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GOPAL GARTAJI

Another deadend

Refugee families from Bhutan who have lived in camps in Nepal for more than two decades and were finally ready to board flights to the United States this week have been stopped by President Trump's immigration ban. This is another blow for the remaining refugees whose UN food rations were reduced last week.

Kali Maya Magar (pictured at right, above, with mother-in-law Nar Maya and 17-year-old daughter Sushmita) was all set to fly to Kathmandu on Tuesday on a journey that would take them to Vermont to rejoin the rest of the family.

The Magars are some of the last among 120,000 refugees who were evicted by Bhutan in the early 1990s and had been living in camps in Morang and Jhapa. A multinational agreement in 2007 arranged their resettlement, and the US has already taken 92,000 refugees with smaller numbers

going to Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the Netherlands, Norway, Denmark and UK.

Kali Maya was a teen-age girl when her family was forced out of southern Bhutan. She married her husband, Dhan Bahadur, in the Beldangi Camp. Her married children have already been resettled in the US, and she was waiting for a grand family reunion when the Trump ban came into effect.

"I was so happy that our family would be together again in America, but everything is uncertain now," Kali Maya told us, sitting amidst packed bags in the bamboo hut that has been the family home for 25 years. Trump has hinted that refugees may be allowed to the US after four months, but only those from 'minority religious groups', a euphemism for Christians.

This comes as the UN's World Food Programme (WFP) last week reduced food it has

provided refugees since 1992. While retaining full rations for the remaining 3,100 children, elderly and disabled refugees, it is giving only half ration to the rest.

In protest, all 500 WFP refugee volunteers involved in distribution stopped work on Wednesday. Said Sanchahang Subba at Beldangi: "We are hungry, our children are unable to study."

Full food supply is unlikely to resume as WFP is said to face a funding crunch because of more serious crises elsewhere.

Of the 9,000 refugees remaining in camps, 1,700 say they want to be repatriated to their own homeland. However, EU ambassador to Nepal Rensje Teerink told Nepali Times in Jhapa last week that Nepal and Bhutan need to accept the refugees who remain after the resettlement ends in June. 

Gopal Gartaula in Jhapa

THE UGLY AMERICAN

**HEARTBREAK
IN AMERICA**
GUEST EDITORIAL
BY UPASANA KHADKA

PAGE 2

Nepal's bird family

Hira Dangol has got his whole clan to blend art with ornithology

BY **SMRITI BASNET** PAGE 8-9



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THE UGLY AMERICAN

Pundits pondered how Trump America would affect Nepal even before he was sworn in. Ten days into his presidency, POTUS has not just made good on one after other of his campaign promises on immigration, foreign policy, trade, etc., but over-fulfilled them.

And, sooner than we expected, shockwaves from the Great American Earthquake have reached Nepal, in doubts about H1B visas, undocumented Nepalīs in the US and families of Bhutan refugees who were suddenly told they can't go (*see page 1*). Donald Trump and Narendra Modi look like they were separated at birth, which means a closer US-India alignment vis-a-vis China, and aid cuts.

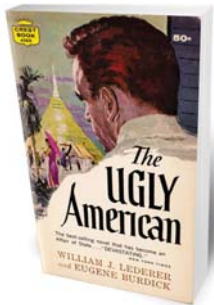
As we watch from afar America being wrecked by the un-American activities of its ruler, we must also give a thought to how such a witless, populist, xenophobic, misogynist can even be elected in a democracy. Alas, 1930s Germany showed how despots can rise when traditional

politicians go astray, fail to fulfil their mandate, and forget their mission. That is when people look for messiahs.

Demagogues get themselves elected through hate-speech and immediately begin to dismantle and overhaul the very institutions that got them to power: the legislature, judiciary, the security apparatus. They bypass the media and go directly to the people with fiery public oratory. Or Twitter.

Here in Nepal we were already seeing a steady dissolution of democratic institutions and the rule of law. Now, the prepotent political cartel doesn't want elections. A discredited kakistocracy exploits hollow nationalism and tribalism to rule and keep plundering. In order to prevent our country, too, from falling off the populism precipice again we must safeguard the independence of the two pillars of democracy still standing: the judiciary and media.

Sad, though, that we don't have the Americans anymore to lecture us about democracy and human rights.



GUEST EDITORIAL UPASANA KHADKA

Heartbreak in America



WASHINGTON D C -- Even among those of us who chose to leave our homeland voluntarily, there is a certain type of nostalgia for 'home' that never goes away. To add to this longing are everyday challenges to being 'foreign'. We feel the strain of having a less powerful passport as we get patted down by airport security during not-so-random random checks or when our alien status bars us from even applying for jobs that could potentially be a good fit. But we bear with it because what made us come here was less the push and more

the pull of better opportunities.

As an outsider in America, it is easy to believe that it could very well have been any of us in the place of those who are banned. In the stories about those who were deplaned or detained or deported or denied visa, there are fragments of our own journeys.

What we enjoy in America is usually not 'American' at all. The food we like the most are Lebanese or Ethiopian, but by appreciating all these not-American things we are indirectly appreciating America for its diversity to be a melting pot and for the freedom to enjoy them as we please.

It is in this diverse country that I have had the opportunity to make friends with people including those from the now-banned list. An Iranian friend had gone back to renew her visa only to realise she would not be allowed back in the US. An Iraqi-British friend who is now based in Indonesia is no longer able to come to DC for his training.

There are many Nepalīs who have overstayed their visas and are working in the shadows. Some were granted Temporary Protected Status post-earthquake. There are many in limbo waiting for immigration paperwork. The resettlement of Bhutan refugees has been suspended. When the administration is capable of detaining Green Card holders it is difficult to know what awaits.

America is full of stories of immigrants, of hard work and sacrifices, of opportunities and perseverance. Watching that freedom and diversity being curtailed has been heartbreaking. But there are reasons to be hopeful. I have faith in the humanity and compassion of that side of America that is organising spontaneously in solidarity with those who are banned or feel unsafe here.

Times.com

WATCH VIDEOS



LONG DISTANCE DOCTORS

Follow patients in Myagdi getting medical advice from doctors in Kathmandu through telemedicine. In remote Nepal, where it takes days to reach the nearest health post, real time video conferencing has made it possible for patients to get immediate medical treatment. But slow Internet is slowing down the spread of telemedicine.



THE HOUSE OF ART

Hira Lal Dangol, one of the illustrators of Robert Flemming's field guide, *Birds of Nepal*, has lived his life to the fullest - painting birds and doing what he loves. Now, he has passed his skills and passion to the next generation: his four children. Watch how Pushpa, Meena, Pratima and Iswor are carrying on the legacy of their talented father.

ONLINE EXCLUSIVE



7 years in Jeddah jail

By Om Astha Rai
Ten Nepali migrant workers return home to ask: "Why did our government abandon us?"
Read more online

REMEMBERING FOREVER

Madhav Ghimire was one of Nepal's finest public servants ('Programmed to be heartless', Kanak Mani Dixit, #843). He was also one of the first to befriend me when I took up my position (as British ambassador to Nepal) in 2006. Thanks Kanak for helping ensure he is not forgotten.

Andrew Hall

MISSING MIGRANTS

The volume of missing migrant workers in just one district is enough to understand how pathetic our labour policy is ('Never heard from again', Om Astha Rai, #843). We need an effective mechanism to trace missing migrants, and re-establish their links with families.

B Sunar

UNSAFE FAMILY

We need to ensure that girls are safe home. For this, punishment against perpetrators and awareness are needed. ('All in the family', Sahina Shrestha, #843)

Maya Baniya

WHAT'S TRENDING



Most reached and shared on Facebook
(9,948 people reached)

Most popular on Twitter
(53 retweets, 66 likes)

Never heard from again

by Om Astha Rai
Hundreds of Nepali migrant workers never return home, not even in coffins. They simply disappear.



Most visited online page

Most commented

Programmed to be heartless

By Kanak Mani Dixit
It seems our minds are so collectively hardened, our hearts turned to rock, that we cannot even muster the imagination to remember the man that was Madhav Ghimire.

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
Hundreds of Nepali migrant workers never return home, not even in coffins. They simply disappear. <http://bit.ly/2jQn0Bb> @omastharai

Michael den Hoet @mdenhoet
Horrible! And this is not only about #Qatar2022, but happens in other gulf countries and Malaysia, too.

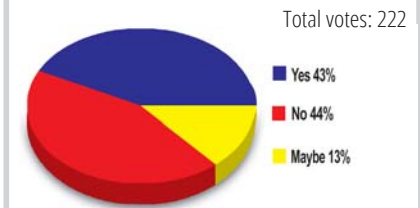
Mel dawson @Meldawson6
Migrant workers, mostly women are vanishing without a trace: The modern face of slavery & #humantrafficking @amnestyusa @Global_Witness Mdx

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
Ten Nepali migrant workers return home to ask: "Why did our government abandon us?" <http://bit.ly/2k7CPU2> @omastharai

Sushma Joshi @joshi_sushma
Horrifying: the Nepali government is completely inhumane.

Times Weekly Internet Poll #842

Q. Do you support the new government policy that requires Nepalīs to obtain permission before going to work in India?



Weekly Internet Poll #843
To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Will Donald Trump's immigration ban induce Nepalīs to return home from the US?



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Long-distance medical care

Lack of Internet access and low bandwidth slows spread of telemedicine in Nepal's remote areas

SONIA AWALE

It is 9AM at Kathmandu Model Hospital. But instead of donning his surgical gown and going into the operation theatre, surgeon Udaya Koirala enters a room with a large computer monitor for his regular Skype call to Shikha Health Post in Myagdi district, 250km away.

Health Assistant Tilak Chhantyal comes online from Shikha through an intermittent video. There are two patients today: A man whose wife is pregnant because of a vasectomy gone wrong, and a burn patient.

Koirala and his team examine the patients, and they suggest options. On other mornings, there are much more life-threatening cases. But telemedicine allows lives to be saved in a country where medical care is sparse.

"Real time video conferencing means we can examine patients directly, and make a diagnosis," Koirala says, adding that in most cases the patient doesn't need to go to a city hospital and can be treated by the health assistant.

Indeed, the burn patient in Myagdi would have made a 16 hour road trip to Kathmandu if Koirala hadn't prescribed treatment at the Health Post itself.

"He wasn't confident about his recovery, and the health assistant was also unsure, but we found out that he didn't need to go to the city. That is the great advantage of telemedicine," Koirala explains.

Then there are cases like a patient in Dolakha who was diagnosed with appendicitis, but once the surgeon opened him up it was actually intussusception, a potentially fatal intertwining of the intestine.

"The surgeon called me from the operation theatre and I guided him through the procedure over Skype," recalls Koirala.

Telemedicine has made it possible for the people in some of the remotest parts of Nepal to get specialist consultation and, in many cases, local treatment



SONIA AWALE

ON CAMERA: Surgeon Udaya Koirala (at right) with colleagues at Kathmandu Model Hospital consults with Health Assistant Tilak Chhantyal in Myagdi through Skype this week about a patient.

Government is planning to extend its telemedicine services to 30 districts, even though it is not being used effectively in government hospitals where video conferencing tools have already been installed. Problems are poor maintenance and the inability of staff to use telemedicine for emergency procedures.

This is proof that technology alone is never the solution. "Training is as important as equipment, software is more important than hardware," says Koirala.

In the first-ever Telemedicine Conference held in September in Kathmandu by NREN, participants recognised that real time video conferencing had proven its usefulness, but needed to be backstopped and up-scaled. Telemedicine lowers the cost of curative medical care, and is especially important as non-communicable diseases become more prevalent.

Mahabir Pun (*see box*) is now working to set up the National Innovation Centre, and says: "Connectivity has to go hand-in-hand with political will." 🇳🇵



MOTIVATION

Mahabir Pun
Chairman, National Innovation Centre

“Broadband fibre optic cables now serve the main cities, so connectivity is not a problem. But in rural areas wifi is not reliable and bandwidth is slow, this is a bottleneck. But connectivity is not enough, you need motivated local health post staff. There is a ‘what can I get out of it’ mentality. Telemedicine works where the local Health Assistant is motivated, if he isn't it doesn't work.”

for emergency cases that may otherwise be fatal. Families also don't have to spend all their savings on taking patients to private hospitals in the city.

All this has been made

possible by the spread of Internet connectivity which is growing exponentially with the mobile phone network. However, as evidenced in the Model Hospital consultation this week, the Skype connection was erratic because of low bandwidth in Myagdi.

"The slow Internet makes it difficult, but we have installed faster speeds in places where we consult regularly," says Koirala. Kathmandu Model Hospital with support from Mahabir Pun's Nepal Wireless and the Nepal Research and Education Network (NREN) started telemedicine ten years ago. Until his retirement, Mingma Sherpa peioneered telemedicine from Phaplu Hospital and extended it to 25 districts through Patan Hospital.

But despite more than a decade of proven experience, telemedicine hasn't reached its full potential.

"In the beginning it was a fad with the appeal of new technology, and it fizzled out," says Saroj Dhital, senior surgeon at Model Hospital who initiated the telemedicine program with Mahabir Pun.

Effective video conferencing needs bandwidth, but the areas of rural Nepal that need telemedicine

the most are places without Internet. Mobile operators provide only 2G services in most rural areas, making phones too slow for downloading data and video.

"The main reason telemedicine has not spread is because of lack of connectivity or slow bandwidth," says Bikash Gauchan who uses video conferencing consultations regularly for his mental health program at Bayalpata Hospital in Achham, where the group, Possible, has installed fast satellite Internet.

Health workers in Achham deliver mental health care under long-distance supervision of psychiatrists based in Kathmandu who can access case details from Bayalpata's Electronic Medical Record system.



LONG DISTANCE DOCTORS

Watch patients in a health post in Myagdi get telemedicine consultation from surgeons based in Kathmandu.

nepalimes.com

prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

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Exchange galore

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Carnival 2017'. Customers can exchange their old cars from any brand with Volkswagen Polo, Vento, Beetle, and Tiguan from the authorised showrooms at Thapathali and Panipokhari. The offer runs till 3 February.

Second set of wings

Himalaya Airlines, a Nepal-China Joint Venture Airline added a second aircraft to its fleet, a new Airbus 320-214. Over



the coming years the company plans to add 15 Airbus 320 aircraft to its fleet. The airlines will be flying directly to Kuala Lumpur and Yangon, this year.

Brand new

MAW Enterprise has launched the new SKODA Rapid in the Nepali market. The new car comes in two engine variants:



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prabhu BANK



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The unsuccessful hippie

Although I never meant to stay, I am still here over 40 years later

It's not easy being a successful hippie. Even if embracing the flowing clothes, dangling necklaces, open sandals and flowers in the hair is not too hard, there is all that sitting around smoking dope and staring into space. Plagued by a nagging protestant work ethic, excess energy and an irrational fear of boredom, I have never been good at doing nothing.



SO FAR SO GOOD

Lisa Choegyal

It is the spring of 1974, and the route from Pokhara to Jomsom has just reopened for trekkers. I have come to explore the network of trading trails that cobweb the Nepal Himalaya, part of a wider overland wander that began in Bali, through South East Asia and Burma to Kathmandu, then a hippie haven. I arrive on the short rickety flight from Rangoon, wide-eyed and entranced, eager to embrace the adventures offered by the still-fledgling Nepal tourism industry.

Blissfully unprepared and recklessly casual, I trek alone through the deepest gorge in the world. My feet ache with blisters, formed before a kindly ex-Gurkha teashop owner forced some good woollen socks on me. I have a large bruise on my thigh from a water buffalo at Ghorepani that did not appreciate my friendly pat. But I am enthralled, captivated by the scenery and people of these sacred mountains.

I bask in their hospitality and warmth — something about this place makes me feel deeply at home.

After the trek, impatient with hanging out in Kathmandu on a tight budget amidst the joint-rolling table-tops of Freak Street, I devour the temples, palaces and medieval bazaars, cycling through the emerald terraces to discover the Valley's outlying corners and remote shrines. It isn't long before a chance meeting in the Panorama Hotel's Union Jack bar results in the opportunity to visit Tiger Tops in Royal Chitwan National Park. I leap at it, rescued from my stoned indolence.

And so it is that, although I never meant to stay, I am still here. Over 40 years later, I write sitting in the garden of the yellow Rana and Newar-style house with traditional terracotta roof tiles that Tenzin and I built in Budhanilkantha, overlooking Kathmandu Valley. The afternoon light filters through the trees, insects are busy amidst the flowers, doves call from among the rocks, and the stream that becomes the Vishnumati River gurgles through the adjacent wood. Of course Nepal has changed since 1974, but the strong sense of connection that overcame me then remains.

The excitement of exploring the jungle on elephant back deep in tiger country does not disappoint. I am charged by a rhino and young calf while out on foot, saved only by a tourist-



WILD SIDE: Lisa Choegyal gets bored of trying to be a hippie and begins to explore a career in adventure tourism and conservation. Here she is on elephant-back safari in Chitwan in 1974. This is the first of her fortnightly columns, *So Far So Good*, in *Nepali Times*.

laden elephant named Rup Kali and her heroic driver, Sultana. I become hooked on the wild thrill of jungle life and persuade the owner of Tiger Tops, Jim Edwards, to give me a job.

"If you can talk me into that, you can talk anyone into anything!" Jim leans back with resignation in his blue chair in Tiger Tops' Durbar Marg office. For the next few years Chitwan becomes my home, before I move to Kathmandu as director of marketing in a career that lasted over 20 years.

During those first weeks of early 1974 I bond with the Lodge staff when the kitchen thatch catches fire and my height helps them hoist up the chain of water buckets from the river to the team working on the roof. I love the complex logistics required to manage a safe, up-market wildlife enterprise in the heart of a national park.

Everything has to run smoothly for the guests, and my colleagues are skilled former Gurkha army engineers, Tharu elephant drivers, Kumal boatmen and Tamang cooks. I learn how to identify every sound in Chitwan, motorised or natural—all so very different from my native north of England countryside—studying the behaviour of the wildlife with Indian and Nepali naturalists.

Working with Jim Edwards is entertaining, innovative his leadership inspiring. I am young, it is a golden time for nature tourism and at last I feel I am doing something useful, released from my life as an unsuccessful hippie. 🇳🇵

Lisa Choegyal is a Brit who has made Nepal her home since the mid 1970s. This is the first of her bi-monthly column, So Far So Good about her personal stories and encounters with a colourful cast of characters during a lifetime of adventure working in tourism and conservation. © Lisa Choegyal

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There is a massive westerly front approaching that has brought blizzards over the Pamirs already. However, it is not expected to bring any significant precipitation to Central Nepal when it grazes us over the weekend. The winter mist in Kathmandu will thicken, though, because of the added moisture in the air and this will give way to feeble haze-filtered sunshine during the day. Expect lower maximum temperature, therefore, and slightly elevated minimum.

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A model designer

Tucked away in an alley to the north of Kathmandu lies designer Tenzing Yangkyi Shrestha's (*pic, above*) studio, a small attic-like space where she works on her fashion compositions, popularly sold under the label of 'Teyang'. Teyang is the reduction of her name and Shrestha says it allows her the opportunity to break free from being identified as a Nepali or Tibetan designer.

Shrestha graduated from the University of Northhampton and spent two years interning in London before heading back to Nepal. Lacking the foundation that most people enter designing school with, Shrestha found her formative years in university to be quite challenging. "Most of my colleagues at university already had a taste of what they were getting into since they branched out immediately

out of high school. I just about knew how to thread a needle," recalls the 26-year-old, who has worked in close association with House of Fashion and has organised her own shows. As a child, Shrestha was enamoured by the lavish flowing gowns and dresses. She remembers that was what sparked her initial interest in dress designing, but that is not what made her stay on in graduate school.



PICS: PRAKAT KHATI

She was naïve enough to think that all fashion entailed was glamour, ball gowns, pretty dresses and fancy ribbons, only to encounter the messy and demanding world of construction. "What attracted me to fashion and the reason I stayed on and eventually took on to garment designing are completely different," she says. "Designing school changed the way I looked at things. I understood the amount of work that went into conceptualising and constructing a piece of clothing. I fell in love with the creative process, and stayed on." Once back in Nepal, Shrestha grappled to establish a customer base. Her designs were minimalist with only one idea per clothing. But Kathmandu banked largely on readymade garments for daily wear and turned to designers only for elaborate, festival clothing. "I was trying to introduce a very minimalistic approach to fashion. But the construction of a garment, however basic, entails extensive construction and great detailing and the end product isn't always inexpensive. When a piece of clothing is flamboyant, or dramatic and there is a lot going on, it looks expensive and people want to pay more," said Shrestha, who found out that social media was the most effective way to showcase designs and garner publicity. In addition to social media platforms, her designs are also showcased in her flagship store at Nag Pokhari, a neat, sparsely-laid out store that complements its collection. Shrestha is happy with the progress she has made and is looking forward to many more creative ventures. **Raisa Pande**

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Nepa

Hira



SMRITI BASNET

When Hira Lal Dangol was offered work as an illustrator for American ornithologist Robert Flemming's field guide on birds, *Birds of Nepal*, in the 1970s, he had little idea it would change his life.

Fifty years and 3,000 bird paintings later, Dangol has become a household name in the world of nature art. Now, he has passed on his skills and passion to the next generation: his four children.

"I used to spend five to six days working on one painting and never felt like stopping till it was done," said the sprightly 77-year-old.

Eldest son Pushpa Lal Dangol recalls having an extraordinary

childhood. While his friends were doing homework, his 'homework' was to fill in colours on his father's bird watercolours.

Four members of the Dangol family, Pushpa, Meena, Pratima and Iswor, held an exhibition of their bird paintings at Nepal Art Council last month as a homage to their father and his work.

"One has to be disciplined to paint birds. It needs to look realistic and has to be precise," said Iswor Dangol, the youngest sibling.

Growing up seeing their father's work from dawn to dusk, eldest daughter Meena feels their upbringing was entirely different compared to other children in the neighbourhood. While their friends were playing outdoors, the Dangol children were busy painting.

"We didn't know when we stopped being just us and started being artists," recalled Meena.

Hira Dangol used to be a *paubha* painter, and it was under the tutelage of noted artist Lain Singh Bangdel that he started painting birds, and it was Bangdel who introduced him and fellow artist, Hem Poudyal, to Robert Flemming.

Much like his father, having a regular job never excited Pushpa. "Today the youth seem to prioritise money over earning a good name," said the eldest son who returned to Nepal recently after spending 12 years in United States.

Pushpa has moved on from portraits of single birds to include their habitat as well. He is now also trying his hand at painting Nepal's other wildlife, showing us a massive wall painting of a snow

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ISWOR DANGOL

Nepal's bird family

Hira Dangol has got his whole clan to blend art with ornithology

IN THEIR GENES: Bird artist Hira Lal Dangol (above, far left) busy at work at his residence. His children (clockwise) Pushpa, Meena, Pratima and Iswor with their artworks.

"We don't have to depend on foreigners anymore to buy our paintings, Nepalis have started to buy art as well," Hira Dangol says. But while the emergence of the art scene in Kathmandu and their own success has been heartening, the family says there is a need for a school specialising in wildlife art.

But for now, the Dangol siblings hope to follow the footsteps of their father who is as active as ever. Hira Dangol says his eyes are getting weak, but he is not one to give up. Of his father and mentor, Pushpa says: "It is only because of our dad that we, his children, are active too." 🇳🇵

leopard.

Meena, on the other hand, has specialised in painting birds of prey. "It is their eyes that fascinates me the most, they signify power," she said, pointing to her painting of a Horned Owl.

Pratima has chosen to paint different variety of birds of the same family on a single canvas. In the recent exhibition she had watercolours depicting in the

minutest detail group portraits of Nepal's avian diversity.

Iswor has found his calling in depicting smaller and rarer bird species. At the exhibition he had painting of tiny sunbirds that told the story of their migration and habitat.

Nepal's location in the lap of the Himalaya means that it has 880 bird species, more than the entire North American continent.

Migratory and resident species, however, are being threatened by habitat destruction not just in Nepal but along their annual transcontinental flight paths.

"We keep hearing that Nepal is rich in water resources and tourism but I want everyone to know that Nepal is rich in birdlife as well," said Iswor.

Iswor remembers Baya Weavers, a common sight during

his childhood in Kathmandu and now rarely spotted, and paints them from memory.

Hira Dangol had to close his Dangol Art Gallery in Kalimati during the Maoist conflict because business was slow. Now, the entire collection is in storage at the family home. Pratima has fond memories of the gallery because that was where, at just 14, she sold her first painting.



Watch video of Hira Lal Dangol and his children as they talk about their shared passion for bird art.

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EVENTS



Namo Buddha pilgrimage,

Embark on a one-day pilgrimage tour to Namu Buddha, a monastery located in Kavre district.

18 February, 7.30 am to 5 pm, Meeting point: 7.30 am at Ratna Park, For more details: 9841454462/9841326364/9808799 589, blossomexpeditions@gmail.com

#photoNepal

Do not miss out on the photo exhibition by Naresh Kusi and Geraldine Werhahn showcasing pictures of Humla as part of the #photoNepal series.

3-5 February, Nepal Tourism Board, Exhibition Road, (01) 4256909

Japanese films,

Learn more by immersing yourself in the culture of the Japanese during this film festival.

3 & 4 February, Pokhara Chamber of Commerce and Industries, Gairi Patan, Pokhara, Free Entry, 10 & 11 February, Army Officer's Club, Sundhara, Passes available at Embassy of Japan, Panipokhari and JALTAN office, Exhibition Road, (01) 4426680, www.np.emb-japan.go.jp



Kathak night,

A musical dance concert featuring kathak dancer Shikha Khare and dancers of Nritya Aagan accompanied by classical music maestro Rabin Lal Shrestha.

10 February, 4 to 6.30 pm, Nepal Academy Hall, (01) 4221283

Farmer's market,

For organic local food, chef brunches and wide green spaces visit farmer's market at Le Sherpa and Yellow House.

Every Saturday, 8 am to 12 pm, LeSherpa, Lajimpat, Every Sunday, 9 am to 12 pm, Yellow House, Sanepa, (01) 5522078

Children's literature,

Book stalls, workshops, shows, talks and more at this year's edition of the Bal Sahitya Mahotsav, an annual children's literature festival organised by Rato Bangala Group of Institutions.

18 February, 10 am to 5 pm, Rato Bangala School, Patan Dhoka, www.bsmnp.org

Women of the World,

Mark your calendars for Women of the World festival, a one day festival to celebrate women and girls featuring talks, workshops, performances and more.

18 February, 11 am to 8 pm, Staff College, Jawalakhel, (01) 4410798, http://bit.ly/2hfe6v8



Pinkathon,

Gear up for the Kathmandu Pinkathon, a women only event, and choose to run in 3km, 5km, 10km or 21 km run to promote and encourage women empowerment.

24 February, 7 to 11 am, Dasarath Rangashala Stadium, Tripureshwor, www.kathmandupinkathon.com

Festival management,

Train with facilitator Amy Walker and learn how to manage a festival with a social focus, a three-day workshop organised by Kathmandu Triennale.

6 to 8 February, 2 to 6 pm, British Council, Lajimpat, Apply: https://goo.gl/forms/DTTgXWvPKqaLWE9x2

Self defence,

Participate in self defence classes for women with Romee Giri, fourth dan and young national referee of taekwondo.

25 February, 10 am to 1 pm, RSTCA, Lajimpat, Tickets: form.jotform.me/60151655603449, (01) 4426258



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MUSIC



Sax Machine live,

Listen to French hip hop band, Sax Machine, perform live at Alliance Française. Nepali band The Triplets will be opening the concert.

5 February, 5 to 7 pm, Alliance Française, Dhalko Bato, Pulchok, 9808418422

Trombone time,

Attend as American trombone player Ray Heberer performs in this week's Impromptu Music Sessions series.

3 February, 8.30 to 10 pm, Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, Jhamsikhel, (01) 5013554, Rs 400 (KJC or Moksh)

Black History month,

Don't miss out on this year's Black History Month which will begin with performances by two of the biggest names in the Nepali music industry: Mukti & Revival and Robin and the New Revolution.

3 February, 8 to 11 pm, House of Music, Thamel, 9851075172, Rs 300



Bombay Vikings,

Save the date for Indian pop and rock group Bombay Vikings. Hear them belt out some of their hits in this live performance.

18 February, 4.30 to 8 pm, Jawalakhel Football Grounds, 9813089163/9802092034

Sufi nights,

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DINING



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Until 4 February, 6.30 pm onwards, Garden Terrace (Deck), Soaltee Crowne Plaza, Tahachal, (01) 4273999



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Bhatbhateni, (01)4443839

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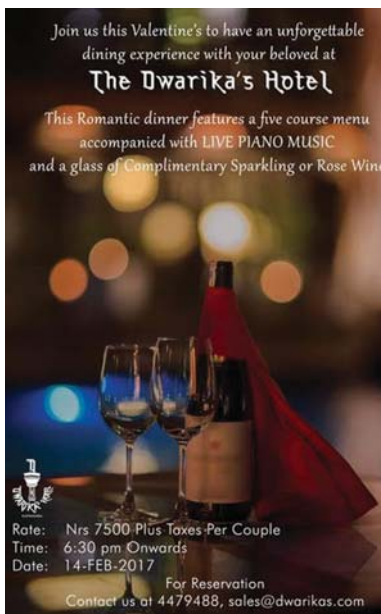
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Bulldozing development



ALOK TULADHAR



GOING, GOING: Kathmandu's road-widening spree has destroyed centuries-old heritage sites like Sorakhutte (above).

SRIZU BAJRACHARYA

SRIZU BAJRACHARYA

After widening the roads in the city, the Kathmandu Valley Development Authority is now moving its bulldozers to the outskirts, tearing through historic neighbourhoods. Ancient townships in the southern fringes of the Valley like Sunakothi, Harisiddhi, Thaiba, Badegaon were seriously hit by the 2015 earthquake. Now they face a bigger threat from the road-widening campaign.

'Development' is narrowly defined only to mean infrastructure, whereas holistic development includes the cultural landscape, traditional homes, squares and streets where ethnic festivals and rituals are held. The destruction not just flouts the Ancient Monuments Act, but the haphazard way ancient homes are being spray-painted in red signifying that they are condemned, is misguided and ill-advised.

But there is also support for wider roads. Says Surya Tamang of Chapagaun: "When there is development, there is always some destruction. Hopefully it will make our lives better."

In Badegaon, Jog Bahadur

Maharjan, shakes his head as the excavators move in in a cloud of dust. He says nearly 30 heritage sites will be affected when the street that snakes through his town is widened. "We are not against the government here," he tells us, "we just want to make sure that the government has thought this through. Where will we live afterwards? We want to develop our town, but not at expense of our cultural and ethnic histories."

At Sunakothi, locals like Nanda Lal Maharjan, are skeptical that the road-widening will ever happen. "Well, we have been hearing about it for a long time, but I don't even know if it's happening," he says.

Over at the Kathmandu Valley Development Authority, its chief Bhai Kaji Tiwari is aware of the worry about heritage destruction. "My hands are tied, but the government has assured us it will not destroy heritage sites."

However, on the ground there is little transparency about the plans for road expansion, there is almost no local consultation. The people have a right to know what the government plans to do with their towns.

Development is not just roads, it is the inheritance of memories from our ancestors and future survival of the Kathmandu Valley civilisation.



HERITAGE LIVE!

Series coordinated by Alok Siddhi Tuladhar

“



I have always supported development, and we are trying to modernise our towns. The government will always win despite local opposition, although it may be delayed because of lawsuits.

Bhai Kaji Tiwari, Chief,
Kathmandu Valley Development Authority



My plea to the public is to be aware of our heritage. We need to know and value it, and protect our history and prestige. Don't ignore it just because you are not directly affected now. Nepal needs informed citizens.

Suman Sayami, lead activist of Upatyakabyapi Sadak Bistar Sangharsha Samiti

”



PRABIN MAHARJAN

Badegaon is one of the most important ancient towns of Kathmandu Valley with ancient homes and religious monuments. Out of the four important Buddhas, the one here has been around for centuries. The place also has the Lachhi Dhunge Dhara built during the Licchavi period 1,200 years ago. The Mahankal Mandir is equally important to locals. It is estimated that 30 heritage sites will be affected when the road is extended in Badegaon.



SRIZU BAJRACHARYA

Sora Khutte used to be a resting place for travellers built 207 years ago. During the turmoil of its destruction, Alok Siddhi Tuladhar, a heritage conservationist, had asked the contractor to spare the sattal, but came the reply: "These 16 wooden pillars can be assembled again in some other place. Here it is just coming in the way for everyone."



PRABIN MAHARJAN

Chapagaun is a town older than Kathmandu itself. But after the earthquake old buildings are being replaced by concrete structures. There is local support for the road-widening because the narrow streets are in bad shape.



PADMA MAHARJAN

Sunakothi, is another ancient Newar town waiting for the bulldozers to arrive. The days are numbered for its cultural and architectural sites. Locals are also worried about how road widening will affect their festivals.

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LA LA LAND

La La Land is the forerunning Oscar contender for Best Picture this year with an astonishing 14 nominations that recognise the talents of its young director, Damien Chazelle, and the leads, Emma Stone, and Ryan Gosling, along with two original songs that define this fun, airy musical with a surprisingly steely core.



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

As someone who is not a fan of musicals, the singing and dancing aspect of *La La Land* kept to a minimum, is, quite frankly, a relief partly because the music part of the film is the least charming aspect of it, the tunes being the frothy, run of the mill stuff that will probably not stand the test of time.

The real genius of the film lies in the casting, the well written roles, the thoughtful, sensitive cinematography that is directed with humour and pathos, as well as the

resistance to pat, happy endings that are ultimately more deeply satisfying than the usual sugary stuff that is often stuffed down our throats, leading to insanely high, unrealistic expectations regarding how one's partner ought to be perfect, a romantic comedy con that began around the same time as the late 1930s De Beers campaign that solidified the diamond as the symbol of 'forever', before that, any kind of engagement ring was perfectly acceptable.

Ryan Gosling and Emma Stone star as the truly likeable couple, Sebastian and Mia, a jazz musician and aspiring actress who paths keep crossing in the City of Angels. While things do not start out well between these two, their interactions, all of which are delightfully funny, bodes well for their future together. As the two get together over fantastical musical routines, some quite bearable, in particular the light, unaffected dancing, we see a series of classic Hollywood set-pieces play out in beautifully lit scenes and well chosen

locations, bringing real gravitas to what might have been a fluffy film about an actor and a musician.

There are stereotypes here to start with, but the film succeeds in moving past them, bringing something very real to Mia and Seb's relationship and their future together as they begin to see each other for how special they are, realising slowly, with true heartbreak, how their other passions might lead them away from each other's sides.

I did not expect to like this film, but I really did, mostly because of Stone and Gosling's abilities to bring so much humanity to what might be considered superficial first world problems and neuroses. The film, I believe, has gotten flak for being too "white", but personally, I don't see why every film must strive to be diverse and political if it is not in its inherent nature. *La La Land* is what it is, a very appealing, really lovely, slightly goofy love story about two people who fall in love in modern day Los Angeles. 🇺🇸

nepalitimes.com

View trailer

HAPPENINGS



DIPESH SHRESTHA

DIPLOMATIC ENCLAVE : Minister for Foreign Affairs Prakash Sharan Mahat briefs ambassadors, diplomats and UN, EU and SAARC Secretariat representatives at Singha Darbar on Tuesday.

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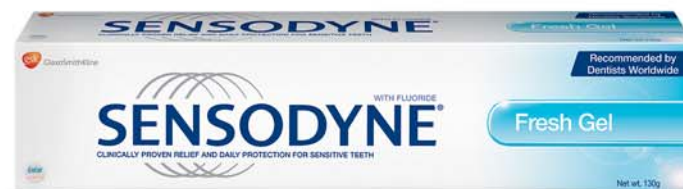
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The Madhes mood

Sarala Gautam in
Himal Khabarpatrika, 29 January
– 5 February

हिमाल
खबरपत्रिका

Binita Devi (*pictured*) lost her husband, Sohan Sah Kalwar, during last year’s Madhes movement. She now runs a tea shop in Birganj to feed her children. On a recent winter morning, the 23-year-old widow asked rhetorically: “What did the Madhes gain from my husband’s martyrdom?”

The Madhes certainly faces discrimination in terms of political representation and access, and the region exploded twice in 2007-8 to assert its identity. But the uprisings did not help raise living standards, though it catapulted a few Madhesi leaders to power. These leaders spearheaded another movement in 2015 that was accompanied by a crippling five-month border blockade that wrecked Nepal’s economy.

The people in Madhes have no doubts that the constitution is always work in progress, and its implementation is the key to the future, but their opinions have been ignored by the leaders who claim to be representing them.

Jahur Mubarak, 58, runs a shoe shop near the clock tower in Birganj. He feels Madhesi leaders have cultivated a culture of political polarisation. “There is no gain from hostility, only if we stand united will we prosper.”

Rakesh Singh, a Birganj-based politician, says the Madhes will not prosper without tapping the vast natural resources of the Chure hills to the north. Madhesi leaders only talk of rights, and not development, he says.

Subhas Kumar, a civil society member in Birganj, says the Madhesi people’s anger was



fueled by rumours, and not the actual content of the constitution. “Madhes can enjoy all the rights even from this constitution,” he says, “we perhaps need a few amendments, and the right intent to make the laws that would ensure our rights. But the leaders are not trying to solve the problem this way.”

Naresh Ram, 56, is a cobbler. He did not get work, and had to take loan to feed his family

during the last Madhes uprising. He is still working overtime to pay off the loan. “All I want is to work and live peacefully,” he says.

Madhesi leaders and activists are accused of distorting the contents of the charter to whip up passions, but failed to understand the actual aspirations of the people they represented. Civil society activism was absent, and as a result, the chasm between Kathmandu and the Tarai grew. The Madhesi people’s allegiance to nationalism was questioned.

Sociologist Chaitanya Mishra says: “There was no one who could assure the Madhesis that the hill people do not doubt them, but they harbour suspicions about India.”

Mukti Ram Dhamala, a professor of political science in Birganj, agrees that Madhesi leaders ignored the true aspiration of most people in the plains for economic progress.

Rakesh Singh, an NC leader says: “Madhesi leaders talk of identity, but just care about power. Madhesi leaders do not listen to the poor Madhesis, their voice is not the voice of the Madhes.”

Singh says it is not true that Kathmandu ignores the Madhes. “Look at the plight of the earthquake survivors,” he says. “They are hill people, but the Singha Darbar is indifferent to their plight.”

“I cannot say where this movement will take us in future, but I can say it is not doing anything good to us at present,” says gold trader Jitendra Saraf.

Centre for Investigative Journalism

Clannish Maoists

Madhav Basnet in *Nepal*, 29 January-5 February

नेपाल

All 70 Central Committee (CC) and politburo members of the CPN (Maoist-Centre) from Sindhupalchok district resigned en masse last week, saying their party executive committee is ‘ridiculously big’ and ‘filled with family members of top leaders’.

When the CPN (Maoist-Centre) had only 2,483 CC members, the party Chair and Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal’s 14 family members were among them. The party secretariat increased the number of CC members to 3,999 in December, and Dahal’s youngest son-in-law also found a place.

When the Maoists declared a war in 1996, Dahal’s two daughters Renu and Ganga were in Kathmandu. After police raided the houses of rebel leaders, they were taken to New Delhi where they got married.



After the ceasefire in 2006, Renu came to Kathmandu with her husband Arjun Pathak. Both of them are now the CC members of the party. Ganga’s first marriage did not work out, and she later married Jiban Acharya. Ganga was already a CC member. Jiban too was inducted into the party executive committee.

Dahal’s wife Sita and son Prakash are not active in party policy, nor have they ever trained Maoist cadre. Prakash is just a body guard of his father, and Sita is only Dahal’s consort. But they are both CC members of the party.

“What is Prakash’s contribution to the revolution other than accompanying his father?” Maoist MP

Shyam Shrestha asks. “If accompanying the Party chair would be enough to qualify as a CC member, then we should induct all bodyguards and orderlies into our executive committee.”

Dahal is not the only nepotist in the Maoist-Centre. Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Krishna Bahadur Mahara, Maoist leader Agni Sapkota, Energy Minister Janardan Sharma and Ex-Energy Minister Top Bahadur Rayamajhi all promote family members. Five members of Mahara’s family, 15 of Sapkota’s, 15 of Sharma’s and three of Rayamajhi’s are also Maoist CC members.

Maoist MP Shrestha says: “Our leaders prefer to handpick their family members to stop more competent leaders from rising up and challenging their authority.”



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Periods of banishment

Women in western Nepal are starting to refuse to be thrown out of the house once a month

SUBEKSHA POUDEL
in ACHHAM

Pulling the *dhoti* up to her ankle, Dambara Regmi, 24, used to clamber up to a mud room atop the cowshed. In the tiny, dark claustrophobic room, her sister-in-law and a young neighbour, also menstruating, would each chose a corner to sleep in. Regmi remembers tucking her legs between the folds of the blanket, and telling herself: "When I get married I am not going to stay inside the shed again."

Now a community health worker in this district in western Nepal, Regmi talks to a group of 15 women who have come together for a session of antenatal care counseling. "What do you like the most about menstruating?" she asks. A ripple of giggles goes around. "There is nothing good about it," they reply.

Regmi asks them if they would continue the tradition of banishing their daughters to the cowshed once a month once they became mothers themselves. After an uncomfortable silence a woman from the group responds, "It is society that decides."

Indeed, it is the women who adhere to traditional belief in the cruel tradition of *chaupadi* which evicts women once a



WOMEN POWER: Women take a break from hard farm work amidst a backdrop of Achham's scenic mountains. The beauty of western Nepal hides the cruel practice of *chaupadi* which forces women to spend their periods in a tiny mud room like this one (*below, left*) above the cowshed. Community Health Workers warn young women (*below, right*) of the dangers.



PICS: SUBEKSHA POUDEL

Blood sisters

Menstrual stigma is a manifestation of persistently unequal gender relations in Nepal

The symbolism and practices surrounding menstruation differ across cultures: in some it is largely concealed and in other more conservative societies, it becomes visible and more stigmatised. But the common feature is that menstruation is a taboo.



GUEST COLUMN
Sangita Thebe Limbu

In some extreme cases, like in parts of the mountains of western Nepal, women are banished to the cowshed for four days in a month. In the past months alone, two young women have lost their lives, once more sparking national outrage over the practice, known as *chaupadi*.

In December 2016, 15-year-old Roshani Tiruwa in Achham district was found dead in a tiny menstrual hut. A month earlier, Dambara Upadhyay, 26, also died while living in the outhouse during her period.

Snake bites, wild animal attacks, suffocation from smoke,

and sexual harassment and assault are threats that many menstruating women and girls face during this monthly exile.

In 2005, the Supreme Court outlawed *chaupadi* and in 2008

the Ministry of Women, Child and Social Welfare promulgated guidelines to eradicate it. However, a 2011 UN report of Achham district estimated that about 95 per cent of women

still practiced *chaupadi*. This staggeringly high figure alone shows that changing age-old traditions and social attitudes requires more than legal reforms and guidelines.

The impact of stigma compounded with poor menstrual hygiene hinders equal and meaningful participation of women and girls in education, economic activities, and perpetuates the cycle of gender inequality and social exclusion. Menstruation affects school attainment with a third of girls missing schools during periods in Nepal.

Poor menstrual hygiene also results in reproductive health ailments such as urinary tract infection, and other problems arise from internalised feelings of shame and untouchability. Creating a safe and enabling environment for women and girls to manage their menstruation hygienically, and with dignity is therefore an important development and human rights agenda.

Breaking the taboo on talking about periods is the first step, with interventions required in both schools and communities. According to WaterAid's 2009 study in Nepal, only 17.2 per cent said that they were informed about menstruation by teachers, majority of whom avoided reproductive health topics, prescribing self-study



CHAUPADI THREATS: A billboard in western Nepal highlights the dangers associated with the menstrual shed. Despite being banned, the *chaupadi* tradition persists in the region.

month for four days to a cold, dank outhouse. Many here believe that a woman is deemed impure during menstruation, and if she defiles the kitchen or touches sacred objects in the house, it will invite god's wrath, livestock will die and crops will wilt.

A tiny cell outside the home is allocated for women with periods, and sometimes the room has to accommodate up to a dozen people. On the fourth day, the women bathe and are finally allowed to enter the house again.

The government has put up billboards along the highways of western Nepal highlighting the dangers of *chaupadi*, ranging from wild animal attacks to burglars and worse. In the past few weeks two young women have lost their lives while staying inside sheds in Achham. It is clear that despite the ban on *chaupadi*, society has a long way to go in eradicating a deeply embedded menstrual taboo.

Regmi works with Possible, which runs hospitals in Achham and Dolakha, and is engaged in convincing one woman at a time to stop the practice. She urges the members in her group to take a united stand against the tradition, to not tell anyone when they have their periods and refuse to be sent to the shed.

The women fidget, they find it more comfortable to swim with the tide in this patriarchal society than against it. But there is one soft voice from the group. Playing with the ends of her shawl one of the participants stares at the floor and finally musters the courage to say, "It really isn't a bad omen, it's something natural. Just keep yourself clean and keep your periods a secret."

Possible employs 26 female

community health workers like Regmi to integrate care between hospital and home, and together provide comprehensive healthcare to more than 400,000 patients.

"It is very encouraging to know that everybody in the village knows you, to have their trust that you can attend to their medical needs," says Regmi.

One of Regmi's patients is Chandra, an expecting mother. Chandra's deeply-held belief indicates why Regmi's work is so difficult.

"I understand there isn't any rationale behind isolation during menstruation," says Chandra, "but I have seen cattle die, family members fall ill and other misfortunes befall families that don't practice *chaupadi*. For the wellbeing of my children and husband I will have to go to the shed."

The stigma about menstruation may be severe in western Nepal, but there are varying degrees of taboos even in the capital. At a recent rally in Kathmandu against the *chaupadi* deaths, participants said even educated urban women had to observe certain social etiquettes during their periods.

"God created me this way, I menstruate. I don't understand why somebody else would find it unacceptable if I entered a temple or prayed to my God when I'm menstruating," said one participant, Shikha Pant.

When newly-married, Dambara Regmi didn't tell anyone in the household when she had her periods. She was lucky to have the support of her husband, and they fended off criticism from the family and neighbours. Not everyone is so lucky. 🇳🇵

instead. Another study shows that participants learnt about menstruation towards the end of secondary school, but many had already started their periods by then.

It is important to educate both girls and boys on how period happens through age appropriate and culturally sensitive teaching materials. It is not enough for menstruation to be featured in school curriculum, attention must also be paid to how, when and whether the curriculum is being taught at all.

Engaging young people is important as they can be agents for change, but the stronghold of culture, and internalisation of shame and inferiority cannot be underestimated. Although a majority of women believe menstruation as a normal biological process, they also observed menstrual restrictions often accepted on the grounds of long-standing tradition and family pressure, particularly from mother-in-laws and grandmothers.

These findings suggest that any interventions should go beyond the individual level and focus on local and collective efforts to challenge adverse social norms. This was evident in villages such as Bhageshwar in Achham and Gairagaun in Bajhang that have eliminated chaupadi. In both cases educated women themselves took the

lead by coming together as a group to collectively campaign against the practice.

In other places like Mangalsen, remittance from workers abroad has resulted in better houses with more rooms so that menstruating women and girls no longer have to go out, creating a domino effect in the wider community. However, such incremental changes must be complemented by collective action if the aim is to focus not just on practical but also 'strategic needs' related to challenging women's subordinate position in society.

It is estimated that only 36 per cent of schools in Nepal have a separate toilet for girls. Access to affordable menstrual products along with provision of separate toilets with door locks, running water, soap and waste disposal facilities should be taken into account in Wash, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) interventions.

Most importantly, menstrual taboo and stigma should be seen as manifestations of unequal gender relations. Future action should focus on individual empowerment as well as changing the wider social discourse. 🇳🇵

Sanita Thebe Limbu is a Gender Analyst at Social Development Direct.

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Vibrating democracy

Who would have thought even a month ago that America is no longer the country that most Nepalis want to sneak into illegally?

It's fascinating to watch that while the wheels of democracy are grinning to a halt in **The Land of the Free**, here in **The Home of Brave Gurkhas** it is spinning out of control. We don't just have one election in 2017, but three. We have women in high places, and have shuffled 9 male **Primate Ministers** in 8 years.

Our leaders never take decisions unilaterally, they always do so bilaterally. That is why Deputised Prime Minister Needy disappears from parliament during voting on a crucial bill on electoral laws. Or Comrade Upadro vanishes during a meeting of the Morcha and cannot be located. In an emergency, these honchos can only be reached on the +91 area code.

The Sri Lankan astrologer who was arrested this week for predicting that his country's President would kick the bucket must now be wishing he had made the prediction about another Prez. But even that soothsayer would not have foretold that this winter we in Nepal would be enjoying 24 hours of electricity.

Electric power has been restored to be the people, all we have to do now restore political power as well. Proof that electricity has injected renewed vigour into our vibrant economy is that vibrators (Slogan: 'No side effects') are flying off the shelves. This means those of you improvising with the use of handsets for purposes other than **mobile telephony** can now stop

doing so.

The other sign that things are limping back to normalcy in our democracy is that the **Department of Sewage Canals** is digging up roads that were recently filled up by the **Department of Potable Water**.

And as the dust settles, what a relief it is to see that despite the monumental transformation of the country's political structure and replacing a king with kinglets, the sitting President of a former monarchy invites the ex-King of a new republic when her current daughter marries a sitting grandson of an ex-President. **#OnlyInNepal**

Another sign of the New Normal is that the Big Plop Student Union (Revolting) has started sending out extortion letters to businesses demanding oodles of moolah for its election campaign.

Many recipients of these threatening letters were overcome with nostalgia for the good old days when we ate death threats for breakfast. A dropout Baddie student, however, denied his union had demanded **Rs10 million** from hotels. "We only demanded **Rs5 million**," he clarified, on condition that his name remained a mystery.

Those hankering for the good old days of our vibrating democracy should take heart that we are already making **drastic progress**. Political pyromaniacs used to burn tyres in the streets. These days the tyres are set on fire while still attached to their vehicles.



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