

**K**hovari Patel (*pictured*), a 50-year-old rickshaw puller in Birganj, was waiting for passengers one late evening this week underneath the border city's iconic clock tower. It was a moonless night, and he looked somewhat sad.

Asked if he will cast his vote in local elections, his face lit up. "Yes," he said enthusiastically. "I had to bribe a government official for my son's citizenship. He wouldn't have dared if we had an elected mayor."

The Madhes-based parties which united last week and on Wednesday registered at the Election Commission seem to have heard people like Patel. Many in the Tarai want an end to the politics of agitation and local elections. However, there are no visible signs here of impending polls.

Campaigning is in full swing in the hills for the 14 May elections, but here there is more time till the second phase of voting on 14 June, and the fever hasn't caught on. Also, there is still uncertainty about whether it will actually happen.

Despite an unwritten deal with the ruling Maoist-NC coalition, the Madhesi Front has not formally called off its agitation, and in fact has threatened to protest if the constitution amendments do not go through.

As we went to press Thursday, Prime Minister Dahal met coalition partners and then Madhesi leaders to push for polls. In a phone conversation, Indian Prime Minister Modi is said to have assured Dahal about New Delhi's help to conduct elections. That may have been reassuring, but Dahal's job is cut out trying to get the UML and the Madhesis on the same page.

Here in the Tarai, Madhesi parties are still obstructing campaign rallies of the NC and UML. Arbind Singh, UML's candidate for Deputy Mayor in Birganj, says: "Madhesi parties intend to drive us out of the Tarai. But their strategy will not work." Last week, an NC rally was disrupted here. Lokesh Singh of the NC says: "Madhesi parties are preparing for elections internally, but they are also trying to sideline us."

Pramod Sah of the RJP, the new unified Madhesi force, says amendments must come first: "Sooner the amendment, sooner the elections."

*Sanjeev Sharma* in Birganj

## NOT YET THERE EDITORIAL

### MADHES ELECTIONS GUEST EDITORIAL BY MANISH JHA

PAGE 2



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FURNITURE LAND

# NOT YET THERE

The proposed Rastriya Janata Party (RJP) and the Federal Alliance (FA) made a deal with the government last week over tabling an amendment in Parliament to pave the way for their participation in a two-phase local election in May-June. The alliance then suspended its protest campaign, did not waste time in registering with the Election Commission and applying for an election symbol. They are now on candidate selection spree for village and municipality councils. All this is positive, but we are not out of the woods yet. In Nepal we know it ain't over until it's over.

These are make-or-break times. After 10 years of war and 11 years of peace we are finally headed towards the first elections under the new inclusive Constitution. The quotas for women, Dalits and minorities in local councils mean that for the first time in Nepali history, the under-represented will be represented (*see page 13*).

Finally, this paves the way for the country to break free from the legacy of violence unleashed by the Maoists. When it looked that the conflict was going to be a stalemate, the comrades turned the class war into one for identity, ethnicity and regionalism, thus entangling the polity since 2006. Even if the abolition of the monarchy was indispensable in the new Constitution, one could argue whether a push for ethnicity- or territory-based federalism and secularism were necessary for that. The framers of the Constitution never bothered to understand that secularism was equated with

godlessness by a majority of Nepalis. We could have saved ourselves a lot of heartache if we only it was translated as 'freedom of religion'.

That is all in the past. But it may be important to learn from those missteps now that we have a breakthrough of sorts. Saturday's agreement still has kinks. The UML pressured the government on Wednesday to withdraw the amendment bill because of a provision on adding village councils in the Tarai to reflect the population, provisions on the electoral college and rules for naming provincial assemblies. The RJP and the FA reacted by threatening to resume their agitation. They now have misgivings about whether the government is willing, or capable, of tabling the promised 'fast-track' motion for amendments. There is nothing in writing yet.

Even so, there is no backing down despite the new deadlock. From here on, any future political disagreement should not be a zero-sum-game to be thrashed out on the streets, but settled in Parliament through civilised politics.

The ball is in the government's court. As the ruling coalition it has the responsibility to address grievances through compromise – that would be a win-win-win for all parties. Prime Minister Dahal would get a much-deserved feather in his cap, the opposition would no longer be seen as a spoilsport, and the Madhes-based parties would rise above territorial and ethnic identity to be a national alliance.



MARTY LOGAN

## GUEST EDITORIAL MANISH JHA

# Madhes elections

A Madhesi MP recently wrote to me on social media: 'I cannot make out whether you are a Madhesi or Pahadi, I am confused.' I understood what he was trying to get at and replied: 'If you just regard me as a Nepali you will not be confused.'

Neutrality is the first casualty of conflict. Especially when the conflict is communal, sectarian or ethnic, it can polarise society, prompting people to see themselves as right and everyone else as wrong. But that is precisely when neutrality is needed most. However, it takes courage to be a moderate when everyone else is baying for blood: you can be labelled as traitors, middlemen or worse.

I recently spent a few days in the Tarai districts of Mahottari, Dhanusha, Siraha and Saptari to try to understand the mood in the plains about local elections. I was asked in a TV debate why the Madhes Movement cannot be non-violent, like the People's Movement of 2006 or Gandhi's protests.

For one thing, there was only one slogan in 2006: 'Long Live Democracy'. Today there is confusion about the demands and goal of the Madhes movement: Upendra Yadav and Rajendra Mahato couldn't be more different.

I ran into one of my classmates who has a shop in Janakpur, and asked him about local elections. "We want elections, we want to vote, it is possible and necessary," he

replied. Leaders in Kathmandu do not represent the aspirations of the plains people, he added.

In Siraha, a hotelier told me that for every 5 people who are against elections, there are 20 aspiring candidates for the municipal council. A young man in Janakpur summed it up when I asked what he wanted. "We want to be left alone to live and work," he said.

To be sure, there are others who insist that the Madhesi parties' demand to amend the Constitution before elections must prevail, but across the plains there is a sense of anticipation of the coming elections.

In the 2013 elections Madhesi leaders were punished for pursuing the politics of identity and rights, and seem now to have finally seen the writing on the wall. They have decided to unite, shed the words 'Madhes' and 'Tara' from their names, opt for a more broad-based national character, and agree to take part in local elections.

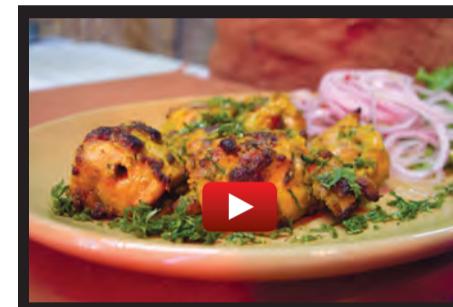


**Manish Jha** is co-founder and general manager of FACTS Nepal @manishjhanepal A longer Nepali version of this Guest Editorial appeared in Himal Khabarpatrika



NT STUDIO

This week's Nepali Times Studio features UN Ambassador Walton Alfonso Webson in conversation with Marty Logan about how the UN will push reconstruction forward in Nepal. He seems confident there will be no cuts in US funding despite Donald Trump's threats.



MAKE CHICKEN TIKKA AT HOME

Marinate, add spices to your taste, cook to perfection and voila, your Chicken Tikka is ready. Two chefs from Soalteo Crowne Plaza give us a step-by-step guide to prepare a succulent Punjabi dish. View video online and start prepping away.

### LESSON NOT LEARNED

Not having suffered the level of destruction as anticipated we have, perhaps, become more complacent ('Search, locate, rescue in collapsed concrete houses', Sonia Awale, #855). Surprisingly, it does not seem to have affected even those who endured losses at the personal level. The government is essentially insular and has no time for anything other than tackling problems on day to day basis. In reality, no one can see beyond the tip of their noses. A forward-looking vision thus becomes even more distant than the legendary distant dream.

Anupam

While it is obvious that the government is ill-prepared for search and rescue from highrises, what is more disheartening is that we have not learnt our lessons and continue to flout building codes and build substandard houses. We need to remember bigger is not always better and rules are not meant to be broken especially where safety is concerned. Unfortunately, the 2015 earthquake doesn't seem to have made us any wiser.

Aasma Shakya

Much more to do. The earthquake seems just like yesterday but at the same time, in many ways a long time ago ('Righting reconstruction gone wrong', Alok Tuladhar, #855). We've forgotten that there is much more we should do.

Sunaina Saraf

### BREAKING RULES

Let's not forget that the implementation of the law in Nepal is only for weak, poor, helpless, access-less and voiceless people ('Building back unsafe', Om Astha Rai, #855). Those powerful will just mock at these people.

Romraj Sharma

Important to note that building back unsafe is the mindset for the whole of Nepal, not just Gongabu.

Alex Ferguson



Building back unsafe

by Om Astha Rai

A *Nepali Times* investigation last week revealed that survivors of the earthquake in Gongabu are back to illegal multi-storey construction that resulted in so many fatalities. The story was widely shared on social media with most reach, likes and comments.

Most reached and shared on Facebook (8,596 people reached, 14 shares)

Most popular on Twitter (67 retweets, 57 likes)

Most commented

### Desperation for translation

by Kanak Mani Dixit

The world does not understand Nepali, and Nepalis do not understand the world. We need translations both ways. The *On the Way Up* column last week was the most visited by readers online. If you missed it, check in at [www.nepalitimes.com](#)

Most visited online page

Watch video of what people call their mothers.  
#mother'sday



MOTHER'S DAY

## QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times@nepalitimes #POLL Are you in favour of Kathmandu's new No Horn policy?

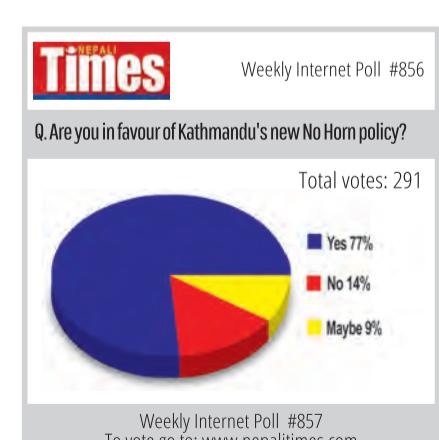
Sa-Rose Stha@sarojshir Yes with condition.. I mean the pedestrians and the micro-bus won't move an inch without honking. Instead strict no horn on schools, hospital

Samir Banerjee@SamirBa11258243 Govt has to work on infrastructure first, than only horn can be refrained....

heaven rai@heaven4r I am flashing headlight these days. It works sometimes :)

Nepali Times@nepalitimes #POLL As more people use #concrete to #rebuild, how will future search & rescue be more challenging than 2015? #NepalQuake <http://bit.ly/2oXeVND>

Upendra Sapkota@usapkota Unfortunately, majority of Nepal's engineers only know RCC. Problems: lack of research on local tech. & their reluctance to use local tech





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# Survival strategy for a new era

Revisiting Leo E Rose's book to analyse the need for a new kind of inclusive nation-building

The Constitution promulgated by the elected constituent assembly in 2015 with an overwhelming majority of more than 90 per cent after a decade of troubled politics was boycotted by the Madhesi parties. The issue has already been internationalised enough because of the Madhes Andolans, protests against the Constitution

**CONNECTING DOTS**  
Dinkar Nepal

and the blockade thereafter. Despite last week's developments, a solution seems far from in sight.

A Labour Party MP in the British Parliament recently filed a proposal urging the Nepal Government to be responsive to the demands of the Madhesi people, citing the Saptari protest in which five civilians were killed in a clash with police during a UML rally in March.

'Humanitarian concern' provides the legal basis for such international pressure tactics, which are often used as tools in the political game. Nepal has seen this throughout recent history, with the Indian blockade of 2015 just the most recent example. The British proposal, however, only helped reinforce the widespread notion among the hardliners that identity politics is a foreign tool to keep Nepal unstable.

The story of Nepal is the story of an extraordinary survival. The



MADHESIVANI.COM

book 'Strategy for Survival' (Leo E Rose, 1971) relates how Nepal has been 'beset by a seemingly irresistible array of "interested" outside parties, eager to assist, advise and manipulate'. Attempts to restrict 'Nepal's capacity for independent action' are not new for Nepal, but 'its rulers have themselves displayed a deft hand in defining and, at times, even circumventing these restrictions'.

Rose says the reason Nepal was successful in surviving was because of its external policies and internal inclinations. There has been a broad consensus on the broader objectives and tactics suggesting that Nepal has mastered the survival skills of a buffer state. This is made possible by internal cohesion brought by a 'cultural dynamic that seems to permeate all the articulate political, social, ethnic and regional entities in the state'.

Leaders like BP Koirala had struggled against the British in India and brought a fresh breath of democratic air into the political arena. BP himself was jailed for four years by the British. Educated in India, and of a Tarai family, he mostly spoke Hindi. The lines between India and Nepal, culturally and politically, were blurred in many ways for these politicians, and that was exploited first by the Ranas and later by the king to question their loyalty.

Rose's book was written in the 1960s, when King Mahendra had already sabotaged the democratic experiment and started re-engineering the idea of Nepal. This re-imagination, which is now referred to as Mahendrabadi Rastriyata in an almost derogatory tone, was based on common language, religion and dress. Although it was a continuation

of the natural predisposition of the Nepali state since the time of integration, it evolved building on the need to be seen as different from the Indians.

Indirectly, Rose also has an explanation for this as he writes: 'For the Nepalis, independent, democratic India constituted a far greater challenge, both politically and psychologically, than had the alien autocratic British Indian Polity'. Nepalis were thus forced to 'continuously assert, and indeed exaggerate, their differences with Indians in order to justify in their own minds their country's national existence'.

This geopolitical reality got Mahendra support from most of the Nepali public, including those who opposed his domestic policies and political system. BP Koirala's disillusionment with India, differences with Nehru and later with Indira Gandhi, made him sceptical of India and accommodative towards the king. This naturally permeated down to Nepali Congress cadres. Events in Sikkim then further deepened the survival instinct and reinforced the idea that the only way Nepal could continue to exist was by being different from India.

Historically, Madhesis have been culturally excluded from the 'psychological framework' of 'Nepaliness'. There is therefore a historic

necessity to initiate a process of inclusive 'nation-building'. The definition of 'nation' in the Constitution of Nepal has already created an inclusive framework. Supportive measures in the form of reservations for marginalised groups and a unique model of federation, whereby local-level deliberative democracy has the potential to revolutionise the relationship of communities with the state, have been put in place.

In this historic build-up, group relationships within the Nepali polity have changed dramatically after the removal of the monarchy. Now, politics is purely based on power equations. The assertiveness of different groups and the force behind them defines not only the character of the group but also its 'soft power'. In this scenario, the tools used for short-term gain may have long-term negative impact.

The Madhesi Morcha's efforts to strangle Kathmandu into submission with India's help through the blockade have turned moderate sympathisers into hardliners. The Madhes is not, and cannot be Nepal's Kashmir. Any such tactics, which revive the deep-rooted notion of threat among the majority, will take the political course towards more confrontation. This will make hardliners on both sides stronger and a solution unreachable. 



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**ADVENTURER:** Warwick Deacock (above) and (left) crossing the Simpson Desert in South Australia in 1983 on the route from Pumi Bore to Birdsville.

# Warwick Deacock, 90

Who lived life to the full and left a footprint in Nepal

**M**ajor Warwick Deacock's erect bearing and bronzed craggy features evoke his British military background, his crooked nose that of a former sportsman. Striding into my Kathmandu office with his wife Antonia in his wake, Warwick's thick steel grey hair is swept back with comb marks visible, his safari shirt immaculately rumpled.



**SO FAR SO GOOD**  
Lisa Choegyal

"We have run away from home, Lisa," he declares in a booming Anglo-Aussie twang, his bright eyes creasing in the corners. "Antonia and I want to do our own thing and will walk the length of Nepal at our leisure, no set itinerary. We will follow our noses, away from the guidebook trails for as many months as it takes." Antonia appears just as strong, but smiles resiliently. "As long as it takes," she echoes.

It is typical of Warwick that he and the intrepid Antonia consider a major traverse of the Himalaya is the sort of activity to celebrate escape from the office. It is 1988 and the Great Himalaya Trail is yet to be conceived. In fact, their trip took eight months of "mountain travelling" as he called it, five in Nepal and three in India. Periodically they reappeared to restock and resupply, never looking bedraggled or even much worn, then off again with glee for the next uncharted section.

The grand old man of Australian adventure tourism is ebullient, pithy and passionate, his words famously difficult to follow – I struggle to stay focussed as he rambles on, his conversation meandering through

a range of zany tales and obscure memories. But there is no doubt that Warwick is the real thing. A soldier, sailor, mountaineer, adventurer, conservationist and visionary, he is credited with wild adventures from India and Pakistan, Fiji and Papua New Guinea, to Alaska and the Antarctic, and counts Bill Tilman and Ed Hillary amongst his pals.

And Antonia keeps up with him, relishing their reputation as a formidable couple. An architect from South Africa and newly married, she was one of three housewives in 1958 to drive across Europe to India then walk to Zanskar, having charmed Prime Minister Nehru into giving them special permission to cross the mystic 'Inner Line'.

Together they made a business out of what they both liked doing best: daring to be different. Warwick introduced Outward Bound and Duke of Edinburgh Awards to Australia, where the couple migrated to – from the UK – in 1959, following a British Army and SAS career. In 1965 their Ausventure became the world's first adventure travel agency, putting together groups of Australians and New Zealanders for the world's first trek operator, Colonel Jimmy Roberts, who had established Mountain Travel Nepal in 1964.

The first commercial trip to Nepal from Australia was a 25-day Dolalghat to Everest Base Camp trek in December 1967 for a group of four women and two men. Ausventure also arranged the first Australian commercial mountaineering expedition to Mulkila, Lahaul in 1975, and the first Everest clean-up trek in 1977 to highlight environmental threats.

Warwick led over 100 treks and expeditions worldwide. "Ask my knees," he joked. But the Himalaya remained central

to the Deacocks, who sponsored students, organised volunteers and served as Nepal Honorary Consul General to Australia.

A couple of years ago in his late 80s, Warwick visited Kathmandu and the Khumbu for the last time, arranged by his kids Kate and Nick but now 'mountain travelling' alone as Antonia had died in 2012. Warwick was looked after by two of their protégées, Sonam and Lakpa, sons of late Dawa Norbu Sherpa, an original Mountain Travel stalwart.

With Warwick and Peter Hillary, I attended the ribbon-cutting inauguration of improvements to the Lukla drinking water system, organised by Lakpa with local communities and funding from the Himalayan Trust. Warwick was in fine form, slightly thinner on top but as dapper and incomprehensible as ever, full of enthusiasm for the mountains, his Nepali friends and relived memories.

Seeking to make the visit of this aged giant of Nepal trekking a bit more comfortable, I had arranged with the Australian Embassy that he use the VIP facilities and a wheelchair on arrival. His flight landed, the Embassy staff were briefed and in place, but Warwick failed to emerge as the anxious Sherpas waited outside at the crowded airport curb. Eventually Warwick was wheeled through the normal channel, undaunted and grinning. He had presented himself at the VIP lounge, only to be told that Warwick Deacock had already arrived and been received – just the kind of mix-up he relished.

For those of us who knew him, there will only be one Warwick Deacock – the one who lived life to the full and left a footprint in Nepal. Warwick died peacefully on 3 April 2017, aged 90, following a stroke and surrounded by family. Farewell. ☺

## prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

### Go green

Business class passengers on Turkish Airlines now get to fly in a 'Living Garden', featuring products by Molton Brown. With the concept, the brand's cosmetics, including hand lotion, hand soap and room freshener, are presented on specially designed wooden stands and business class lavatories are adorned with flowers and plants.

### All about art

Standard Chartered Bank's Lajimpat branch is hosting a collection of Nepali bank notes printed by De La Rue along with historic botanical paintings of Nepal created using the research of Sir Frances Hamilton, renowned historian and botanist. This exhibition is part of



a celebration of 200 years of Nepal-Britain relations called the Nepal Britain Bicentenary Exhibition (BIEX) which is

being held at Nepal Art Council until 30 April.

### Luxury flies high

Qatar Airways has unveiled its Qsuite in the Middle East, enabling passengers to enjoy First Class features within the airline's Business Class cabin. It features the industry's first-ever double bed in Business Class,

with privacy panels that stow away. London, Paris and New York will be the first destinations to feature the service.

### Selfie sufficient

Chinese electronics manufacturer OPPO will be launching its new dual selfie



camera smartphone, OPPO F3 soon. The phone will feature a high performance hardware and an optimised software according to the company.

## prabhu BANK

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# All together now

Milijuli Nepali has been sharing stories of hope and survival from villages affected by the 2015 earthquake

SASHI SHRESTHA

**A**fter his village was devastated by the earthquake two years ago, killing 15 of his neighbours, Bir Bahadur Tamang needed an engineer who could tell him about seismic-resistant designs.

But like many other families in earthquake-affected districts, Tamang, the former chair of Satyadevi village of Dhading district, had never met an engineer. Still, he got all the information he needed on building safer homes using salvaged material from *Milijuli Nepali*, a radio program syndicated through local FM radio stations.

Tamang had never met a journalist in his life either, but knew the names of most of the reporters on *Milijuli* by heart. Which is why earlier this month he was very happy to finally meet not just a journalist, but one whose voice he had often heard on his radio set.

"No one ever came here: no engineer, no journalist. The only information we had was from the radio," Tamang said. Soon, the earthquake survivor was himself being interviewed for the next episode of *Milijuli*, and his voice broadcast across Nepal through nearly 400 FM stations as well as streamed around the Nepali-speaking world through the Internet.

For *Milijuli* broadcaster Bhawana Gurung (pictured, right) there was no firmer proof that her program has helped convert awareness about post-earthquake reconstruction into behaviour change — something that was previously just a theory she heard about in media school.

Radio programs like *Milijuli* have been filling the gap left by the lack of elected village leaders and making up for the absence of accountability in post-earthquake relief by spreading information about how to build safer, stronger homes, and by bringing the concerns of survivors to the attention of Kathmandu.

Sharada Danuwar of Kavre



PICS: BBC MEDIAACTION



worked as a porter, earning Rs 500 a day. One evening she heard over *Milijuli's* Katha Mala program that because of the shortage of brick-layers needed for reconstruction, women were being trained as masons.

She applied for training and today earns Rs 1,250 a day helping rebuild most of the 78 houses in her village that went down. With the money she has

saved, she is planning to buy a scooter so she can commute to neighbouring villages to work on reconstruction there too.

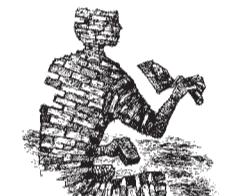
*Milijuli Nepali* is produced by BBC Media Action, the BBC's international development communication unit, which also broadcasts weekly debates called *Sajha Sawal* over radio and TV. *Milijuli* now has a listenership of over 2.1 million, and is

relayed over 11 radio stations in the quake-affected districts. The programs are driven by personal stories of survivors, and generally have a positive slant.

"We have found that personal stories are the most effective method of communicating," explains Subash Karki of BBC Media Action. "It is information not for the survivors, but about them. We try not to preach, or talk down to them ... this is what communications for development means. It is proof that radio works."

Indeed, while other media outlets try to highlight problems, *Milijuli* deliberately looks for solutions. Listeners are surprised that most of the people featured are women, and how cheerful they sound despite the adversities they have faced in the past two years.

Bhuwana Timilsina, program coordinator at *Milijuli*, says it was originally created as a radio show



## REBUILDING OURSELVES

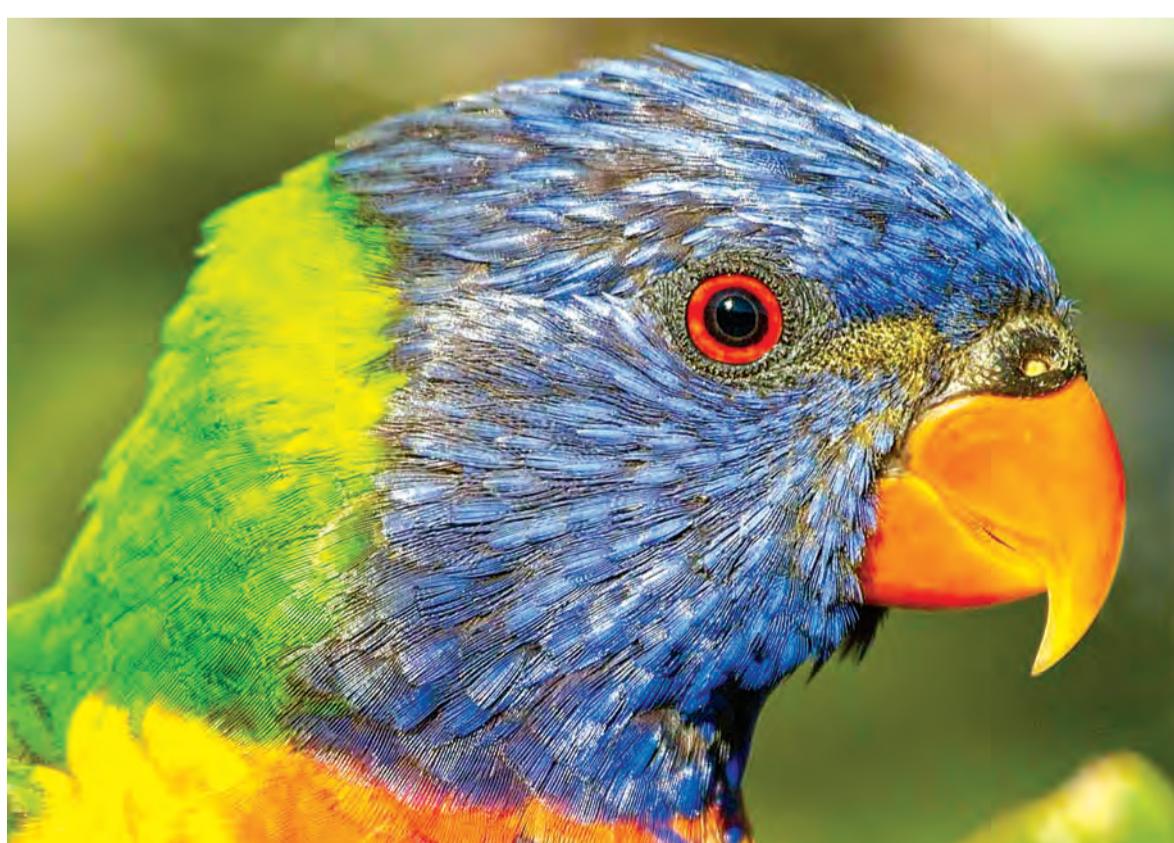
providing lifeline communication — broadcasting information that could actually save lives in the aftermath of the earthquake.

"Just like food, water, medicine and shelter, providing correct and timely information to the public is equally crucial during times of crisis," explains Timilsina, "and there is a unanimous opinion that telling personal stories is the most effective format to spread information."

This is something that Lal Maya Shrestha of Sindhuli knows only too well. She says: "I feel guilty if I miss a single episode of *Milijuli*, and sometimes I listen to the same program over and over."

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

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After that week of unseasonal rain and below-average temperatures, Kathmandu's weather will return to what is more normal for this time of year. The maximum temperature will climb to the high twenties, but it will feel hotter because of the residual moisture. Minimum will be in the mid-teens. Hot bright days with some afternoon buildup in the mountains. The western Tarai will hit the 40s, while the north-south valleys will see high afternoon winds as updrafts from the plains are funnelled to the Tibetan Plateau. Send us weather pictures from where you are to: editors@nepalitimes.com

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## "New homes have to be safer"

In 2014, Ambassador Walton Alfonso Webson became permanent representative of the Caribbean island nation of Antigua and Barbuda to the United Nations. Earlier this month, as president of the executive board of UNICEF, he led a 28-member delegation of board members of six UN agencies to Nepal.

Travel is a central feature of the diplomat's life. Prior to arriving in Kathmandu he visited South Africa and Lesotho, and once on the ground in Nepal he and his colleagues split into four groups, in nine days visiting nine districts. The fact-finding mission discussed priorities with women, children and youth, and local authorities.

Recovery and rebuilding from the 2015 earthquakes was a central theme, as Webson pointed out in a video chat with *Nepali Times*. Excerpts:

**Nepali Times:** Overall, how would you assess recovery from the earthquake and the UN's role in it?

**Walton Alfonso Webson:** I am sure there are still lots of complaints on the ground, because our human nature is we want to see things happening, and once things begin to happen you want to see them happen faster ... We certainly heard great need for reconstruction so that people



RUPAJOSHI, UNICEF

in the areas that were hit hardest can get access to water faster and more reliably.

We certainly know that there is need in terms of housing but we also saw the efforts that were being made to rebuild. There are two forms of reconstruction that one always has to take into consideration in a disaster: one is social reconstruction – people who are looking at rebuilding their lives... That social reconstruction is very important and United Nations programs are focusing a lot on that.

Then of course you have the physical reconstruction: buildings, bridges, homes, etc. There's a lot of emphasis and efforts being put into the rebuilding of homes.

### What role can the UN play in trying to accelerate the rebuilding?

We had very good meetings with representatives of the government: the prime minister, minister of foreign affairs,

and with the National Reconstruction Authority. We did speak about the need for hastening and they emphasised, the NRA in particular, the need to rebuild homes ... UN teams will continue to work with different groups and development partners because this is a process that is not done solely by any one body.

We believe that there will be a response but, again, this is a government-led initiative and the UN is supporting the government and will continue to urge the government to move things along as quickly as possible. But you also want to ensure that the new buildings, the new homes, are built within code so that if a future earthquake comes – as is predicted – there will be better stability and less loss of lives.

**How will rumoured funding cuts from the Trump administration to agencies like UNFPA affect Nepal in particular?**

**GROUND REALITY:** Ambassador Walton Webson (second from right) gets a musical welcome at Bhumiraj Primary School in Sunkuda village, Bajhang.

The UN has a really good relationship with the United States government, which is a major partner of the UN. As you said, it's rumours. There have been discussions about UNFPA, but nothing is yet approved. It should not affect Nepal's work in any way at this stage ... So I wouldn't be worried. We in the programs, at this moment, are not worried.

**Marty Logan**



This week's NT Studio features UN Ambassador Walton Alfonso Webson as he talks about how the UN will push reconstruction forward in Nepal.

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After that week of unseasonal rain and below-average temperatures, Kathmandu's weather will return to what is more normal for this time of year. The maximum temperature will climb to the high twenties, but it will feel hotter because of the residual moisture. Minimum will be in the mid-teens. Hot bright days with some afternoon buildup in the mountains. The western Tarai will hit the 40s, while the north-south valleys will see high afternoon winds as updrafts from the plains are funnelled to the Tibetan Plateau. Send us weather pictures from where you are to: editors@nepalitimes.com

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## "New homes have to be safer"

In 2014, Ambassador Walton Alfonso Webson became permanent representative of the Caribbean island nation of Antigua and Barbuda to the United Nations. Earlier this month, as president of the executive board of UNICEF, he led a 28-member delegation of board members of six UN agencies to Nepal.

Travel is a central feature of the diplomat's life. Prior to arriving in Kathmandu he visited South Africa and Lesotho, and once on the ground in Nepal he and his colleagues split into four groups, in nine days visiting nine districts. The fact-finding mission discussed priorities with women, children and youth, and local authorities.

Recovery and rebuilding from the 2015 earthquakes was a central theme, as Webson pointed out in a video chat with *Nepali Times*. Excerpts:

**Nepali Times:** Overall, how would you assess recovery from the earthquake and the UN's role in it?

**Walton Alfonso Webson:** I am sure there are still lots of complaints on the ground, because our human nature is we want to see things happening, and once things begin to happen you want to see them happen faster ... We certainly heard great need for reconstruction so that people



RUPAJOSHI, UNICEF

in the areas that were hit hardest can get access to water faster and more reliably.

We certainly know that there is need in terms of housing but we also saw the efforts that were being made to rebuild. There are two forms of reconstruction that one always has to take into consideration in a disaster: one is social reconstruction – people who are looking at rebuilding their lives... That social reconstruction is very important and United Nations programs are focusing a lot on that.

Then of course you have the physical reconstruction: buildings, bridges, homes, etc. There's a lot of emphasis and efforts being put into the rebuilding of homes.

### What role can the UN play in trying to accelerate the rebuilding?

We had very good meetings with representatives of the government: the prime minister, minister of foreign affairs,

and with the National Reconstruction Authority. We did speak about the need for hastening and they emphasised, the NRA in particular, the need to rebuild homes ... UN teams will continue to work with different groups and development partners because this is a process that is not done solely by any one body.

We believe that there will be a response but, again, this is a government-led initiative and the UN is supporting the government and will continue to urge the government to move things along as quickly as possible. But you also want to ensure that the new buildings, the new homes, are built within code so that if a future earthquake comes – as is predicted – there will be better stability and less loss of lives.

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# Reconstructing the re



The contrast between the lethargic NRA and its can-do CEO couldn't be more stark

collapsed two years ago – what did you learn from that disaster?"

Siwakoti scratched his head, looked at his home. "That we must build strong houses so we will be safe in the next earthquake," he replied.

Pokharel, dressed in a suit and blue tie, hadn't disclosed his true identity, and looked like someone important. His eyes lighted up as he threw another question: "People in radio, television and newspapers blame the government for not building houses. Is that true?"

"It is our responsibility to rebuild our own houses, not the government's. The government just gives us Rs 300,000 and some guidance, then it is up to us," he said.

This was obviously what Pokharel wanted to hear. The government and the NRA that he helped set up in 2015 have been strongly criticised for not doing enough to help rebuild the 600,000 homes that were destroyed in the earthquakes. And here was a chance encounter with

a villager who was not waiting for government, but rebuilding himself.

Back in Kathmandu, the international coverage of the anniversary was negative and on social media the NRA was facing blistering criticism, even ridicule. Amnesty International and the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) slammed the NRA for 'violating the human rights of survivors'. Whatever Pokharel said was going to sound defensive, so he had driven out to the mountains, disregarding numerous invitations to anniversary functions, to see things for himself.

Pokharel and his team spent 19 hours in the field on Tuesday,

**OM ASTHA RAI**  
in DOLKHA

**O**n Tuesday, as Kathmandu got ready to mark the second anniversary of the 25 April earthquake, the man heading the reconstruction campaign was on a long and bumpy 7-hour jeep ride to a village in Dolakha.

Just as the clock showed 11:56 AM Govind Raj Pokharel of the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) was meeting Dil Bahadur Siwakoti, 55, who was busy building his house.

Glancing at his wrist-watch, Pokharel asked: "This is exactly the moment when your house



Watch this unique 360-video of earthquake survivors rebuilding their lives in Sindhupalchok filmed by Bhrikuti Rai and Bikram Rai as part of the citizen-funded Blank Spot Project.

stopping along the road to meet villagers, talk to engineers, inspect newly-built houses and handing over second-installment cheques. Last week he had gone to Sindhupalchok with the *Milijuli Nepali* radio team (see page 6) to spend a night in a tent with survivors to get a first-hand account of the obstacles to reconstruction.

Those who know Pokharel say that the German-trained engineer is a workaholic. He has not taken a day off since he was re-appointed as the NRA chief in January, reaching his office inside Singha Darbar at 7 am, eating a home-cooked lunch and often taking work back to his home late in the evenings.

As a boy in Pyuthan, Pokharel decided to become an engineer after watching his mother get lung infections from cooking in a smoky kitchen wood stove. He studied hard, got a scholarship to do engineering first in India and then in Germany.

After returning to Nepal, Pokharel first worked in a UNDP project in Myagdi and then headed the Alternative Energy Promotion Centre (AEPC) where colleagues credit him for pushing the goal of smoke-free stoves for all by 2017. Although that goal has not been met, fuel-efficient smokeless fireplaces are now commonplace in rural Nepal.

When the earthquake struck two years ago, Pokharel was Vice-

# construction authority



PICS: OM ASTHA RAI



**Mamata's school**

Mamata Thami (left) was studying in Grade 2 when the earthquake destroyed her Gurjapa Basic School in Lapilang village of Dolakha. If it hadn't been a Saturday, she and her fellow students in the 10-classroom school would have been crushed. Since then, Mamata and her friends have been studying in a temporary tin hut, where she is now in Grade 4. The 25 April earthquake and its 12 May aftershock destroyed as many as 366 schools in Dolakha. Two years on, only 17 of them have been rebuilt. Sagar Acharya of the NRA in Dolakha says 89 more schools will be completed in a year, and it will take three more years for all schools to be rebuilt. By that time, Mamata will have finished primary school and moved on.

chair of the National Planning Commission (NPC), appointed by the NC government to envision and lead an autonomous body to rebuild the earthquake-damaged Nepal. But he got to work only for two weeks, and was soon replaced by Sushil Gyewali when the UML government took over.

Pokharel is a comeback kid. The Maoist government sacked him from the AEPC in 2008 to

appoint their own man, but he returned to the Centre to continue where he had left off to promote renewable energy at a time of crippling electricity shortages. Similarly, he returned to the NRA after the government changed three months ago.

Much of the delay in reconstruction and the ineffectiveness of the NRA is due to this political meddling in the

NRA as the main parties compete for influence, and what they think would be control over vast sums of donor money for rebuilding.

When he was re-appointed to the NRA it was expected that Pokharel would hit the ground running. But much to his own dismay, he has found that the agency he helped found is neither autonomous nor able to make its decisions on disbursement.

Pokharel readily admits that reconstruction is delayed, doesn't want to get into the blame game, but is focused to make up for lost time. It is not easy because he has to refer even the smallest decisions to the Cabinet, and all the money is controlled by the Ministry of Finance.

"People expect me to be a Kulman Ghising," Pokharel told us while walking in rural

Dolakha this week. "But look at the authority and resources given to him. I can only coordinate and collaborate."

Pokharel is mild-mannered, polite and has a pleasant demeanour. But he can be blunt and impatient sometimes, as when a radio reporter asked him for a sound bite on the NHRC's report on delayed aid. "Some people only know how to criticise," he said with a sharp edge in his voice.

Pokharel's first order of business has been to revise some NRA guidelines. Families who had not strictly followed quake-resistant house models and had therefore been refused the second installment of their reconstruction grants can now get it. "They still have to adhere to the design elements that strengthens the house, but we have decided to be flexible on dimensions and other small shortcuts," Pokharel says.



## REBUILDING OURSELVES

On the way back to Kathmandu, as the jeep lurched along the Jiri Highway, Pokharel received a call. The President of the National Association of Foreign Employment Agencies (NAFEA) wanted to discuss his proposal to mobilise outbound migrant workers in reconstruction.

Pokharel sounded excited, and explained his idea. "There is a huge shortage of masons that is also hampering reconstruction, we want to encourage migrant workers who are waiting to fly out to earn some money and get trained, with the hope that some of them may decide to stay back."

Pokharel is finally back in Kathmandu at midnight, and by 9AM is at the Radisson Hotel to attend a seminar on safe housing by the Japanese group, JICA.

It has been a long road for Govind Pokharel from his mother's kitchen in Pyuthan to Dolakha, with many twists and turns along the way.

But he says: "The thing is to focus on your goals. No point complaining. Delays and interference are a given in Nepal, the question is what are you doing despite all that." ☐

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## EVENTS

**Short story contest,**

Let the writer in you emerge. Apply for Writing Nepal 2017: A Short Story Contest, organised by LaLit in partnership with writer Samrat Upadhyay and Indiana Review. Deadline: 15 August. For more information: [facebook.com/lalitmag.com](http://facebook.com/lalitmag.com)

**Paper circuits,**

A creative mother-child workshop, organised by Karkhana, about paper circuits. Participants will be introduced to concepts of tinkering and other simple electronics.

29 April, 2 to 5 pm, Karkhana, Gyaneshwor, (01) 4412624

**Film opportunity,**

A chance for independent young filmmakers with projects to apply for the Writing Program and Asia Threads organised by DocSkool.

For more information: [docschoolnepal@gmail.com](mailto:docschoolnepal@gmail.com), [www.docschool.org/Home](http://www.docschool.org/Home)

**Solo exhibition,**

Attend the first solo exhibition of Bangladesh-based artist Arfun Ahmed titled 'Not to Name a Name'.

Till 1 May, 10 am to 7 pm, Artudio, Chhauni Hospital Road, 9851180088/9818344048, [artudio@hotmail.com](mailto:artudio@hotmail.com), For more information: <http://bit.ly/2pykBkp>

**Bird counting,**

Make a day out of bird watching and be part of the Urban-Rural Bird Count Phase II, organised by Bird Conservation Nepal. Registration required.

1 to 10 May, For more information: (01) 4417805, 4420213

**Monthly mela,**

BAC Mela, local products, foodstuffs and a second-hand garage sale, plus entertainment for the whole family at BAC's monthly mela.

29 April, 1 to 7 pm, BAC Art Cafe, Pulchok, 9851147776

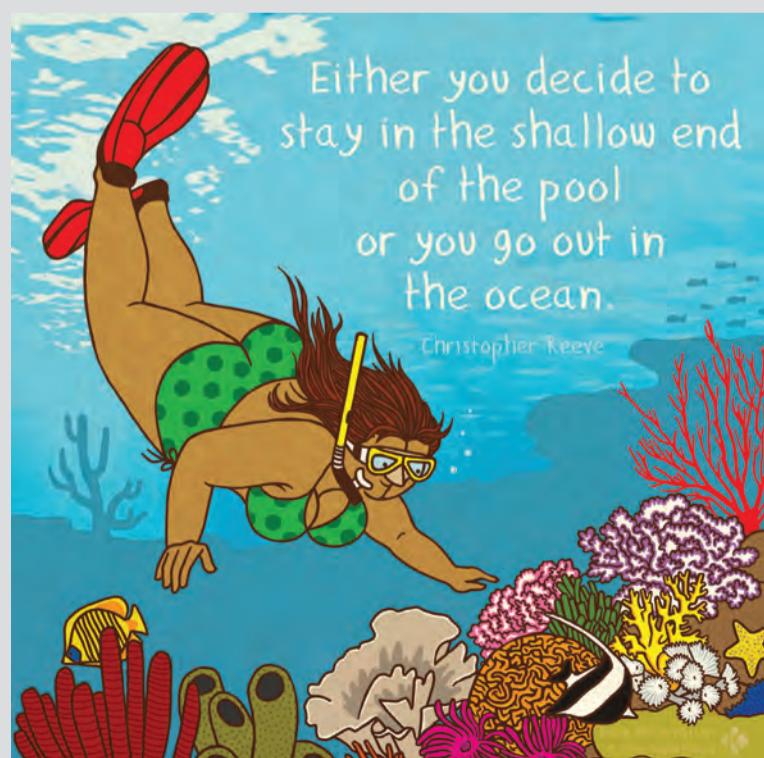
**Click away,**

Hone your photography skills with a 10-day workshop for beginners. Learn from professional artists and photographers.

6 to 15 May, 7 to 10 am, Artudio, Chhauni Hospital Road, Rs 5,500, 9803779777/9813931488/ 9851180088

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KRIPA JOSHI



## MUSIC

**Mi Ku live,**

Tap to the beat of folk contemporary ensemble, Mi Ku. Enjoy their live performance as they fuse poetry with music.

28 April, 6 to 11 pm, Café Aamu, Krishna galli, (01) 5520886

**Kanta dAb dAb live,**

Spend a musical evening with this sitar, percussion and bass trio. Enjoy as they entice you to groove with their fusion beats.

28 April, 7.30 to 10.30 pm, Places Restaurant & Bar, Saath Ghumti Marg, (01) 4700413

**Jazz day,**

Join artists from Germany, Spain, Italy and Brazil as well as local musicians to celebrate International Jazz Day. Attend also for live art, film screening and workshops.

30 April, 12 to 6 pm, Nagbahal, For more information: [www.katjazz.com.np/ijd2017](http://www.katjazz.com.np/ijd2017)

**Kathmandu Chorale,**

Hear Hannah Dornon direct a choir perform classics and pieces from the musical 'Sister Act'. The choir will be performing pieces by notable composers like Eric Whitacre, René Clausen, and Thomas Tallis.

6 May, 3.30 to 6 pm, KISC, Jhamsikhel, For more information: [thewkathmanduchorale.wordpress.com](http://thewkathmanduchorale.wordpress.com)

**Music while dining,**

Don't miss out on a traditional Newari and Hindustani concert by Singhini consort. 28 April, 7 pm onwards, Pauline's Garden Baluwatar, 9803919575, Rs 850

## DINING

**1905,**

Heritage boutique suites with garden dining, 1905 Suites and Restaurants is now open for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Bookings open for four boutique suites with promotional rates and offers open till June.

Nagpokhari, Naxal, For more information: 9860374450

**Hyatt Regency,**

Enjoy different afternoon teas from May throughout July. Choose from a classic English experience and a signature Indo-Nepalese experience, complemented by afternoon tea or masala tea.

1 May to 31 July, 3 to 6 pm, Hyatt Regency Lobby Lounge, Kathmandu, (01) 5171234, Rs 950 plus taxes

**Voodoo,**

The new home of Newari cuisine also has a safe continental menu for those who are not yet ready to experiment with new dishes.

Lajimpat, (01) 4005222

**Barista Lavazza,**

The Valley's best European inspired coffee-culture cafe serves excellent mochas and lattes, don't forget to try their grilled chicken sandwich.

(01) 5548597, [javalahel](http://javalahel), (01) 4005123, Uttar Dhoka, [barista.nepal@gmail.com](mailto:barista.nepal@gmail.com)

**Mezze by Roadhouse,**

Spot a superstar at one of Kathmandu's most popular restaurants.

Mercantile Plaza, Darbar Marg 01 4223087

**Gokarna Resort,**

Choose from a wide variety of Lebanese shawarma, Hyderabadi biryani, Tibetan momos and many more.

Every Saturday, Gokarna Forest Resort, Ranikunj, 12 to 3 pm, For more details: (01) 4451212

**Embassy,**

Away from the hustle-bustle of the streets, indulge in the variety of multi-cuisine dishes at a place ideal for business meets and casual rendezvous.

Panipokhari, (01) 4424040

**Hotel Shangri-la,**

Enjoy a sumptuous brunch at Shambala Garden and Club Sundhara.

11 am to 3 pm, Hotel Shangri-La, Lazimpat, (01) 4412999, Rs 1,500 per person (includes shawarma and pasta)

## GETAWAY

**Kasara Resort,**

A luxury resort located in the lush setting of Chitwan National Park. For those who value their privacy and prefer a more secluded stay, Kasara offers two private villas with private pools.

Chitwan (01) 4437571/4438570, [kasararesort.com](http://kasararesort.com)

**Shivapuri Heights Cottage,**

Treat yourself to a 90 minutes ayurvedic massage at Neema's Spa, followed by a healthy lunch at the Cottage.

Shivapuri Hills, Bhudanilkantha, 9841371927, Rs 5000 per person, advance booking essential. Transport available on request at extra cost.

**Buddha Maya Gardens,**

Add value to your travel in Lumbini with a stay at probably the best hotel in the area.

Lumbini, (71) 580220, 9801033109, [info@ktmgh.com](mailto:info@ktmgh.com)

**Famous Farm,**

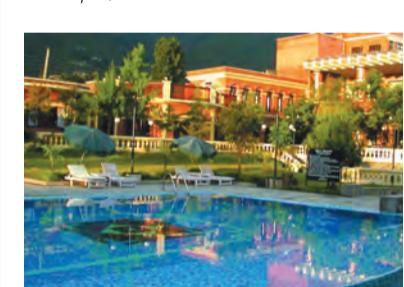
Wake up to the sounds of chirping birds and a fresh morning breeze wafting in through the aankijjhyaal.

Nuwakot, (01) 4700426, [info@rural-heritage.com](mailto:info@rural-heritage.com)

**Milla Guesthouse,**

If you enjoy the quiet, and admire a mix of old and new, this is the perfect place to stay. Not too far from the city, yet miles apart.

Bhaktapur, 9851024137

**Park Village Resort,**

Yoga, detox and ayurveda treatment in a quiet corner of Kathmandu. Himalayan Peace and Wellness Center, Park Village Resort, Budhanilkantha, (01) 4370286, [peace@wellness.com.np](mailto:peace@wellness.com.np)

**Ranibin Retreat,**

Situated at the other end of Phewa Lake and nestled inside Ranibin forest and the World Peace Stupa, this retreat has one of the best views of the Annapurna range.

Phewa Lake, Pokhara, (01) 4411855

**Tiger Mountain Lodge,**

Situated 300m above Pokhara valley, this resort offers spectacular views of Machhapuchhre, Dhaulagiri, Annapurna and Manaslu.

[www.tigermountaininpokhara.com](http://tigermountaininpokhara.com), (01) 4426427, 9849194874



## BEING FULFILLED

The entire sundeck of the Garden restaurant at Soaltee Crowne Plaza has been transformed into a *dhaba*, the popular roadside eateries that dot the highways in India, for the annual Punjabi-flavoured Dhaba festival.

Visitors are greeted with the stage set straight out of Chandigarh: a mock garage with a cardboard truck that reads 'Happy Singh Da Dhaba', a paan stall, posters of Bollywood oldies, cooking smoke spiralling up and out of the stalls and tent names that remind you of Jalandhar. Punjabi music plays in the background.

The festival caters to all tastes: meat lovers, vegetarians and those among both groups with a sweet tooth. We scanned the stalls and decided to go for drinks first. Arranged in a pyramid format, on offer were lassi, *chas* (butter milk) and lichee juice.

Both the lassi and *chas* were rich and frothy: the first a thick blend of curd and the other with a sharp taste, and both whet our appetites for the snacks. (Fresh seasonal juices are also available.)



Next: the food. We started with two varieties of Aloo Tikka, Bitter Gourd Tikka and Paneer Tikka. The crunchy Aloo Tikka, dipped in a green paste made from mint, green chili, raw mango and other spices, compensated for the bitterness of the gourd.

Having done the round of the veggies, we moved on to the carnivore carnival: Mahi Lahori (fish), Mutton Sheikh Kebab and Chicken Tikka. The meticulously prepared chicken (first soaked in spices then in curd) cooked in the

tandoor was a delight. The first bite of the piping hot chicken was juicy and the spices seeped out.

The vegetarian spread had well known Punjabi items like Chole Bhature, Dal Makhani, Sarso da Saag, Paneer Lababdar, Methi Aloo, and more. An ample variety of rotis, parathas and kulchas provided an alternative to rice. The savory gravy paneer dish, flavoured with hints of cashews and spices, paired well with the deepfried bread (Chole). The

bhature's taste, however, was overpowered by the black pepper.

A sumptuous range of dishes greeted meat lovers as well. Be it Murg Kali Mirch (mutton), or Ghos Achari Korma (chicken) the variety of flavours and textures triggered the Pavlov Effect in us.

Dipped in gravy, the subtle flavours of the Murg Kali Mirch (mutton) blended well with the no-nonsense biryani and accompanying raita. The chicken was equally succulent, with the fish finishing a distant third. We are a long way from the sea here.



PICS: CHARUMATHI RAMAN

As they say in Punjab, by end of it we were "fulfilled" (or even perhaps "fed up"). But there was still the dessert to sample. After a heavy meal of spicy snacks and mains, we were delighted to taste hot Jalebis and Rasmalai, rounded off with a cup of chai.

As the guests shuffled and wobbled out, it seemed somehow appropriate that we were all humming snippets of Daler Mehendi that was the staple background music of the Soaltee Dhaba Night. ☺

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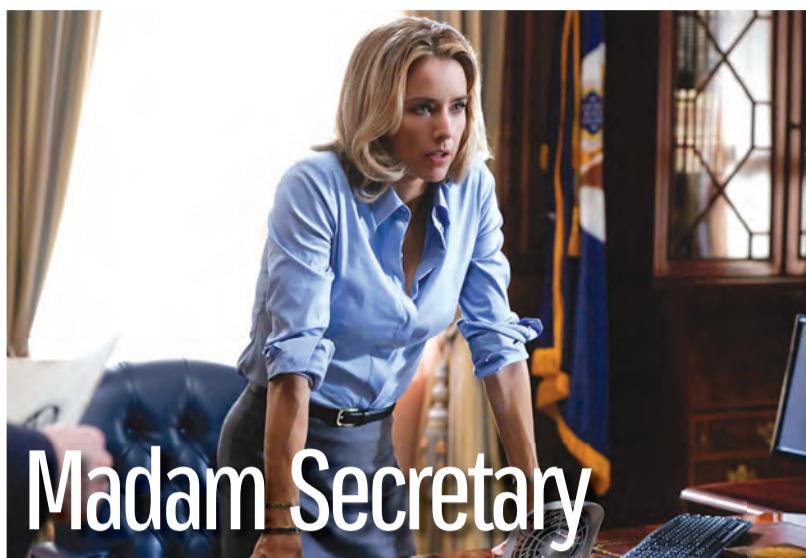
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## Madam Secretary

Years ago, as a senior in a (very) liberal arts college in the US, I found myself watching a days-long rerun of "The West Wing" (1999-2006) during Thanksgiving break. At the time, that peerless show was in its fifth season. All caught up at the end of the TV

**MUST SEE**  
Sophia Pande

marathon, I realised I had learnt more about American politics and policy-making from this one show than I might have taking a few related classes. If you find this hard to believe, take some time to watch the show that really put Aaron Sorkin on the map: as the creator and writer of "The West Wing" the man revolutionised the way important political issues were portrayed onscreen.

Years later, a few attempts have been made to ape the

success of this brilliant, idealistic, heart-warming show, and "Madam Secretary" (2014-present), now in its third season, though still a far cry from the luminance of The West Wing, comes closest to imitating the glowing ethos that made "The West Wing" such a heavy hitting, beloved drama.

Starring the superb Téa Leoni as the titular Secretary of State, the series is a well-written and odd new hybrid of politico-family drama, if one can say such a thing. Bess, or Elizabeth McCord (Leoni), is a former CIA analyst who used to work with the President, Conrad Dalton (Keith Carradine), when he headed the CIA. The mysterious death of Dalton's former Secretary of State propels Bess into her current position.

Bess is a liberal pragmatist, often aided by her academic husband, Dr. Henry McCord (Tim Daly), a world-renowned bible scholar who also moonlights for the intelligence

community on occasion. The duo, steered by their moral compass, make an exceptional team – professionally as well as personally – exemplifying one of the most likeable and convincing couples I've seen on television.

Without being moralistic, "Madam Secretary" shows us what courage looks like in the face of impossible circumstances. It also highlights the power of communication, and how a well-worded, heartfelt apology or statement can defuse the most hideous of situations, domestically or professionally. As in "The West Wing", the writing wields humour as a tool: Elizabeth McCord is both sharp and funny, her wit and self-deprecation help her through her job, her marriage, and the raising of her three teenage children, the oldest of whom Stephanie or "Stevie" (Wallis Currie-Wood) is a college dropout – to the horror of her scholarly parents.

There are hundreds of shows out there now, available to those fortunate enough to have access and a bit of time to kill. We all get caught up in TV binges, and while my moments with "The West Wing" were defining and nothing has come close to it since (well, maybe "Twin Peaks"), you could do much, much worse than the satisfying mellowness that defines "Madam Secretary".

 Watch trailer online  
[nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com)

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Tulsipur : 082-562575

## HAPPENINGS



KUNDA DIXIT

**HERITAGE SIGHT:** Pratima Pande and Rohit Ranjitkar of the Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust with US ambassador Alaina Teplitz at launch on Wednesday of a five-year campaign to restore Patan Darbar Square.



JICA

**SAFETY FIRST:** Japanese Ambassador Masashi Ogawa (right) with Krishna Bahadur Raut of the Home Ministry and Govind Pokharel of the National Reconstruction Authority at a disaster risk reduction seminar on Wednesday to mark the second anniversary of the earthquake.



GOPEN RAI

**STRONG WOMEN:** Temporary police personnel recruited for the upcoming local elections receive training at the Jawalakhel football ground on Monday.



GOPEN RAI

**REST IN PEACE:** Students gather to attend a candlelit vigil on Tuesday at Boudhanath Stupa in Kathmandu to mark the second anniversary of the devastating 2015 earthquake.



GOPEN RAI

**MUMMY DEAREST:** A devotee pays homage to the deities at the Matatirtha Temple, Kathmandu during Matatirtha Aunsi on Wednesday.



Women in Gurvakot village of Surkhet take part in a meeting to choose candidates for local elections last week.

LAXMI BHANDARI

## Women, Dalits in local polls

Himal Khabarpatrika, 23-29

April

**हिमाल**  
खबरपत्रिका

Kamala BK is a candidate for the Gurvakot village council election in Surkhet. She has been a social activist, and says she is excited about joining local government after years of working with a non-government group.

Sita Devi BK is also standing as a ward council member, from Barahatal village. She also worked for a non-government group and predicts that little will change if she enters government. "I will be doing what I have been doing, struggle for gender rights, by standing in elections."

Across Nepal, there are many women – most from minority groups like Dalits – who are going to have a chance at governing because of quotas for women candidates in local government units. Nepal's first election under the new Constitution mandates that municipality and village councils must have a woman in at least the post of chair or vice-chair. The councils themselves should have at least two women members, of which at least one must be from the Dalit community. In Surkhet alone, the five municipalities and 99 wards will have at least 207 women; 99 will have to be Dalits.

In the Tarai, too, there was already considerable enthusiasm for local elections even before the Madhes-based parties decided to unite and take part in the second phase of polling. The interest is especially palpable among Dalits and women. Pasi Devi Rajbansi of Dhanpal village of Morang is standing for vice chair from the UML party. She says: "We are really excited. There is now a certainty that we will be represented in local government."

Kala Devi Sah of Kathari village is from the NC and Devkala Yadav of Sunbarshi is standing for ward chair: both are actively campaigning door-to-door. Whatever their party affiliation, candidates' campaign promises are all the same: education, health, jobs, better roads and no discrimination.

Sangita Darji, 38, is from the tailor caste and would be considered 'untouchable', but today she is standing for



Dalit women candidates from Morang (from top to bottom): Anita Thatal of the NC, Sangita Darji of the RPP, Kopila Nepali of the Maoist-Centre

ward council member of Kamal village of Jhapa district, from the RPP, and has already started campaigning. Darji had actually decided to go to the Gulf to work as a domestic help, but abandoned the process after hearing that it would be possible to stand in local elections. Kopila Nepali is also a Dalit from the same village. A member of the Maoist-Centre party came to her house to convince her to stand in the council election. She is not a member of the party and makes ends meet with a small tailoring shop, and money her husband

sends home from the Gulf.

Anita Thatal was also approached in her own house by a member of the NC who convinced her to run in elections. The quota for women and Dalits in local elections has put a lot of pressure on political parties to find candidates, but the fact that women outnumber men in rural areas has made that job a little easier. However, many of the candidates recruited are not members of any party.

Even though caste discrimination has been outlawed for more than 55 years, Dalits are still ostracized. But the local elections, with their quotas for Dalits and women, are expected to go a long way in removing the stigma. Says Rajendra Diyal of the Maoist-Centre in Damak Municipality: "We Dalits are finally being inducted into mainstream politics. Maybe now we will get more respect in society."

The 131 wards of Jhapa Municipality will be getting at least 524 Dalit women candidates from the NC, UML, Maoist-Centre and RPP. "The gates to state power have now been opened to our community," says Tikaram Bayalkoti of the Dalit Empowerment Forum.

However, the other community that has been excluded from past elections — the roughly 5 million Nepalis working abroad — may have to wait some more years before they can vote. Because absentee ballots are not allowed, migrant workers (half of them in India) have been unable to cast ballots. However, there has been a noticeable influx of Nepalis crossing from India at the Sunauli border in the past week, mostly locals who are returning to vote.

Khumal Thapa from Bamgha of Gulmi district works in Haryana, and is headed to his village. So is Ganesh BK from Argakhanchi, who works in Punjab. "If there are local elections, there will be development and jobs, and we may not have to migrate anymore," says BK. The organisations of Nepalis in India are affiliated with various political parties back home and these have been actively mobilising to bring back voters for the elections.

Dipak Gyawali in Butwal, Gopal Gartaula in Jhapa, Laxmi Bhandari in Surkhet and Mukesh Pokhrel in Morang.

## Buildings not strong enough

Mahesh Acharya in BBC Nepali, 24 April

BBC  
नेपाली

Two years ago, when the earthquake destroyed the mud-mortar houses in Kathmandu Valley, it convinced many that cement buildings were safer. But a new study has revealed that many of the reinforced concrete construction (RCC) buildings in the Kathmandu Valley do not meet minimum government standards and would not withstand a strong earthquake in future.

The two year-long study titled 'Project for Assessment of Earthquake Disaster Risk for the Kathmandu

assessment said that many of the RCC houses were found to have 9x9 or 9x12 inch columns.

"There are criteria for load calculation in the building code, and the building code at the time deemed that a 12x12 inch column would sustain the load of a building with a certain number of floors," said Ram Bahadur Thapa, head of the construction permit division at Kathmandu Metropolitan City. This rule is applicable to buildings of up to three storeys having a footprint of less than 1,000 sq ft. Today, most concrete buildings in Kathmandu are more than three floors and need pillars and beams



BIKRAM RAI

Valley,' led by the Ministry of Urban Development in coordination with Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and other government agencies, found that out of 250,000 RCC houses in Kathmandu only 27,000 or so followed proper engineering and design guidelines.

"Only six per cent of the RCC houses in Kathmandu Valley follow engineer-approved designs, whereas 48 per cent of houses are non-engineer RCC building, meaning they were constructed by the house owners without keeping the earthquake safety in mind," explained Suman Salike, senior divisional engineer at the Ministry of Urban Development who was involved in the assessment.

According to the 1993 building code, an RCC building needs to have 12x12 inch pillars, but engineers involved in the

that are stronger, with bigger dimensions and more rods.

Experts also said that the building codes need to be followed more strictly and amended accordingly to build safer and stronger houses. "If you don't upgrade this building code, you will have to suffer damage equal to or more than in 2015. That is why it needs to be amended," said Ryoichi Takahashi of JICA, who was involved in the assessment.

Along with the study, the government has also started discussions with national and international experts to amend the criteria in the building code so it reflects the requirements of taller buildings and stronger earthquakes. There are around 450,000 houses in the Kathmandu Valley, about half of them are of RCC and most do not meet the specifications in the building code.



Vote for me

नेपाल

Rabindra Manandhar in Nepal, 23 April

### QUOTE OF THE WEEK



Election Commission shouldn't become a puppet of the government. The commission should be cautious of its prestige. ■■■

Surya Prasad Shrestha, former Chief Election Commissioner in Nagarik, 27 April

# HIGH SCHOOLS

Education is the most neglected service in two of Nepal's most neglected districts

**PAWAN DHAKAL**

in DOLPO

**M**ore than other groups in Nepal's diverse ethnic fabric, the mountain communities of Upper Mustang and Dolpo are left out of the country's social and political mainstream.

These high and arid regions in the Himalayan rain shadow have been isolated from the rest of Nepal not just due to their remoteness, but because of lack of investment in health and education by faraway Kathmandu, poor infrastructure, and restricted and expensive tourism.

One of the most neglected among the neglected sectors is education. Schools here are run mostly by non-government groups, with minimal state involvement. Students do not get text books even by the end of the academic year, and those books first have to be bought by private groups and then carried by mules to remote villages.

Apart from the romanticisation of their 'exotic' and 'authentic' Tibetan lifestyle and the potential for trans-Himalayan tourism, communities here are rarely represented in the Nepali national psyche. There is a high rate of out-migration to the cities and abroad, and villages have to rely mainly on private support for education, unlike other areas of Nepal.

Since Upper Mustang and Dolpo have low population densities, the settlements are sparse and students have to travel long distances to reach school. Although the districts fall within Nepal's boundaries topographically, they belong to the Tibetan plateau, with a harsh yet stunning landscape at an average altitude of 3,000m.

The pan-Nepal problem of an overly standardised, often decontextualised and culturally mis-representative 10-year-old national curriculum is starker here than elsewhere. Poor school facilities and gaps in human resources exacerbate the problem.

In Mustang and Dolpo, children four and older are lined up at school assembly every morning, where they do 'hands-up', 'hands-down', and 'stand-at-ease' in front of the principal



without really understanding what they mean. The students are then made to sing the national anthem in a language they cannot yet speak.

The need to control the students is evident in classrooms where children are lined up on uncomfortable benches to copy sentences from books in English, their third language. Most teachers are on contract, and unable to hold conversations in a language they are supposed to be teaching. Most cannot speak in

the mother tongue of the students.

Government teachers are largely unfamiliar with the curriculum, which was put together with European funding. They are unaware of learning objectives for each grade, and teach the way they were taught: reading from textbooks and privileging rote-learning and social conformity. They are unaware or incapable of using the curriculum to develop local content for regular subjects.

The district school



**Jana Jyoti Community School, Ghiling, Upper Mustang**

This school sits in pleasant green surroundings on the main trail from Jomsom to Lo Manthang. It goes up to Grade 8 and serves about 100 children from the town and surrounding areas. Situated at 3,500m, it is supported by Maitri-Ratna, a Nepali NGO started by a former resident of Ghiling to boost the future of children in the region.

Apart from teaching Tibetan language and Buddhist philosophy, the school runs an apple orchard and a greenhouse to help defray costs and make it less dependent on private donations. With a hostel housing 60 students, Jana Jyoti has earned a reputation throughout Mustang for its success rate in school-leaving exams.

Two graduates are now government teachers at the school, one of whom is the head teacher. Another grad is working as a nurse at the school, and also serving the village's health needs.

The view (above) of Annapurna I and Thorung Peak from Ghiling School in Mustang looking south.





ALL PICS: Pawan Dhakal

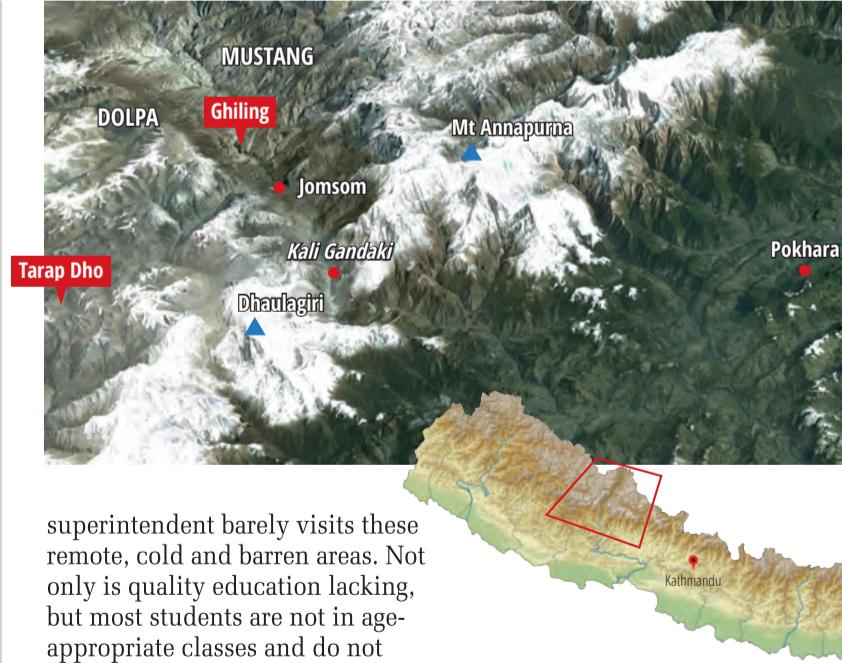


## Crystal Mountain School, Dho Tarap, Dolpo

This school runs up to Grade 7 and is operated by Vision Dolpo in collaboration with Action Dolpo, a French NGO. It was the first school in this remote and road-less district and its reputation continues to grow. With 200 students from four surrounding communities, it is situated in the scenic 4,200m Dho Tarap Valley.

Vision Dolpo also runs a local health post and the Snow Leopard Residence in Kathmandu, where students stay while attending Grades 8-12. The coordinator of Vision Dolpo and Crystal Mountain is one of the school's first graduates. Other grads regularly volunteer at the school after their Grade 12 exams.

The school has good facilities, including a passive solar house that allows local teachers to conduct classes even in the harsh winters here.



superintendent barely visits these remote, cold and barren areas. Not only is quality education lacking, but most students are not in age-appropriate classes and do not continue to higher education.

To be sure, not all schools are doing poorly. Since they are supported by international charities, many are better than most public schools in rural Nepal. But they face problems of curriculum implementation and lack of teachers.

Some schools focus on culturally meaningful education, including study of the Tibetan language, Buddhist philosophy

and local histories, and graduates have gone on to become teachers, health assistants and skilled workers.

Although education has improved dramatically in the past two decades in both Upper Mustang and Dolpo, there is uncertainty about whether the schools can sustain themselves. Moreover, the current decontextualised education

**SCHOOLED IN NATURE:** The dramatic scenery surrounding Crystal Mountain School in Dho Tarap of Dolpo (above) belies the lack of care for education in this remote and road-less district.

Students of Jana Jyoti Community School in Ghiling on a hike above their village (below, left).

system is locally irrelevant, culturally misrepresentative, actively discourages independent thinking, and barely imparts necessary life skills.

High mountain areas face specific challenges owing to their geography, climate, unique culture and customs. These districts are 'Nepali' when it comes to tourism promotion but are treated as 'non-Nepali' by the district authorities and teachers who cannot come to terms with communities that don't fit their definition of what being Nepali means.

**Pawan Dhakal** is a Dartmouth College Class of 2016 alum on a year-long Public Service Fellowship with two schools in Upper Mustang and Dolpo.



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## Snarling at traffic

A lot of traffic has flowed across the Bagmati since the last time we wrote about the traffic snarl at the Bagmati Bridge. So it is time for another one of our Regular Traffic Updates. It is now mandatory to carefully peruse these bi-annual reports in order to keep your driver's license valid, and failure to read this column in its entirety and memorise the new traffic signs below will automatically result in your driving permit being declared null and/or void. Legal Fineprint: While all care has been taken to accurately reflect provisions in the Traffic Violence and Uncontrollable Road Rage Act 1992, the publisher is not responsible for any arbitrary alterations in rules once they have been ratified by parliament, or adopted by acclamation at the weekly meeting of the Rotary Club of Bakhundole.

The government has left no stone unturned to embark upon an anti-trafficking campaign to ensure

that vehicular movement is smooth during state visits by our president to Togo or the Togolese president to Nepal (whichever comes first), during future SAARC, BIMSTEC or Mt Everest Summits by declaring a dawn to dusk curfew. Road user groups are advised that traffic rules will be strictly enforced during VIP movements when Ambulances and the Fire Brigade will have to give way to Beriberi Important Personalities Carcade.

However, once the convoy with outriders has passed, the city can go back to being its normal chaotic self, viz: buses can once more park on the middle of the road, motorcyclists are allowed to cross the road via the ovalhead bridges, trucks can spew all the smoke they like as long as they don't blow their horns, pedestrians can walk as if they are jay, and the gumblement can make an illegal U-turn on constitutional amendments.

New traffic signs have also been installed, and since it has been so long since we had them in Kathmandu,



drivers may need to brush up on what they mean. As a public service, the Ass presents below new street signs so drivers, and pedestrians who haven't yet been run over on zebra crossings, can use it as a tear sheet for easy reference during an emergency:



Does it feel like you are going around in circles? You are going around in circles.



Caught while blowing horn? Pay baksheesh not exceeding this amount.



Drop whatever you are doing. Tomorrow is a holiday for the President's Visit to São Tome and Príncipe. Yay!



No urinating here.



Bank robbery in progress. Give way to male with cash-filled suitcase and possibly armed female perpetrator running to getaway car.



Don't tweet and drive.



CAUTION: Abandoned bra on road.



The Ass

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