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GOPEN RAI

## In the driving seat

Nepal's festival season starts this weekend with Tij, the day devoted to women that they themselves are ambivalent about. Most Nepali women will fast, visit Pashupati, take a holy dip, and don red and green to wash away sins and for the longevity of husbands. Others regard Tij as a practice that perpetuates female subservience and fatalism.

But Tij is also a festival of solidarity and sisterhood, and has emerged lately as a day of defiance. If the lyrics of this year's traditional Tij duets are any indication, women are saying enough is enough, and want an end to existing inequalities within the home, at work, and in state structures.

Despite constitutional provisions for one-third female representation in all sectors of government, the number of women ministers in the current cabinet is only three out of 31.

"The cabinet seems like an old boys' club, and proves that the constitution alone can't guarantee equal participation of women at decision-making levels," says Bandana Rana, member of the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW Committee).

Nor is it enough for Nepal to boast of having its first female

President, Speaker of Parliament, and Chief Justice. Apart from proportionate representation of women in all state organs, at the very least women need to have rights to grant citizenship as men do, as well as benefit from equality in inheritance laws, and stringent penalties must be strictly enforced for any violence against women.

Says Rana: "The cultural values that define women as second-class citizens need to be changed. Nepali women must enjoy equal opportunities and equal participation in decision-making." *Shreejana Shrestha*

**PATRIARCHY IN THE HIERARCHY**  
EDITORIAL  
PAGE 2

## TIJ SPECIAL

**POWER TO WOMEN**  
GUEST COLUMN  
BY BINEETA GURUNG  
PAGE 6

**SONGS OF REBELLION**  
BY SMRITI BASNET  
PAGE 7

**IN PERFECT HARMONY**  
BY SAHINA SHRESTHA  
**HERITAGE LIVE!**

PAGE 11

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# PATRIARCHY IN THE HIERARCHY

The Tij fast by Nepali women could also be considered a one-day hunger strike against male dominance in our politics and society.

Nepal is going through a dramatic demographic shift. The country’s fertility rate is approaching replacement level — although the momentum of population growth will continue for another generation, it will stabilise thereafter.

This demographic transition of low birth rate and higher life expectancy is accompanied by the biggest population migration in the country’s history. The hill districts are depopulating at staggering rates, having lost between 15 to 25 per cent of their inhabitants in the past 10 years as people migrated to cities, plains and abroad for work.

Nearly 20 per cent of Nepal’s population is away at any given time, and considering that the migrants are mostly young men, this could mean that up to half the men in the 20-35 age group are essentially missing from their families, communities and society.

This brings us to the other ongoing societal transformation: the gender shift. Families and communities in rural Nepal are being run by women. With most men gone, rural Nepal has been feminised. The number of female students in high schools and colleges is at an all-time high. Women are moving into jobs traditionally considered the domain of men: driving public transport, and engaging in masonry, carpentry and construction, especially in the earthquake-affected districts. The feminisation of the workforce is subtly empowering women, providing them with cash income and new confidence, and bolstering their sense of self-worth.

Gender activists are not particularly fond of Tij — the annual celebration by daughters, wives and sisters — which this year falls on Sunday, 4 September. Their criticism is of the practice by women of fasting for the wellbeing and longevity of their husbands. It is absurd, particularly in this day and age, that women should be culturally required not to eat so that their husbands will be well-fed.



BIKRAM RAI

However, Tij has traditionally also been a celebration of sisterhood and solidarity, a one-day rebellion characterised by deliberate defiance against male dominance. Could it be that some Nepali women today consider the Tij fast as a hunger strike against patriarchy? Going by the lyrics of the new duets that have been released in the run-up to this year’s festival, there is open ridicule of menfolk as lazy, good-for-nothing spoilt brats (*see page 7*).

Add ‘corrupt’, and how aptly that sums up the attributes of most men who have the audacity to rule over us. Let’s just leave aside for the moment the fact that Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal has already squandered one-and-a-half months of his nine-month rotational tenure just to form a council of ministers from a coalition of four parties.

The Nepali Congress could not even agree on a list of

ministerial appointees until after the Nepal Students’ Union elections as well as the return from New Delhi of Deputy Prime Minister Bimalendra Nidhi. Why the selection of ministers by Nepal’s largest party should be held hostage by the election of 45-year-old ‘students’, and a visit to India by the prime minister’s special envoy, has never been satisfactorily explained to the public.

Nevertheless, of the 31 ministers appointed in his fourth consecutive expansion of the cabinet, only three are women, two of whom are junior state ministers. Clause 42-1 of the new Constitution expressly stipulates that women and other marginalised groups be given proportional representation in all agencies of government. When it sent its list of 13 ministers, the NC could muster only one woman.

In terms of inclusivity, the ratios are not much better for Dalits, Janajatis, or Madhesis either. For example, there are only two Dalit ministers, and three from Janajati groups. As Bineeta Gurung argues in her column in this issue (*see page 6*), not only is there no ‘substantive representation’ in support of gender-based governance, but even ‘descriptive representation’ — corresponding to the constitutionally-stipulated ratio of 33 per cent of female representation in government, is sorely lacking.

The sad irony is that this is happening under the prime ministership of Pushpa Kamal Dahal, who used to be the ‘Supreme Commander’ of a guerrilla army of which one-fourth was made up of women warriors, many of whom laid down their lives for equality.

The members of the ruling coalition are the same political parties that took to the streets to protest King Gyanendra’s ‘regression’ in 2006. What a cruel joke that real regression is happening under the rule of these same so-called democratic parties.

Times

THIS WEEK

JAY POU DYAL

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Go Do Phoksundo by Jay Poudyal

Dolpa lake in the monsoon is a precious jewel in Nepal's crown

(9,798 people reached)

Most shared on Facebook

Go Do Phoksundo by Jay Poudyal

(24 shares)

Most visited online page

Face-to-face by Shreejana Shrestha

Most popular on Twitter

Cartelling of Carnage, Editorial

(79 retweets, 54 likes)

Most commented

Face-to-face by Shreejana Shrestha

YOUR SAY

www.nepalitimes.com

CARTELLING OF CARNAGE

Syndicates are running and ruining the country ('Cartelling of carnage', Editorial, #823). The cabal of Dahal, Deuba and Oli is driving us into oblivion. Madhesi 'leaders' are making matters worse, purportedly touting the cause of 'their' people. Everyone is 'fighting' for their rights, but no one is taking on their responsibilities. We rid the country of the monarchy, but we have not built the pillars required to run a country. It will be a long time before we recover from this mess, and that is if we are ever lucky enough to recover at all. Meanwhile, lawlessness will prevail, everyone will fend for themselves while our celebrated dollar billionaires will become multi-billionaires, the looters and plunderers will proliferate, the political class will get pudgier and more belligerent, and the remaining institutions will further decay. And the have-nots will continue to languish and hope that times will change for the better. It is really that grim, if we continue on this path!

P Raj

The mafia has infiltrated Nepal's polity and bureaucracy ('Highways of death', Santa Gaha Magar, #823). Where does the buck stop? No one in

authority appears to want to take a firm, responsible stance on anything.

Raymond Fuller

Road accidents have become a regular feature in our lives ('Another bus plunge', eSpecial, 26 August). Accidents can be prevented if we use the 3 Es (Engineering, Education and Enforcement of Law). First, public transport drivers must be compelled to drive cautiously without overspeeding. A speed limit of 40 km/h must be made mandatory, and any breach of this law must be punished. Guard rails with self-emitting lights must be constructed along the edge of the river. The tests (theory and practical) for obtaining a licence must be thorough and stringent. The lives of many people are at stake, and the authorities must be very serious about it.

Shyam Thapa

FACE TO FACE

Special thoughts and prayers for Chitra and other taxi drivers ('No gain, only pain', Shreejana Shrestha, #823). They must get compensation, and be able to live with the dignity they deserve.

Finnen Morris

Mingmar G Sherpa@DrMingmaSherpa

True! Yet nobody speaks up a word. Nor do those responsible have any feelings...

Nepali Times@nepalitimes

The bloodbath on Nepal's highways is a direct result of Kathmandu's syndicated politics http://bit.ly/2bmNSr

@ksimkh

It's a shame Biplav is destroying sources of bread & butter of the very people he claims he's fighting for.

Nepali Times@nepalitimes

Driver meets Maoist activists who set fire to his taxi and destroyed his livelihood http://bit.ly/2bmJIVK

Times

nepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll #824

Q. Do you agree with the use of cement in the reconstruction of earthquake-damaged heritage sites like Rani Pokhari?

Total votes: 405

Yes 45.43%

No 39.26%

Maybe 15.31%

Weekly Internet Poll #825

To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Who is responsible for the frequent road accidents in Nepal?

Times

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Publisher and Chief Editor: Kunda Dixit

Associate Editor: Om Astha Rai | Design: Kiran Maharjan

Published by Himalmedia Pvt Ltd | Patan Dhoka, Lalitpur | GPO Box 7251 Kathmandu

editors@nepalitimes.com | www.nepalitimes.com | www.himalmedia.com | Tel: 01-5005601-08 Fax: +977-1-5005518

Marketing: Arjun Karki, Surendra Sharma rachanas@himalmedia.com | Advertisers: Ram Krishna Banjara | Subscriptions: Santosh Aryal santosha@himalmedia.com

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YUWEI LIEW



BIKRAM RAI

# From un-uniform development...

Western mountain districts improve while east-central Tarai stagnates, as Nepal’s development remains uneven

SAHINA SHRESTHA

The traditional narrative in Nepal’s development and political circles is that the eight districts of the east-central Tarai are the least developed parts of Nepal. They are often bunched together at the bottom of the pile with the under-developed districts of the western and far-western mountains.

Past UN Human Development Reports over the years show that compared to the national average, both the western

mountain districts and east-central Tarai have lagged behind in the Human Development Index (HDI) — a composite statistic of life expectancy, education, and income per capita indicators.

More careful examination of the 2014 Human Development Report figures shows that the eight districts of the east-central Tarai (Siraha, Saptari, Dhanusa, Mahottari, Sarlahi, Rautahat, Bara and Parsa) performed better in terms of HDI than the hill and mountain districts of western Nepal (Achham, Dailekh, Bajura, Bajhang, Doti, Mugu, Humla).

Life expectancy and per capita

incomes are actually higher in the east-central Tarai districts whereas the literacy rate and average years of schooling are better for the mountain districts of the west.

The far-western hill districts of the trans-Karnali have often been the first to suffer from food insecurity, due to the remote topography and out-migration of able-bodied men. This has affected agricultural productivity, leading to poor nutrition especially among women and children.

East-central Tarai districts are less vulnerable — despite

an entrenched caste system and gender disparities, these districts are more accessible, and benefit from proximity to the open border with India.

However, while the western hills and mountains are now slowly climbing up in the development parameters, the index for east-central Tarai has remained stagnant over the years. Because of the higher population in the plains, government development outlay per capita is also much lower in the Tarai than in the hills.

“It is not fair to compare the two regions,” says Tula Narayan

Sah of the Madhes Foundation. “They are different historically, geographically and population-wise. Although the districts in Far and Mid-West have lower HDI scores, they are making progress compared to the past whereas in the Madhes, the progress has been stagnant.”

Indeed, Nepal’s Human Development Report published in 1998 shows that the districts in the mid- and far-west were the poorest in the country. The districts in Central Tarai were comparatively better: for example, Rautahat’s HDI score was 0.308 whereas Bajura’s was

# ...to inhuman under-development

Nepal is performing well in terms of its Human Development Index (HDI) world ranking in UNDP’s annual Human Development Reports because of overall improvements in national-level parameters such as the literacy rate, maternal and child mortality rates, per capita income and average lifespan.



ECONOMIC CLASS  
Manish Jha

The HDI is a composite statistic that is used to rank countries into four tiers of human development. A country scores higher when indicators such as lifespan, education level and GDP per capita are higher, and fertility rate and inflation rate are lower.

The Index is based on a formula devised by UN economist Mahbub ul Haq in 1990 with the explicit purpose ‘to shift the focus of development economics from national income accounting to people-centered policies’. He worked with Nobel laureate Amartya Sen on capabilities and functions that provided the underlying conceptual framework for development.

Nepal has recorded one of the most dramatic improvement in HDI among least developed countries, but it still lags far behind other countries in South Asia and the global South. Nepal has set a challenging goal for itself, of graduating from a ‘least developed’ to a ‘developing country’ category by the year 2020.

That is just four years away, and given how development has suffered due to political instability and poor governance,



BIKRAM RAI

We know what needs to be done to raise Nepal’s Human Development Index, we just need to do it.

the goal is not likely to be met. Currently, Nepal ranks 145th among countries with a score of 0.548 in the HDI, among 188 countries in the Human Development Report 2015. Nepal’s score falls in the low human development category, and there has to be much more improvement in the indicators in order to progress to the ‘developing country’ category, such as in per capita Gross National Income, education, health, and the economic vulnerability of the people.

In education, Nepal needs to raise the average years of education of people aged 25 and above. The figure for this indicator increased by 0.1 years from that in 2013, and reached 3.3 years in 2014. However, if we compare it with fellow SAARC members, we lag behind Sri Lanka and Maldives (which are the top HDI performers in South Asia). Education of those aged 25 years and above stood at 10.8 and 5.8 years in Sri Lanka and Maldives respectively, in 2014. To catch up, Nepal has to make an

enormous investment in education.

The aspect of HDI where effort is needed is in per capita income. Although Nepal’s poverty rate has fallen dramatically, mainly due to the infusion of remittance cash into the economy, there are still hurdles ahead. In 2014, the per capita Gross National Income of Nepalis rose to \$2,311 from \$2,194 the previous year. But to take a big leap forward, Nepal has to generate more jobs within the country by investing in high-value agriculture, manufacturing and infrastructure development.

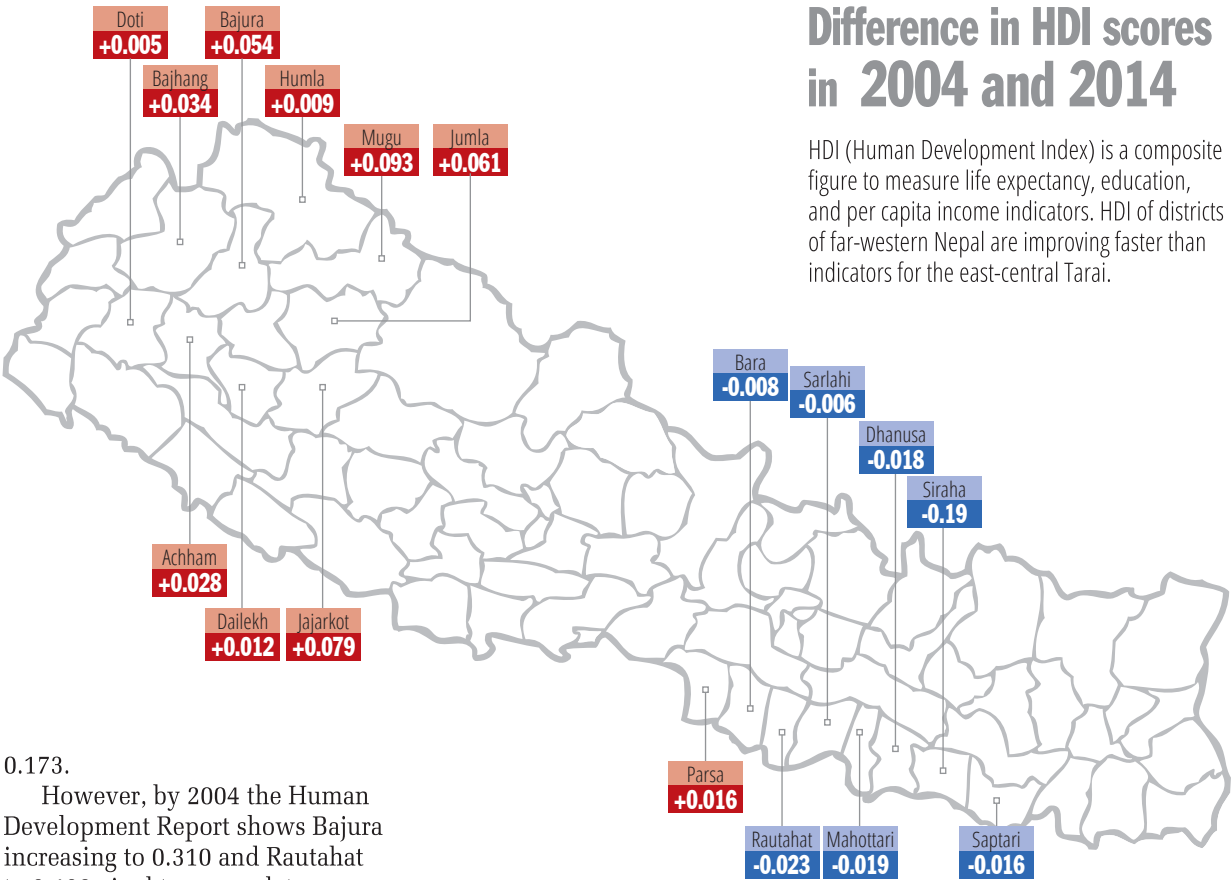
The other component of Nepal’s HDI that needs work is in lessening the gender disparity in all aspects of development. The recent Human Development Report put Nepal’s HDI score for women lower than for men.

Nepal’s average national achievement in HDI improvement also masks serious regional disparities between hills, plains and mountains as well as between eastern and western Nepal, and in rural-urban scores. The six districts of the eastern Tarai together with the districts of the western and far-western mountains lag behind the rest of the country in just about every parameter of development.

The Nepal Human Development Report 2014 states: ‘The pace of economic growth needs to be accelerated and be accompanied by large-scale employment generation and enhanced productivity.’ There is also a need to improve education and raise the standard of Nepal’s human resources, and decrease the gender and geographical disparity in development within Nepal.

We know what needs to be done, we just need to do it.





### Difference in HDI scores in 2004 and 2014

HDI (Human Development Index) is a composite figure to measure life expectancy, education, and per capita income indicators. HDI of districts of far-western Nepal are improving faster than indicators for the east-central Tarai.

0.173. However, by 2004 the Human Development Report shows Bajura increasing to 0.310 and Rautahat to 0.409. And ten years later, Bajura was 0.364 and Rautahat had come down to 0.386. Other districts in the two regions follow a similar trajectory.

In the Human Development Report of 2014, the districts in the east-central Tarai lag behind the districts in mid- and far-western mountains in terms of education.

In his book, *Some Aspects of Nepal's Social Demography*, Pitamber Sharma breaks down literacy data in the 1991, 2001 and 2011 censuses, by region, caste and district. In 1991 Rautahat was the only district from Madhes that had a low literacy rate, in 2001 Mahottari joined the ranks, and by 2011 six Madhes districts had the lowest

literacy rates in Nepal. The decline in education is not because of a lack of schools but due to educational policies, says Sah. He added: "Many Madhesis faced difficulties when the one-language policy was introduced in the education sector, moreover there are fewer teachers for more students."

Government expenditure is higher in hills compared to other ecological belts and there is a wide variation in public expenditure in Nepal. "The per capita expenditure is more in the west and far-west than in the Tarai, even though the population

in Tarai is greater than in the hills," says Sah.

Uma Shankar Prasad in his study *Government Expenditure in Madhes* shows that in 2001/2 the Tarai got 19.4 per cent of the budget whereas the hills received 75 per cent, and the mountains 5.6 per cent. By 2009/10 the Tarai's share had gone up slightly to 22.1 per cent, and the hills got 71.7 per cent. Because of the larger population involved, per capita government expenditure in the Tarai is even more disproportionate, and this is reflected in the lack of improvement in the HDI.

### prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

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#### HBL

auto show. Commercial auto loans are for 70 per cent of the vehicle price, and have a 9 per cent interest rate and a five-year maturity period.

#### Festive delight

Laxmi Intercontinental, authorised Hyundai distributor in Nepal, announced its Dashain-Tihar scheme 'Hyundai Festive Delight'. Customers get a discount of up to Rs 600,000 on each purchase and a one-year



comprehensive insurance. 100 lucky winners also get a chance to win a tola of gold each, and two lucky winners can win a brand new Hyundai Creta and Hyundai Elite i20.

#### Travel fest

Qatar Airways announced its festival deals for customers booking before 6 September, with two-for-one fares, discounts of up to 40 per cent, special deals for hotels and discounted holiday extras to travel from 15 September 2016 to 30 June 2017.



Special giveaways include round-the-world air tickets, and tickets to Qatar Airways-sponsored FC Barcelona matches.

#### New wheels

TVS Motor is launching its new TVS Apache 200 4V in Nepal at the NADA auto show. It sports a cleaner, edgier and sportier design, and comes



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# Power to women

Male politicians still do not believe women to be as capable and deserving as themselves

Those who argue that a woman's elevation to power does not necessarily advance the interest of women cite examples of Benazir Bhutto, Khaleda Zia, and Sheikh Hasina. There were also Indira Gandhi, Golda Meir and Margaret



GUEST COLUMN  
Bineeta Gurung

Thatcher who wielded power, but chose to rule their countries with a pro-militaristic attitude that served the male-dominated establishment. It is only fair to assume that Hilary Clinton's past hawkish approach to US foreign policy will not advance the cause of feminism. Statecraft requires leaders to act tough to prove their mettle, more so if they are women.

The same argument crops up every time there is a demand in Nepal for fair representation of women in leadership. It is said that female representation in parliament does not guarantee better lives for women. When a woman is elected to a significant post, her merit and competence are doubted, and her elevation often attributed to 'positive discrimination'.

The old boys' club is also cited. It is not mere coincidence that most women in politics are either born or married into political families. But that is not the whole truth — Nepal's political establishment is sexist to the core.

Despite her proven record, a woman's leadership capacity is questioned across the board.



RSS

She is held against unrealistic standards that do not exist for men. Women leaders are expected to be motherly, divine and untouched by sin.

Corruption has to do with power, it requires a favourable ecosystem to protect those on the take. Ministers like Sarita Giri and Radha Gyawali are fired without a second thought while men like Vijay Kumar Gachhadar and Mahesh Basnet stay in government despite shady backgrounds.

The presence of women in the legislature, known as 'descriptive representation', reflects the degree to which the representatives look like the public. Women's proportionate representation in parliament is essential if they are to equally access and fully

participate in power structures and decision-making. Studies show that without gender quotas, some countries will take another 500 years to have fair female representation. High levels of women's representation in parliament, such as in Rwanda (63.8%) and Sweden (43.6%), are possible because of quotas.

An increased proportion ensures 'substantive representation' in support of feminist issues. A recent study in Argentina found that such a boost was associated with more women's rights bills being introduced. In India, women are more likely than men to raise issues of domestic violence. In Botswana and Rwanda, female MPs passed women-friendly bills despite stiff opposition from men.

Nepal's new constitution sets women's representation in parliament at 33%. Women lawmakers constituted only 29.8% in the second CA, but it is higher than the 22.3% world average of women parliamentarians. The election of Bidya Bhandari as President and Onsari Gharti Magar as the Speaker of Parliament marked a tangible shift in Nepali politics. The appointment of Sushila Karki as Nepal's first woman Chief Justice added another gender milestone.

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal repeated this week that the increase in female participation in Nepali politics was a direct result of his armed struggle. While this has some merit, he overlooks the confluence of strategies of both internal and external women's

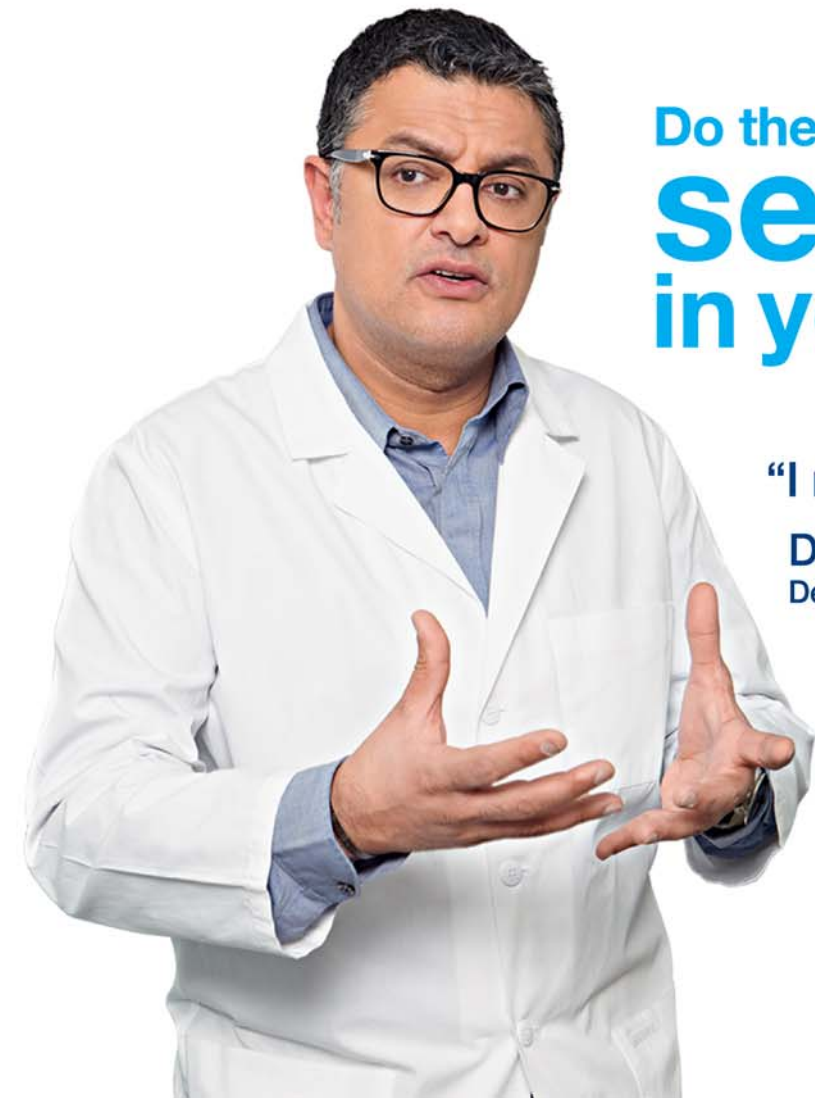
movements, which helped women advance their status during and after the conflict.

Conflict have levelling effects as societies seek to re-create themselves by framing new constitutions. During the war, gender roles were disrupted, pushing women into new activities in the absence of men. Women were also exposed to political opportunities, both as members of the Maoist movement and as peace mobilisers.

However, if women's organisations had not seized the opportunity during the constitution-making process, the deep institutionalised gender bias in society would have persisted. Throughout the tenure of the first and second CAs, various organisations and feminist groups lobbied vigorously to secure reservations for women. In addition, emerging international norms and mounting pressure from bilateral donors and international agencies gave women a new impetus to demand a political presence.

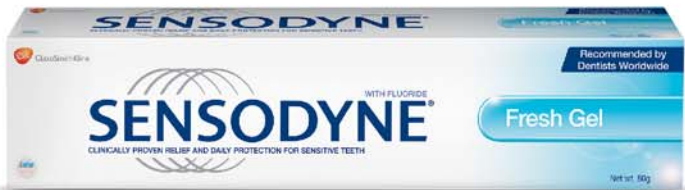
Nepal's brazenly biased citizenship laws prove that Nepali politicians still do not believe women to be as capable and deserving as men. Further proof of male domination is the composition of the coalition cabinet. Of the 13 allotted seats, the Nepali Congress could come up with only one woman minister. The Maoists included only two women in government, but they are only state ministers.

Why do we need more women ministers if we already have so many women parliamentarians? The answer is simple: because female representation in the executive has a symbolic effect. They serve as role models and inspire other women to engage in politics. More importantly, they help to raise awareness of what women can achieve if they can wield political power. 🇳🇵



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**BEAUTIFUL MESS:** Street artist Dibyeshwor Gurung working on a wall opposite the Russian Embassy. His art deals with issues of unplanned urbanisation and migration.



# TAKING ART OUT INTO THE OPEN

The shift in setting of Kathmandu's arts from private to public spaces could be a catalyst for change

SMRITI BASNET

Previously festooned with billboards for big brands, the wall opposite the Russian Embassy in Baluwatar now showcases a black-and-white artwork of crumpled transmission lines over a cramped city depicting unplanned urban growth.

Probably inspired by Kathmandu's own chaotic growth, street artist Dibyeshwor Gurung thought this wall would be an apt medium to put out his message: "If everyone leaves, there won't be anyone left behind to untangle the mess."

Like Gurung's wall, there are many other examples of outdoor art in Kathmandu, and the city's walls are getting a makeover with ArtLab's PRASAD Street Art Festival this month.

Political slogans and advertisements are being painted

**PUBLIC AWARENESS:** A 70-metre long temporary art installation by Cambodian artist Leang Seckon on the lake inside the Central Zoo, Jawalakhel during KIAF 2012. Made out of plastic collected from the Siem Reap River, the work of art speaks to environmental issues.



ARTUDIO FOR KIAF 2012





BIKRAM RAI

over with bright, tongue-in-cheek artwork with themes ranging from migration to portraits of local heroes to inspire youths. The street art festival tries to conjure up the country's current present socio-political milieu.

"This is our way of triggering

the thought process of the public, saying this is what is happening, and questioning what we are trying to do about it," said Rommel Bhattarai of ArtLab, which has exhibited in Tansen, Beni, Pokhara, Dharan and Birganj in the past three years and has returned to



**LEAVING FOOTPRINTS:** Artist Sarganga Darshandhari's art installation titled 'Where Am I', looking at issues of home and belonging, in Mangal Bazar during KIAF 2012.

ARTUDIO FOR KIAF 2012

## KATHMANDU TRIENNALE

After two successful editions in 2009 and 2011, the Kathmandu International Art Festival 2017 is scheduled for 7 March to 9 April next year, with the theme 'My City'. Belgian artist Philippe Van Cauteren will be the festival curator.

"The artists will create new works in the city, about the city, collaborating with the city," said festival manager Nischal Oli.

The month-long event will feature works by 45 local and international artists. It will also have gala events, a three-day symposium, public performances, passive and guided tours, film screenings, master classes, and workshops (including for children).



of the cityscape and by arousing social consciousness.

"The average member of the public is intimidated by these white cubes called art galleries. Street art challenges this notion, making art accessible to the public," says Sangeeta Thapa of the Siddhartha Art Gallery.

Earlier this year, Kabi Raj Lama's 'Irritation Machine', a satire on Nepal's frequent changes in government, drew the public to an exhibition in the Nepal Art Council. Titled 'All Party-Meet', Lama used stencil art to draw portraits of 13 Prime Ministers of Nepal in the last 22 years, in nine different venues across the Valley, to attract people to the exhibition.

Even Ishaan's red-coloured walls with the phrase '*Swadesh bachauna ke gardaichhu ma*' (What I am doing to save my country) sparked conversations on social media.

Ashmina Ranjit has been engaging in performance art, carrying a human skeleton on her back to represent the state of neglect of public health. ArtTree (pic, left) has accompanied protests supporting crusading physician Govind KC. The impact of such performances goes far beyond that of an indoor gallery exhibition.

When art goes public, it wields the power to challenge the status quo. Ranjit says this power can also be used to highlight the spaces themselves. Historically Kathmandu was a city that emphasised open spaces for its festivals, gatherings and performances, but Ranjit says today those very spaces have shrunk. She says it is the duty of Nepali artists to help reclaim such open public places from being smothered by concrete structures.

Although the city houses magnificent sculptures by artist Thakur Prasad Mainali, like the one in the BICC garden dedicated to Mother Nature, it is increasingly becoming an eyesore.

"Art affects architecture. If you have art in the public sphere, it starts changing the face of the city and makes it unique," said researcher and artist Promina Shrestha.

Many works of art by international artists in the Kathmandu International Art Festival 2012 were temporary outdoor installation art initiatives, to draw attention to environmental degradation and social issues.

Said Nischal Oli of Siddhartha Arts Foundation's Education Initiative (SAFEI): "Usually artworks are commissioned by governments to create cultural cities. In Kathmandu's case, the city needs to get involved and artists need to be encouraged." 🇳🇵

Supported by SAFEI.



**FOR, AND OF, PEOPLE:** Locals observe photographs during Photo Kathmandu, Nepal's first international photography exhibition, last year.

## PHOTO KATHMANDU 2016

Kathmandu witnessed its first-ever international photography festival last year. Uniquely, it used public spaces like walls, streets and courtyards, and the exhibition was scattered in and around Patan where residents and visitors could interact with each other.

"The festival made people aware of places within Patan, and more than that it helped facilitate communication among different communities in Patan," said Nayantra Gurung Kakshapati of photo.circle.

This year, Photo Kathmandu will take place from 21 October to 3 November, with workshops, exhibitions and talks by artists. The festival will showcase photographs around the theme of 'Resilience', looking at how people cope with disaster and conflict, with participants from countries such as Iran, Cambodia, Bangladesh, and Saudi Arabia.

GOPEN RAI



# EVENTS



**Tij,**  
Paint the town red with crowds of women as they come out to celebrate the day with folk songs and dances.  
*4 September*

## Art exhibition,

Attend the exhibition by German contemporary visual artist Lena Koester, organised by Artudio. All sale proceeds go to Subsashree orphanage.  
*9 to 13 September, Artudio, Swayambhu, Chhauni Hospital Road, 9851180088, artudio@hotmail.com*



## Level-I photography,

Master the tricks and trade of photography with Artudio's ten-day long beginner workshop.  
*15 to 24 September, 7 to 10 am, Swayambhu, Chhauni Hospital Road, Registration: By 14 September, 9803779777, Fee: Rs 5,500*

## Film festival, ,

Experience the diversity of Africa with the fifth edition of Nepal Africa Film Festival. Attend also for the dance performances, music and an Afircan fashion show.  
*7 to 9 September, 10 am onwards, Russian Cultural Center, Kamalpokhari, (01) 4416650*

## Arjuna's Dilemma,

Mark your calendars for the staging of the opera Arjuna's Dilemma, based on the Bhagvad Gita, by One World Theatre.  
*3 to 11 September, 7 pm onwards, Patan Museum, Patan Darbar Square, Tickets: Rs 750, 500 (adults), Rs 250 (students)*

## Fragments exhibition,

Save the date for Kabi Raj Lama's 'Fragments' lithography prints exhibition.  
*29 August (inauguration at 5:30 pm) to 9 September, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited*

## Monochrome mandalas,

Master mindfulness by learning the art of making monochrome mandalas with Sattya Media Arts Collective.  
*10 September, 11 am to 3 pm, Sattya Media Arts Collective, Jawalakhel, Apply: https://goo.gl/uzlawd, Fee: Rs 500*

## Ride to Khokana,

Contribute to restoring Nepal's cultural heritage by participating in a cycle ride program from Kasthamandap to Khokana, organised by Khokana Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Committee.  
*20 September, 7 am onwards, Price: Rs 600*

## Day hike,

Don't miss out on this one-day hike, offering exhilarating glimpses of Kathmandu Valley and pine forests, from Kapan to Nagi Gompa.  
*3 September, 7.30 am to 3 pm, Starting point: Akashe Dhara, Kapan, 9841454462 / 9808799589, blossomexpeditions@gmail.com*



## Street art,

Don't miss out on the International Street Art Festival organised by ArtLab Life, featuring a host of art events: mural making, art talk shows, documentaries, exhibitions, street art jams and more.  
*1 August to 23 September, Multiple venues, 9813462106 / 9841807005, artlab.ktm@gmail.com, artlablife.com*



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# DINING



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## Chez Caroline,

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*Baber Mahal Revisited, (01) 4263070 / 4187*



## Koto,

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*Lakeside, Pokhara; Pulchowk; Darbar Marg*

## Mezze by Roadhouse,

Dine at this place with its smart, modern interior and chic terrace, and imbibe the Italian culture.  
*Darbar Marg*



## Lhakpa's Chulo,

Nepali dal-bhat, Newari khaja, Swiss rösti, Italian risotto, and Thai green curry – take your pick.  
*Jhamsikhel*

# MUSIC



## Pop Saturday,

Spend a musical evening with popular pop singer Sabin Rai, along with the Pharaoh Band.  
*3 September, 7 pm onwards, The Victory Lounge, Darbar Marg, 9801031277 / 9802961570, Tickets: Rs 1,000*

## Gharana Music Festival,

Mark your calendars for the second edition of the international classical music festival organised by the Gharana Music Foundation.  
*14 to 18 September at Hotel Yak and Yeti, 17 September, 4 pm, at Tangelwood, Tangel, 9813284480 / 9851006246, www.gharanamusicfoundation.org, Tickets: Rs 700 (general admission), Rs 250 (students), Rs 2,000 (four-concert package)*



## Kutumba live,

Tap along with the beat of soul-stirring music, as Kutumba performs live.  
*16 September, 6 pm onwards, Patan Museum*

## Rock n Roll,

Groove along with famed Nepali band Abhaya And The Steam Injuns this weekend.  
*3 September, 7 to 11 pm, Purple Haze Rock Bar, Thamel, 9803719781*

## Cobweb live,

Enjoy Saturday night with veteran rock band Cobweb as they belt out their hits.  
*3 September, 7 pm onwards, Sports Hive Bar & Lounge, Jhamsikhel*

# GETAWAY



## Neydo Monastery,

A monastery and guest house, Neydo is home to many significant religious sites of the great siddhas. Book a room, and leave your troubles behind.  
*Pharping, Kathmandu, www.neydohotel.com*

## Barahi Jungle Lodge,

The first eco-jungle lodge of Chitwan directly overlooks Chitwan National Park, with spa, boutique guest room, individual and two-in-one private villas, including a suite with a private swimming pool.  
*Andrauli, West Chitwan, www.barahijunglelodge.com*



## Shangri-La Village Resort,

Escape the heat this summer with a two-night, three-day package in Pokhara.  
*Gharipatan, Pokhara, Rs 5,999 per person, (01) 4420252, 9808187015 / 9860260894*

## 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.  
*Lakeside, Pokhara, (061) 463468*



## Mango Tree Lodge,

Culture walks, rafting in the Karnali, wildlife exploration, and jungle safari at the Bardia National Park.  
*Bhetani, Bardia, info@mangotreeelodge.com*

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# In perfect harmony

Done right, Kathmandu's traditional architecture would add to the city's aesthetics and make it more seismic-resistant

SAHINA SHRESTHA



PICS: GOPEN RAI

When the Malla dynasty ruled the Valley's kingdoms, rivalry between rulers translated into magnificent monuments, *bahals* and city squares in the three main towns.

Over time, this extraordinary architectural heritage has been confined to the historic cores of the towns. These centuries-old mud-brick structures were hardest-hit by the earthquake last year, sending the incorrect message that traditional architecture is weak and prone to seismic damage.

One-and-a-half years after the earthquake, it is clear that most ruined homes are being rebuilt using concrete beams, with few choosing traditional facades and even fewer opting for traditional materials.

In Harisiddhi, Bungamati and Sankhu, while the temples are yet to be reconstructed, new homes are being built with concrete and have started dominating skylines that used to feature tile roofs. Conservation architects are appalled, not just because this spoils the traditional look of the towns, but also if the right materials and techniques are used, older designs would be more seismic-resistant.

"Elements of traditional architecture can be added to modern building codes for two- to three-storied buildings as well," says conservation architect Sudarshan Raj Tiwari, "and if the houses are periodically maintained, the overall design, construction, technology and the materials make traditional buildings fairly earthquake-resistant."

Bhaktapur's historic core suffered some of the worst damage. A few blocks off from Dattatreya Temple, in an alleyway in Inacho, old houses



destroyed by the earthquake have been ravaged by two monsoons and are neglected. Just opposite, Namuna Ghar (*pic, above*) stands tall and unscathed. The 150-year-old house was renovated in the early 2000s using mud, brick and timber, but did not suffer even a hairline crack during the earthquake, and just lost some *jhingati* tiles from its roof.

"Now we have figured out a way to install the *jhingati* so that they won't fall the next time there is an earthquake," says heritage conservationist Rabindra Puri, who restored the house. "The best architecture for any given place is the one that has evolved there."

Puri's other projects — including the Toni Hagen House in Gachhen and the ambitious Namuna Gaun in Sanga where three houses (one each of stone, brick, and mud mortar) line a ridge — all survived the earthquake.

In Patan, Devendra Shrestha says restoring his family home in

## Old is bold

Old does not mean weak, as traditional architecture is flexible and can withstand shaking better.

- 1. Wall thickness:** Its thickness is maximum on the ground floor and decreases on the higher floors, reducing shear failure.
- 2. Mud mortar:** Mud may be a weak binding element but it helps absorb shock waves and cushions the walls, preventing a total collapse of the building.
- 3. Timber:** Traditional houses have beams, joists, lintels, beautifully carved doors, windows and pillars. Timber ties the brick walls, and bend with shock waves, preventing the distortion or displacement of walls.
- 4. House plan:** Traditional houses are generally rectangular or square, which gives them better stability.
- 5. Height:** Traditional buildings are never more than four stories tall. Keeping this dimension makes for safer and more aesthetic towns.



the traditional style was the best decision his family ever made. The Malla-era Newa Chhen, also known as Shrestha House, was renovated and opened as a tourist accommodation in 2006. While the nearby residential buildings are supported by wooden frames after the earthquake, the 350-year-old house sustained only minor damage.

"No new materials were added when it was restored," says Shrestha, "and by the looks of it, it was the right decision."

What makes traditional architecture relatively earthquake-resistant is that from the floor to the attic, each element is bound together. The use of timber, mud and traditional *chuku* joints and wooden beams makes the house flexible during quake shaking. The maximum wall thickness on the ground floor, double framing of windows, wall plate weightage, roof system, as well as use of bigger bricks like *ma apa* — these make traditional buildings resistant to earthquakes.

"Each element functions as an individual piece, so even when one part collapses the whole house will not go down like concrete structures do," says urban planner PS Joshi of UN-Habitat. "The lifespan of concrete is around 60 years, but houses built using traditional materials have a lifespan of 100 to 150 years. Old architecture should be promoted, and this is the perfect opportunity to research more about it."

Adding traditional silhouettes and textures of the Valley's Newari architecture into designs while rebuilding would not only add to the aesthetics of the city but also help conserve Kathmandu's unique architectural heritage. The neighbourhoods would be elegant, affordable, and suited to the climate because of the use of mud mortar and brick. With salvageable materials, building a house the old way would cost Rs 3 to 4 million in the Valley.

Rabindra Puri's resort in Fulbari of Kavre (*pic, top left*) using only mud, brick and timber withstood the earthquake. "Even if something does happen during the earthquake, the human casualties will be much fewer," says Puri.

Old architecture does not mean an outdated lifestyle, as interiors can be modern. Examples of this are Newa Chhen in Patan and Namuna Ghar in Bhaktapur, which blend old and new in perfect harmony.

Says Puri: "The trick is to adapt newer materials to reflect and blend with the traditional methods. It is still not too late to rebuild using traditional architecture, and this is the perfect opportunity to preserve history, share endangered traditional knowledge, and promote tourism." 🇳🇵



## Which Rani Pokhari?

How old does a building have to be, to be considered an architectural heritage? Which style is the original? These questions are at the centre of the debate about post-earthquake reconstruction of monuments and temples that were restored in the Mogul style after the 1934 earthquake and destroyed again last year.

For example, should the iconic Balgopaleswor Temple in the middle of Rani Pokhari be rebuilt in the stucco Rana style, or as a Newari tiered temple? The Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC) decided to reconstruct it as it was before April 2015, but using reinforced concrete columns to increase the structure strength.

There was an uproar on social media, protests were held, and the KMC has now been forced to backtrack on its decision. The Department of Archaeology directed the KMC to demolish the cement pillars, and the project has been halted for the moment.

Says urban planner PS Joshi: "Heritage is not only about art and artefacts, it is about the knowledge of our ancestors that is on the verge of being forgotten, and the link between tangible and intangible heritage." Joshi is an advocate of traditional materials as well as traditional techniques being used wherever or whenever newer methods have to be employed.

After the 1934 earthquake, many of the temples lost their original



ALOK TULADHAR/IMPACT PRODUCTIONS

form when they were rebuilt. The Bhai Dega temple in Patan was a three-tiered pagoda-style structure dedicated to Lord Shiva. It was rebuilt as a smaller one-storey structure with a Mogul-style domed roof. After three years of planning to restore the temple to its original style, construction had just started when the April 2015 earthquake struck. Work has now resumed.

Kathmandu's clocktower, the Ghantaghar, was modelled after London's Big Ben by the Ranas and was reconstructed in its present form after the earthquake in 1934.

This issue has come to the fore once again, with the rebuilding of Rani Pokhari. A rare image of Rani Pokhari that shows the temple in the middle of the pond in Shikhara style, was found by heritage conservationist Dipesh Risal in the archival German publication, *The Journey of His Royal Highness Prince Waldemar of Prussia to India: In the Years 1844 to 1846*.

"Rani Pokhari is like all other temples with *patis* and *sattals*, and a part of our heritage," says Risal, "so we need to make sure that if destroyed or damaged, they are rebuilt according to the original design, instead of a cheap knock-off that Jang Bahadur imported from India."

Conservation architect Sudarshan Raj Tiwari says that while Shikhara style was popular during the time of Pratap Malla, the German image is just a sketch by an artist and not photographic evidence.

Said Tiwari: "It is not mandatory that the temple be built according to the sketch, in which the proportions of the temple are all wrong. It is taller than it should be, and could be a mistake by the artist. We have photographs pre-dating the 1934 earthquake that show the temple with a dome structure. More research is needed about whether it was actually in Shikhara style."





# PETE'S DRAGON

Children's movies are tricky — if too light, the adults get bored, if heavy and complex, both kids and adults (perhaps even more) get traumatised. These films try to pull their punches but most end up being pretty upsetting



**MUST SEE**  
Sophia Pande

regardless; more so to adults who have first-hand knowledge of love and loss than to the little people who, one hopes, have not experienced separation anxiety, death, and viciousness at close quarters just yet.

*Pete's Dragon* — Disney's newest live action remake of its 1977 classic animated musical —

is a bit wrenching for grownups, who know how cruel fate can be, with its blind reckonings and bad hands dealt to the nicest of people, while liars and thieves reign free (a certain very morally ambiguous presidential candidate with a toupee comes to mind).

Pete (Levi Alexander) is a very cute 5-year-old who is in a car accident with his parents when they are on a road trip adventure. Pete crawls out of the car with only his little red backpack, which contains his book *Elliott Gets Lost* — the story of a little dog who finds himself separated from his family. Wandering in the vast woods, Pete meets his Dragon, a big, green, flying, furry version of Scooby Doo who immediately falls in love with this fearless little creature who fits into his paw.

The film moves into its main meaty bit six years later when a logging company begins to encroach on Elliott the Dragon (named by the little boy) and the older Pete's (Oakes Fegley) habitat. Sceptical, acquisitive adults ruin things, particularly Gavin (Karl Urban), a logger and hunter to boot, who is always in conflict with his brother Jack (Wes Bentley), both of whom co-own the said lumber mill.

The logging brings Grace Meacham (Bryce Dallas Howard), a dedicated forest ranger and the girlfriend of Jack, into the ken of Pete and his large friend as she is marking special trees that are not to be touched. Disputes over haphazard logging in restricted areas (a venal exercise of pure greed on the part of Gavin) also bring Natalie (Oona Laurence), Jack's 10-year-old daughter, into the vast forest, and a fascinated Pete is discovered and taken to child services while Elliott is sleeping in their underground lair.

The anxiety that follows was unbearable for me — Elliott is so well-characterised, though he never says a word, that you can feel his heart break at the loss of his only friend Pete. Luckily, Bryce Dallas Howard and Oakes Fegley bring so much love, warmth, and genuine compassion to this film where, in the end, things do thankfully go well.

You have been forewarned: if you weep over furry creatures, this film will extort tears from your eyes.

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

■ Trailer

## HAPPENINGS



MAOIST SECRETARIAT

**THE OLD MAN FROM THABANG:** Legendary communist leader Barman Budha of Thabang, the cradle of the Maoist revolution, meets Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal in Kathmandu on Saturday.



SANJOG MANANDHAR

**ENDLESS WAIT:** Family members of the disappeared become teary-eyed at an event held in Kathmandu on Tuesday to mark the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances.



RSS

**REVIVING BAGMATI:** European Union envoy to Nepal Rensje Teerink enjoys rafting in Bagmati River on Saturday.



BIKRAM RAI

**FIVE OFFERINGS:** A boy receives *Pancha Dan* (five offerings) during the eponymous Buddhist festival in Kathmandu on Tuesday.

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# I am not a rebel

Sarala Gautam in *nepalkhabar.com*, 7 August



I do not need to be a rebel, I just want to live each day as it comes. I carve my own destiny, decide for myself what I do with my life. I did not need any special protection from family or society, I did not whine about the odds being stacked up against me, I decided to fight back with my work. It hurt when some couldn't take it and hit back at me, but it made me stronger. My female friends often tease me: "Wonder what kind of man you'll get to marry." Others urge me: "Enjoy life, don't bother to get married." And some commiserate: "You've done right, marriage is hell."

At Vipassana, a young woman shared her thoughts with me: "I searched for happiness everywhere. At 20, I looked for a boy friend. I thought I'd find it in marriage. At 22, I had a son and thought I'd be happy. I didn't find it. Today, I have found happiness within myself. I will not let anyone take it away from me." She asked me why I wasn't married. "I have loved, but marriage didn't happen," I said, and she replied: "You did right. That is why you are so confident and radiant. Married women look perpetually anxious."

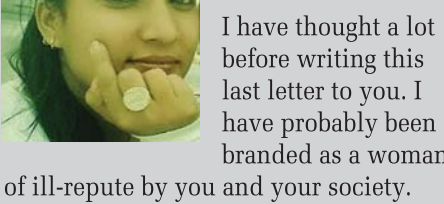


Why is that? Why do married women look harried? It's surprising, isn't it, that as women we have only two options: fly free, or be chained to a marriage. Another roommate confided: "It hasn't even been a year since I got married but I am stressed all the time. I have to support my husband's dreams, and there is a pile of expectations from his family on my head. I have no time for my own dreams."

We have one life to enjoy and experience. We have to plant our happiness and let the branches entwine those we love. Let's make our little worlds happy, there is no time to rebel.

# My first husband

Srijana Basnet in *Setopati*, 13 August



I have thought a lot before writing this last letter to you. I have probably been branded as a woman of ill-repute by you and your society. I was in Grade 8 when my parents agreed to give me away, after hearing from your folks that I could continue going to school. I was 17 and completely opposed to marrying you. On our wedding night a month later, I was terrified having to share a bed with someone I didn't even know. You were five years older, and quite plump. After all, you were a migrant worker, and you had just returned from Qatar. We didn't talk much, you held me tight, and I couldn't sleep the whole night. Everything was new: new place, new man, new relations. Your mother kept telling her new daughter-in-law: do this, do that. Within a week, she was acting nasty and I later realised it was because my family was poor and couldn't afford a dowry. I never saw you much. After a day of work, you'd claw at me for sex and I always had to be ready to offer it. What I needed did not matter. I never did get back to school. You said you were going to Qatar in six months, and I would run a shop. There was no need for an education. I cannot tell you in this letter how much I was tortured by your mother after you left. I cried on the phone with you. The money you sent all went to your mother. She just gave me enough to



buy soap to wash clothes. Your mother treated her dog better than me. When you did not return, neighbours started asking about you. At Tij, I went and stayed at my parents' home for two months. The day I returned, it was late when I got to your house. Your mother was eating, and said I could have stayed with whomever I was going out with. She told me to go back to where I had come from. I tried calling you many times. Some said you had probably married again, others said you may have died and I could find another partner. I couldn't stay in your house, and I couldn't get to my parents' house. So I went to Kathmandu with a friend from the village who tried to help me heal my wounds. She found work for me in a garment factory, and I got a room nearby. A contractor named Saila was very helpful. I once fell ill, and found out later he had saved my life by donating his blood. He brought his sister to look after me. After I got better, Saila did not let me work and brought me fruit and medicine. He asked me to marry him, and wiped my tears when I couldn't stop crying. We went to a nearby temple and I got married for the second time. There must be many women like me who are forced to marry again. Society is judgemental about us, and never understands. I couldn't care less how society looks at me. I waited seven years for you, now I have cut you off. I wanted to tell you all this in person, but since it is impossible, I have written this letter. Your first wife, but now someone else's, *Sapana*

# Where is my home, mother?

Mira Prasai in *Setopati*, 9 August



Don't keep criticising. If you want to live in this house, do what I say. What's it to you where I go, or with whom? You have to change your behaviour, it can't go on like this. The children will be upset. If you don't want to stay with me, don't. I can't change myself to suit you. Get out of my house. If you come back here, I'll break your legs. I am a man, I can do what I want. This is also my house. Where can I go? Shiva and Radha ran to their mother when she cried and wiped away her tears. She held their hands and left on a journey without a destination. She stopped at the crossroads to her parents' home. It is where you were born, she heard an inner voice say. Shiva and Radha were happy to see their grandparents. In the evening, Father asked: "You've come alone, is son-in-law OK? Sita was quiet. Mother: Why don't you speak? Sita: I am tired, I think I'll sleep. Sita thought her husband would come to get her. It had been two weeks. Mother: Go home to your husband now, there is no one to cook for him. Sita: Where is my home, mother? Where is a woman's home? Your son-in-law drove me out of the house, and you want me to go back? My husband's house is not my home, the house where I was born is not my home. Shiva and Radha are listening from their grandmother's lap. They tell their mother: "Father's house is not your home, Grandfather's house is not your home. Mother, we will build you a home. Your own home. A home as loving as you."



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Long before the earthquake hit last year, the districts around Kathmandu were already hotbeds of trafficking

OM ASTHA RAI

Charimaya Tamang was just 16 when she was drugged, trafficked and sold into a brothel in India. She was rescued, and returned to Nepal in 1996.

Twenty years later, Nepal has introduced multiple measures, most importantly the 1998 National Plan of Action (NPA) to eliminate human trafficking, to allow the government to stop the scourge. But although reduced, trafficking is still rampant in Sindhupalchok, Nuwakot, Dhading and other satellite districts of Kathmandu.

Tamang founded Shakti Samuha along with 14 other trafficking survivors, and fought against trafficking. Their organisation won the Ramon Magsaysay Award in 2013.

“Things have improved, girls are now relatively more aware and protected than they were in my time,” says Tamang who was honoured by the US government in 2011 with the TIP (Trafficking in Person) Report Hero Acting to End Modern Slavery Award.

However, new forms of trafficking are emerging, and the



SHAKTI SAMUHA

# Epicentre of trafficking

problem is now becoming much more complex than it was two decades ago. Whereas in the past trafficking rings sold young, uneducated and poor girls into Indian brothels, the destination has now shifted to the Gulf and even East African countries.

Shakti Samuha's Executive Director Sunita Danuwar — herself a trafficking survivor — lists foreign employment, inter-country marriage and surrogacy as the new and most prevalent forms of trafficking. “Combating these new forms of trafficking is more difficult than fighting sex

trafficking,” she says.

According to a 2014 report by the Labour Ministry, Sindhupalchok tops the list of districts with the most female migrant workers. Kavre, Makwanpur, Nuwakot and Dolakha trail close behind. These were also the districts worst hit by last year's earthquake, which has deepened the crisis of human trafficking.

Two convicted traffickers, Sukhman Dong and Kaila BK, fled when the walls of the Sindhupalchok District Prison collapsed in the earthquake. They

have not been arrested yet, and there are fears that they are back in business.

“After the earthquake, the girls from these districts are now more vulnerable because they have lost homes, and parents,” says Danuwar. Shakti Samuha has installed three more checkpoints in Sindhupalchok alone, to protect girls from traffickers.

While over 70 per cent of male migrant workers obtain labour permits through registered recruitment agencies, more than 60 per cent of female migrant workers do it individually.

“This is alarming, women who obtain individual labour permits often end up being trafficked and exploited,” says Manju Gurung of the migrant welfare group, Paurakhi Nepal.

Ratna Kaji Bajracharya, a former Joint Secretary involved in formulating several anti-trafficking policies, says it is Kathmandu's periphery where most women migrate from, because that had always been the hotbed of traditional trafficking.

“It is like using the old slaves to catch new slaves,” he says. “The source districts of

# Hiding hidden wounds

SHREEJANA SHRESTHA

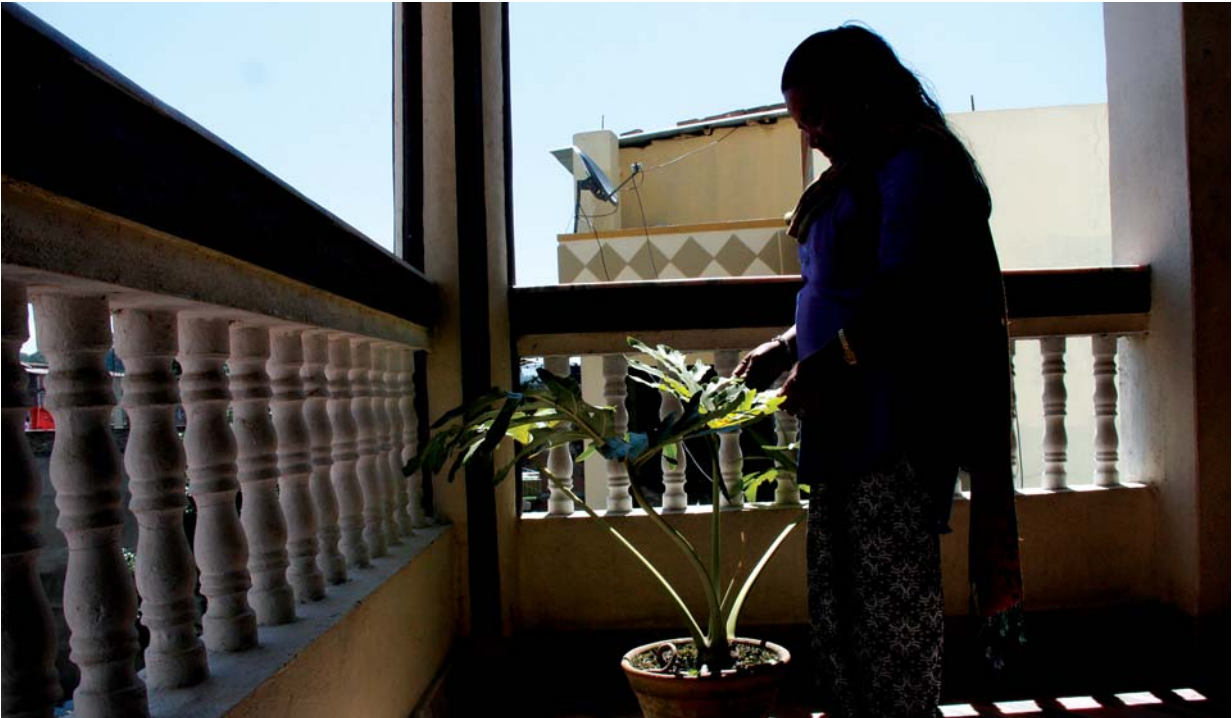
Shanti tried to kill herself several times after being sold by her relative to a brothel in Delhi when she was just 11. After five years as a virtual sex slave, during which she had to serve multiple clients every day, she was rescued and brought back home.

However, the euphoria of freedom was short-lived. After being saved seven years ago, she had to struggle against societal stigma and ostracisation, and faces the strain of hiding her past life.

“I was so elated after being rescued but the happiness didn't last forever. It is painful to be cautious all the time and pretend nothing happened to me,” says Shanti.

She still remembers her first night at the brothel, when she was raped by a 40-year-old man, and then by seven other men that same night. Her little feet made footprints in her blood on the floor in her room.

Shanti is from the Badi community in Surkhet, which has one of highest rates of trafficking.



SHREEJANA SHRESTHA

After facing years of abuse in Indian brothels, rescued young women have to then struggle to fight stigma back home in Nepal

Light House Foundation Nepal brought her to Kathmandu after her rescue, and trained her in sewing and making jewellery.

Raju Sundas of the Foundation

says trafficking survivors are given life skills so that they can better reintegrate into the society. “If they don't earn on their own, they might return to the same

profession,” he says.

Shanti wants to start her own business, and has to constantly guard against people finding out about her past. Being ostracised

**OUT OF BROTHEL:** Bimala's family does not know that she was sold to a brothel in India, and spent seven years as a sex worker.

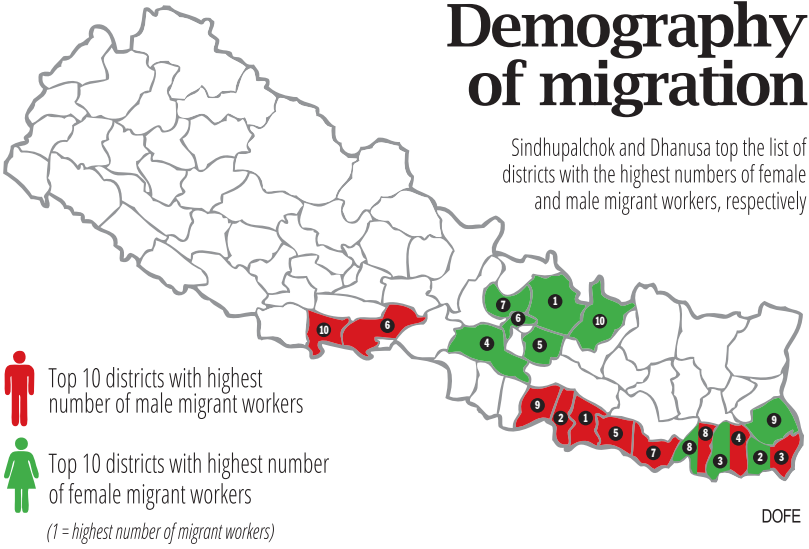
by her community was bad enough, but what hurts Shanti more is the fact that the relative who sold her into prostitution lives around the corner from her in Surkhet (*see box*).

Despite crackdowns, at least 7,000 Nepali girls are still being trafficked to brothels in India every year, and there are about 200,000 Nepali girls there, according to a 2015 report by the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Bimala has lived with her daughter in Kathmandu since her marriage failed. For her own family and neighbours, she is someone who resided in India for many years, got married and is living happily.

What they do not know is that she, like Shanti, was also sold to a brothel in India when she was 11, and spent seven years as a sex worker. After being rescued, she got married to an Indian man but could not endure the torture from her husband. She has not met any members of her family, although she is back in Kathmandu with





**STOP, LISTEN AND GO:** Prospective female migrant workers at a counselling centre run by Shakti Samuha in Sindhupalchok, the district with the highest number of female migrants.

the trafficked girls are same, the modus operandi of trafficking is also the same, only the destination has changed.”

Most female migrant workers who obtain individual labour permits reach Arab countries as housemaids, and some of them are sexually exploited, not just by employers but also relatives and guests. Some of them also reach African countries as dance bar girls.

The precursors to trafficking can even be traced back to the Rana days, when young girls from Sindhupalchok, Kavre and Nuwakot used to be sent to the palaces in Kathmandu as concubines. But with the construction of highways connecting Nepal with India, traffickers began selling girls, most from Janajati communities, into Indian brothels.

An ethnic breakdown of the 336 trafficked girls rescued from

India in 2014 and sheltered in the rescue and shelter agency, Maiti Nepal, revealed that 60 per cent of them were Janajati.

“It is mostly Janajati girls who are sold into Indian brothels because they are easily manipulated, and they are also the ones trafficked to the Gulf and Africa,” says Bhagawati Nepal, a Sindhupalchok-based anti-trafficking activist.

The Human Trafficking and Transportation (Control) Act 2007 defines trafficking not just as an act of forcing girls into prostitution, but also transporting people without their consent and forcing them to work. But the legislation does not clearly describe luring women into foreign jobs with false promises as an act of trafficking.

Sunita Nepal, of the anti-trafficking section of the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, admits that the lack of clarity over whether tricking women or men into foreign jobs is an act of trafficking has made it difficult for the victims to get justice.

She says: “We are revising the Act, but this is not enough. There should be more awareness about trafficking itself.”

## Turning the tables

Both Shanti and Bimala know the relatives who lured them to India and sold them to brothels there. But neither wants to take them to the police.

“The person who sold me in Delhi lives near my house, she apologised to me after I was rescued. But since she is a relative, I didn’t want to file a case,” Shanti explained, head bent. “My life became a living hell because of that person, but I cannot punish her.”

Young girls and women from Nepal are sold to India mostly by their close relatives, and that makes the prosecution process difficult. Nepal Police had 185 trafficking cases registered in 2014 and 2015 even though the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) estimates that about 17,000 women and children were trafficked from 2013 to 2015.

Kamal Thapa Chhetri of the NHRC explains: “Usually victims and their families try to settle the cases outside the court system. Due to this, the number of cases registered with the police is low compared to our data.”

Victims avoid filing cases against the perpetrators to steer clear of social stigma, having no hope of compensation and facing a sluggish justice mechanism, Chhetri adds. In addition, most perpetrators are relatives who lure the girls with promises of jobs, and rescued women generally prefer to keep quiet.

her daughter after leaving her husband in India.

“If you have been trafficked once, you are never going to be the same person, and will not fit into society ever again,” Bimala says, “people will always remind you about what happened to you in the past.”

Bimala has managed to keep her past a secret, and she has decided to make her own future back in Nepal. She works in a student hostel to support her daughter. She has also mustered the courage to go see her family in

Mugling this Dasain.

Sundas says trafficking survivors need years to overcome the stigma and be rehabilitated in society. “So we keep them in shelter houses, and try to boost their confidence through counselling,” he says.

Bimala says: “I don’t want to tell them anything about my past life and my broken family because I will be blamed for everything, even though none of it was my fault.”

(Names have been changed)

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# Fasting for the longevity of dorks

Because his logic is often backward, the Ass can't figure out why women need another festival to celebrate the fact that they are downtrodden. What's the fuss about anyway? They are already assured 33% of all civil service jobs and ministerships. Even if they make up only 3% of the current cabinet, so what? It's the thought that counts.

In case you hadn't noticed, our nascent republic has females as President, Speaker, Justice, Editor-in-Chief, and Head Bartender. Parliament has also passed legislation allowing daughters to inherit parental property, and is working on a new law requiring parents to force their daughters to marry certified dorks, thus making doubly sure that the property remains in safe hands. We have no problems with girls joining the rank and file to stand shoulder to shoulder with us, we just want them to be grateful, that's all.

This Tij, women will fast, as they have for millennia, so that their present or future husbands have health, wealth and a ministerial berth in the new coalition. Those who, for technical reasons, do not wish their current spouses to have any of the above can of course just secretly stop by at the Mt Everest Bhojanalaya and gorge themselves on buff momos.

Methinks Parliament may be overstepping its bounds. At this rate there will be no jobs left for men. What is it doing to help broad-minded men like us who, the last time we checked, were still allegedly holding up the other half of the sky? Ok, ok, one-third. What we in the Central Non-Working Committee of the recently formed All-Nepal Federation of Alpha-Males and Drones (Revolutionised) want to know is, how is Parliament going to guarantee that this epidemic of politically correct legislation in favour of members of the female persuasion will not leave us he-Asses high and dry and out in the wilderness?

Should we guys be getting worried? You bet. And what should we gentlemen be doing about it? Kicking butt. Yes, taking a leaf out of the book of the Great Helmsman himself, who said (and I quote), "To be offensive is the best form of defensiveness", we men have no recourse but to follow this wise dictum and start behaving in an even more obnoxious and loathsome manner than we already do. And all of us who wear Y-front undies must launch a multipronged campaign throughout maledom, starting just about right now, to reassert our manhood and reclaim our past honour. We will protect the bastions of our maledom from female encroachment till the last man is left standing.

But, some good news at last — just when we card-carrying members of the unfair sex were feeling a trifle beleaguered, comes word that Kathmandu is getting its first male beauty parlour. At last there is a place us boys can go and get our blackheads squeezed by professionals without any danger of those things getting infected and erupting into pus-filled carbuncles and aunties.

So, let this be a warning: we are not going to sit idly by while women outscore us in SLC and take away our jobs. This Tij, we will counter-attack by sitting outside Parliament till all our demands are met. Which means we want 33% of all jobs traditionally held by women to also be reserved for men. Only through affirmative action can men also have a chance to prove themselves to be as good housewives and homemakers.



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