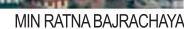


MIN RATNA BAJRACHAYA



QATAR 
AIRWAYS القطرية
GOING PLACES TOGETHER

FEDERAL FEMININE REPUBLIC OF NEPAL

Nepal is still a patriarchy. Girls are discriminated against within families, communities and society. Men from privileged castes dominate decision-making, they are disproportionately represented in the cabinet, the executive branch, the civil service and also in senior positions in the private sector. Men sit where it matters.

Yet, there are winds of change blowing across Nepal's gender landscape. Nepal's President, Speaker of Parliament and Chief Justice are all women, and nearly a third of Parliament is female. And now, the feminisation of Nepali politics is trickling down to the grassroots through new constitutionally-mandated quotas for women candidates in local elections.

With 90 % of the votes counted from the 14 May elections as we go to press, women have won 4 of the mayorships and 65 of the vice-mayoral in races to municipal councils. Women also won 8 of village council chairs and 263 vice-chairs, and 2,598 of ward memberships. The vice-mayors in all four metropolitan cities where ballot papers are still being counted are sure to be women as well.

Compared to the total number of male candidates this may not seem like much, but it represents a revolution in the way many new villages, municipalities and cities will be governed from now on. As our report on page 14-15 shows, this election is putting Dalit women not just in policy-making positions, but also making them responsible for implementation. Nowhere else in Asia has this gender shift in governance been as dramatic, and it is the most vivid indication yet of the inclusiveness promised in the

new constitution.

Let's zoom in on the Hupsekot Village of Nawalparasi district. Laxmi Pandey of the NC became the first village council chair to be elected in last week's election. But it didn't end there. The vice chair is also a woman: Kopila Malla of the UML. By voting women from two different parties to the highest offices in their village council, the people of Hupsekot have demonstrated their confidence in female leadership.

Even conservative Jumla, which is still steeped in patriarchal values, made history last week by elected social activist Kantika Sejuwal of the NC as the country's first

female mayor. After the votes were counted it was another woman, Apsara Devi Neupane, of the Maoist-Centre who was elected deputy mayor in Jumla.

As more results come in, more women are being added to decision-making positions at the local level. There are twice as many candidates in the second phase of elections in 14 June, and this trend is expected to continue.

All this has been made possible by the provision in the new constitution mandating

that every Ward Council must have a woman and a Dalit member. Parties were required to field a woman candidate in either the head or deputy in metropolitan, municipal and village councils.

Yet, there are places like Jumla and Hupsekot where both the head and deputy are both female. Some gender rights activists had complained before the polls that the female and Dalit quotas were 'tokenism'. But the new Constitution is turning out to be a spectacular surprise — signifying a major shift in gender power balance in Nepal's political history.



GUEST EDITORIAL
KANTIKA SEJUWAL

Madam Mayor

I was just 14 when they got me married, I had my first baby one year later and dropped out of school. I had always dreamed of going to college, but I wasn't about to give it up. I rejoined school and passed the SLC exams when my husband, Manab Sejuwal, was in jail in Kathmandu for taking part in the 1990 Democracy Movement. My husband was freed but became even more active in politics, rising to be the Jumla District President of the NC. He was away most of the time. I started teaching at a government school in Jumla while raising my baby. I became principal, and founded a non-profit to support underprivileged communities in the Karnali.

After my husband was killed in the Nepal Airlines plane crash in Arghakanchi in 2014, I quit teaching to be more active in politics. When I became Nepal's first woman Mayor, it was not just because of my political credentials but because of my social work.

The people of Jumla know me as a hardworking single woman committed to transforming the image of the Karnali. They voted for me because they know I deliver what I promise.

I have already assumed office as Mayor of Chandannath Municipality and my first decision is to transform Jumla into a Smart City — this doesn't mean highrise buildings and a metro it is to turn it into a clean and green city with adequate drinking water supply, 24-hour electricity and blacktopped roads.

People in Kathmandu are happy to get rid of load-

shedding after 10 years, but here in Jumla we are still suffering power outages not just because electricity is in short supply but so many transformers destroyed during two Maoist attacks have not been replaced.

Irrespective of which political party they support ideologically, most women in Jumla voted for me. During my victory rallies, many women held on to my hands and told me not to let them down. They have faith in me, and I will not betray them. Even the men who have upheld Jumla's traditionally patriarchal society have shown faith in a woman Mayor.

Despite gains, women are still discouraged by political parties, including my own NC, from joining politics and holding public office. This is the right time to change their attitude. Women are more accountable and transparent, and that makes them more suitable to lead local government. Devolution is good for grassroots democracy and local development. It will be even more impactful if women are encouraged to take the lead.



Kantika Sejuwal is the newly elected mayor of Chandannath Municipality in Jumla

Times.com

ONLINE VIDEOS



ROYAL LODGE

This week 15 years ago the royal massacre marked the beginning of the end of the monarchy. Where are the surviving family members now? What has become of their assets and property? Take a tour of the dilapidated former royal hunting lodge in Gokarna and watch video of (Crown Prince and King) Dipendra's favourite hunting spot in *Hawa Ghar*.



AMING HIGH

Captain Bed Upreti bought a written-off Airbus 330 and is now turning it into an Aviation Museum in Kathmandu. Follow us into the inside the aircraft as it is being reassembled, listen to Upreti speak from the mockup cockpit and watch him show us around the cabin of the plane that is set to open to the public in September.



EVERY PUFF

On World No Tobacco Day, watch a *Nepali Times* video on how smoking is harming Nepal's economy, development and public health. Although cigarette use is declining because of government campaigns, Nepal's tax on cigarettes is still lowest in the region. Follow tragic story of patient with smoking-induced cancer.

JUST VOTING

It's hilarious, USA/UK/INDIA, supposedly democratic Nations, upset and complaining about Nepal and Nepalis, just voting and exercising their democratic rights ('Say something, or say nothing', Kanak Mani Dixit, #859). Hypocrites.

Ramesh

DOUBLE STANDARDS

Touché ! The Ass is hilarious, but this also a deadly serious exposé of the double standards of the Anglo-Americans who should first put their own house in order before preaching to Nepalis who have finally taken a step towards restoring democracy ('Nepal elects Hitler', Backside, #859). I am ashamed of my country.

S J Klinsman

RADIOACTIVE

Radio stations like press are financed by local and national political parties ('Frequently modulated', Om Astha Rai, #859). Today's news: political party press releases.

David Durkan

REBUILDING OURSELVES

The aid community does little to strengthen the homegrown state structures that worked so well before the advent of aid industry ('From subjects to citizens', George Varughese, #859). We should be listening less to the expats, who like staying behind for the great weather, scenery and friendly natives in Nepal and more to the ones within from now on.

Sarath Gaurav

WHAT'S TRENDING



Nepal elects Hilter

Backside

The Ass' spoof on the blunt statements by the US and UK Embassies on the first phase of local elections got unprecedented shares on social media and was the most commented. Go online to read feedback.

Most reached on Facebook
(6,949 people reached)

Most visited online page
(1,022 views)

Most commented

The radio wave

Editorial

There is an urgent need to revive the values of public service broadcasting that saw the birth of community radio 20 years so that it continues to buttress grassroots democracy and local development.

Most shared on Facebook

Best years of their lives

by Kunda Dixit

Photo book about hopes and hardships of Bangladeshi migrant workers in Malaysia could very well have been about Nepali labourers there.

Most popular on Twitter
(18 retweets, 45 likes)

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times@nepalitimes
#NepalElection was so enthusiastically embraced by voters that Nepalis deserved more than a 'no comment'. Read: <http://bit.ly/2qBgseR>



eraj@tamang_eraj
Although quarter of national budget is contributed by foreign aid, that doesn't justify their ownership in social engineering.

Nepali Times@nepalitimes
Kathmandu tends to discard old faces and elect new ones every time. Where will Ranju Darshana be in four years? <http://bit.ly/2qEanMM>



Sonam Goperma@sonamkaji
Not still convinced that Kathmandu is on a path to discard old faces. She may still be fighting to change the trend.

Nepali Times@nepalitimes
20 years on, Radio Sagarmatha keeps defending its founding values of a public service broadcaster Read: <http://bit.ly/2qCQfuo> @omastharai

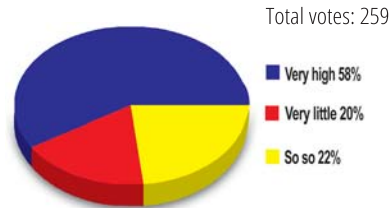


Bhawana Gurung@BhawanaNa
This made me miss those days in Radio Sagarmatha. I'm proud that I spent 3 years there. It has helped me a lot to enhance my production skills.



Weekly Internet Poll #860

Q. What are the chances of the second round of local elections being held on 14 June?



Weekly Internet Poll #861
To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Who do you want to see as the next Prime Minister of Nepal?



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From royal to republic

Nepal sets an example in smoothly transitioning from monarchy to republic

SHREEJANA SHRESTHA

When historians look back at the beginning of the end of Nepal’s monarchy, they probably will not dwell long on a newly-elected Constituent Assembly declaring Nepal a republic in 2008, but on the night of 1 June 2001.

Sixteen years ago this week, as the country was buffeted by chronic instability and a spreading Maoist war, a routine clan dinner at the Naryanhiti Palace in Kathmandu turned into a gruesome massacre of royals unprecedented in world history.

Piecing together eye-witness information and cross-checking with doctors at the Army Hospital and other sources, this newspaper has followed the saga to maintain that Crown Prince Dipendra shot his father King Birendra, his mother Queen Aishwarya, his uncle Prince Dhirendra, his brother, sister, four other royals and finally himself (*sitting at left in family portrait in 1981, right*).

Even though he lay in a coma for four days, and as the rest of his family were taken in cremation processions through a capital in curfew, Dipendra was declared king. After Dipendra died, Gyanendra was crowned, making him the third king of Nepal in four days.

The royal massacre contributed to the Maoists deciding to accelerate their goal to abolish the monarchy, and within five months took the war directly to the Royal Nepal Army. However, the factor that was almost as important in leading to the abolition of the monarchy was King Gyanendra’s attempt to turn the clock back on democracy.

Although rocky, Nepal’s transition from monarchy to republic was civilised compared

to other countries which have executed deposed monarchs, ransacked the palace or driven them into exile. The state also exercised restraint while dethroning the king and abolishing a 250-year-old institution.

However, the years since the abolition of the monarchy saw the country mired in a deadlock over the constitution, rulers openly flouting the rule of law, chronic political turmoil and economic

stagnation. There is such great public disillusionment about the four-party cartel that runs this country that some sections have started openly speaking about a return to the relative stability of the monarchy years.

They argue that republicanism, secularism and federalism were never the agenda of the 2006 people’s movement, and were foisted on Nepal by outside forces through proxies

in the Maoist party.

One of them is former Army Chief Rukmangad Katawal whose sacking by Pushpa Kamal Dahal led to his resignation as prime minister in 2009. Katawal says the abolition of the monarchy was not done through a democratic process.

“If we are to follow the democratic practice as laid down by B P Koirala, the political parties should have first asked

the people if they really wanted to get rid of the monarchy. The end of monarchy was an impulsive decision of the political parties,” Katawal told us.

The former army chief credits King Gyanendra for the smooth transition from monarchy to republic because he avoided a direct confrontation by vacating the palace peacefully immediately after the CA’s decision in 2008. But the general noted: “It would have been better if he had exhibited the same statesmanship while he was king.”

The political parties also showed accommodation, allowing the royal family to reside in Nagarjun Palace, the Queen Mother to stay in a section of Narayanhiti Palace and in Bharatpur. Gyanendra himself has laid low in the past nine years, shuns interviews, and appears only occasionally in public. However, from time to time, he has made royal-sounding pronouncements that hint at impatience with political parties ignoring the people’s welfare.

Past public opinion polls in this paper have shown that Gyanendra’s popularity is still very low, there is a slight increase in support for a restoration of monarchy, but there has been consistently high backing for rolling back secularism from the constitution.

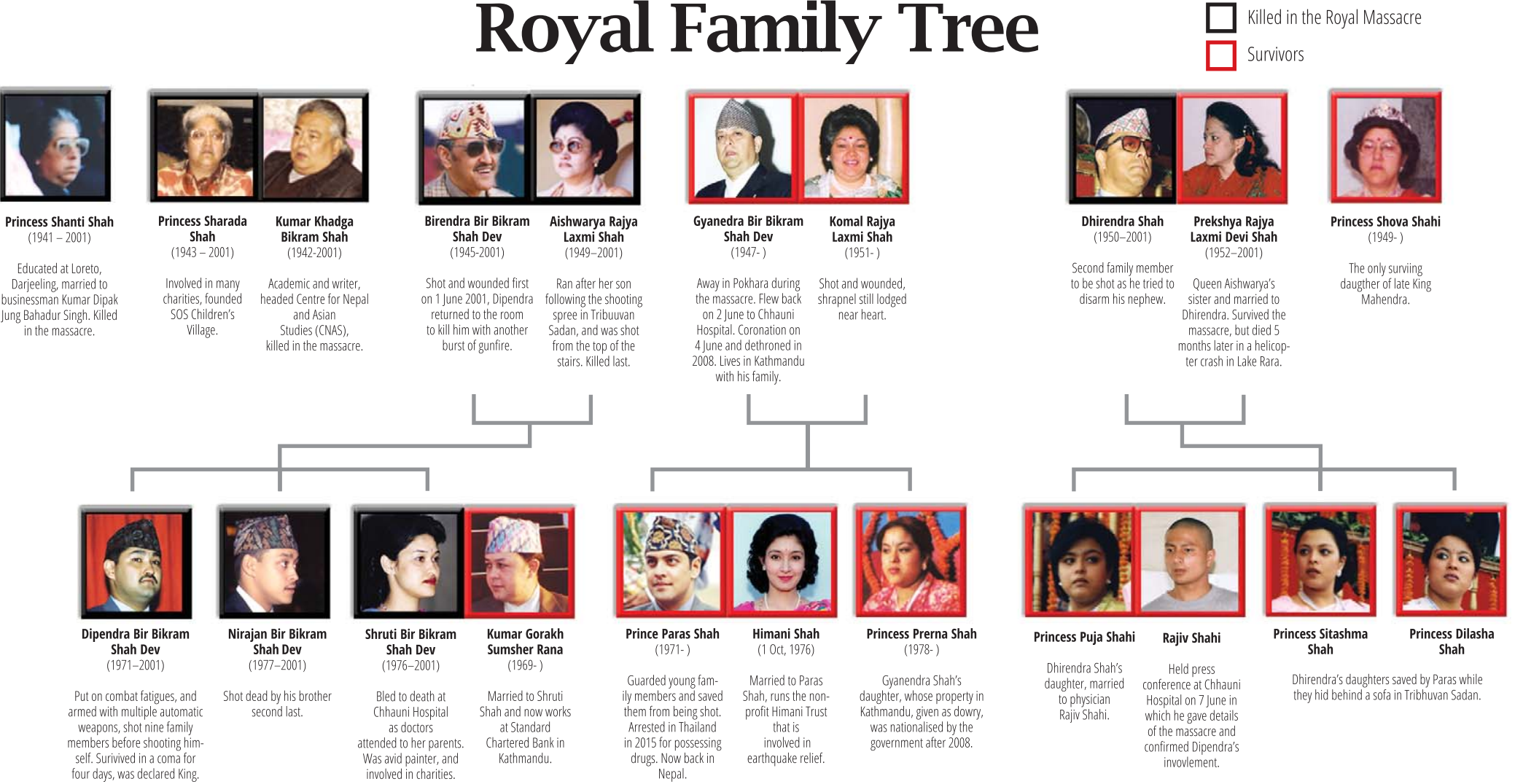
Political scientist Hari Sharma says Nepal’s monarchy has been contentious ever since the 1950s, and the people have always opposed dictatorial monarchs.

He added: “The transition from monarchy to republic in Nepal was smooth unlike other countries because the dethronement of the King had political mandate. Also, the social root of monarchy had become shallow and weak, and the institution was alienated from larger social discourse.”



MANGAL MOHAN SHRESTHA

Royal Family Tree





SHREEJANA SHRESTHA

Royal assets

After the end of the conflict in 2006, Nepal became a kind of ‘Maoist monarchy’. The country was still nominally a monarchy, but had an interim government in which former guerrillas were ministers. The legislature ordered King Gyanendra Shah to submit property details in a move that was the beginning of the process of nationalisation of assets belonging to King Birendra and his family which had been transferred to Gyanendra after the royal massacre of 2001.

An autonomous body called the Nepal Trust was set up a year later to oversee the process. Gyanendra refused to submit his property details, and even a decade after abolition of the monarchy and 16 years after the royal massacre, the office is still trying to piece together details of royal property and assets.

The Nepal Trust has taken possession of 21,000 ropanis of royal property across the country, but very little liquid assets have been identified. *(Details online.)* The Trust has not been able to obtain any information on the assets in foreign banks belonging

to Birendra’s family.

Lekh Bahadur Karki of Nepal Trust Office admits there could be a lot more property and assets that belonged to King Birendra and his family that are in the names of others.

“We are still trying to find out what they owned, we are not convinced that this is all they had,” says Karki. The Trust recently uncovered 40 ropanis of land owned by former royal family members in Gokarneswor Municipality in Kathmandu and is preparing to transfer ownership.

The Trust is also eying the Nagarjun Palace even though the government had decided to allow Gyanendra to use the property as a country home after they vacated Naryanhiti in 2008.

According to the law, the Trust can confiscate any property belonging to King Birendra, Queen Aishwarya and their sons Dipendra and Nirajan if it is found that they were transferred to King Gyanendra after the royal massacre.

Ram Bahadur Kuikel, who worked at the Narayanhiti Palace

for more than 10 years, admits that the people find it hard to believe that Birendra’s family only owned what has so far been uncovered.

Property taken over by the Trust includes Gokarna Forest Resort, Standard Chartered Bank in Lazimpat, Kathmandu Business Complex, Nepal Red Cross building in Tahachal, Diyalo Durbar in Bharatpur, and Ratna Mandir in Pokhara. The Trust has also collected Rs 401 million revenue from the leased property.

Although the Trust is mandated to use the money for welfare of underprivileged families, the money is just sitting in the bank. Trust officials say that they are unable to allocate it because of the lack of proper guidelines on where to spend it. **Shreejana Shrestha**

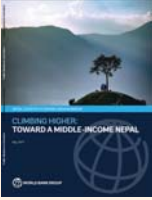


Follow our reporter on a video tour of Samjhana Sadan, the former hunting lodge of the former royal family in Gokarna, and badly damaged in the earthquake. Also see Hawa Ghar, Dipendra’s favourite hunting spot. nepalimes.com

prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

Bleak report

The World Bank’s Country Economic Memorandum (CEM) on Nepal titled *Climbing Higher: Toward a Middle Income Nepal* says that despite a rapid reduction in the poverty, there is an urgent need to boost economic growth. If this trend continues, Nepal will not meet the goal of graduating to middle income country status by 2030. *(Full report online.)*



Accelerating business

Enterprise – Nepal Business Accelerator Program is calling for applications from entrepreneurs for the third batch for growth-stage companies. Batch Three will incorporate 10 teams and is scheduled to begin on 1 August. www.enterprise.com.np

Yeti pushes SDGs

Yeti Airlines and the United Nations have agreed to promote global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to raise awareness to reduce poverty, improve wellbeing and protect the environment. Yeti’s new aircraft as well boarding passes and other literature will



carry the SDG goals on climate change, poverty reduction and gender equality.

Sporty Turkish

Turkish Airlines EuroLeague Final Four 2017 concluded this week with Fenerbahçe emerging victorious over Olympiacos Piraeus with 24 basketball teams taking part in the final in Istanbul 19th-21st May. Turkish Airlines is also sponsoring the ENGAGE Empowering League premier wheelchair basketball competition in Nepal 27 May-1 July.

Hyundai exchange

Laxmi Intercontinental concluded a three-day Hyundai Exchange program held in showrooms in Biratnagar, Butwal, Dhangadi and Narayangadh with special discounts. One lucky winner from each showroom will receive Coolpad Cool 1 smartphone with ‘Test Drive and Win’.





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Landing hard in Megghauli

The Twin Otter lurched, and a blur of elephants and people flashed past the left wing

The two pilots wore their Royal Nepal Airlines uniforms, but from my vantage point in the front seat of the Twin Otter it never occurred to me to notice that both were only qualified as co-pilots. Good old RNAC – two halves make a whole.



SO FAR SO GOOD

Lisa Choegyal

As we descended down to Megghauli, my mind was on the onward flight to meet Himalayan-hero Eric Shipton and escort his group down from Pokhara to Chitwan – such an iconic mountaineer deserved special treatment and Al Read, the bearded American head of Mountain Travel, had asked me to oblige. The clear weather and pleasant chill in the November 1976 air were a reminder of winter to come.

The white peaks of Himalchuli and Manaslu soared on the northern skyline as we started losing height over the lowland forests. Despite being a dusty dirt airfield, Megghauli is longer and wider than is needed for the nifty 19-seater Twin Otter. The airstrip had been carved out of the jungle in 1961 for one of the last great tiger hunts to entertain Queen Elizabeth II, and had loads of space.

I have never been a nervous flyer, but something felt wrong when the aircraft wheels bounced hard on the ground, then disturbingly lifted again and again, on and on, bouncing higher and higher down the long runway for what seemed ages as we increasingly lost control. The cockpit stall signal shrieked, the small aircraft shuddered and lurched, and a blur of elephants and people flashed past the left wing. A sharp jolt threw me sideways into the aisle, a heavy



crunch brought us to a halt.

I noticed the pilots were dazed and bleeding. We were at a strange angle, my seat belt strained, and I had to retrieve my two tortoiseshell hair combs from under the seat. “Is everyone all right?” I called out, attempting tour professional calm. The turbaned tour leader was ashen faced and speechless.

As we tumbled out of the rear door, I still thought this had just been a bad landing. But the battered plane was well off the main runway and poised on the edge of a jagged crater gouged out by the monsoon. “Lucky we didn’t go into that,” I muttered to Chuck who had hurried over,

clad in khaki shirt, shorts and uncharacteristic agitation. “You did,” he drawled, “you went right into it, spun around, and came out up the other side!”

Only then did I notice that the plane’s nose was smashed in, its undercarriage ripped off and one wing drooped sadly. Chuck briefed the incoming group then sent them off on the two-hour elephant safari through the park to Tiger Tops lodge, just as though the crash had never happened.

The afternoon was frenetic, radioing for help, getting the outgoing guests onto diverted flights and the injured to hospital in army helicopters. No one was badly hurt. One of the half-

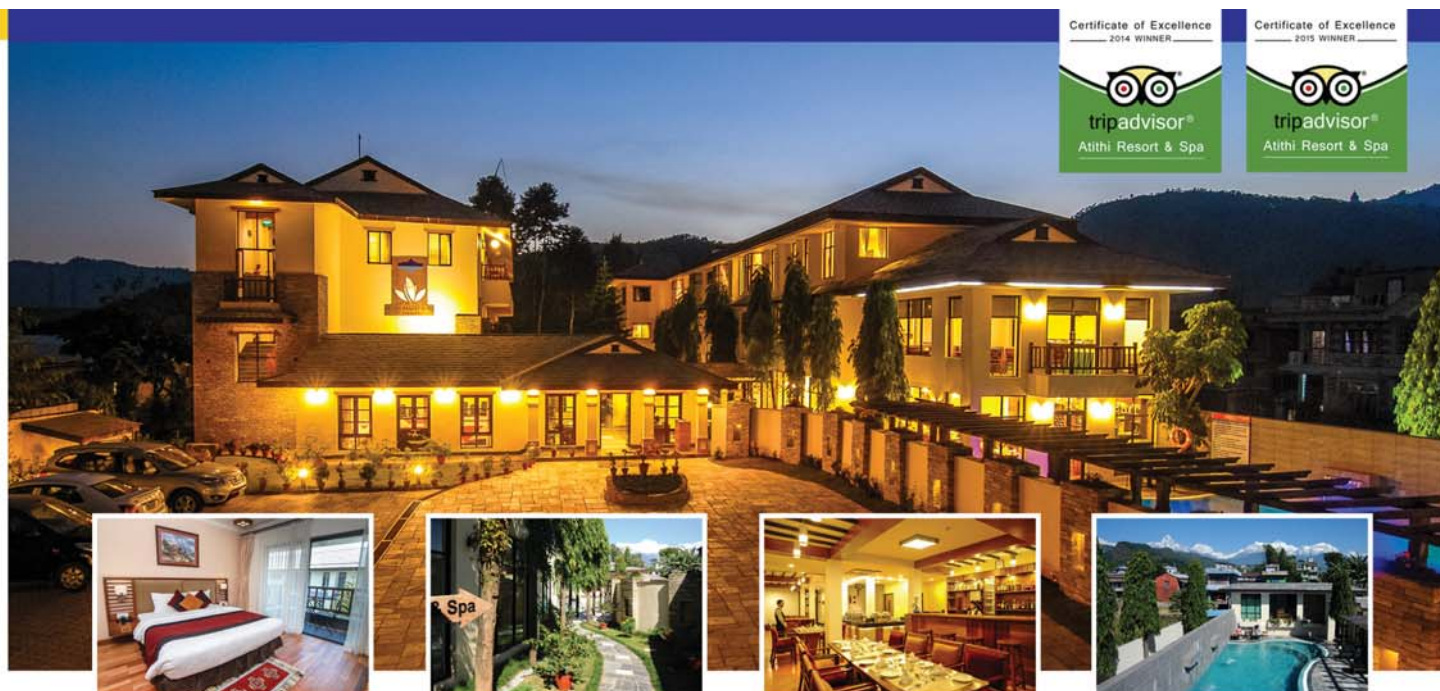
captains had broken a leg. The rogue aircraft had hit two people on the ground who kept the dogs and cattle off the runway -- Prem Bahadur was struck on the back of his head and Ram Singh was run over having thrown himself into a ditch. Everyone was shaken as the plane had hurtled straight towards the rustic terminal until the pilots managed at the last minute to put power into one engine to avoid them.

It was some weeks later that the official flight assessor was sent by de Havilland Canada to investigate the incident. Wonderfully named Mr Popov, he confirmed that the Twin Otter had “ballooned” on landing. Only

the grass airstrip had prevented an explosion on impact, killing us all.

By the time I flew back to Kathmandu later that afternoon with Captain Emil Wick in his Pilatus, the adrenalin had dissipated. The light was fading on the hills, and I was beginning to fade myself. Walking straight through the crowds at the airport, I arrived shaky and weak-kneed into the cool of Al’s high-ceilinged office.

“I was told you were dead,” he hugged me. The rumour mill had made me a minor celebrity. “But you know what they say.” grinned Al, “any landing that you walk away from is a good one.” 🇳🇵



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LA SPA

Bed Upreti's Aviation Museum gets off the ground

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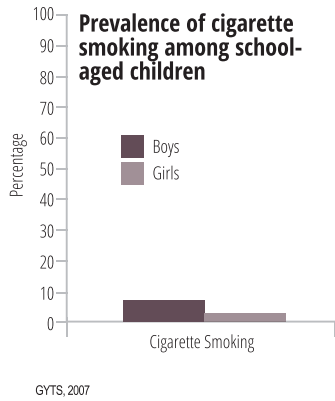
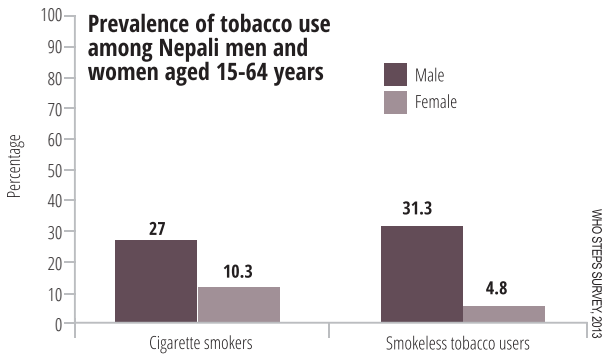
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RECPHEC

PUT IT OUT: An activist tries to talk a smoker out of lighting up during an awareness-raising rally by the Resource Centre for Primary Health Care in Kathmandu.



Fired up over tobacco

Nepal should focus on its current commitments before taking on plain packaging of cigarettes

Earlier this month, Health Minister Gagan Thapa told a workshop of South Asian activists fighting tobacco use that Nepal would adopt plain packaging of cigarettes in 2018 and make the country tobacco-free by 2030. Revealed just weeks before World No Tobacco Day on 31 May, the minister’s timing was great, but what about the content of his message?



COMMENT
Marty Logan

In Nepal, tobacco use causes 15% of all deaths in men older than 30, in women 2%, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO). There’s also growing recognition that the economic cost to countries of tobacco use is money lost to development for which funding is getting harder to find.

Plain packaging is the latest thing in tobacco control. It extends the trend of putting increasingly large, shocking photos on packages to warn about tobacco’s health hazards. Pictorial, or graphic, warnings are one measure contained in the global blueprint for fighting tobacco use: the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. Nepal joined the treaty in 2007.

Plain packs go a step further. They retain larger warnings and remove all logos, colours, and unique fonts to make packages as unattractive as possible,

especially to potential smokers, usually minors. Australia, France and the UK have adopted plain packs and a handful of other countries, including Canada, New Zealand and Norway, have launched the process.

While setting the 2030 target for a tobacco-free Nepal may be a smart way to motivate campaigns against tobacco use, plain packaging plans might be too much too soon. There are other more urgent measures.

Health Minister Thapa announced early this year that as of 14 March tobacco would be sold in special, licensed shops only, not in general stores. That hasn’t happened yet. Buying a single cigarette, a great way to get kids started smoking, is still easy. Public smoking bans are not strictly enforced. New local governments could play a role in implementing these measures but only if effectively lobbied first.

In May 2015 Nepal became the world’s leader in graphic warnings, requiring that they cover 90% of the front and back of packages. The move put this country ahead of tobacco control pioneers Australia, the first country to adopt plain packaging, and Uruguay, the first with warnings larger than 75 per cent, as well as Thailand (the former #1).

Yet more than two years later, not all packs have 90% warnings. Manufacturers outside the country have no choice but to comply if they want their cigarettes to clear customs but not all local players have

followed. Instead, they have launched court cases against the provision.

Court challenges are a common tactic of the global tobacco industry (sales of \$699 billion in 2015) and just the threat of them has prevented some governments from going ahead with measures like larger graphic warnings. But Big Tobacco took its opposition to Australia’s plain packaging to a new level.

Besides suing in a national court, Philip Morris International (PMI) argued that the country’s pioneering move violated a bilateral investment treaty between Australia and Hong Kong, and launched a court case in the World Trade Organisation using proxies Indonesia, Cuba, Honduras and Dominican Republic.

While PMI lost in all three venues, the UK and Ireland have

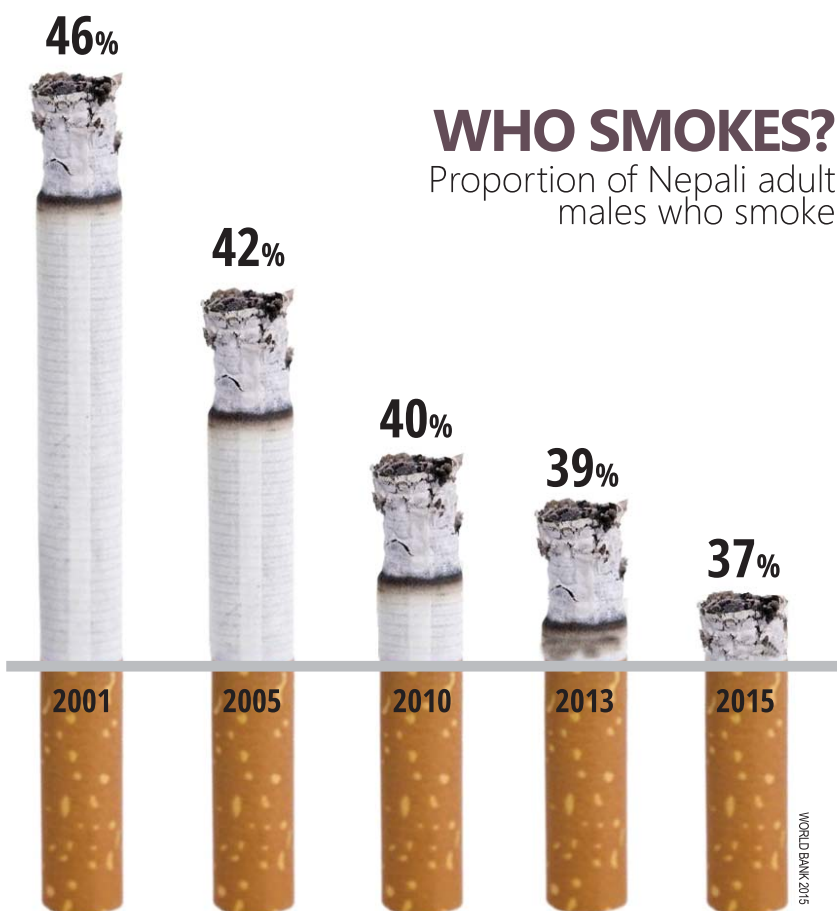
also been sued for plain packs so it is likely that if Nepal goes ahead it will also be targeted, a move that could drain substantial money and other resources. Thapa revealed in this month’s workshop that he has been pressured by tobacco firms over the 90% warnings.

Taxing tobacco is said to be the most effective way to get current smokers to stop or cut back, and to prevent potential users from getting addicted. But Nepal’s tax rate of 28% is one of



WHO SMOKES?

Proportion of Nepali adult males who smoke



In a puff of smoke

Nepal has some of the strictest laws against smoking, but suffers from poor enforcement

SONIA AWALE

Laxmi Ghimire is weak and tired after her sixth chemotherapy at the Oncology Department of Bir Hospital in Kathmandu. She started smoking when she was 16, spent decades cooking on a smokey fireplace and now at age 61 her face is swollen, and she wears a red scarf to hide her balding head (*pictured*).



GOPEN RAI

For the past decades, public health experts in Nepal have focussed on infectious diseases like diarrhoea and TB. But the burden of non-communicable diseases like cancer is increasing alarmingly, and today makes up nearly 90% of all hospitalisations.

One important risk factor is smoking, and a 2015 survey found that 37% of Nepali men and 15% of women smoke. Nearly a third of adult males also regularly use smokeless tobacco.

“There is a direct correlation between the higher prevalence of lung cancer and smoking,” says oncologist Bibek Acharya at Bir Hospital who is treating Laxmi Ghimire. Nepal has the highest proportion of female adult smokers among South Asian countries, and the impact is seen in maternal and child health.

Tobacco consumption is falling in Nepal (*see chart, below*) but is still the cause of death of about 10% of men and women. Even so, Nepal is far ahead of other countries in the region in its anti-tobacco campaigns.

Last year Health Minister Gagan Thapa called for pictorial warnings to cover 90% of cigarette packs. The Ministry of Health announced that from mid-March tobacco products could only be sold in authorised shops. Nepal plans to introduce plain cigarette packaging by 2018, and make the country tobacco free by 2030.

“People’s attitudes have changed, no one serves cigarettes at parties anymore, and

passengers have stopped smoking in public vehicles,” points out anti-tobacco activist Shanta Lal Mulmi. “We have some of the best anti-tobacco policies in the world. It is the implementation that has held us back.”

For example, the 90% pictorial warning on cigarette packs is only enforced for imported brands, the sale of tobacco products at licensed vendors has not gone into effect yet, the sale of cigarettes in public places isn’t strictly monitored.

Physician Anil Bikram at the Bharatpur Cancer Hospital agrees that continued easy access and indirect promotion in social media platforms are drawing younger people to smoking.

At the Ministry of Health Secretary Sailendra Raj Uprety admits that there is room for improvement. “The Health Ministry makes laws and policies, but for enforcement we need coordination with other agencies. We have to work harder on that.”

One way Nepal could further reduce smoking prevalence is to raise taxes. WHO recommends at least 70% excise on tobacco products, but Nepal has one of the lowest taxes in the region at 29%, far behind Sri Lanka (73%).

“We have to make it difficult for cigarette companies to sell their products by increasing taxes and enforcing plain packaging,” suggests cardiologist Prakash Raj Regmi.

Despite a gradual decline in tobacco production in Nepal, the industry is a lucrative source of revenue for the government, which collected Rs 9 billion in excise from tobacco products, contributing 4.37% to the total tax net in the last fiscal year.

However, the state spent Rs16 billion for the treatment of diseases directly related to tobacco use. Many lose the most productive years of life, families plunge into poverty, and the state has to divert resources away from development to treat tobacco-related morbidity.

Says activist Shanta Lal Mulmi: “Stronger regulation is necessary, but tobacco control is our collective responsibility. Everyone has to be involved in raising awareness if we want to make Nepal tobacco free by 2030.”



Watch video of Laxmi Ghimire as she battles for life at Bir Hospital. She started smoking as a teenager and now has stage two terminal lung cancer.

nepalitimes.com




EATENS US ALL



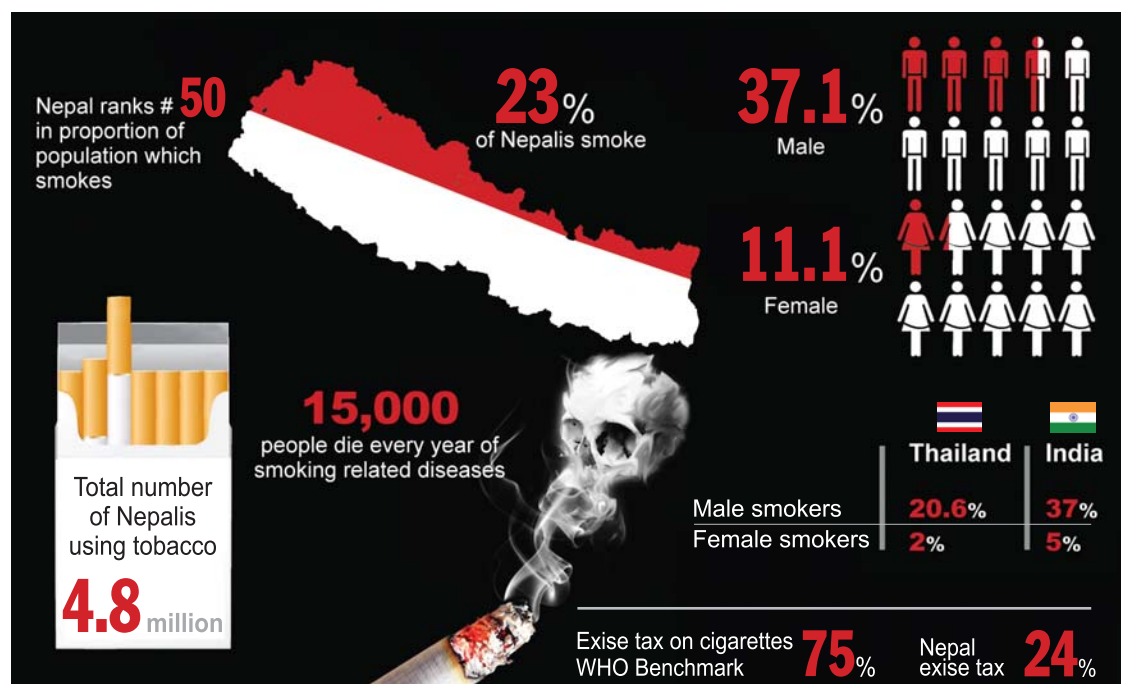
the lowest in South Asia compared to Sri Lanka (74%) and India (61%). In India, a public debate has raged for months over what rate of goods and services tax to apply to tobacco products, especially bidis.

Thapa has singled out tobacco tax as a main funding source for various new health projects, which

is another reason that raising this should be a priority for him and his successors. This holds for smokeless products like gutkha, khaini and surti too.

Notably, 20% of boys and 13% of girls in Nepal used some form of smokeless tobacco in 2011, which is higher than in most of the region. Officials should also keep an open mind about electronic cigarettes, unlike many neighbouring countries. Although the evidence base on e-cigs is still small, it appears increasingly likely that they are not as harmful as cigarettes, and can be useful to help smokers quit the habit. 

Marty Logan managed communications for Framework Convention Alliance (FCA) 2010-2016.



EVENTS



Empowering league,
Support your favorite basketball team at the Turkish Airlines ENGAGE Empowering League organised to sustain physical and mental wellbeing of players with physical disabilities.
27 May (opening day) to 1 June, National Army Sport Training Center, Lagankhel, 984-34-99-639, bharat.engage@gmail.com

The LGBTI tales,

Book seats to watch *The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later*, a play adapted to stories of Nepal's LGBTI community. The iconic hate crime is based on the story of Matthew Shepherd in Laramie, USA.
19-28 May, Nepal Tourism Board, Rs 200-750 980 1192690

Everest Green,

Be a part of discussion with Everest Green team to learn about mountain environment awareness.
30 May, 6 pm
Alliance Francaise de Kathmandu 9808418422

Living heritage

Join Simrik Atelier as it celebrates its 8th anniversary with a painting exhibition by Lok Chitrakar and special musical performance by Vishal Bhattarai, Inoue So and Mukesh Shakya
27-29 May, 12 pm onwards
Simrik Atelier, Patan Dhoka (01) 5528810



Coffee queries

For interesting business ideas and experiences, entrepreneurs, students and start-ups can participate in Monday morning coffee queries.
29 May, 9-11 am
Bodhi Books and Bakes, Maharajgunj <http://www.clockb.com/events/71>

Bird watching,

Celebrate this year's World Environment Day by watching bird and walking in the nature.
27 May, 7 am, Pani Muhan, Shivapuri, 9851156280



Kora Cycling

Join hundreds of cycling enthusiasts and ride 50, 75, or 100 km to raise funds for a cycling trail in the Bungamati Area of Kathmandu valley.
15 July, 7 am onwards
Patan Darbar Square
<https://www.facebook.com/ktmkora/>

Mini-retreat,

Renew your energies through mindfulness and meditation practice under the guidance of Elena Dokun Dakmo.
27 May, 10am-2pm
Hotel Mandala, Boudha
Rs 2900 (without lunch) Rs 3,600 (with lunch)
dokundakmo@gmail.com

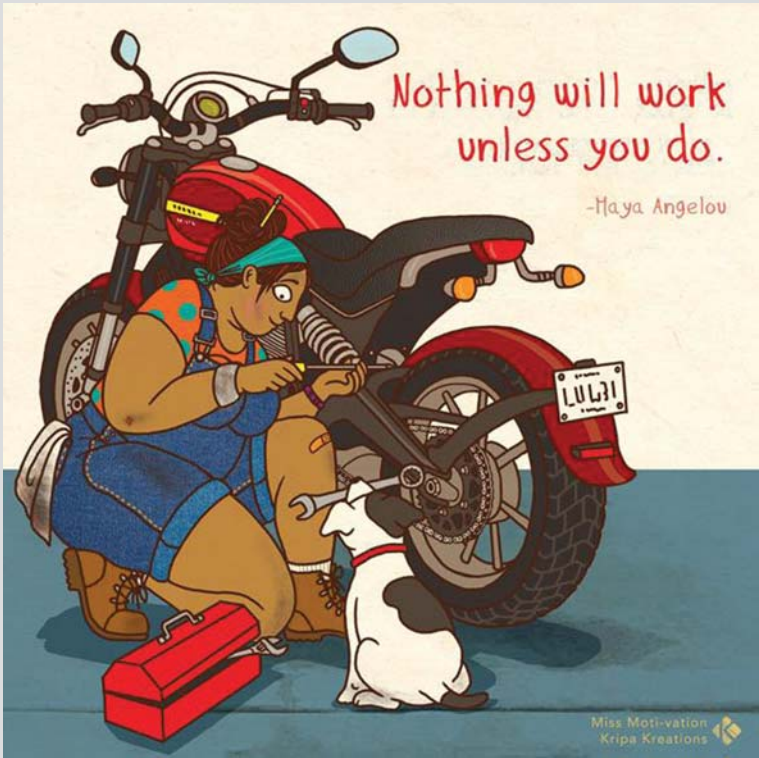
Crossing borders,

An exhibition featuring the works of Korean artist Hyun Ju Kim and printmakers from Australia, Nepal and Pakistan.
28 May-18 June
Siddhartha Art Gallery (01) 4218048



MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



MUSIC



Sound of music

Join Nasty, Paramita RL Rana, VZN, Symfamous, Tyrant Music and Grizzle for a musical evening.
3 June, 6 pm onwards
Karma Bar & Lounge, Tripureswor



Magical fusion

Dig in to scrumptious BBQ while listening to some live music by KaNTa dAb dAb an Sandy Sax.
26 May, Social Cafe, Gairidhara, (01) 4427370

Gypsy jazz,

Book your table to enjoy a jazzy evening with Hari Maharjan.
27 May, 6 pm onwards, Pauline's Garden, Baluwatar, Rs 600, 9803919575



Tone Stage

Bands Underside, Underlying Inc, Born in silence and Psychotive knerve will be performing live in the Lakeside city.
28 May, 4-7:30 pm, Rolling Stones Rock Bar Lakeside, Pokhara, Rs 300



Live alive

Listen to one of the upcoming artists in the Nepali music scene Swoopna Suman perform live.
2 June, Irish Pub, Lazimpat, (01)4416027

DINING



Sing-Ma,

Get food-court experience with authentic eats from Singapore and Malaysia. Tip: try the blueberry cheese cake.
Jhamsikhel, (01) 5009092, 9813453650

Café Swotha,

An intimate setting in the heart of Patan, with an atmosphere of sophisticated, romantic warmth.
Patan, (01) 5551184
info@traditionalhomes.com.np



Hotel Shangri-La

Let the subtleties of Arabian cuisine tease your palate or opt for pasta if you're not too adventurous with food.
Every Saturday, 11 am-3 pm, Shambala Garden, Hotel Shangri-La, Rs 1500 (01) 4412999

Wine and dine,

Indulge in a four-course Italian meal paired with Zonin wines with Chef Mauro. Get to know their new menus.
27 May, 7 pm onwards
Rox restaurant, Hyatt Regency Rs 4,000 (01) 5171234



Little Italy,

Turn vegetarian at this Italian food chain and don't forget to end your meal with the chef's special chocolate bomb.
Kamaladi Road, (01) 4233577, 4233578 9801195000

Phat Kath,

Offering French-ish food, a takeaway crêperie, low tables and hookahs for hippies, tables and chairs for normal people, and a formidable hip hop soundtrack for everyone.
Thamel, 9816696571

Lhakpa's Chulo,

Nepali dal-bhat, Newari khaja, Swiss Rösti, Italian risotto, and Thai green curry. Take your pick.
Jhamsikhel, (01) 5542986

GETAWAY



Pataleban Vineyard Resort,

Japanese-influenced eco-resort with great views, jungle walks, and picnics. Chisapani, Kathmandu, 9841679364

Monsoon madness,

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Pokhara, Rs 6,299 per person (01) 4420252 / 9861388277 / 9804116774



Mum's Garden Resort,

Head out to Pokhara for a peaceful and comfortable stay in beautifully designed cottages surrounded by a lush green garden with great views of Phewa Lake and the Annapurna range.
Lakeside, Pokhara, (06) 1463468, www.mumsgardenresort.com

Dwarika's Hotel,

A little slice of paradise hidden in the middle of the city. Start the day off with complimentary yoga classes in this grand heritage hotel.
Battisputali, Kathmandu, (01) 4470770

Balthali Village Resort,

A small, cosy retreat with a bird's eye view of green terrace fields dotted with ochre painted houses.
Balthali, Kavre, 9851075818

Park Village Resort,

Yoga, detox and ayurveda treatment in a quiet corner of Kathmandu.
Himalayan Peace and Wellness Center, Park Village Resort
01-4370286, peace@wellness.com.np



Atithi Resort & Spa,

A quiet sanctuary that fuses Nepali tradition with modern amenities, complete with a fancy pool and a cosy restaurant.
Lakeside, Pokhara, (06)1466760, info@atithiresort.com

The Yellow House,

Bed and breakfast for the light traveller.
Sanepa, (01) 5553869 / 5522078, www.theyellowhouse.com.np



"He is in a hurry, and wants to reach Baluwatar faster than his own car."
कान्तिपुर
Abin Shrestha in Kantipur, 23 May

Necessity or gerrymandering?

himalkhabar.com, 23 May

हिमाल

Former government secretary Balananda Paudel who headed the Local Bodies Restructuring Commission fears that the government decision to increase the number of village councils in the Tarai is political expediency, and says there is a danger that devolution may be sabotaged by forces of centralism.

Himal: The government has added local bodies three weeks before the second phase of local elections. Your take?

Balananda Poudel: According to Section 295 of the Constitution, local level restructuring should be done through a Commission that is the sole authority on the number and demarcation of local levels as per the basis and criteria set by the government. The Commission decided on 719 local councils and said that the number can go up to 744, but we had given a certain limit for each district. The government has now added more local councils to Province 2. There is no provision for this in the Constitution. Parliament can give the government the right to restructure. But no such law has been made till date.

After the recommendation is received, the government has to decide within six months. But all this has to be done at least a year before the elections as defined in Article 5 of the Act. Based on which Act and law did the government take the decision?



transparent governance. If we lose these, the government and the entire system will fail. Another misunderstanding is that more units are needed for development. The argument is that there should be more local bodies in the Tarai as the population is higher. If more units meant more development, I would support it too but there no proof that supports the statement. It may just result in more ineffective governments.

The most dangerous thing is that the government decided to restructure the boundaries three weeks prior to the elections. This will create confusion among voters.

For political reasons?

I cannot see any legal, constitutional or ideological justification for this decision. Even the procedure is problematic.

What are the implications?

The constitution has separated the work of the three levels of government. The Province was decided by the government but it was not possible to get into the details of local levels, therefore an independent commission was formed. The idea was to structure local levels in a way that it could fulfill the role and responsibility mentioned in the Constitution. We found that we needed a small number of local bodies. The economy of scale does not allow more than 200 local units, but that wasn't possible. Because there was the huge job of setting up the system with local representatives who could run the government and form laws. So we chose a middle path and came up with 565 local levels which in itself was not an ideal number. After we completed 74 districts, the government came up with a different criteria and the numbers increased further. The biggest danger here is that the local bodies may not be capable to use their rights because of which the power may be centralised once again. There is a danger we might be backtracking from federalism.

Is federalism at risk then?

There are certain political forces that want the power to be with provinces and then there are others who say we should not go into federalism. There is a danger of devolution of powers being sabotaged by forces of centralism. There is another danger as well: federalism is the medium for better, effective, responsible and

“ People have not chosen agents of Singha Darbar, but their own Singha Darbars in their own villages through local elections. ”

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal in his address to the nation before submitting his resignation to President Bidya Bhandari, 24 May



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Alien: Covenant



Ridley Scott's iconic film *Alien* (1979) broke all boundaries when it came out, with Sigourney Weaver in an unforgettable lead role as Officer Ellen Ripley, a tough, gorgeous heroine who set the standard for sci-fi leads to come. Thirty-eight years later, after three sequels in 1986, 1992, and 1997, *Prometheus*

of the creatures remains the central mystery through all of these films. With *Prometheus*, Scott returns to the origins of both mankind and the alien, taking us on a space journey on the eponymous ship back to what could possibly have been the beginnings of the sleek, murderous, black creatures that famously use humans to incubate their spawn.


Alien: Covenant, with yet another title named after a space ship, picks up ten years after the *Prometheus* mission spins out of control. *Covenant* is on an entirely different mission altogether, her crew consisting of couples who are in charge of two thousand souls traveling in stasis, in pods that keep them asleep and preserved through space travel in search of Origae-6, a planet that they have identified as suitable to start a new colony.

Also on board is Walter (Michael Fassbender), the synthetic android first created as David 8 (also played by Fassbender) who was on the *Prometheus* crew. When the

ship encounters difficulties due to a neutrino blast, Walter is forced to wake up the crew.

Tensions emerge when the *Covenant* receives a transmission from a nearby planet that also appears extremely habitable; they are still 7 odd years away from Origae-6 and would have to go back to their pods; a reluctance compounded by the captain's demise in stasis during the neutrino flare. Thus begins the crew's ill-fated descent towards the planet that initially showed so much promise.

This new "Alien" film is a hybrid of science fiction and space horror. It takes us on a journey that brings us a step closer to solving the central mystery, but also through a series of dreadful revelations, including a deeply sinister plot that involves the enigmatic David 8, who at the risk of a spoiler, is lying in wait for the crew of the *Covenant*.

While there are smaller shocks, there are no really big surprises here. The first *Alien* film was a true pioneer, those that have come after it have relied heavily on the menace of that initially conceived, viciously capable killer - to the detriment of truly innovative storyline. *Alien: Covenant* does not differ but it does provide stunning special effects, and some moments of very real trepidation. 



Watch trailer online

nepalitimes.com

HAPPENINGS



BIKRAM RAI

LATER: Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal announced his resignation in a 28-minute televised address to the nation on Wednesday.



RSS

ANTI-CORRUPTION CZAR: Newly appointed Chief of the Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) Deep Basnyat greets President Bidya Devi Bhandari after being sworn in at Shital Niwas on Monday.



GOPEN RAI

WE SWEAR: Chiri Babu Maharjan and Gita Satyal are sworn in as Mayor and Vice Mayor of Lalitpur Metropolitan City in Jawalakhel on Wednesday.



BIKRAM RAI

HUMANITARIAN PARTNERS: Representatives from the government, diplomatic community, donors and UN agencies convene at the Humanitarian Staging Area at Kathmandu Airport on Thursday to plan for future emergencies.



PEMA SHERPA

EMPOWERED PLAYERS: Abdullah Tuncer Kecici of Turkish Airlines hands over a trophy during the second edition of Turkish Airlines ENGAGE Empowering League on Tuesday.

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“We have lots to do in Waling Municipality, lots,” said Dilip Pratap Khand with a serious look on his face just before he took his oath as newly-elected Mayor of my hometown in Syangja. There were 70 other representatives of various wards who now all have a huge responsibility to fulfill the bottled up expectations of the people.



CONNECTING DOTS
Dinkar Nepal

Nepal has now entered an ambitious new phase in its history called 'radical decentralisation' and much of whether it will work will depend on these leaders. As the head of a municipality and from an area that is relatively privileged in education, Khand starts with lots of advantages.

The dream he has built and successfully sold to the voters is of Waling as a 'Smart City'. After the government declared ten different towns all over Nepal to be developed under this concept, the term has received attention from both voters and candidates.

“We have a few villages that are really cut off even within the Municipality. The awareness level among a majority of voters has increased this time, but some people still live in the 18th century,” explained Khand, who was elected deputy mayor in the last local election 20 years ago.

Khand's candidness came as a shock to me. I was perhaps expecting a rosier picture of

Radically decentralised

Newly-elected representatives have a huge challenge to fulfill the people's pent-up expectations

development in rural Nepal. Having grown in a place with schools and basic medical facilities only five minutes walk away, I had no idea how underserved some areas of my hometown still were.

After the nation entered into a federal structure local governments are now powerful bodies with the authority to make decisions on most issues of direct relevance to the people. This enormous responsibility has increased public expectations of local bodies, and the high turnout in the first phase of elections has shown the eagerness among people to have their own representatives.

Some skeptics had expressed concern that revolutionary decentralisation could just be a conspiracy to wreck federalism and to reinstate a unitary governance structure. That seems far-fetched. The real challenge now, and the reason for its failure if decentralisation fails, will be much more intrinsic to our polity, society, culture and outside intervention.

Firstly, there are clear signs that the transition to this new system is fraught because of the clumsiness of our bureaucracy. The government is shockingly ill-prepared to decentralise. The



MAN CITY: Newly-elected Mayor Dilip Pratap Khand of Waling of Syangja represents a new breed of can-do local politicians.

law regarding local governance is yet to be drafted. Regulations have not yet been formed. When elected representatives take office, they will be working in a systemic vacuum. There is hardly any debate in the public sphere about this, and the result could be that no one will be really accountable.

Secondly, corruption at the local level will be difficult to control. For two decades, local councils have been run by bureaucrats and since the end of the conflict in 2006 by a ‘political mechanism’ – a euphemism for local cartels that have divided up the spoils.

Local politicians have thrived in a culture of patronage and corruption, acting as brokers




DINKAR NEPAI

between corrupt officialdom and the people. The success of previous representatives at local levels were marked by the contacts they had at the 'centre' and the deftness they displayed in being able to draw favours from the rulers in Kathmandu for their area.

Another challenge for the new local government bodies is the mountain of expectations and imposed foreign concepts. The citizenry is exposed to a world dramatically altered by globalisation and the information revolution. This adds to the people's expectations from their elected local leaders even though many of them may not be in tune with the latest developments.

around the world. Combined with the modus operandi of the aid industry this will add huge challenges to local bodies.

Khand is aware of these challenges, and says he has a plan. He told me: "We can call it Smart City or something else, but in effect we have to develop as a cluster of really well administered villages supported by a strongly self-reliant town at the centre."

At least in my hometown, talking to my new mayor, I had a feeling of optimism that last week's election has brought a man who seems to know what he is doing and is aware of the enormous challenges ahead. May there be more mayors and village heads like Dilip Pratap Khand. 

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Gorkha 064-421571, Karki Multi Trading Concern Pvt.Ltd., Charikot, Dolakha 049-421402, Shrestha Auto Concern Pvt.Ltd., Banepa, 011-664302, Lok Sushila Auto Concern Pvt.Ltd., Butwal 071-545986, Kwasoti 9857040391, Tansen 9857062131, Tamghas 9802620965, Sandhikharaka 9802620968, Kala Incorporated Pvt.Ltd., Dhading 010-520660,
Samridhi Enterprises Pvt.Ltd., Bhairahawa 071-527254, Ghorahi 082-560278, Birendranagar, Surkhet 083-525270, Bhusal International Pvt.Ltd., Nepalgunj 081-551599, Dakshinika Incorporated Pvt.Ltd., Dhangadhi 091-416058, Dipayal 094-412281, Option Nepal Pvt.Ltd., Mahendranagar, Mahakali 099-520856

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INCLUDING THE EXCLUDED

The real winners of the local elections are not political parties, but women

OM ASTHA RAI

When Bidya Devi Bhandari became Nepal's first woman President in 2015, cynics dismissed her arguing that she was the widow of a political leader, it was a ceremonial position anyway, and one woman becoming head of state did not change the lives of millions of downtrodden women in Nepal.

Then, Onsari Gharti Magar became Nepal's first female Speaker of Parliament and Sushila Karki the first ever woman Chief

Justice. Nay-sayers were still unimpressed.

Now that 15,000 women have been elected to local governments in the first phase of elections this month, even the skeptics are grudgingly nodding their heads. After all, as is said, a journey of a thousand miles has to begin with the first few steps.

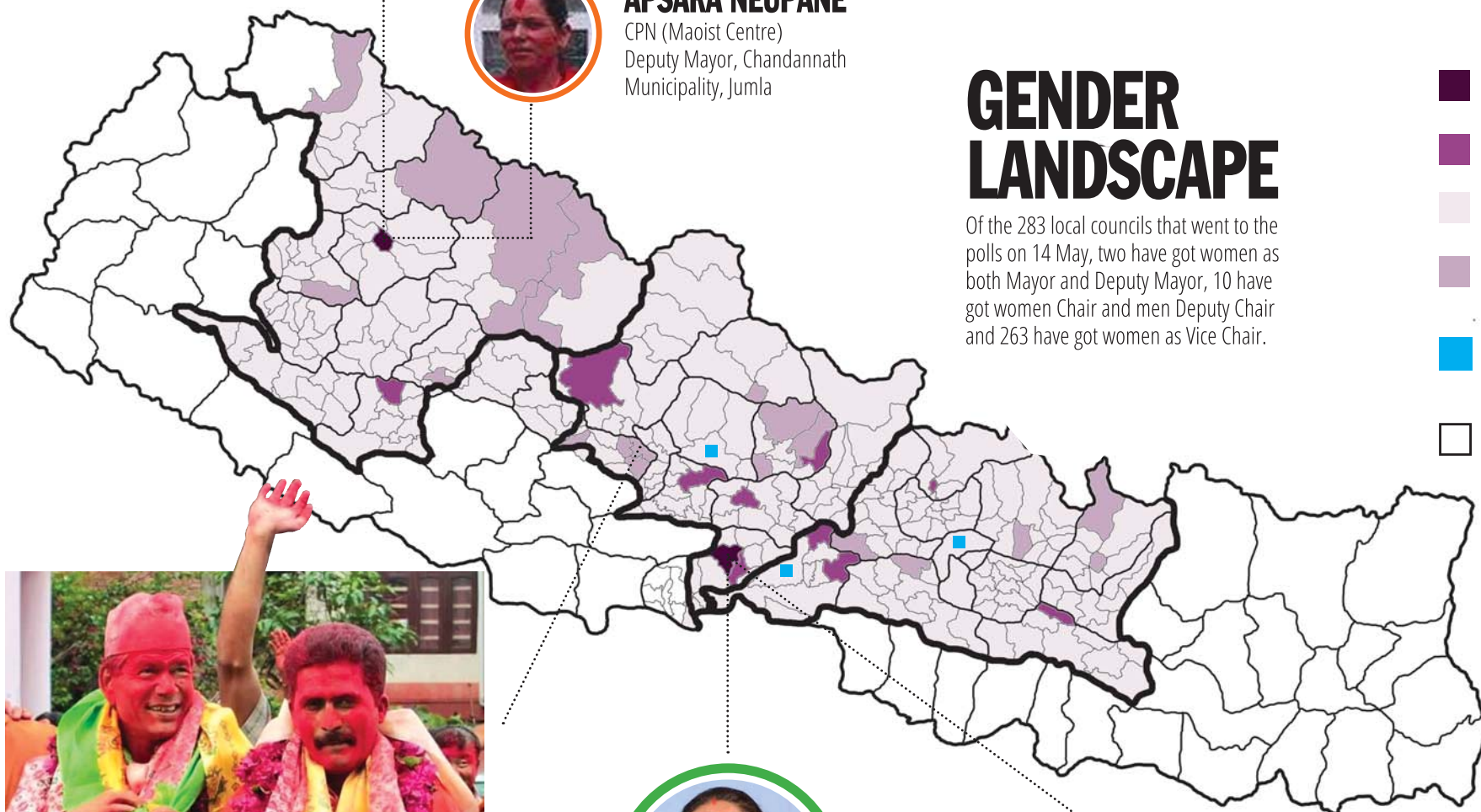
"Our first female President is an inspiration for all young women, but that was mostly symbolic, now electing thousands of women to Municipal, Village



KANTIKA SEJUWAL
Nepali Congress
Mayor,
Chandannath Municipality, Jumla



APSARA NEUPANE
CPN (Maoist Centre)
Deputy Mayor, Chandannath
Municipality, Jumla



GENDER LANDSCAPE

Of the 283 local councils that went to the polls on 14 May, two have got women as both Mayor and Deputy Mayor, 10 have got women Chair and men Deputy Chair and 263 have got women as Vice Chair.

- Where women are both Mayor/Village Chief and Vice Mayor/Village Deputy
- Where women are Mayor/Village Chief and men are Vice Mayor/Village Deputy
- Where women are Vice Mayor/Village Deputy
- Where men are both Mayor/Village Chief and Deputy Mayor/Village Deputy
- * Vote counting ongoing in Kathmandu, Pokhara and Bharatpur till press time, but the 3 metropolitan cities will all have women vice mayors.
- Districts where the second phase of local elections will take place on 14 June



YUVARAJ SHRESTHA

All-men municipalities

Janak Poudel (*right*) and Surendra Khada are newly elected Mayor and Vice Mayors of Baglung district. Inter-party electoral alliances have resulted in all-men leadership in 21 local councils



LAXMI PANDEY
Nepali Congress
Chair, Hupsekot Village Council,
Nawalparasi



KOPILA MALLA
CPN (UML)
Deputy Chair, Hupsekot Village
Council, Nawalparasi



HEM BUDTHAPA

WOMEN AT THE CENTRE: Nepal's first woman mayor Kantika Sejuwal (*on left*) and her Deputy Apsara Neupane with elected men in front of the Chandannath Municipality office in Jumla last week. This rare sight was made possible by elections under the new Constitution.

inter-party electoral alliances, effectively ending the chance of many women candidates to win major posts. As many as 21 Municipal and Village Councils have men as both mayor or village chiefs, and vice mayors or village deputies.

For example, UML and RPP forged an electoral alliance in Baglung municipality. If they had contested elections separately, both should have fielded women either for mayor or deputy mayor. The UML chose only a male candidate for mayor, as did the RPP for deputy mayor. As a result, UML's Janak Poudel became mayor and RPP's Surendra Khadka became deputy mayor in Baglung Municipality.

Such electoral alliances have resulted in all-male leadership in four of 10 local units of Baglung district. Even in Dolpo, four villages have men as both chiefs and deputy chiefs.

Ranju Jha, President of the Parliamentary Committee on Women, says political parties are not technically in violation of election laws, but they have ignored the spirit of the Constitution.

"The Local Level Election Act 2017 just requires political parties to field female candidates for either of top two executive posts. This law does

not guarantee victory of women to either of top two posts," she says. "But forging electoral alliances to keep women out is against the constitutional spirit of inclusion."

Even so, four municipalities and six village councils have got female mayors or village chiefs and male vice mayors and village deputies. In two local councils, women have been elected as both mayor/village chiefs (*see map opposite*).

In 263 municipalities and village councils where men are mayors or village chiefs, women are vice mayors or village deputies. Some of them are from the Dalit community, like Maina Biswakarma, the newly elected deputy mayor of Gurbakot Municipality in Surkhet.

"We feel that we have finally become equal citizens in our country," she says.

Apart from chiefs and deputies, more than 13,000 women, including 6,500 from the Dalit community, have been elected to Ward Committees each of which is as big as the previous Village Development Committee (VDCs) and has more resources and power to carry out local development activities.

But rights activists are still not satisfied about the scale of women winning in local elections.

"Women still have a long way to go," says Amrita Lamsal of the Institute for Human Rights Communication Nepal. "But it is indeed a great start, and we will gain more in the next elections." 🇳🇵



IN OFFICE: After being elected as a Ward Committee member under the Dalit quota in Narayan Municipality of Dailekh, Parbati Bisunke aims to be Mayor or MP in five years.

Double affirmation

These elections have brought a revolution for the rights of Dalit women

OM ASTHA RAI

All her life, Parbati Bisunke (*pictured, above*) has faced triple discrimination: as a woman, as a Dalit and as a Dalit woman.

She was fortunate enough to go to school along with her four younger brothers, but first had to finish household chores every morning. Her brothers never needed to work in the kitchen.

Bisunke did well in Sanskrit in class, and was recommended for a scholarship to study in Varanasi. But the headmaster rejected it saying Dalits did not need to master the language of the priesthood.

When Bisunke was chosen by the UML as a candidate in Narayan Municipality-8 of Dailekh district, she faced opposition from Dalit men within her own party who felt their contribution was undermined just because they were men.

After winning the election last week, Bisunke thought the achievement would finally reduce ostracisation by other castes as well as by men from her own community. But at her victory rally some supporters refused to smear auspicious red vermilion powder on her face because she was a Dalit.

"It was heart-breaking but not surprising," she told us.

In some villages of the mid-western mountains of Dailekh, Dalits can buy a cup of tea at just Rs 9 while non-Dalit customers need to pay Rs 10. Dalits get a discount because they have to wash their own glasses.

"We are still treated as untouchable," says Bisunke. "My electoral victory has not ended discrimination, but I will fight against it during my five-year tenure."

Bisunke is one of the 2,500 Dalit women who have been elected to Ward Committees of 283 Municipalities and Village Councils in the first phase of local elections on 14 May. This number will increase to 6,500 from 483 local government units in the second phase of polls on 14 June.

Three Dalit women have also been elected Deputy Mayors and seven more as Deputy Chiefs of Village Councils in results so far.

"This is revolutionary. Never before have Dalit women gained so much power in Nepal," says rights activist Renu Sijapati.

When Nepal held its last local elections in 1997, it was mandatory to elect one woman to every ward committee. Most women elected that year went on to fulfill greater political and social responsibilities.

"This year's local polls have given to Dalit women what the 1997 local polls gave to women in general," says Sijapati. "This is the biggest exposure Dalit women in Nepal have ever got."

She adds: "It is now possible for a Dalit woman elected this year to be Nepal's first Dalit woman president in 20 years time. I may be too optimistic, but the elections have surely given us a reason to hope for that."

Nepal's new Constitution in 2015 guaranteed that two of the five members of every Ward Committee would be female, but it was not constitutionally guaranteed that one of the two seats reserved for women would go to Dalit women.

Even when the Local Level Election Act 2017 was promulgated under the new Constitution, Dalit women still did not have one seat reserved. Jeevan Pariyar, a Dalit MP from the NC registered an amendment bill seeking reservation for one of the two women seats for Dalit women and had it passed by Parliament.

Pariyar says the 2017 local election has been like a revolution. He adds: "We often hear that it was the Maoist war that raised political awareness among Dalits, that was nothing compared to what has taken place with these local elections. Not just the winners, the losers will now prepare for the next elections, and beyond that. This will change the face of Nepali politics."

Others are not so sure because they say that when political parties could not find suitable Dalit women candidates, they chose token Dalit women in many constituencies.

Kala Swarnakar, President of the Feminist Dalit Organisation (FEDO) says: "Given the socio-political and economic status of Dalit women, it was a given, but look at the bigger picture. This is a victory for all Dalit women in Nepal not just for the 6,500 elected members."

To be sure, not all Dalit women are token candidates -- many are educated, opinionated, articulate, courageous, and capable of influencing policy in self-governing local councils.

Just like Parbati Bisunke. She was not chosen as a candidate for her caste and gender but her involvement in advocacy for human rights for which she won three awards for supporting people displaced by the Maoist war.

Bisunke, a political science student, is asked what next. Her confident reply: "To be a Mayor or Member of Parliament in five years." 🇳🇵



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Climbing Mt Buggery

This week Nepal faced a crisis with far-reaching implications for its territorial integrity. When history looks back at this momentous time, it will be with a sense of shock and awe at how we as a people survived such a cataclysmic threat to our stability as a nation. Yes, I am talking about the collapse of the Hillary Step.

Responding to this national crisis, the Grovelment of Nepal (GROAN) categorically denied that the landmark on the world's highest mountains was no more. "Why do we say that? Because it is there," Information Minister Comrade Partha Chhetri told reporters at a press conference in which not a single foreign correspondent asked him about the Prime Minister's resignation a few hours before.

GROAN has also taken serious note of the increase in the number of people trying to climb Mt Everest illegally. A South African stowaway who was caught in flagrante on the Western Cwrrw is in a dungeon in Kathmandu pending payment of a \$22,000 fine. Given the number of climbers these days who are illegally traversing Mt Everest from China to Nepal without a permit the Department of Immigration is establishing a Visa on Arrival Desk on the summit. Ever-vigilant, the Department has also slapped a fine for overstaying his visa on a trekker who died last spring in Manang.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Tourism and Altruism has obtained the lost transcript of a conversation between Hillary and Tenzing during the first ascent of Mt Everest in 1953 which should finally put to rest the debate about who got to the top first. The content is rated 'R' and we will request all unaccompanied minors at this point to run along outside and play on the swing for the duration of this column:



TENZING: (Muffled, through oxygen mask) There is a bit of vertical rock here, I'll have to fix ropes. Can we name this the Tenzing Step?

HILLARY: Nope, I hereby name this the Hillary Step after myself.

TENZING: Sir, your fly is open.

HILLARY: That is because I am trying to relieve myself and establish the highest urinal in human history.

TENZING: I'd check the wind direction first, Sir.

HILLARY: Oops, too late. Billions of blistering barnacles, it's so cold the \$%\$#@ thing freezes solid I'll have to keep breaking it off as I relieve myself over the Tibetan plateau.

TENZING: That's the summit. I'll race you to the top.

HILLARY: I'm so bugged, I'll take a short nap right here.

TENZING: It's getting late, we're nearly

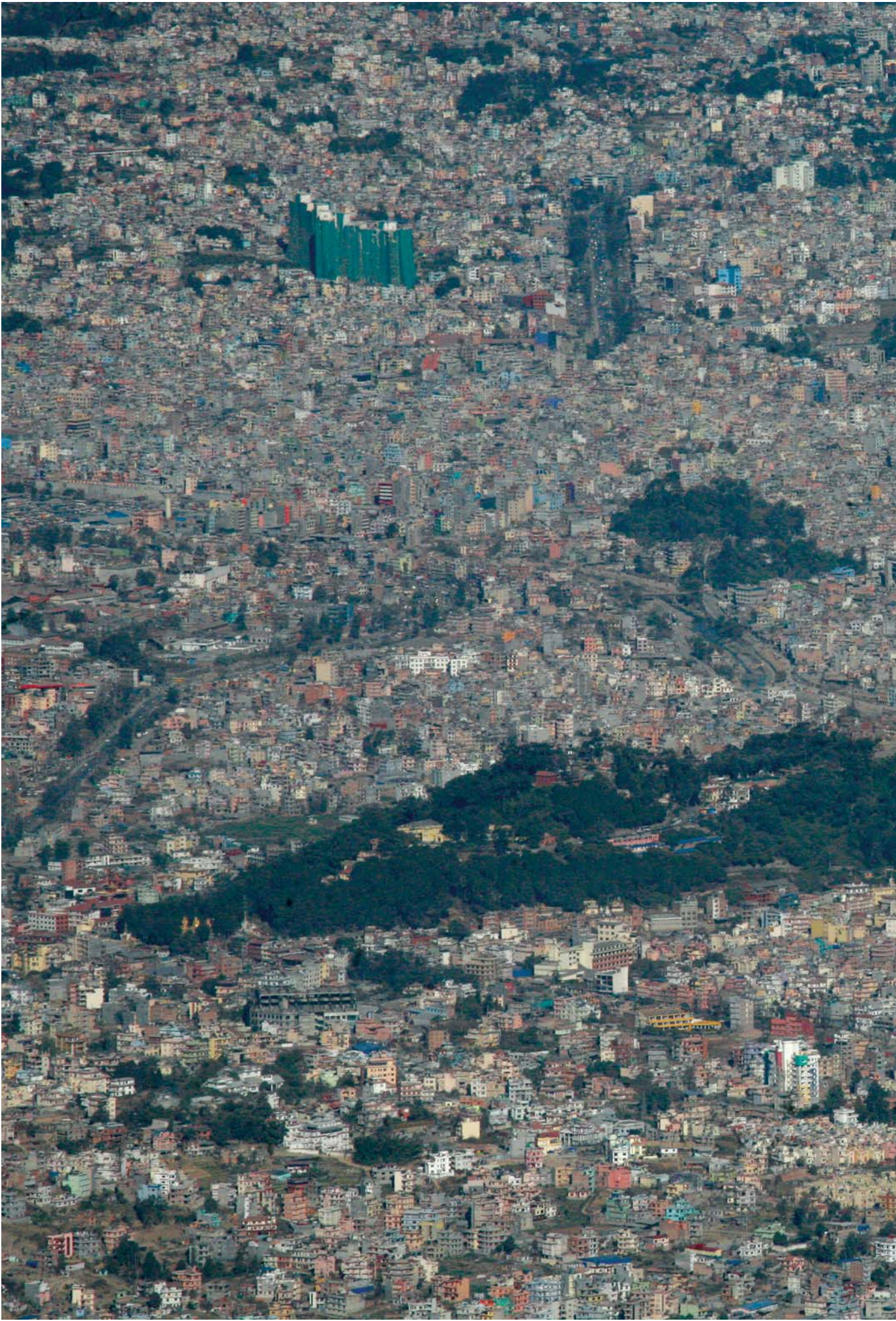
there, Sir. Here, let me carry you. *(Heaves Hillary on his shoulder, see pic above).*

HILLARY: We knocked the £\$%&* off. Someday I'll be on a New Zealand \$5 note and on the cover of the %\$#&+ National Geographic.

This secret recording clearly proves that while Tenzing was indeed first to set foot on top, Hillary by virtue of being on his shoulder actually reached a higher altitude above mean sea level. Back in Kathmandu, it turned out Tenzing was Indian so Sir Ed was awarded an honorary Nepali citizenship in honour of his ability to swear like a native. As a Nepali, Hillary could thenceforth fly to Lukla at one-third the tourist rate, and had to go to New Delhi to get an Aussie visa.



The Ass



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