and industries enjoy too many holidays ('Gross national holiday index', the Ass, #799). But the reality is even more terrible. Even when government offices are open, people queue up for hours. Even when schools are open, teachers are busy in political activity.

R. Bista

Times

nepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll #800

Q. How do you rate the performance of the Reconstruction Authority so far?

Total votes: 195

■ Good 7.49%

■ Bad 77.19%

■ Don't know 15.32%

Weekly Internet Poll #801

To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. How do you rate the importance of Prime Minister KP Oli's visit to china?

Times

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# Noble ends through noble means

The blockade might have been lifted, but we are nowhere close to addressing real Madhesi grievances

The five-month blockade came to an end in much the same manner as it started. Nobody knows for sure what prompted such a drastic course of action on India's part, or what led to its lifting. We can only speculate.

For that matter, 25 years later, we still don't know the reason behind the 1989 Indian blockade either. Many things have changed in the intervening years but what hasn't changed is a passive acceptance of reality.



**THIS IS IT**  
Rubeena Mahato

Nepal's political leadership has accepted it as a given that such interventions are part and parcel of our existence. We do not seem interested in understanding the trigger factors or underlying causes. What is more important for us, it seems, is to bargain our way around such events when they occur. And so the blockade might have been lifted, but we are nowhere close to addressing the real issues, let alone resolving them.

In this space I have been vocal against the use of violent means and terror tactics during the Madhes movement, and

have been unequivocal in my condemnation of the border blockade. It was actually suicidal for the Madhesi parties to let a foreign country get involved in what should have been their struggle. However, I also believe that Madhesis have every right to demand equal treatment and dignity from the government as well as from their fellow citizens, and that the

movement should continue in more constructive forms.

The blockade became an opportunity for some to display their racist intolerance towards Madhesis and dismiss their experiences of discrimination and exclusion. As a Madhesi, it was shocking to see the extent of denial that plagues the privileged circles of Kathmandu who see no reason for Madhesis or any other community to complain.

They cannot believe how ungrateful the Madhesis have been after all the adjustments the government has made to accommodate them in government and state institutions. For them, the action of some is enough to question the loyalty of millions of Madhesis who had no part to



play in enforcing the blockade. Madhesis were seen to be causing unnecessary trouble, and there was a fear that even after the blockade was lifted the sentiment could persist.

We cannot and should not justify the actions that caused the Tarai to burn for five months. Secessionist and violent rhetoric espoused by some fringe groups are unacceptable, but I can

understand why a section of Madhesi youth got radicalised in the way they did.

Every Madhesi has a story of the constant belittlement and everyday racism. Things have improved in the last decade because of growing literacy, mobility and exposure as well as the first Madhes Movement of 2007, but Madhesis are only a few questions or insults away from a painful reminder of their status.

While other communities in Nepal face discrimination too, it is only the Madhesis whose nationalities are questioned on a regular basis. Simply expecting the Madhesis to change their behaviour and expectations while the state and society continue their old ways will not be a solution.

One way to address such grievances is for the state to introduce more inclusive policies, as it has been doing. What is even more important though, are gestures that communicate that the state is serious about correcting past wrongs. In some cases it can be simply an acknowledgement or apology. At a societal level, it can be dedicated efforts to reshape discourses and narratives about national identity through constructive and meaningful conversations.

Now that frayed nerves have

been calmed and both parties are in a position to gain some perspective of their actions, it is a good time to get these conversations going. Nepalis are generally tolerant, and we saw in the past six months that despite repeated provocations and hate speech Madhesi and Pahadi communities did not succumb to them. The journey from tolerance to acceptance is not that long if instead of presiding on hatred, suspicion and shaming, we promote conversations rooted in trust, respect and forgiveness.

The first step would be acceptance on the part of other Nepalis that Madhesis have been subjected to historical injustices and discrimination, and that Kathmandu should take steps to end them. The second would be for Madhesi ringleaders and supporters of the blockade to realise that noble ends demand noble means.

There is now a real opportunity to build up this movement in a way it should have started: as a peaceful, dignified and meaningful struggle to achieve the rightful place of Madhesis in Nepali society. The movement will only grow stronger if it sheds the burden of violence, and it is time the Madhesi civic leadership reclaim ownership of the movement in a way that makes this possible.

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The recent arrival of a guest from the West felt like an inquisitive, future alien had somehow landed in my living room. Before I knew it he perused the newspaper and began a litany of questions, asking first what UML stands for.

“You’re kidding, right? United Marxist-Leninists in this day and age? Aren’t they extinct already?” I found myself earnestly explaining the present government was a coalition led by the ‘mainstream, good communists’.

**MOVING TARGET**  
Foreign Hand

“Now, there’s an oxymoron for you. And who are these so-called ‘good’ communists in coalition with?”

“The bad communists.” Upon hearing the Maoists were back in power I noticed his eye furtively check the wall calendar, as if seeking reassurance he hadn’t

entered a time warp circa 1975.

“So, what century are we in here exactly?” Load shedding suddenly plunged the house into darkness, partially answering his question.

“And anyways, weren’t the Maoists badly defeated in the last election?” I nodded mutely, helpless before the absurdity of the situation. My attempt at explaining the Congress betrayal of the alternating leadership deal with the UML, probably at India’s behest, leading to the Maoists being included in the coalition, sounded like gibberish worthy of

a neta. All the while he muttered ‘United Marxist Leninists and Maoists’ under his breath with a chuckle. This was enough, apparently, to reduce any further discussion to a cartoon from the Cold War past.

It’s at times like this one realises our leaders, being quite divorced from 21st century reality, are profoundly unqualified to deal with the modern era and all that means. Nepal has been cast adrift in the currents of world history by its leadership, slowly sinking as the party bosses squabble and loot.

Further questions about aid for the earthquake victims, forever delayed, led to “how can they possibly get away with it?” I agreed it was shocking while gesturing as eloquently as possible, trying to encapsulate a thousand years of chronic neglect in a shrug and a scowl. Instead of letting it go at that and pouring himself another drink, as our political class surely would, he brought up accountability, even suggesting it was in the politicians own interests to help so they’d get re-elected.

That’s when I began wondering which one of us was from Mars.

Further questions as to the blockade’s purpose had me babbling about angry Madhesis, broken promises of equality and a constitution that was rushed through despite its many flaws. “But I read the drafting took over 8 years. You call that rushed?”

Each morning he set out to visit the temples and scenic spots of the Valley, returning home to sing praises of the beautiful sights and wonderful people he’d met before launching his next interrogation. Why are there so many communist parties? Don’t Nepalis know communism has collapsed world-wide? And what about Baburam Bhattarai’s New Force? How can a lifelong Maoist ideologue expect to be taken seriously as a born-again capitalist? Does Prachanda really mean ‘awesome’? What did the blockade achieve for the Madhesis? For Delhi? How could the black market thrive so openly despite being illegal?

I shrugged so often my shoulders began aching. If only he’d spent some time in Nigeria or Pakistan on the way here, I thought to myself, Nepal’s dysfunction might not appear quite so alarming. The fact so many questions went unanswered began taking a toll on both my guest and my liquor cabinet. He was clearly suffering from a severe case of Logic Syndrome, that consuming compulsion to make sense of the inexplicable that’s driven many a Westerner in Asia to drink. The Hand thinks of it as Kathmandu’s version of altitude sickness, with similar symptoms of nausea, confusion and disorientation.

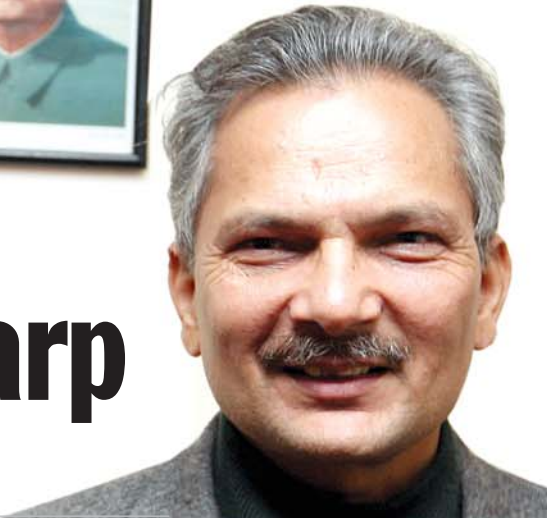
Hiding the morning papers to get a break didn’t help when he began visiting the news-stand and doing further research online.

By the time he discovered the hapless TRC and many cases of war-era crimes being ignored and dismissed it felt like he’d stumbled on a dirty little family secret. Your columnist, of course, had long stopped trying to excuse the inexcusable, amused that his questions proved the citizens of other countries demand much more from their leaders than we do here.

It seems Nepal’s enduring time warp, once rather charming and quaint (Time warp gone wrong, #336) has endured far too long, nurtured by an elite that’s neither willing nor able to change with the times. Worse still, after so many years of abysmal governance this appears almost normal.

Readers don’t need the Hand or any other alien meddler to tell them Nepal has been hijacked by a coterie of highly incompetent individuals who, for all their self-importance and elevated stature locally, would be laughed off the political stage elsewhere. The dysfunction that’s become the local norm is considered totally unacceptable in most places, and I thank my visiting Martian for reminding me it doesn’t have to be this way.

The fact there are so few sensible answers to the many serious questions indicates something’s very wrong with this picture, and perhaps it’s time for the voters to finally demand satisfaction and results from those holding the country back. 🇳🇵



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भर्ना खुल्यो



# Thakali delights

When it comes to homely Nepali food, nothing beats Thakali cuisine



AYESHA SHAKYA

Situated next to Club 25 Hours within the Tangelwood Boutique Hotel premises, Nilgiri Thakali Delights is the newest addition to the Valley's long list of restaurants specialising in Thakali cuisine.

With an extensive menu prepared by Chef Shambhu Basnet, who has been preparing this distinctive trans-Himalayan cuisine for the past 19 years, expectations were high from the start. Instead of jumping straight for the Thakali Khana Sets, we controlled our dal bhat urges and begun with a couple of Nilgiri's specials: Kanchhemba (Rs 210), Sukuti Sandheko (Rs 770) and Sukuti Pla (Rs 590).

The first dish of Sukuti Sandheko was a slight disappointment, as it tasted like any other basic sandheko dish. Garnished with tomatoes, onions and coriander, the only distinct feature of the dish was the lingering aftertaste of the Chyangra meat.

Contrary to its name, the Sukuti Pla comprised less of Sukuti and more of vegetables. Made up of potatoes, beans, sukutu and jimbu, it was more reminiscent of a humble meal made at home rather than a dolled up restaurant dish. Although the flavours were mild, it was better suited to be eaten as a main dish with rice rather than a standalone snack.

While these two dishes did not really strike a chord, the Kanchhemba was a winner. With a crispy exterior and soft filling, the buckwheat fries were truly Thakali and a healthy replacement for the usual fried, oil-dipped snack options.

We then tried the Alankhu (Rs 450), a breakfast soup commonly made in the mountains. Extremely spicy and with a strong taste of the meat, a few sips were enough to leave us sweating and reaching for tissues. While the flavour was bold, this dish is not for the faint of heart.

Since no Thakali meal would be complete without everyone's favourite dal bhat combo, our main course was the Thakali Chicken Khana set (Rs 510). The set came with all the essential elements of a Thakali meal: white rice, *kalo dal*, chicken curry, fried fish curry, *rayo ko saag*, *alu simi*, *gundruk ko achar*, *mula ko achar*, *lapsi ko achar* and *golbeda ko achar*. While the chicken curry was slightly watery, the thick Mustang ko dal more than

made up for it. With two meat options in the same khana set, the variety of fish and chicken in the same dish is a delightful surprise for carnivores.

For guests not keen on white rice, the restaurant serves brown rice (Rs 75) and *dhido* (Rs 100) as well. Apart from chicken, they also have vegetarian and mutton khana set options.

Although slightly on the

pricier side, Nilgiri Thakali Delights boasts good food and great ambience. With its brick styled walls and wooden interiors, the restaurant has a very earthy, Nepali feel, suitable for an upscale restaurant. With its vast selection of items, and mouth watering Khana sets, the restaurant proves that when it comes to homely Nepali food, nothing beats Thakali cuisine. 🇳🇵

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excavators by brick industries, irrigation projects, and civil engineering projects in Nepal.

### Award for Lemon

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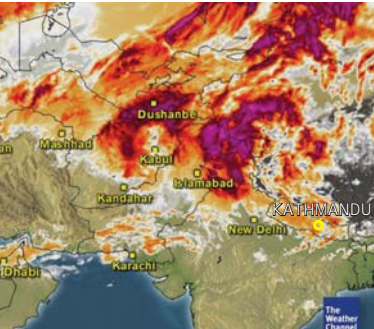


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No matter the time and place, every time Sristi KC heard music growing up she'd get up and dance - it was a creative outlet for self-expression. But when she developed an eye allergy in Grade 8, her doctor failed to warn her about the prolonged use of steroids and KC contracted glaucoma. She lost her eyesight at age 16.

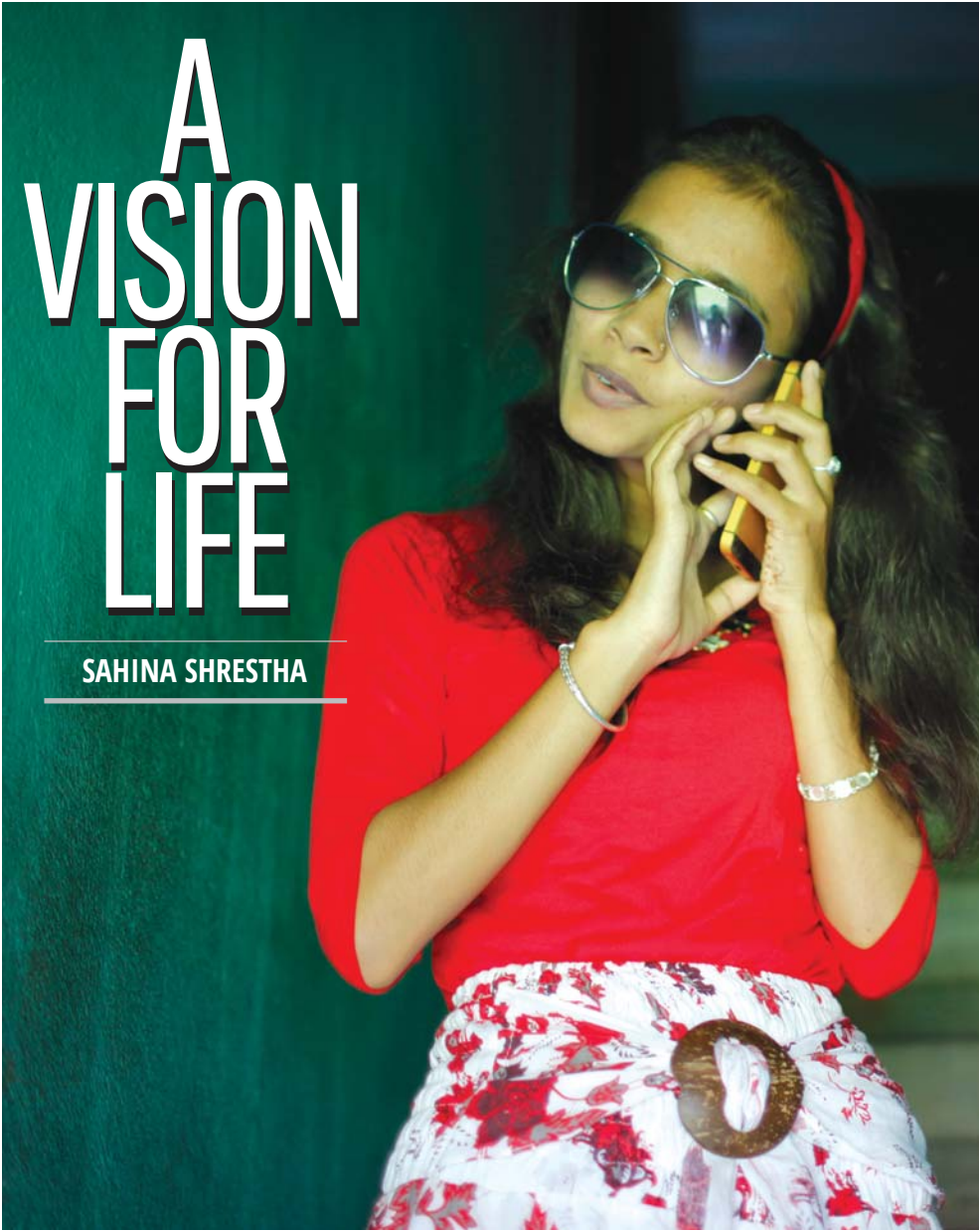
She still retained her passion for dancing, but no dance school was willing to accept her. Worse, no college would give her admission.

"Private colleges didn't want me, they saw me as a drawback," recalled Sristi. She finally got admission to Padma Kanya Campus, but KC had to struggle to keep up with her studies. As someone who lost her eyesight later in life, she didn't know how to read or write Braille.

Yet she persevered and developed tools to help her write, she recorded her lessons and asked her friends and family to read out loud to her. With hard work and help, she earned the highest grades in her class and received the Nepal Chatraa Bidya Padak, a top academic award, from the President. Later, she was also awarded the Arjun Swarna Padak gold medal for the highest scores in Nepali in her Bachelors exam.

"When I first lost my sight, I was dejected. But then I realised that it was only my eyes that were missing and not my hands and my feet," said KC, giving full credit to her mother. Today, the 25-year-old runs Blind Rocks an institute training the visually impaired in interpersonal skills, dance, fashion and adventure sports to change society's attitude towards them.

"When people talk about helping the blind, they usually mean education and jobs. Those are important, but even more important are



life skills blind people need to assimilate into society," KC explained.

When she first started conducting workshops on body language, posture, facial expressions and art forms like singing and dancing, people questioned whether these skills were even needed for the blind. But with more publicity, interest grew even from sighted people.

"The situation of the blind is similar around the world, so I want to empower them and make them proactive members of the society and change the way society views us," KC said. Blind Rocks has conducted workshops abroad also in India, Poland Russia, France, Norway, and Hong Kong.

"I have found that the workshops are better suited for foreign countries because in Nepal we disabled people and our families are too caught up in meeting our basic needs. Skills needed to assimilate and integrate into society takes a back seat," KC added.

KC is currently studying dance and acting at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, and as the only visually impaired student, she has had to come up with innovative ways to take in the lessons. She told us this has made her more determined to open an arts school for the vision impaired in Nepal too.

"I lost my sight but gained a vision for my life," says KC. "To others like me, I want to say that opportunities are out there. All you need to do is reach out."

nepalitimes.com

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BIKRAM RAI

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SMRITI BASNET

SMRITI BASNET

Once again this week, a man refused to give Ichhya KC a bus seat entitled to the handicapped. The visually impaired 45-year-old was infuriated, and called out to a policeman when the bus stopped at a checkpoint in Pharping.

Finally, after the police pointed to the notice that said the seat was reserved for the physically handicapped the man relented.

“If you don’t ask, people don’t offer you the seat 70 per cent of the time,” said KC.

Though KC started losing her vision at five, it never stopped her from building a life for herself, working as a front desk manager with UKAid. But that stint ended last year, and since then the English Literature masters student has struggled to find another job.

KC said: “Even if they don’t say it to my face, I know people are rejecting me because I am blind. Otherwise why would they? I know I am qualified.”

The 2011 Census counted 96,000 visually impaired people in Nepal, with blindness affecting less than 0.5 percent of the population. “More than 70 per cent of the cases are avoidable,” explained Sanduk

**HELPING HANDS:** Kathmandu Sustainable Urban Transport Project’s tactile sidewalks, like this one in Bhadrakali (*above*) was delayed due to the earthquake and blockade.

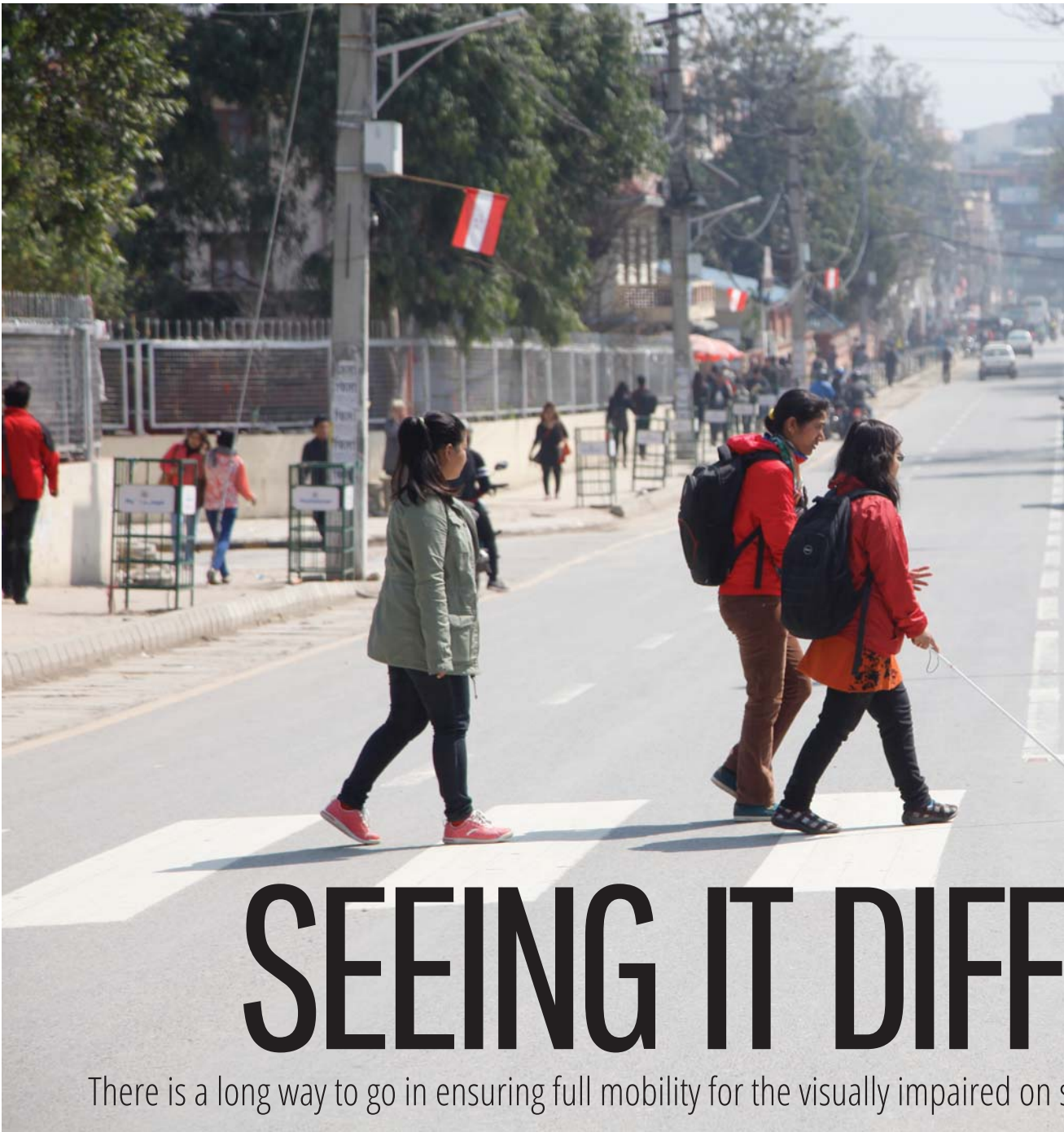
For Ichhya KC (*right*) crossing the street in Kathmandu where zebras are disregarded by motorists, is a nightmare.

Sita Gyawali (*far right*) teaches Braille to students at the Laboratory School which has a dedicated room equipped with Braille slates, stylus and an embosser.

Ruit at the Tilganga Eye Hospital and Nepal’s internationally-renowned cataract surgeon. Nepal’s high blindness rate is due to cataracts, uncorrected refractive errors, and emerging factors like diabetes, glaucoma and trauma, Ruit said. According to WHO Visual Impairment and Blindness global estimates, the prevalence of blindness in India is higher at 0.7 per cent and China 0.6 per cent.

Many have been pressing the government to prioritise awareness and access to education, employment, infrastructure and life skills training for the visually impaired, and although textbooks in Braille from Grade 1-10 have been introduced, the lack of books after SLC is a problem.

“There is no trace of Braille



# SEEING IT DIFF

There is a long way to go in ensuring full mobility for the visually impaired on s

after we complete Grade 10. We can’t write in Braille because teachers don’t understand it,” said Suprabha Aryal, a psychology student at Trichandra Campus. Students like Aryal must depend entirely on classroom lectures and have to arrange for writers to sit with them for exams.

Additionally, annual revisions of textbooks make it hard for organisations like the Nepal Association for the Welfare of the Blind to translate them into Braille.

“Publishers are very market driven, they cater to only sighted children,” says Gopini Pandey, education specialist at Save the Children (SCF).

Laboratory School in Kirtipur, which introduced Braille in its curriculum as far back as 1964, is one of the few schools that provide inclusive education for visually impaired learners. With 53 blind students enrolled this year, six will be appearing for SLC this April.

“The investment is huge, and not every school opts for it,” said teacher Bindiya Shrestha at Laboratory which has a separate resource centre where teachers, both sighted and non-sighted, instruct children using computers equipped with Braille adapted embossers, slates and styluses.

Still, Gopini Pandey at SCF said education is only an entry point and the government should also push for jobs opportunities for the visually impaired. The Public



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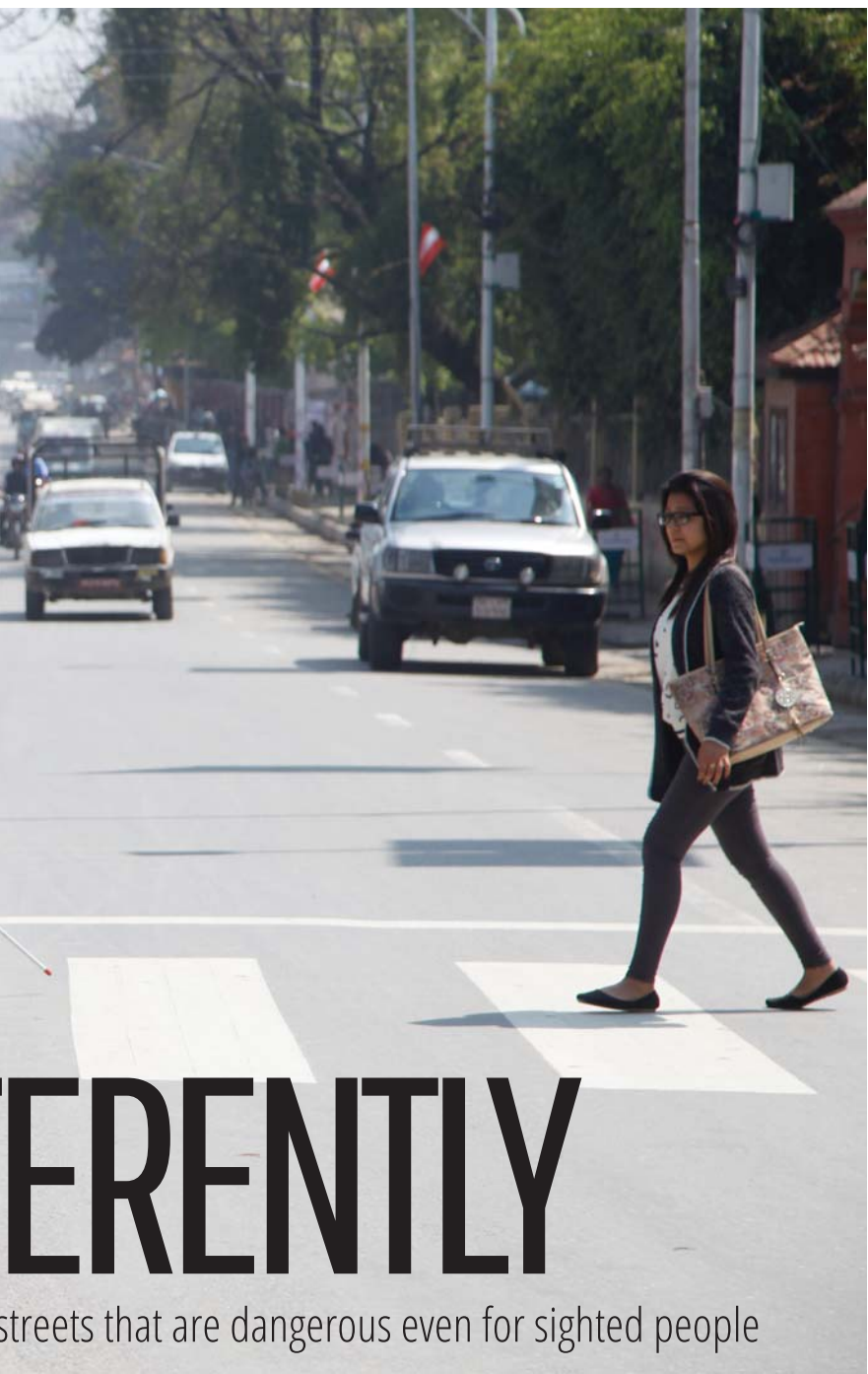


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# DIFFERENTLY

streets that are dangerous even for sighted people

ALL PICS: BIKRAM RAI

Service Commission of Nepal has granted 5 per cent of its budget for people with disabilities and private organisations have also been instructed to hire one person with a disability out of every 25 employees, but there is no monitoring if this is followed.

"We have the policy, what is lacking is its implementation and enforcement," admitted Hum Kala Pandey, Under Secretary of Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare. The government

is trying to catch up with the tactile sidewalks in the city centre, but there is a long way to go in ensuring full mobility for visually impaired people in a city that is dangerous even for sighted people.

Said Kumar Thapa of the Nepal Association for the Welfare of the Blind: "It is very difficult to move around, manholes are left open, there are poles in the middle of the footpath, cars are parked everywhere." 🇳🇵



## Against all odds



When sisters Narayani and Sunita Dawadi (pictured above) both blind since birth, started working as telephone operators at Tribhuvan International Airport, co-workers scoffed.

"They thought we were a burden to them and I was determined to prove myself," recalled Narayani.

Both studied at the Purvanchal School for the Blind in Dharan and Laboratory School in Kirtipur. Narayani has completed her Masters from Dilli Bazar Kanya Campus, while Sunita's thesis is underway.

"Education has played a vital role in our lives. Without education, I would not be able to talk to you or would not know what is going on," said Narayani, who is disappointed about the lack of books in Braille and help in sitting for exams.

However, their conviction and will to become self-reliant have seen them through the challenges and brought them to where they are today. And the sisters' co-workers have changed their mind about them weighting down the office. Eight more jobs openings for the blind have been announced at the airport after management saw their performance.



[nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com)

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## EVENTS



### Holi,

Mark your calendars for the eagerly awaited festival of colors. Join in on the fun as thousands in Kathmandu claim the streets to celebrate the advent of spring with unmatched enthusiasm and fanfare.

*Note: Government has issued a strong warning against the harassment of pedestrians. 22 March*

### Film festival,

Experience European culture and lifestyle with the fifth edition of the European Union Film Festival. Free tickets at the hall on a first come first serve basis on each screening day.

*19 to 24 March, QFX Kumari Hall 1, (01) 44294456,*



### KJC for Kids,

Music lessons, vocal training, ballet dance, beat boxing, arts and more for your kids at the KJC Spring Camp for Kids. For children aged 5 to 11 years old.

*4 to 15 April, 10am to 4pm, Mondays to Fridays, Extended week: 28 March to 1 April, 10am to 2pm Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, Jhamsikhel, (01) 5013554*

### Art for Nature,

Attend an exhibition showcasing artworks of Chitwan National Park's wildlife. *Till 19 March, Taragoon Museum, Boudha, (01) 4491234*

### Art exhibition,

Appreciate the artwork of five Nepali artists done during their residency period at Bindu. More on page 11.

*13 to 29 March, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal, 9818996169*

### Photography for beginners,

Learn the art behind photography in a six-day workshop for beginners. Fee: Rs 4000 + 13% VAT

*6 to 11 April, 2 to 5 pm, photo.circle headquarters, Arun Thapa Chowk, Jhamsikhel, 9818830540, sagar@photocircle.com.np*

### #MyGHT,

Capture, caption and share a picture from your experience on the Great Himalaya Trail with the hashtag #MyGHT.

*Deadline to enter is 25 March at 23.59 (GMT +5.45), www.greathimalayatrails.com/photo-competition/*



### Himalayan Rush,

Gear up for the fifth edition of the Himalayan Rush triathlon series and experience the thrill of trail running, cycling and fresh water swimming.

*26 March, Begnas, Pokhara, (01)5550758/ (01)5550759*

### Master class,

Learn all you need to know about music with composer, pianist and music educator James Miley and his faculty from Willatmette University.

*22 to 28 March, Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, Jhamsikhel, (01) 5013554*

### Trade Expo,

A three-day trade expo organised by the Federation of Women Entrepreneurs Association of Nepal (FWEAN).

*1 to 3 April, 10am to 5pm, Army Officer's Club, Bhadrakali, (01)2003080, fwean.info@gmail.com, www.fwean.org.np*

### MISS MOTI-VATION

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## DINING



### Hyatt Regency,

Join in on the celebration of St Patrick's Day celebration at Hyatt Regency's Rox Bar. The restaurant will be rolling out a delectable a-la carte Irish food menu for the occasion.

A selection of Irish cocktails will be available along with a cash bar throughout the evening. Guests will also be able to enjoy live traditional music by The Mixtapes and relish starters like smoked salmon on Irish soda bread, fish and chips, and Guinness drunken wood fired chicken. So book your tables now, put on green and go Irish.

*18 March, 6.30pm onwards, Hyatt Regency, Boudha. For reservations: (01) 4991234, kathmandu.regency@hyatt.com*

### Hotel Yak & Yeti,

Don't miss out on the poolside fun featuring house music by the resident DJ, barbecue and a wide variety of international beverages.

*Rs. 2000++ per person, 19 March, 12 to 4pm, Hotel Yak & Yeti, Durbar Marg, (01) 4248999 extn: 2865, www.yakandyeti.com*



### Shangri-La Hotel and Resort,

Enjoy your Saturdays with a wide spread of shawarmas and pastas at Shambala Garden and Club Sundhara.

*Rs. 1500 per person, 11 am to 3 pm, Shangri-La Hotel & Resort, Lajimpat, (01) 4412999 Extn. 7508, 7520*

### Cafe Cheeno,

Comfortable and elegant, this is the perfect place to have a cup of coffee and chat with friends on a cold day.

*Patan, (01) 2210423*

### Heritage Kitchen and Bar,

Quick, friendly service, good Thai food, and the charm of a refurbished old Newari building.

*Thamel, (01) 4254343*

## MUSIC

### Cadenza Collective live,

A Friday well spent with Cadenza Collective's Afro-Caribbean tunes.

*Rs. 400, 18 March, 8 pm, House of Music, Thamel, 985-1075172*

### Metal mania,

Blood Bash Festival: bringing together all metal heads of Kathmandu featuring bands Underside, Jugaa, Vomiting Snakes, Dying Out Flames, The Exorcist, Kings Among Men and more.

*19 March, 1pm onwards, Purple Haze Rock Bar, Thamel*



### Album release,

Mark your calendars for singing sensation Rohit John Chettri's new album release.

*Rs 500 including album, 18 March, 7pm onwards, Base Camp, Arun Thapa Chowk, Jhamsikhel, 9841226397*

### Ciney Gurung live,

Fine dine with Ciney Gurung serenading you. *Rs 2000 per person, Every Friday, 7pm onwards, Shambala Garden Cafe, Hotel Shangri-La, (01)4412999*



### Jazz it up,

Groove to the beats of Willamette Underground's dynamic music inspired from avant garde, jazz fusion, rock & pop, and contemporary classical music. Tickets: Rs. 500 without invitation, Rs 300 with invitation

*7.30pm, 26 March, Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, Jhamsikel, (01) 5013554*

## GETAWAY



### Shivapuri Heights Cottage,

Celebrate the festival of colours with your family in addition to a sumptuous meal at Shivapuri Heights Cottage. Price: Rs 2500 per person, free for children below 6 years, and half price for children aged between 6-12 years old.

*22 March, 11.30 am onwards, Shivapuri Heights Cottage, 984-1371927 info@shivapuricottage.com*

### Milla Guesthouse,

If you prefer a quiet environment, and have an admiration of the mix of the old and new, this is the perfect place to stay. Not too far away from the city, yet miles apart.

*Bhaktapur, 9851024137*



### Atithi Resort,

A perfect place to stay with a nearby pool, massage, sauna, and delicious food of your choice.

*Shantipatan, Lakeside, Pokhara. (061)466760/400207, info@atithiresort.com*

### Mum's Garden Resort,

Head out to Pokhara for a peaceful and comfortable stay in beautifully designed cottages surrounded by a lush green garden with great views of Phewa Lake and the Annapurna range.

*Lake Side, Pokhara, (061)463468, www.mumsgardenresort.com*

### Dhulikhel Lodge Resort,

Located on a hilltop, the resort offers a magnificent vista of valleys, foothills, and mountains to the north.

*Dhulikhel, (011) 490114/494, www.dhulikhellodgeresort.com*

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The second best time is now.

- Chinese Proverb

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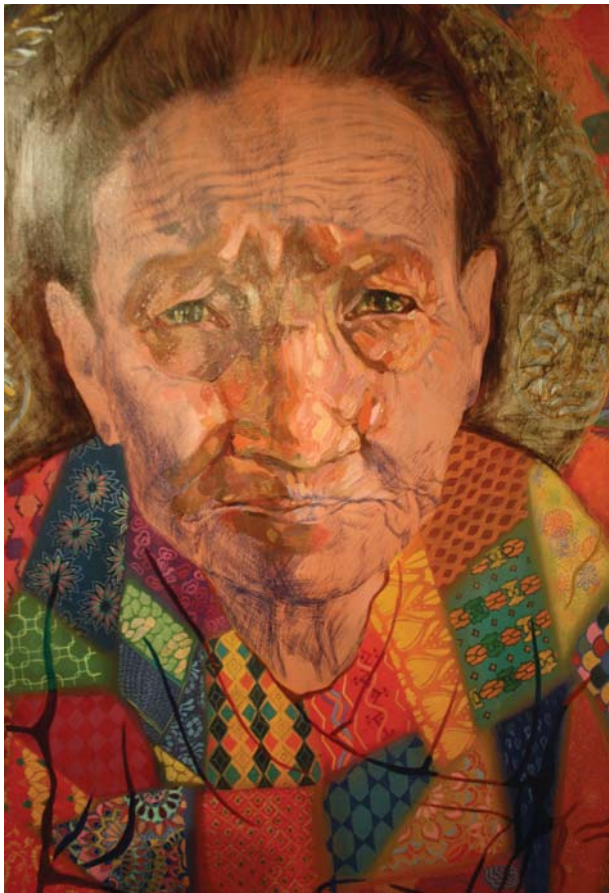
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# The solace of art



As the anniversary of last year's April earthquake approaches, a unique crossborder art initiative tries to remember the tragedy and pay tribute to the victims. Shortly after hearing about the disaster, over 90 Bangladeshi artists donated works and held a fundraiser at the Athena Gallery in Dhaka in solidarity with Nepali artists.

Supported by residencies at Kathmandu Contemporary Arts Centre and BINDU, Space for Artists, 'The Solace of Art' showcases the work of five artists severely affected by the

earthquake, illustrating the nation's collective trauma.

Sandhya Silwal and Anil Shahi's pieces on the first floor of the exhibition focus on the simplicity of the everyday. Silwal uses light colored backgrounds juxtaposed with black cutouts, signifying the need to remove negativity from our lives through her intricate works channeling the Wheel of Life. Similarly Shahi, through his theme of 'Diaries of the Unsung', envisions the daily lives of people on the street, utilising both broken and unbroken mirrors to inspire the viewer to interactively

reflect on their own place in the community.

"Normally in our society, many people on the street are thought of as unsuccessful or broken. So in this piece, the visual pattern represents all kinds of people," says Shahi. "It's a sketch of everyone's diary."

Jeewan Suwal of Bhaktapur capture his city's heritage in a combination of aesthetics ranging from striking colours of bright yellow and orange of monks' robes to dark hued skies in varying textures. The spontaneity in his work encapsulating losses of

home demonstrates the pains of overcoming trauma.

"After the earthquake I lost my home, I lost my father and I was traumatised. I was confused and I didn't know how to start new work," he says. "But then the mind clicked, and with support from Bangladeshi artists, everything became my inspiration. Gradually elements became more defined and I found my peace inside."

Jenney Ghale and Muna Badel's works occupy the final floor, dovetailing journeys of memory and self-reflection. Ghale

from Dhading invokes the 'selfie' as a technological phenomenon that breeds superficiality and leaves the self paradoxically more isolated even in a crowd. As Ghale explores the gnawing human desire to be someone else, Badel's series depicts a woman aging through time yearning for what once was. She portrays a stoic, wrinkled face that is guarded by vibrant dress, covering up emotions that changed vastly from those of a free-spirited youth.

Thirty-one other Nepali artists from different disciplines and a community in Sankhu were also supported by artists from Bangladesh in an effort to preserve culture and livelihood in the wake of the destruction.

The launch on March 13 was dedicated to recently deceased award winning Bangladeshi film director Khalid Mahmood Mithu, who along with his wife, Kanak Chanpa Chakma, spearheaded the fundraising effort.

His powerful words echo the themes of unity and resilience: "Because of the earthquake, all artists united for one aim, one goal. It was truly something inspirational and marvelous."

Michael Nishimura

*'The Solace of Art'*  
Till 29 March at Siddhartha Art Gallery  
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## THE HUNGER GAMES MOCKINGJAY PART 2

Like the *Twilight Saga*, which remains an inevitable, but unfortunate comparison to *The Hunger Games* trilogy, these books were written for what is known as the 'young adults' (YA) category. Both made millions for their authors, and then proceeded to make hundreds of millions for



**MUST SEE**  
Sophia Pande

the producers who bought the film rights. This is also why the final books in each of the series' were broken into two films each, purely to maximise revenue.

Fortunately, because of the complexity of Suzanne Collins' original vision, *Mockingjay Part 2*

does stand alone as the final film in a harrowing conclusion to a riveting story about youth, human nature, war, survival, and, of course, love.

Katniss Everdeen (played by Jennifer Lawrence in the role that made her famous) is reeling from the return of her friend, partner, and lover, Peeta Mellark (Josh Hutcherson) who had been captured by the evil Capital after the dramatic end of the last *Hunger Games*. All of the districts that were once ruled with an iron hand by the Capital are now in revolt against President Snow (Donald Sutherland) a cruel, psychologically astute dictator who knows how to hit where it hurts.

Over the course of the *Hunger Games*, an annual event where the youth of the 12 Districts are

pitted against one another in an arena and broadcast live all over Panem (a dystopian version of North America), Everdeen, with her stoic nature, moral courage, and unexpected beauty, becomes the inadvertent face of the revolution. Dubbed The Mockingjay by the rebels, who use her image to incite rebellion, Katniss has now become enemy number one for President Snow, who kidnaps and tortures Peeta, altering his perception of reality making him hate Katniss, in a heinous attempt to break the Mockingjay's spirit.

As Katniss struggles with the brutality of war without Peeta by her side, she becomes alienated from Gale (Liam Hemsworth), her childhood friend and competitor for her affections, while he becomes ever more ruthless regarding the rules of the game when it comes to winning the battle. It is rare, in Hollywood, to see such an exceptional heroine who is anchored by her own humanity, but is neither perfect nor invincible. Katniss's surprising choices (not every women would have ultimately chosen shy, brave, kind Peeta, over the fiery, handsome, headstrong Gale), her sound instincts, and her commitment to justice, help *Mockingjay Part 2* succeed as a character study of a compelling figure who owes her complexity to Suzanne Collins, the writer of the original source material. The world of YA literature is ultimately a better place with heroines like Everdeen versus the Bella Swans of melodramas such as *Twilight*.

[nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com)

■ Trailer

### HAPPENINGS



GOPEN RAI

**HI I'M BACK:** Indian Foreign Secretary S Jaishankar meets Prime Minister KP Oli at Baluwatar on Tuesday before heading to Pokhara for a SAARC meeting.



RSS

**WINNER WITH LOSER:** NC leader Ram Chandra Poudel shakes hands with the new party President Sher Bahadur Deuba at a tea party in Kathmandu on Tuesday.



GOPEN RAI

**FREE RIDE:** Industry minister Som Prasad Pandey and actor Madan Krishna Shrestha ride a new metro bus operated by Mahanagar Yatayat in Kathmandu on Sunday.



BIKRAM RAI

**STEPPING IN:** Businessman Suraj Vaidya receives the SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry pin from past president Vikramjit Singh Sahney in Kathmandu on Monday.



BIKRAM RAI

**SITAR STAR:** Nepali sitar player Iswari Upreti enthalls the audience at Yalamaya Classic, a monthly musical event at Yala Maya in Patan on Tuesday.



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# Oli in China

Rameswor Bohara in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 13-19 March

हिमाल  
खबरपत्रिका

Exactly one month after he flew to New Delhi for a meeting, Prime Minister KP Oli will fly to Beijing next week. However, his purpose in China will be different from his India visit. While he headed south to mend fences, he will travel north to explore new frontiers of trade and transit. Oli downplayed his India visit, calling it “just an effort to clear misunderstandings between the two countries”. No new deal was signed with New Delhi, but in Beijing he will ink multiple agreements on trade, transit and development.

Oli is visiting China at a time when Nepal has not fully recovered from the Indian blockade, and there is pressure on him to begin diversifying trade away from India. China also looks keen to welcome Oli and is preparing to roll out the red carpet in Beijing.

During the Indian blockade, Nepal decided to import one third of its fuel from China. When Foreign Affairs Minister Kamal Thapa visited Beijing in December, Nepal and China reached an understanding to this effect. This time, Oli will likely take it one step further by solidifying a petroleum trade deal.

It is not clear which development projects Oli will be seeking China’s support for. But the 1200 MW Budi Gandaki hydropower project, international transmission lines and petroleum storage projects top his list. Oli has denied playing the ‘China

card’ against India, but everyone is interested to find out what he brings back from Beijing.

Narayan Kaji Shrestha, Foreign Affairs Chief of the UCPN (M), says Nepal must sign trade deals with China to reduce its dependency on India and save Nepalis from future blockades. “Just because the blockade is lifted now, we should not stop whatever efforts we initiated to diversify our trade,” he says.

Oli is expected to help bridge the present trust gap between Kathmandu and Beijing and assuage Beijing’s concerns about the seemingly endless political instability in Nepal.





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# How to braid two cultures



Kathmandu Valley's exemplary assimilation of generations of Newar Muslims

SEULKI LEE

On a bright morning this week, Ayesha Banu greeted her first customers of the day at her sidewalk bead and bangle shop in Bhaktapur's Sukul Dhoka. Pratikshya, a 28-year-old lawyer, was there with her mother sampling green glass garlands with gold pendants.

A Hindu woman buying from a Muslim vendor a necklace of glass beads made in the Czech Republic in a town in Nepal shows just how harmoniously Muslim merchants have assimilated into society here.

"I'm the sixth generation of my family in this business," said Banu, 23. "From the time of my great great grandfather we have been stringing beads here."

Banu's ancestors first came to Gorkha in the 18th century as gunpowder makers for the Shah Kings, and later migrated to Bhaktapur. Today, from her attire and looks, Banu is indistinguishable from the Newar inhabitants of a street bustling with traders, shoppers and tourists.

After her father left to work in Saudi Arabia five years ago, her mother taught her to string beads. "It took me some time to master the skill, but now I can make a *potey* (glass bead necklaces) in five minutes," she said, as her mother Hamidun Nisa Banu attended to Pratiksha who has been buying necklaces from the Banu family for years.

Muslim merchants are known as *churoute* (from the Nepali word for bangles) and have sidewalk stalls near the Darbar Squares of Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur.

There are about 10 bead, bangle and hair braid shops at Bhaktapur's Sukul Dhoka, 35 vendors in Indra Chok in Kathmandu and a dozen in Patan's Mangal Bazar.



"The location of these shops near Malla palaces proves that Muslim traders had good relations with the local Newar community and the king," explained Rajan Joshi, 41, a lecturer at Tribhuvan University.

There are said to be 211 'Newar Muslim' households in Kathmandu Valley. One of them is Indra Chok jewellery merchant Mohammad Ashraf. "We Kathmandu Valley Muslims are very close to the Newar people," he said in fluent Newari. "It was jewellery that brought the Muslims and Newars together. While we Muslims specialise in glass, gems and diamonds, the Newars are good in gold and copper craftsmanship."

Ashraf, 47, is the sixth generation tending the shop located in a bazar established by Prithvi Narayan Shah after his conquest of Kathmandu 250 years ago. Despite this proud heritage, however, the Newari Muslim identity is at a critical transition.

"I'm not bringing my son into this business," said Ashraf, "there are so many options for them. Most probably my generation is the last in the Muslim jewellery



LIEW YU WEI

business in Nepal."

Mohidin Khan, 49, decided to write a history of Nepal's Muslim merchants because his ancestors were too busy and the younger generation is also not interested. His book chronicles the history of Kathmandu's Newar Muslims with socio-anthropological and

linguistic records. It includes the story of Begum Hazrat Mahal, the Queen of Awadh, who sought asylum in Nepal after the Mutiny in Lucknow. She died in 1879 and is buried at the Jame Masjid in Kathmandu.

In his flowing white beard, Ferozuddin Khan attends to a

bangle customer next to Patan's Krishna Mandir. The 75-year-old has been tending the shop at this exact spot for the last 50 years, but says none of his six sons and one daughter are likely to carry on in the business.

"I'm the 16th generation doing this, and it used to be



# together



**GREEN AND RED:** Mohammad Ashraf, 47, is the sixth generation tending his bead and bangle shop in Indra Chok.

Ayesha Banu (*below, left*) does brisk business at Bhaktapur's Sukul Dhoka.

Ferozuddin Khan, 75, (*below*) has been tending his *chura-potey-dhago* shop for 50 years. His ancestors came to Nepal 16 generations ago during the Malla period.

ALL PICS: SEULKI LEE



my mother's shop. I open it every day from 10am till 6pm except for big Muslim holidays," said Ferozuddin Khan, whose ancestors were invited to Patan by the Malla kings.

The Newar Muslims are now concerned about rising intolerance by new settlers in

Kathmandu, who tend to look down on them.

However, losing their jewellery business doesn't just represent the disappearance of a livelihood and heritage, but also the harmony they enjoyed with the local Newars of the Valley that took centuries to nurture.



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## Muslims of Nepal

From 15th century, Muslims from different parts of the subcontinent and Tibet migrated to Nepal trading in glass beads, bangles, gunpowder, perfume, and textiles. The major settlements of Nepal's Muslims, mainly Sunni, are in the Tarai, in Palpa, Syangja, Gorkha districts in the hills, and Kathmandu Valley.



The Muslims of Kathmandu Valley have three main origins: Kashmiri, north Indian, and Tibetan. According to the Vamshavalis, the oldest chronicles of Nepal's ancient history written during 14th century, Kashmiri Muslims arrived during the reign of King Ratna Malla (1482-1520). They built a mosque, the Kashmiri Takia, and worked for Nepal's kings as Urdu scribes to correspond with the Delhi Sultanate, scent manufacturers, musicians and bangle suppliers. Some were admitted as courtiers to the Malla Durbar, and many traded with Tibet.



The north Indian group entered the Valley in Pratap Malla's reign (1641-1674) and during the 16th and 17th centuries mainly fleeing Moghul incursion. They were allowed to build new mosques like the Nepali Jame Masjid in Kathmandu. Muslims from northern India were also invited by hill rulers to manufacture military hardware including cannons and later as makers of agricultural implements, utensils and ornaments. Some Muslim descendants of north Indian migrants are known as the *churaute* (bangle-seller) and many are farmers.

Muslims from the north migrated to Nepal from Ladakh and other parts Tibet, mainly arriving after the Chinese annexation of Tibet in the 1950s. Another wave of Bihari Muslims settled in the eastern Tarai after the Bangladesh war in 1972.

Sources: *The Nepali Newar Muslims of Kathmandu Valley* (2015), *Muslim of Nepal* (2014), 'How the crescent fares in Nepal' (*Himal Southasian*, May 1995), 'Ramzan Kareem' (*Nepali Times* #618, 17-23 Aug. 2012)



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## Silent minority

Muslims in Nepal officially make up 5 per cent of the total population, but members of the community claim their numbers are double that. Either way, they still do not have a proportionate say in Nepal's political structure.

Historically, Nepal's Muslims are descendants of those who migrated in waves from northern India, Tibet and Ladakh, and more recently from Bangladesh. Even compared to Nepal's other minorities, Muslims were treated as underdogs. Women who shopped at Muslim bangle shops had to wash their hands when they came home.

"Until 30 years ago Muslims were regarded as untouchables together with Christians. We were the outcasts of mainstream Hindu Nepali society," said Rahmat Khan (*pic above*), 63, a medical doctor educated in Cairo's Al-Azhar University and chairman of Madrasa Islamiya School in Kathmandu which has 390 students until Grade 10.

Indeed, the 2014 book *Muslim of Nepal* by Tribhuvan University anthropologist Prakash Upadhyay highlights the exclusion: "The Muslims' feeling of insecurity being surrounded by majority Hindus has created an incongruous psychology in which culture of fear and despondency has become a part and parcel of their lives."

Rizwan Ansari, the central committee member of Upendra Yadav-led Federal Socialist Forum-Nepal and Mohammad Aftab Allam, the ex-chairman of Rautahat working committee of Nepali Congress are the most prominent Muslim names in Nepal's political arena today.

"It isn't easy to launch yourself to a high level appointment without political party affiliation in a culture of political patronage. And I never had that," said Mohna Ansari the member of National Human Rights Commission and the only female attorney from the Muslim community in Nepal.

The word 'Muslim' appears exactly six times in the new constitution and alongside mentions of other traditionally discriminated groups like women, Dalit, Adivasi, Janajati, Madhesi and Tharu.



"You can write anything about Muslims but please don't touch the political part. We suffered a lot in history, but we do have hope about the new constitution that guarantees equal rights to all Nepalis citizen despite ethnic, religion and gender," said Khan.

With the hope of more equal treatment, the younger generation of Nepali Muslim has been told that Nepal is the best example of harmonious co-existence of Islam in South Asia. Said Sahela Sheikh (*pictured at centre, below*), a Grade 10 student of Madrasa Islamiya School: "This is a secular country and we are all Nepali people. I haven't faced any discrimination because of my religion."

Seulki Lee





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# When I'm 64

Before any of you get carried away and start sending the me belated birthday greetings on Assbook, allow me this week to give you humans a few tips on aging gracefully. From a donkey that is getting long in the tooth and developing a double jowl, these suggestions should be treated with the courtesy and respect they deserve. You twit at the back in the hoodie, what are you sniggering at?

With advances in science, technology and genital engineering, we as a species have become so good at preserving our youthful good looks that we can fool most of the people most of the time. Like tourists, older people in our culture are regarded as gods. (If you are a 80-year-old trekker, people will worship you.)

But how can you actually tell that you are in the august presence of an elderly gentleman if he or she still looks like David Bowie? How can disgustingly young whippersnappers barely out of their diapers and recently weaned from mama's mammaries accord senior citizens like us the reverence that we deserve in the autumn of our lives?

As I was saying. Wait a minute, what was I saying? It'll come to me in a minute.

Meanwhile, without any further ado around two birds in the bush I'll let you in on some tricks some of us have perfected over the past century to look younger than our age:

**1. Hair.** With recent advances in Follicular Genetic Mutilation Techniques and the successes of the Community Forestry Program, it is difficult to tell that a guy is old just by inspecting his or her canopy. Hair can be deceptive. For one thing, a person may have a full head of hair, but it may not be his or her. I have devised a simple yet effective test for this: approach said senior citizen and without warning clutch a handful of the alleged hair and yank it. If old guy howls in pain, then Aha! he's not that old. Us older chaps tend to lose hair from where it is supposed to grow (head, chin, chest, armpit, cockpit) and gain hair where it is not supposed to (ear canal, eye brows, nostrils, bath tub outlet). That is why a closer inspection of the ear lobe of a senior citizen is mandatory to determine his true age within a margin of error. If he has lobes like a lynx, then let's face it, bugger's getting on in ears.

**2. Teeth.** It has been proven by scientologists that the older we get,

the fewer of these we have. That is the general rule, anyway. But some of us wily geezers try to fool society at large by donning a mouthful of 32 manmade molars. Some of these ivories look like the genuine article, but the test is to carefully observe the subject as s/he takes a bite at a guava slice. If teeth attach themselves to guava instead of the other way around, then said subject is a specimen for carbon dating



and you should accord him and her all necessary respect and assistance.

**3. Belly.** According to Newton's Third Law of Thermodynamics and the Archimedes Principle, a body attracts another body with a force equal to the square root of the acceleration of both bodies. This is why my lower abdomen has of late started moving in general direction of the Centre of the Earth. When I hear young passersby say: "Geez, that one's got guts", therefore, I don't take it as a compliment anymore. There are several ways to get one's sagging tummy to defy gravity. One is to wear wired undies that give our soft underbellies some cantilever support, but the trouble with this bit of engineering is that it constricts the diaphragm and makes it hard to breathe. Which in itself can be the kiss of death, and reduce one's average lifespan.

**4. Clothes.** One way to fool people that you are not as old as you look is to take tips from teenage magazines and dress like younger people. Which in this day and age, means wearing jeans that look like they've passed through a combine harvester,

have waistlines in the general vicinity of one's pelvic tattoo, and offer passersby a flattering glimpse of one's rectal cleavage. And never wear black underwear. That is so 2015. In vogue these days are fluorescent green boxer shorts that glow in the dark, which is specially useful when there is load-shedding.

**5. Speech.** Clothes aren't everything, bro, and it is important to learn, like, to speak like other young dudes and liberally sprinkle your conversation with the word "cool" (pronounced "kewl") and make every sentence sound like a question, so no one can tell that you're actually just another old dork. Speaking of sprinkling, I don't even know whether I should tell you this, but when you get to ripe old age like some of us seniormost citizens, "toilet training" takes on a whole new meaning. But thanks to modern technology we can use our smartphones to geolocate urinals and arsenals in our immediate vicinity.



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