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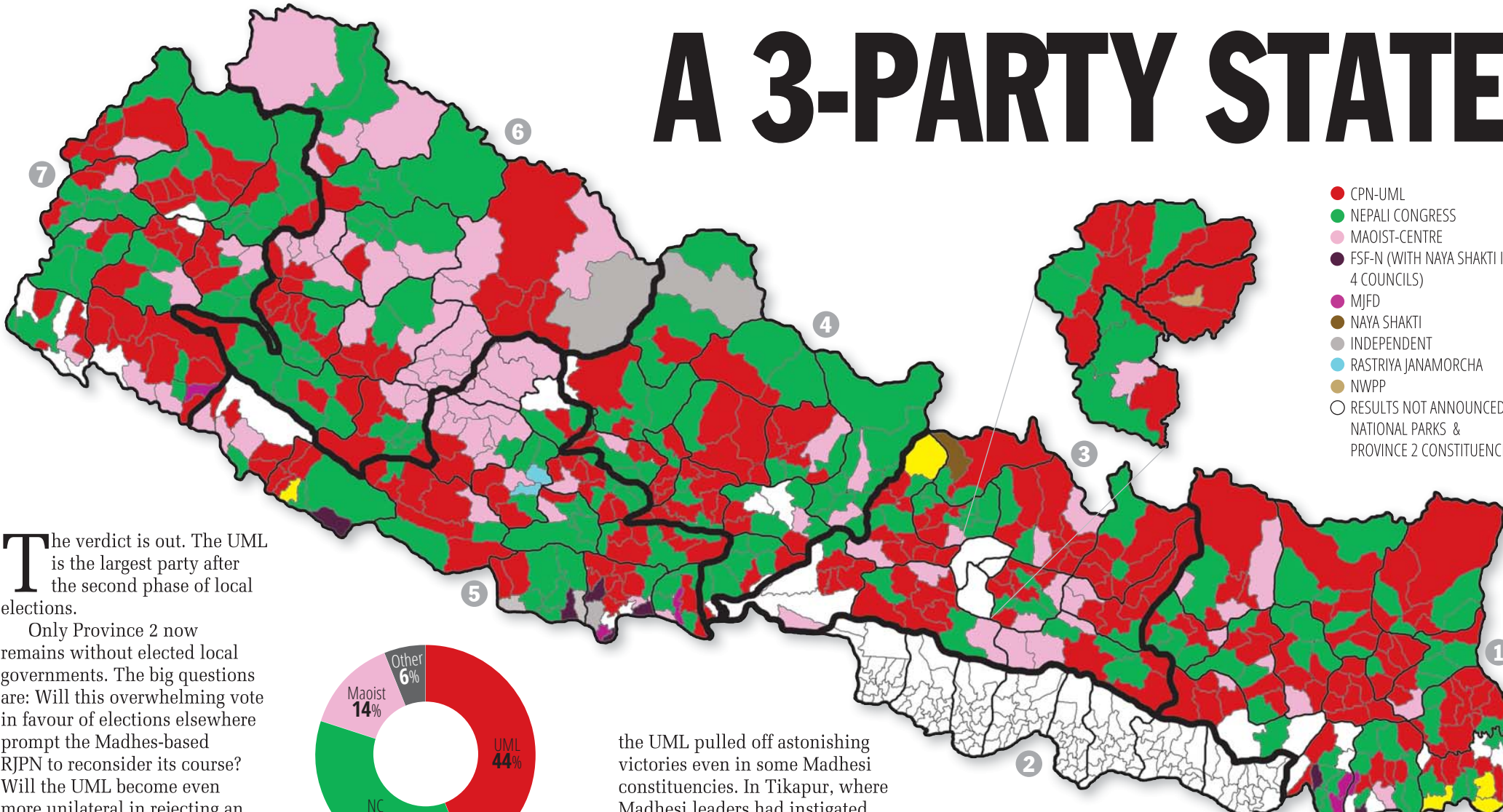
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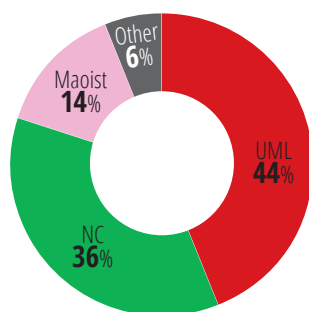
- CPN-UML
- NEPALI CONGRESS
- MAOIST-CENTRE
- FSF-N (WITH NAYA SHAKTI IN 4 COUNCILS)
- MJFD
- NAYA SHAKTI
- INDEPENDENT
- RASTRIYA JANAMORCHA
- NWPP
- RESULTS NOT ANNOUNCED, NATIONAL PARKS & PROVINCE 2 CONSTITUENCIES

The verdict is out. The UML is the largest party after the second phase of local elections.

Only Province 2 now remains without elected local governments. The big questions are: Will this overwhelming vote in favour of elections elsewhere prompt the Madhes-based RJPN to reconsider its course? Will the UML become even more unilateral in rejecting an amendment to the constitution? How will the Nepali Congress make up in Province 2?

How the UML reads this success will largely determine Nepal's future political course. Madhes-based analyst Chandra Kishore says: "The UML should not gloat and become even more nationalistic. If it keeps being arrogant, the current crisis will drag on."

After defeating the NC by 21 seats and the Maoists by 79 seats in the first phase of local elections in May, the UML has widened its lead over the two ruling parties in the second



phase last week (see chart, above) to head 267 out of 744 local councils. At press time Thursday evening, the UML was leading in 8 out of 15 constituencies still being counted.

The Maoist-Centre and NC which toppled the KP Oli government last year are unlikely to catch up with the UML even after the final phase of polls in the remaining 127 municipal and village councils of Province 2 in September.

What is surprising is that

the UML pulled off astonishing victories even in some Madhesi constituencies. In Tikapur, where Madhesi leaders had instigated Tharu protesters against hill-based parties, the UML's Tapendra Rawal became Mayor. In Province 5, where the Madhes-based RJPN cadres had contested elections as independents, the UML swept 11 councils.

The UML's electoral success is due to its popularity among the elderly for the social security program. Being the best-organised party has given it grassroots reach. But it is the UML's nationalist line against the Indian blockade which has resonated well in the mountain districts.

Upendra Yadav's FSFN and Bijaya Gachhadar's MJFD, the

two Tarai-based parties that broke ranks and contested the polls, have won in only 7 and 6 places respectively so far. Yet, both are expected to get berths in the Deuba government.

The RJPN's independent cadres have won in two constituencies, and is seeing rifts as it decides to register at the Election Commission -- a first step towards participating in Province 2 polls.

Says Chandra Kishore: "The RJPN is showing flexibility. So should the UML. Otherwise there will be polls, but no political stability."



Ashim Shakyas
virtual world

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DEVOLUTION REVOLUTION

One of the striking features of Nepal's much-maligned 1991 Constitution was that it devolved power to local government units like DDCs, VDCs and municipalities. The Decentralisation and Local Self-governance Act of 1999 turned this concept into law. Much of the success of the community forestry program, the nationwide network of Female Community Health Volunteers, mothers' and farmers' groups, and the extraordinary progress in health and education in the past two decades were in large part because decision-making was handed over to elected district and village councillors.

Unfortunately, it has been downhill ever since. First, the Maoists bombed VDC infrastructure out of existence. They killed or chased away local elected officials, mainly from the Nepali Congress (the same party, ironically, that the rump Maoists are in the coalition government with today). What was still intact was dismantled by King Gyanendra, who got current Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba to call off the 2002 local elections, using the Maoist war as a convenient excuse. Nepal never really got to reap the peace dividend after 2006 because the two warring sides became part of a political cartel that took turns in government. They controlled local government units through 'political mechanisms', a euphemism for mafia-like syndicates.

Finally, two decades later, we are in the process of installing bigger and more empowered, elected village and municipal councils. The new Constitution has ensured that elections to these local governments are inclusive, and the results of the two phases of local elections have put unprecedented numbers of women and the marginalised into local policy- and decision-making positions. Despite misgivings and grievances

among sections of Tarai-based parties about the Constitution which still need to be addressed, we are finally seeing the light at the end of this long, dark tunnel.

But there is a fly in the ointment. The political cartel suddenly realised it gave away too much to local governments and is trying to back pedal on devolution with a draft bill in Parliament that would essentially cut off the money supply to new village and municipal councils. This is treachery. It goes against the spirit of a Constitution that sought a revolution through devolution. By limiting the share of revenue from mining, hydropower, natural resource extraction, mountaineering and other fees to 5%, the cartel is trying to strangle these newly-elected local councils. (See Guest Editorial below by Khim Lal Devkota.)

Its argument is that DDCs and VDCs had indiscriminately licensed the environmentally unsustainable extraction of natural resources through sand and boulder mining of rivers, logging of local forests and plunder of the Chure. But this plunder was actually made possible because district and village councils were governed by unelected political syndicates and centrally-appointed bureaucrats.

After the recent local elections, they have been replaced with elected councilors more accountable to their constituencies. (See report on page 11.)

Elected mayors and local councilors met in Dhulikhel this week to strongly reject this move to set the clock back. They want to have their rights to raise revenue guaranteed as per the Constitution. This voice must be heard because it represents the true voice of the people to ensure development for the people and by the people.

GUEST EDITORIAL
KHIM LAL DEVKOTA

Function without finance

The overarching principle of fiscal federalisation is that finance follows function. But just when power hitherto centralised in Singha Darbar is being devolved to local governments, a draft bill in Parliament seeks to reverse that.

Federalism aims at enabling people to easily access government services at their doorsteps. For this, locally-elected municipal, village and ward councils need to be not just powerful but also adequately resourced, financially speaking.

The federal constitution has empowered local levels with various sectoral functional areas, giving them 22 exclusive rights. These include local tax collection to provide economic and social services like education, health, drinking water, roads, agriculture, irrigation, livestock, cooperatives, environment, hydroelectricity, wildlife, minerals, language, culture, energy, disaster management, etc. In addition, there are dozens of functional rights delegated to the local levels, around 30-40% of functional roles.

In terms of revenue/rights, 85-90% is assigned to the federal government, and nominal rights to provincial and local levels. Theory and international practice reveal that this gap should be filled via fiscal transfers. However, the bill tabled in Parliament, titled Inter-governmental Fiscal Management, proposes that local levels receive only a few financial rights (fiscal transfers). Without resources, the powers devolved to local bodies in the new constitution will be meaningless.



Khim Lal Devkota, PhD is an expert on fiscal federalisation and local governance.

Times.com

ONLINE PACKAGES



Self-taught digital artist Ashim Shakya received a lot of attention on social media after the earthquake and blockade for his apocalyptic digital images. Join us as we take you to meet the artist who draws inspiration from Kathmandu's rich history, culture, architecture and its dystopian urbanisation. See how he juggles between a digital and traditional canvas to turn his emotions into moving images.



Join *Nepali Times* on a fact-finding trip to Pokhara this paddy-planting season and marvel at the stunning diversity of rice varieties in the Valley of Lakes. Watch video of how Nepal's economy is sustained by rice farmers and seed protectors like Surya Prasad Adhikari (above).

MONUMENTAL LOSS

It saddens me that books are written about Nepal's wonderful diversity of architecture, but when it comes to actually opening their wallets or getting their hands dirty in rebuilding the quake-damaged monuments the vast majority of Nepali citizens stand idly by while 'meddling outsiders' do the job for them ('Remembering what we've lost', Kumar Acharya, #865).

Aleksandr Forgotsyn

NEPAL'S DEMOCRACY

Israel's Prison Service says former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has been released after serving time for corruption ('Salute to the people', Kanak Mani Dixit, #865). Can Nepal's democracy be as good as Israel's. We can hope, definitely.

Bijay Thakur

PROVOCATIVE INDEED

Deuba was just being his incompetent self. But he was not fanning hate - unlike others you cite in your piece ('Purposely provocative', Damakant Jayshi, *nepalitimes.com*). And while Deuba's response was pathetic, the way many of the questions were framed (and allowed to be asked that way) were needlessly provocative.

Niraj Shrestha

NO PRECEDENT

Okay, so all political big shots are corrupted, the whole country knows that ('Setting a bad precedent', Damakant Jayshi, *nepalitimes.com*). The IGPs are in jail for corruption, and now the Election Commissioner and his assistants are involved in a scandal to buy vehicles. What precedent are you talking about? When will this loot end? Nepalis should be disgusted that they salute and greet these corrupted men. We are all cowards that we cannot protect or defend our country and our families.

Mahesh

HUNTER S. THOMPSON

A mainstream news publication quoting Hunter S. Thompson? (Miss Moti-Ovation by Kripa Joshi, #865) No wonder I want to move to Nepal. :)

C B Ahren



WHAT'S TRENDING



On location with Kesang Tseten

by Kate Ryan

Join thousands of *Nepali Times* online users to watch this much-shared video profile of Kesang Tseten as he returns to the location of his 2006 documentary *We Corner People* to film a sequel about how the lives of this once-remote village have changed with new hydropower projects and the highway to China.

Most reached on Facebook
(10,194 people reached)

Most visited online page

Remembering what we've lost

by Kumar Acharya

As a 'protective inventory', the new edition of Carl Pruscha's two-volume compendium attests to the diversity and density of Kathmandu's architectural heritage like few other books have. Go online to compare before and after images.

Most popular on Twitter
(31 retweets, 48 likes)

Most commented



National Paddy Day

The video of farmers in Kathmandu Valley planting rice on the occasion of the official Paddy Day was most shared on social media. Visit *nepalitimes.com* to watch locals celebrate the day with songs, dance, and mud-splashing.

Most shared on Facebook
(87 shares)

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times@nepalitimes
The 3rd phase in mid-Sept doesn't leave much time for provincial & parliamentary elections, says Neel Kantha Uprety. <http://bit.ly/2socubT>

Rajendra Dahal@RDahal62
If that is the case, we have no problem! We will do one election - most probably National Parliament!! That's a good excuse to us.

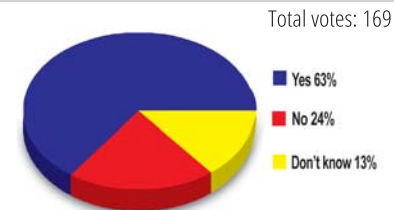
Nepali Times@nepalitimes
From the Nepali Press "You are crossing the line... where do I find an Oxford in Nepal?" <http://bit.ly/2uC5rZL>

Sanjay Poudyal@sanjaypoud
Mockery of Nepal's prime minister's position. Undeserving and unqualified!

Times

Weekly Internet Poll #866

Q. Should the RJPN participate in local elections in Province 2 even without an amendment?



Weekly Internet Poll #867
To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. What do you prefer on the streets of Kathmandu? Mud or Dust?

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Breath of fresh air in Syangja

Visionary local leadership will be the catalysts to allow Nepal to pick itself up



DINKAR NEPAL

In a recent Guest Editorial in this newspaper National Planning Commission economist Swarnim Waglé, laid out a positive outlook for Nepal's economy (#861). The reason for his optimism was the successful conduct of local elections with



CONNECTING DOTS

Dinkar Nepal

70% turnout. What also made him upbeat was that Nepal had exceeded its annual economic growth target this year, making it the country with the third highest

growth rate in the world.

The economist presented the Five Ds (Distance, Democracy, Demography, Digitisation and Diaspora) as a national strategy into the future to take advantage of the prevailing tailwind. Unlike naysayers and doomday-ers among Nepal's international development partners, Waglé was confident that if this growth was sustained, Nepal could double the size of its economy in 10 years and turn itself into a 'vibrant, enterprise-friendly, middle income nation by 2030'.

In a reaction to Waglé's buoyant forecast, British anthropologist-turned-consultant David Seddon wrote in the same

space a week later (#862) that he believed experts like Waglé might have got a bit carried away by the first local election in 20 years. Seddon feared that there was a greater chance that the Five Ds may have quite an opposite effect on Nepal. Rather disparagingly, Seddon wrote that he had 'confidence in the ordinary people of Nepal, but much less in those who preside over them'.

Waglé and Seddon were both educated at the London School of Economics, but the way they evaluate Nepal's future is poles apart. The reason for Waglé's optimism is the enthusiasm with which Nepalis have come out overwhelmingly to vote for

local governments, and the fact that the 2017 Budget had made a transformative departure by transferring hundreds of billions of rupees to local government coffers for the first time.

Seddon was skeptical that just throwing money at the problem would allow Nepal to leapfrog development. The sheer disruption and expense of entirely new local government units and provincial administrations, he wrote, would far outweigh any potential benefits.

After having read these two points of view, I got a chance to test them at the grassroots during a three-day seminar to discuss ways to develop my hometown

of Waling in Syangja as a 'smart city'. This is where Waglé's Five D's are being played out on the ground.

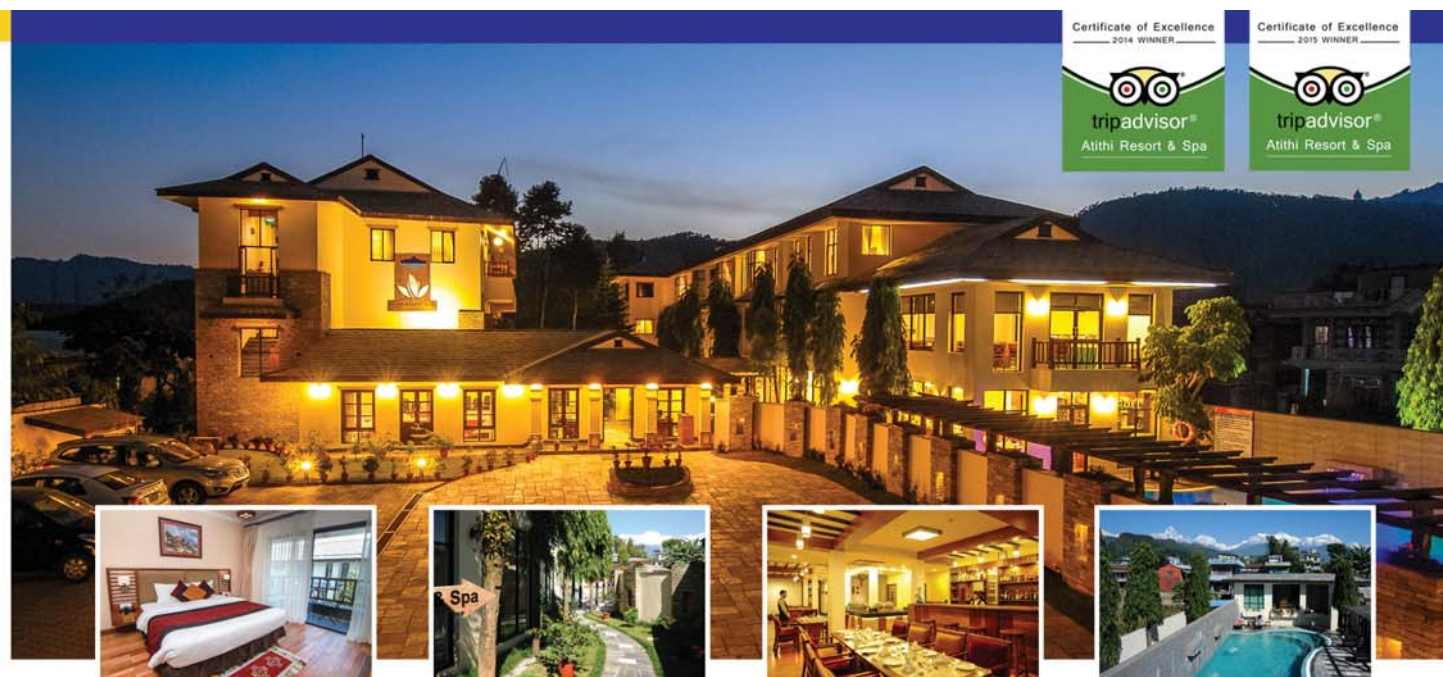
As a welcome departure from an administrative system which works on directions and funds from Kathmandu, the seminar was an initiative of the newly-elected Mayor Dilip Pratap Khand. That in itself showed that there are changes afoot in municipalities – they have actually started thinking and acting like governments and not like local agents of Singha Darbar, or of political syndicates.

A 21-year-old entrepreneur from Waling who is running an e-commerce company from his own district, employing a dozen or so locals shared his experience at the seminar. This was a breath of fresh air: young entrepreneurial talent that had decided not to emigrate but to stay back not just in Nepal, but return to his hometown use information technology for a startup and create jobs. There is hope after all.

To be sure, many other things need to happen for such commitment to be replicated and scaled up. Newly elected local governments need Kathmandu to devolve power and give them the wherewithal to function (see *Guest Editorial, page 2*), elected local leaders need to have vision and the ability for teamwork.

In order not to make Seddon's prophecy self-fulfilling, we need to connect the dots and get ready for the devolution that is coming. There will be pockets in Nepal with stable local politics and able leaders which can show dramatic progress in the near future.

People want change, and visionary local leadership will be the catalysts to allow the country to pick itself up by the bootstraps. 🇳🇵



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Purposely provocative

For leaders in Nepal, India and the US, fanning hate seems to be a universal strategy



DIWAKAR CHETTRI

the Madhesh, Nepali Congress, and a Maoist fringe party made inflammatory remarks, which, according to a parliamentary body, were responsible for violence in Tikapur of Kailali district in August 2015. The leaders themselves blamed the then coalition partners in the government, the NC and the UML, for the violence. There has been no introspection from any of the major or minor political parties as to how their public statements lead directly to the deaths of over 50 people, most of them in the Tarai in 2015.

However, the provocative oratory of Nepali leaders pales in significance compared to what is happening across the border in BJP-ruled India today.

The ruling party has been whipping up public anger mainly against Muslims, which has translated into an epidemic of vigilante violence on the streets. Examples are BJP MP Ananth Kumar Hegde's disparaging remarks on Islam, and Giriraj Singh, a leader of BJP's Bihar unit, saying that those opposed to Modi should leave India. Leaders from the ruling party and like-minded ones from Shiv Sena and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) often speak ill of Muslims in India.

It is hard to say whether it is Modi's India that is emulating Trump's America, or vice versa. Donald Trump has been known to make unfiltered, intentionally offensive remarks and even some of his Republican supporters are aghast. Their steadfast support for the "political outsider" who eschews political correctness is starting to waver.

There are numerous instances when Trump's 'America First' slogan has led to violence. In Kansas, a White gunman shot at least three people, including two Indians, at a bar earlier this year. From the opposite side, another man fed up with Trump shot Republican Congressmen during a baseball practice in Washington DC last month. Not a day goes by without reports of racism-related violence or threats in Trump's America.

ATLANTA -- Words matter. And when they come from those in responsible positions of leadership, they can have consequences. Leaders of some of Nepal's political parties often make provocative comments. Some of these utterances have come back to haunt them.



THE DEADLINE
Damakant Jayshi

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's performance during a BBC Sajha Sawal discussion on Sunday is an example. Visibly irritated by aggressive questioning from the floor, Deuba lost his cool and lashed out in his less-than-articulate fashion with threats like "Who are you to ask me that?", "Don't cross the line", or "Why should I tell you?" The video went viral, at considerable cost to the prime minister's support at election time.

Former UML prime minister KP Oli is infamous for colloquialisms in Nepali that reflect his strong views. While some of the phrases attributed to him are doubtful, or have been taken out of context, he has assiduously positioned himself as a tough-talking nationalist who can protect Nepal's geopolitical interest.

He blamed India for his forced resignation as prime minister, and has often insinuated that Madhesi party leaders are pro-India. His words have angered those leaders, as well as people in the Tarai who feel insulted. Oli's strategy is to brand himself and his party as the sole guarantor of an undivided Nepal, and he has used this strategy in these elections.

Two years ago, leaders from

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Nepal has completed grant negotiations with the US government's Millennium Challenge Cooperation (MCC) for a \$500 million in aid to extend the electricity transmission network, and maintain 300 km of roads in the next five years.

Cleaner electricity

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a loan of \$150 million to improve the reliability and quality of electricity supply in the Kathmandu Valley and enhance distribution through the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA). The loan will upgrade transmission grid capacity, rehabilitate the distribution network in the Valley, and improve the operational and financial performance of NEA distribution centres.

Turkish-ENGAGE League

The Wheelchair Basketball Association and the Tribhuvan Army Club in the

Stronger beer

Gorkha Brewery has introduced 'Tuborg Classic', Nepal's first premium strong beer with Scotch Malts. A 650ml bottle of Tuborg Classic contains 6.5% alcohol and is priced at Rs 310.

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Little Buddha comes to town

When Kathmandu Valley became the location for a Bertolucci film

An old man taps the grey head of the carved lion in confusion. It had not been here last week, and only the hollow ring distinguishes it from the twin stone sculpture guarding the temple entrance.

We are on the movie set of *Little Buddha* in Bhaktapur's main square, and the crew have worked their magic to blend the real monuments with identical fibreglass painted copies, transforming the space into an



SO FAR SO GOOD

Lisa Choegyal



LISA CHOEGYAL

ornate, 5th-century BC Shakya palace. No wonder the local residents are confused – only by touching can these recreated marvels be differentiated from the real thing.

Dozens of other locations around the Kathmandu Valley are under preparation for the film shoot. French money, British designers and Italian plasterers apply their wizardry to remodel darbar squares, adapt medieval palaces, create ancient colonnades and even extend tree roots in Gokarna forest so that Keanu Reeves, cast as Prince Siddhartha, can achieve enlightenment under a Bodhi tree. Deep within Hanuman Dhoka, a courtyard becomes the room in which Queen Mayadevi dreams that a

white elephant descended from heaven and entered her womb – a lithe Indian dancer inhabits the exquisite animatronic elephant whose eyes, mouth and trunk are radio controlled. With special effects engineered in a London studio, the baby Buddha's first seven steps blossom into lotus flowers, terrible temptations taunt him, and a small formation of marching Royal Nepal Army soldiers on a hillside near the airport appear on screen as the demon Mara's fierce phalanxes storming through the underworld.

It is 1992, and many Nepali colleagues cut their teeth on what at that time was the most ambitious movie to be made in the country. On the location recce, the team were enchanted.

We scour the Valley for suitable world heritage sites, then to Lumbini and the Tarai, piling into wooden riverboats and bumping down mud roads in open jeeps. Passing through remote Tharu villages with ladies in multi-coloured saris, tattooed ankles and heavy jewellery, the costume designer cries in delight: "Look, everyone is dressed and ready to shoot!"

Directed by the laconic Bernardo Bertolucci, the multinational film crew boasts no less than 13 Oscars, many of whom had worked on *The Last Emperor*, after which visitors to China surged by 25%. Nepal's new prime minister, G P Koirala, realises the film's tourism potential and deposes

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION: Italian director Bernardo Bertolucci on the set of the film, *Little Buddha*, with Prime Minister GP Koirala in Bhaktapur in 1992.

representatives from his office to help smooth the way. As a result, permits are expedited, not a single day's shooting is lost, and expenditure from the film contributed one-tenth of that year's tourism revenue to Nepal's coffers.

Jeremy Thomas, the veteran British producer, called me from London, his voice reverberating down the line in rapid fire staccato: "For children of all ages, it is a modern story seeking a reincarnation with flashbacks to the life of Lord Buddha. I would like you to do the logistics and permissions." He knew me through his showbiz parents who had come to Nepal on holiday – his uncle had produced all the Carry On films.

Large, curly haired, and with the reassuring demeanour of a teddy bear, Jeremy never has time to waste. With confidence drawn from long experience, he dared to bring a crew of hundreds to Nepal. "Once the filming begins it's like a huge taxi metre ticking away. We can't afford for anything to go wrong."

Inevitably, things do. Bernardo demands a sweeping swathe of set to be dressed at his whim, and large-format cameras

require technicians from Los Angeles to keep them running. Advisers include Rinpoches, monks and Buddhist scholars, but still there are objections to the sacred story.

Shopkeepers around the squares insist on compensation for their closures, and hundreds of extras demand higher pay. Legions of accountants throw money at difficulties to make them go away. In Bhutan, we have problems with the permit, but *Little Buddha* remains the only major movie filmed within the hallowed courtyards of Paro Dzong.

The script needed several rewrites. The affable American screenwriter contrived a private prank for the Choegyal family – Bridget Fonda's role is called Lisa, and Tenzin is the name of a lama. Both our boys, Sangjay and Rinchen, were supposed to appear, but the kid selected does not look Tibetan enough so ends up as Raju.

On the last day of the shoot, as the Valley returns to normal and the elaborate sets are dismantled, Jeremy sits heavily on the sofa in his Yak & Yeti hotel suite, blinking myopically in the dim light. Bernardo leans back with relief into the velvet cushions drawing on one of his special cigarettes and favours me with a rare smile. Both of them have been presented with a painted copy of the unfinished mandala from the walls of Simtoka Dzong, so powerful that it features in the film's opening sequence. We had pulled it off. 🇳🇵

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Central Nepal is in the spell of a monsoon 'pulse', this a low-pressure area of intense precipitation that moves like a wave across northern India. While welcome for farmers to soak paddy fields for cultivation, the rains are also triggering landslides that block highways, and rockfalls in the earthquake zone. The current monsoon pulse is expected to last right through the weekend into the middle of next week. This has been a vigorous monsoon so far, with June precipitation in Kathmandu 10% higher than normal.

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SHALOM: Deepika Bhusal wheeling her employer, Malka Cohen, to the market in the Israeli town of Holon, where they meet up with another Nepali caregiver, Uma Chhetri, and her charge (*below*). There are about 10,000 Nepali women taking care of elderly Israelis.

TSERING D GURUNG
in HOLON, ISRAEL

For the last 10 years, Deepika Bhusal has followed the same daily routine. After waking up, she bathes her employer, prepares her food, gives her medications, takes her out for a walk, puts her to bed at night, and then goes to sleep herself. The monotony is only broken when she has to take Malka Cohen, a 78-year-old Israeli woman with Parkinson’s disease, to a doctor’s appointment.

“The work is fairly easy, and I enjoy looking after Ama,” says Bhusal, using the Nepali word for mother. “But it can get pretty lonesome here.”

Like most Nepali women in Israel, 32-year-old Bhusal works as a live-in caregiver, a job that requires her to be on call at all hours, leaving no time for social life. The only friend she meets regularly is Uma Chhetri, another caregiver in her neighbourhood of the town of Holon. The two usually arrange to go grocery shopping together. And since they cannot leave



PICS: TSERING D GURUNG

their charges at home, they push them along in their wheelchairs.

Of the 60,000 foreign caregivers in Israel, 15 percent are from Nepal, according to KavLaOved, an Israeli NGO that provides advice and legal aid to workers in Israel. Israeli labour laws guarantee workers one day off in a week, but many Nepali caregivers choose to work seven days in return for extra cash.

“I am here to earn, so I try to work as much as I can,” says Bhusal, a single mother who left behind her two daughters, now 17 and 15, in her sister’s care in Kathmandu to come here 11 years ago. She paid a recruitment agency \$4,300 to find her a job in Israel and arrange her work visa.

Her first job was caring for an elderly couple in Ramleh, and after the couple moved into

a nursing home, Bhusal started taking care of Cohen, earning \$1,400 a month, most of which she sends home to pay for her daughters’ education.

“Yes, there are days I feel sad thinking about how I have missed out on watching my daughters grow up,” says Bhusal, “but then I remind myself I am here for them.”

Uma Chhetri, 43, is from

Biratnagar, and had to leave behind her husband and two children, which was the hardest part of working overseas. “Even learning Hebrew was not that hard,” she jokes.

Israeli law doesn’t allow foreign workers to bring any immediate family members, and if they get married while in Israel their visas are immediately revoked.

Despite the isolation, both women said they felt lucky to be in Israel, a much sought after destination by Nepali workers because of its relatively high wages, safe working conditions and strong labour laws.

Until 2009, it was fairly easy for Nepali workers to go to Israel. Then the Israeli government banned hiring Nepali migrant workers, citing corrupt practices of recruitment agencies that were charging workers exorbitant fees. The number of Nepalis working in Israel dropped from 7,450 in 2010 to 4,111 in 2016, but the number of undocumented Nepalis in Israel rose in the same period from 5% to 30%.

A report by KavLaOved says most Nepalis end up becoming illegal because their recruitment agents fail to arrange visas as required by Israel’s Ministry of Interior. Foreign workers cannot come back after their contracts expire, and Israel is strict about work permit renewals.

Foreign caregiver work permits are valid for four years and three months, and can only be extended if they have been with current employers for over a year. In that case, employers have to request an extension of the caregiver’s visa.

Two years ago, Israel lifted the ban on Nepali workers and signed an agreement to bring in 300 female Nepali caregivers to Israel without recruitment agencies as a pilot project. However, this hasn’t deterred Nepalis from coming illegally. Many came to Israel with fake Indian passports when the ban was in place.

So far, only 59 women have gone to Israel through the official government program. Nepal’s ambassador to Israel, Niranjan Kumar Thapa told us: “The Israelis are very satisfied with the performance of Nepali caregivers, and we hope for an increase in the quota for Nepali caregivers.” 🇳🇵

nepalitimes.com

See full interview with Nepal's ambassador to Israel Niranjan Kumar Thapa online.

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Art in a virtual world

SAHINA SHRESTHA

Growing up at a time when all the answers weren't available at the click of a button, Ashim Shakya was fascinated with physics. The boy used to spend days in his room dismantling radios and old televisions and putting them together again just to understand how they worked. There was no Google, so he sought answers in books about how the laws of physics governed everything from electrons to galaxies.

Before long, Shakya found science too confining. "I needed a more creative process to communicate my emotions." After finishing school, he enrolled in Sirjana Art College, where he learned traditional arts, honed his skills in acrylic and oil paintings and clay modeling and perfected his brush strokes.

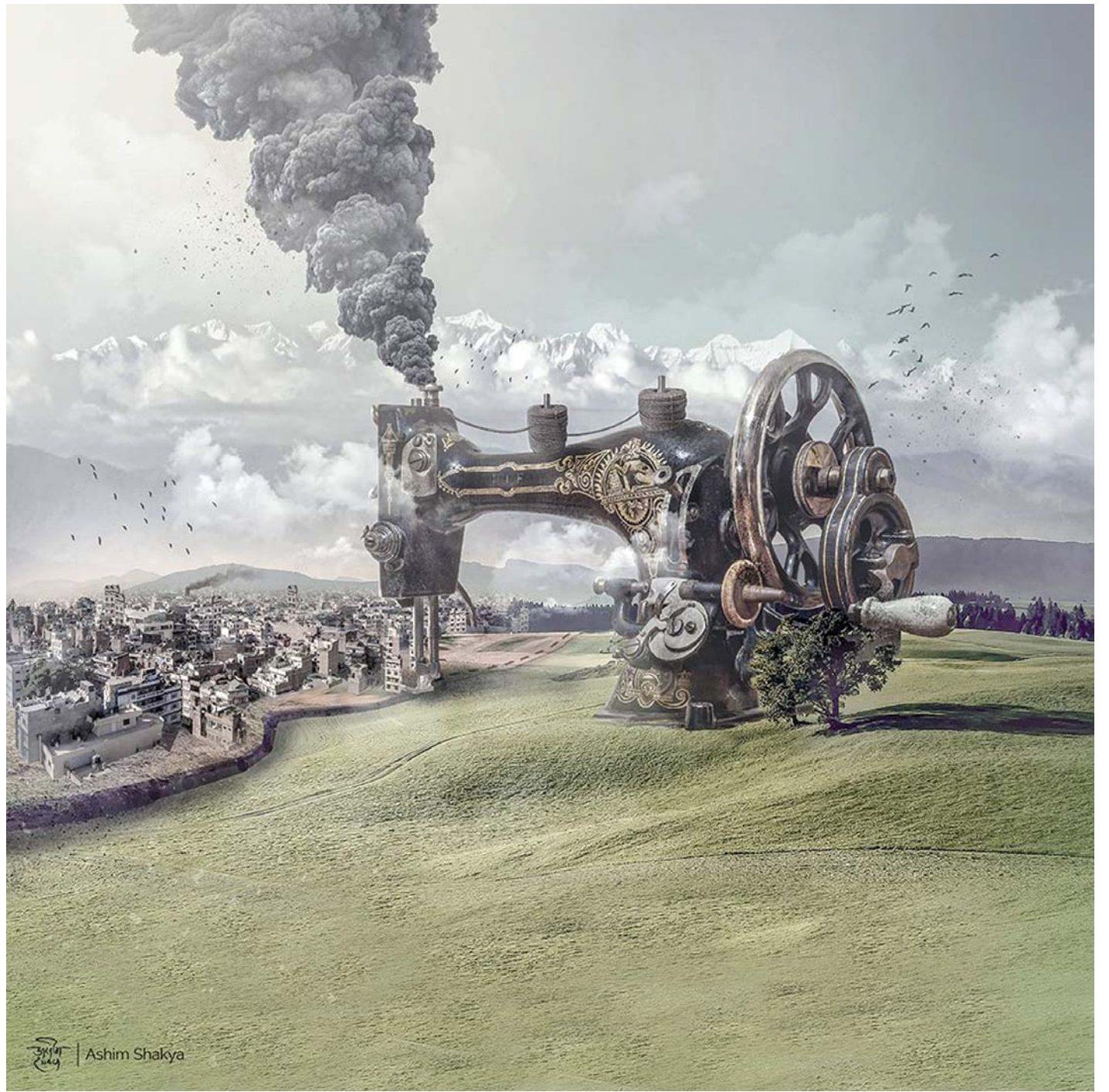
Shakya enjoyed playing with colours and textures, but ever curious and questioning, he sought more. He started dabbling in digital art secretly after class because he was unsure how receptive the college and his family would be. Then, working as a computer teacher, he started experimenting with digital painting.

"Digital art gave me the freedom to express my creativity and emotion in a short span of time and that is what drew me to it," he says. It was uncharted territory, and he was rejected for various graphic design jobs because he didn't have a strong portfolio. "Most of them judged me on the basis of my tools rather than the content of my art."

But instead of being disheartened, he worked on smaller projects to strengthen his portfolio and finally landed a job as a graphic designer, Photoshop expert and, until recently, an art director at the advertising agency Thompson Nepal.



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ALL PICS: ASHIM SHAKYA

a world

As a self-taught digital artist, Shakya takes a completely original approach to his work. He brings his skills for traditional brush strokes and textures to the digital screen, making them look more like paintings on a canvas. Born and brought up in Kathmandu, Shakya uses the city as his muse, drawing inspiration from its rich history, culture, architecture and its dystopian urbanisation.

He received a lot of attention on social media after the earthquake and subsequent blockade for his surrealistic digital images: animated temples floating above a Valley shrouded in smoke and dust, fearsome manifestations of anthropomorphic gods and goddesses, Newari house facades turned into string instruments. Pressurise, the first painting in the blockade series, shows the entire city burning just to cook one meal. He tries to match the colour tones with the mood of the time using dark hues, and lots of reds.

"I pour my feelings into my art, and I also try to put the hopes and fears of the people in Kathmandu into them, which is probably why they have been received so well," says Shakya, who is currently busy converting his digital art into 'hardcopy' canvas and wants to hold an exhibition. "No matter what form of art you want to pursue, having a strong foundation in traditional art is a must," he says. "There is a lot to learn from it."

When he isn't juggling easels with computer monitors, Shakya composes music in his bedroom, which also doubles as his studio, linking everything he has learned via photography, calligraphy and music into composite art.

"Each element is a backbone to the other," he explains. "One needs to find the inspiration from within and not run after materialistic things." 🇳🇵

PAINTING DIGITALLY



Join Ashim Shakya in his studio as he explains what art means to him, his inspiration and future plans. Go online and watch how he juggles between digital and canvas to turn his emotions into stunning moving imagery.

nepalitimes.com



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EVENTS



Inviting submissions,
Submit your documentaries to the 11th edition of Film Southasia, to be held in Kathmandu 2 to 5 November 2017.
Deadline 15 July,
<http://www.filmsouthasia.org/>

Kids camp,
Children five to 12 years old can join this five-day camp to learn music theory, games, guitar workshop, yoga and meditation, wall climbing, photography and much more.
17 to 21 July and 23 to 27 July, 10 am to 2 pm, Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, Jhamsikhel, (01), 5013554

Life in colours,
A photo exhibition showcasing pictures of French-Mexican videographer and photographer Susana San Juan Lopez.
26 to 17 July, Image Ark, Patan, (01) 5506665



City Images,
Lens maestro Mani Lama is back after 10 years with a black-and-white exhibition 'Image of the City'.
3-15 July, Yala Mandala, Patan, (01) 5536690

Bootcamp,
Participate in readings and discussions on different pedagogical ideas, theories and methodologies in a workshop led by Niranjan Kunwar.
1-29 July, Quixote's Cove, Jawalakhel, Rs 5,000, (01)5536974



Samishran,
The unique convergence of the art works of a collective made up of Bidhata KC, Chirag Bangdel and Kapil Mani Dixit.
2-11 July, 10 am-5 pm, Shaligram Complex, Jawalakhel, (01) 5536919

School of Rock,
Mark your calendar to watch School of Rock, an adaptation of the Broadway Musical by Andrew Lloyd Webber, performed by students of Malpi International School.
13 July (5:30 pm), 14 July (3:30 pm), Nepal Academy Hall, Kamaladi, (011) 440080



Balthali hike,
Register by 7 June to participate in a hike on the newly-discovered route from Namo Buddha to Balthali.
8 July, 6:45 am, Meeting point: Bhrikuti Mandap, Rs 900, (01) 4266559, 9851178537

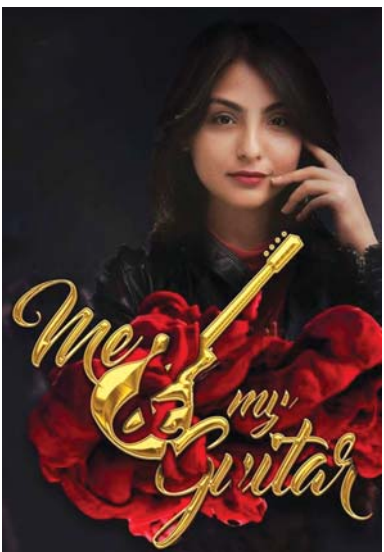
Kathmandu kora,
Join hundreds of cycling enthusiasts and ride 50, 70 or 100 km to raise funds for a cycling train in and around Bungamati of the Kathmandu Valley.
15 July, 7 am onwards, Patan Darbar Square, <https://www.facebook.com/ktmkora/>

MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



MUSIC



Arbitrary live,
Catch the artists from The Arbitrary Group perform live. Nattu Shah, Prayanta Shrestha, Swoopna Suman, Trishala Gurung, Neetesh J Kunwar, Sweta Singh Hamal, Shan R Onta and Arjun Pradhan will perform.
8 July, 4 pm onwards, Club Déjà Vu, Darbar Marg, Rs 500, (01) 4440744

Musical tribute,
Kamero will be playing rap metal, rap rock and alternative metal songs as a tribute to Rage Against the Machine & Tool.
8 July, 2-5 pm, Purple Haze Rock Bar, Thamel, 9841539392



Zephyrtone,
The Zephyrtone duo 'Shooting Stars' will be rocking the stage with their exceptional soundscape of covers and their original tracks.
14 July, 8 pm onwards, Karma Lounge and Bar, Tripureswor, Rs 1,000, (01) 4117148



Jay Sean live,
Book your tickets now to listen to British singer and songwriter Jay Sean perform live in Kathmandu.
12 July, 7 am onwards, Club Deja Vu, Darbar Marg, Rs 2500, 3500, 5000, 9860344642



Nepali fusion,
Tap to fusion beats with Taranga Nepal this weekend.
7 July, 6-8 pm onwards, Laptey Newari Cuisine, Jhamsikhel, (01) 5548968

DINING



The Bent Fork,
This European style restaurant offers the best salads and varieties of continental dishes. Cosy evenings with family and friends.
Bishal Nagar, 9802049888

Shangri-La,
Cool off with ice cream (Rs 450) and smoothies (Rs 350).
Every day, Lost Horizon Café, Hotel Shangri-La, (01) 4412999

Café Jireh,
Escape the hustle bustle of the city and enjoy firewood pizza.
Bhaisipati, (01) 5592102



Hello Café,
Spend an evening at this roof-top garden restaurant. The magnificent view of Boudhanath Stupa will blow your mind. Try their Korean menu.
Boudha, (01) 4916218

Royal Saino Restaurant & Bar,
Enjoy garlic cheese momos at this friendly restaurant.
Darbar Marg, (01) 1430890

Himalayan Java,
This Thamel establishment, known for its coffee and sandwiches.
Tridevi Marg, (01) 4422519



Last Friday Bar & Grill,
Indian cuisine, anyone? Tip: try the kabab.
Lazimpat, (01) 4002170

Lhakpa's Chulo,
Nepali dal bhat, Newari khaja, Swiss Rösti, Italian Risotto, and Thai green curry – take your pick.
Jhamsikhel, (01) 5542986

Koto,
Japanese cuisine served with traditional attention to detail in the sashimi and tempura plates.
Lakeside or Pulchowk or Durbar Marg, (01) 5542936, (01) 4220346

GETAWAY



Barahi Jungle Lodge,
The first eco-jungle lodge in Chitwan directly overlooks Chitwan National Park. Spa, boutique guest rooms, individual and two-in-one private villas, including a suite with a private swimming pool.
Megauli, Chitwan, (01) 4429820

Hatiban Resort,
Climb up to Champadevi in the morning for a royal view of the Kathmandu Valley and jog down to the hotel for a relaxed evening.
Pharping, Kathmandu, (01)4371537/56

Last Resort,
Embrace nature and test your limits with canyoning, hiking, rock climbing, rafting, mountain biking and bungee jumping.
Bhatekosi, Sindhupalchok, (01)4700525/1247

Buddha Maya Gardens Hotel,
Add value to your travel in Lumbini with a stay at one of the better hotels in the area.
Lumbini, (071)580220, 9801033109, info@ktmgh.com

Club Himalaya,
For amazing mountain views through gaps in monsoon clouds.
Nagarkot, (01) 6680080



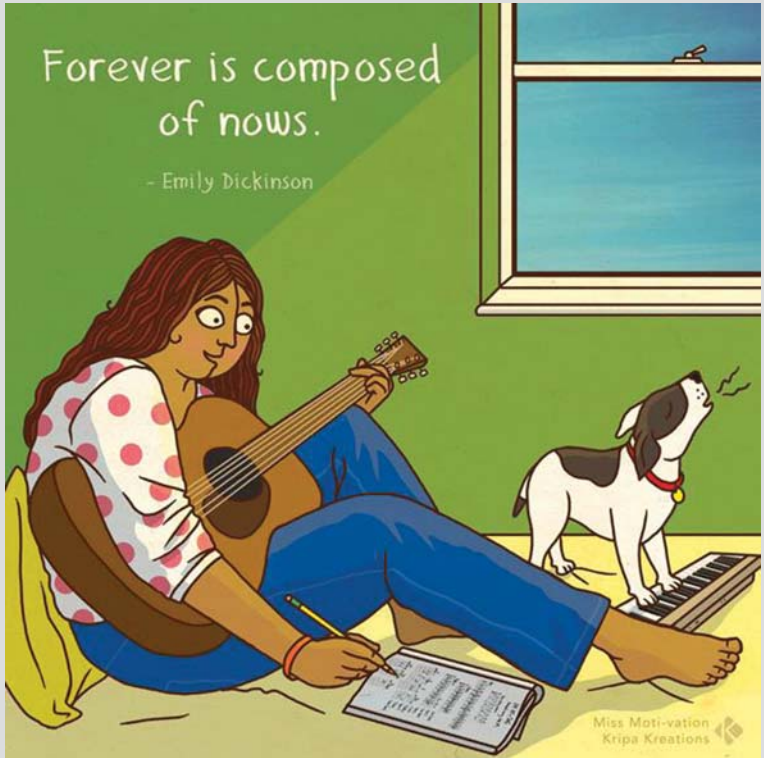
Gokarna Forest Resort,
A forest sanctuary to help you relax, breathe and meditate. Just a 20-minute drive from Kathmandu.
Gokarna, (01)4451212, info@gokarna.net

Pataleban Vineyard Resort,
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Chisapani, Kathmandu, 9841679364, pataleban@mail.com.np

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



Monsoon madness,
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Power without paisa

The Big Three threaten to roll back decentralisation by cutting off money supply to newly elected local councils

OM ASTHA RAI

After the first phase of local polls in May, then Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal had said that the people had replaced the Singha Darbar in Kathmandu with “their own local Singha Darbars”.

Now that the second phase of local elections have also been held with a massive 73% turnout and the remaining Province 2 is next, there is hope that the powers of Kathmandu are finally being devolved to locally-elected municipal and village councils.

Indeed, the 744 local governments being elected in these polls are not just local units of the central government. They are empowered to govern fully with executive, legislative and judicial powers.

But a draft Inter-governmental Fiscal Transfers Bill in Parliament aims to retain Kathmandu’s centralised power by cutting off the money supply to newly elected local governments so that they will have little money to exercise their constitutionally mandated authority.

“It is like throwing a man into the river with his hands and legs tied,” says Krishna Prasad Sapkota, former DDC Chair of Kavre and decentralisation activist. “It is a conspiracy to centralise power, keeping people reliant on Kathmandu for everything.”

Sapkota says the bill is so regressive as it takes back rights already given to local government bodies by the Local Self Governance Act of 1999, which allowed DDCs and VDCs to use half the revenue



DIPAK GWAWALI

from hydropower, mines and minerals to DDCs, VDCs and municipalities. From tourism and hydropower, they got 30% and 10% of revenue respectively.

But the new bill proposes that municipalities and village councils will now get just 5% of revenue from natural resource extractions, allotting the largest slice of 85% for the Centre and 10% for Provincial governments.

One of the highlights of the constitution 2015 is that it has given 22 exclusive rights to municipal and village councils, which will also share other duties and responsibilities with provincial governments and the Centre. Municipal and village councils will be responsible for more than half of the government workload, so they need the revenue sources to be able to deliver services.

“More workload means more expenses. Municipal and village councils have been given rights,

duties and responsibilities, but very little money,” explains Khim Lal Devkota, an expert on fiscal federalisation (*see his Guest Editorial, page 2*)

Nepal’s federal constitution allows the Centre to provide conditional grants to local governments that cannot generate enough revenue from natural resources. But the draft bill proposes distributing 78% of VAT and excise to the Centre and 7% to provinces, leaving just 15% for local councils. Devkota argues that the bill violates a constitutional provision to set up the Natural Resources and Fiscal Commission.

Another bill that is also before Parliament requires municipal and village councils to deposit all housing, entertainment, vehicle registration and other local taxes in a fund managed by the provincial government which would need the provincial government’s approval to spend.

The bill goes against Article 51 of the constitution, which states that local people will have preferential rights over benefits from local natural resources.

Bimal Pokharel, Executive Director of the National Association of VDCs in Nepal, says the fiscal transfers bill and other recent government directives reflect the mind-set of the political establishment which does not want to relinquish control over power and money.

Last month, the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development issued a list of do’s and don’ts for newly-elected local representatives. While most were justifiable, some of the directives clip the wings of new mayors, village chiefs and other elected representatives. One of them directs the local government secretary, instead of the mayor or village chief, to inspect, monitor, control and regulate all schools,

health posts, government and no-government organisations in their areas.

“If the municipality secretary does all this, what will the mayor do?” asks Pokharel. “Mayors or village chiefs are executive, not ceremonial. But it looks like Kathmandu is not ready to see powerful executives in villages.”

In the first two phases of elections, 617 municipal and village councils have been elected in six of Nepal’s seven provinces. But the new Mayors, Deputy Mayors and heads of village councils have started to mobilise against the draft bill on fiscal transfers.

Ishwar Pandey, newly elected village council chief of Bhimsen Municipality of Gorkha district, says: “This bill takes us backwards and needs to be redrafted. This election was the result of our long struggle for decentralisation. We are not going to give up.”





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While you may never have heard of *Get Out*, it is one of the craziest, scariest, funniest, and cleverest films of the year. A bizarre mixture of satire, flat out comedy, chilling horror, and biting social commentary, *Get Out* made its debut at the fiercely competitive Sundance



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

Film Festival in January this year and was promptly bought by Universal Pictures who saw its immense genre bending potential and released it the very next month. The film has grossed \$251.8 million to date against a budget of \$4.5 million making it a smash hit and perhaps a harbinger of the kind of films to come: well written, surprising, non-conformist and supremely uncaring of upsetting the status quo.

Written and directed by Jordan Peele, *Get Out*'s storyline is twisty, keeping you on edge till

the end. Rose Armitage (Allison Williams) and Chris Washington (Daniel Kaluuya) are a lovely young inter-racial couple who appear to be unfazed by the fact that they are about to visit Rose's very white parents. Chris voices his slight nervousness which Rose immediately shoots down, firmly but playfully saying that her father would have voted for Obama a third time if he could have.

When the couple arrive at the stately family home, Rose's parents, Dean and Missy Armitage, played by Bradley Cooper and Catherine Keener, two of the indie greats, are nothing short of warm and wonderful, allaying Chris's anxiety at first. Things quickly start to creep out of the seemingly perfect veneer though, starting with the extremely odd behaviour of the Armitage's black household staff, who they apologise for immediately, seemingly mortified about how it might look to Chris.

Chris, disturbed by increasingly erratic, almost

violent actions on the part of the groundskeeper Walter (Marcus Henderson) and housekeeper Georgina (Betty Gabriel) quickly realises that things are not what they seem but his fears are repeatedly allayed by the charming Rose whose ingenuous warmth keep him from fleeing the progressively frightening house. When Chris is lured into Missy's den (she is a psychiatrist) and hypnotised against his own will on the first night of their stay, we all begin to realise the horror and the horrid racism that is just beneath the surface of this seemingly loving family home.

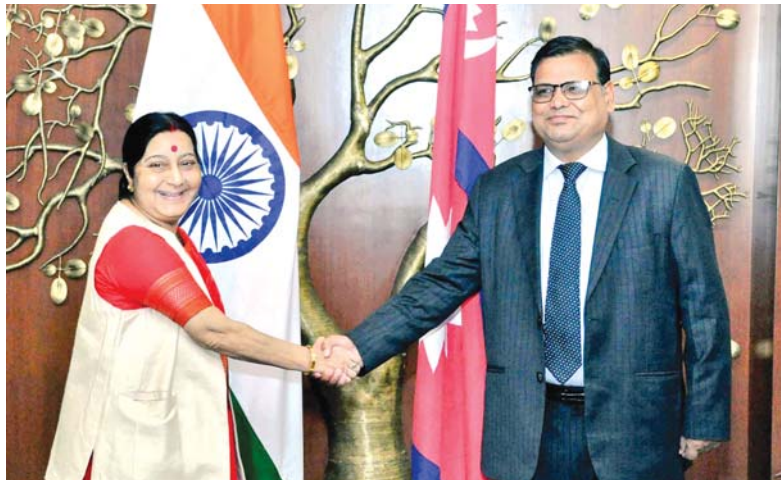
Get Out is an indictment of the underlying ugly racism prevalent in America, and in the rest of the world, a problem that is ignored and denied just as other ubiquitous problems such as sexism and rampant sexual harassment are casually discounted the world over; to acknowledge these grievous sins would be to look fully into the worst face of humanity. The reason why this film is so powerful is because it has so much warmth in the face of wicked dehumanisation personified by the incredible humour of Chris's loyal friend Rod Williams (Lil Rel Howery), the black man at the heart of the film who is not afraid to state things as they are in the face of adversity, leading to a final reckoning that can only come from immense courage.



Watch trailer online

nepaltimes.com

HAPPENINGS



EMBASSY OF INDIA

SHAKE: Indian Minister of External Affairs Sushma Swaraj with Nepal's Foreign Minister Krishna Bahadur Mahara in New Delhi on Monday where they planned for Prime Minister Deuba's India visit.



RSS

YES, SIR: Election Commissioners meet Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba on Friday to advise the government to hold provincial elections by September.



BIKRAM RAI

COOL STUFF: A visitor at a painting exhibition at the Music Art Gallery, Jhamsikhel on Saturday.



PEMA SHERPA

CO-BRANDING: Turkish Airlines Country Manager Abdullah Tuncer (left) and Anand Gurung of Himalayan Java after signing an agreement for joint branding at Labim Mall on Tuesday.



PEMA SHERPA

STEPPING STONES: Pedestrians negotiate a flooded overhead footbridge in Kathmandu after a heavy monsoon downpour on Tuesday.

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“Don’t cross the line”

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba on *BBC Sajha Sawal*, 2 July

BBC Nepali: How will you garner a two-thirds majority to amend the Constitution?
Sher Bahadur Deuba: I cannot guarantee that. But I will try.

Will it not be difficult to hold the third phase of local elections in Province 2 if the Constitution is not amended?
The deal (with the Madhes-based RJPN) is that the polls will be held in Province 2 with or without the amendment.

So there will be local elections in Province 2 even without the amendment?
Where do I get a two-third majority? Can I force them to support the amendment? The deal is to move forward the amendment bill. There is no guarantee that it will be passed.

Why was an impeachment motion filed against Chief Justice Sushila Karki?
I do not want to say anything about it because that motion has already been withdrawn.

Why was the motion withdrawn?
There must be some reasons. I do not want to discuss that now. That’s all.

BBC humiliates PM

Excerpts of Kishore Nepal’s comment in www.pahilopost.com, 4 July

If the UK government-owned BBC humiliates Nepal’s political leadership in a tv program funded by the Swiss government, is that not foreign interference? Will our Foreign Ministry grill the British and Swiss ambassadors to Nepal about this issue? The BBC planted 65 people in the audience and fed them questions aimed at embarrassing Nepal’s PM. The BBC has done it before when it provided a platform for ex-Chief Justice Sushila Karki to vent her ire. A tiny fraction of Deuba’s own NC party, Kathmandu’s elite and the UML were not happy with the PM, so they got the BBC to do a hatchet job. BBC Media Action that produces *Sajha Sawal* is registered in Nepal as a foreign company.

Why was a motion filed if it was to be withdrawn?
Some things have to be done, and they were done. The motion was withdrawn. What’s the big deal, anyway?

So the charges against Karki were baseless?
The accusations ... some things are best left under wraps. There was a deal before the impeachment motion was withdrawn.

What deal?
I do not want to reveal it.

Tell us, please?
No.

Just a little bit may be?
Can you force me?

Not forcing you, just a request.
Forget it. I am not saying anything.

In the last 70 years, all British prime ministers have been Oxford educated. When will we get a Prime Minister who cares for us?
Look, we will go to whatever schools we have in Nepal.

I am not just talking about ...
You are crossing the line ... where do I go looking for an Oxford in Nepal? Why can’t those who cannot go to the Oxford become Nepal’s Prime Minister? People elected me. If someone with a majority cannot become Prime Minister, who can? You?

Why are you not answering the questions?
Where can I go looking for an Oxford-educated Prime Minister? You are just trying to provoke me.

“I’ll fly even higher”

Suvekchya Rawat in *Pahilopost.com*, 6 July

Flight attendant Pragya Maharjan survived the Goma Air crash in Lukla on 27 May and is in a hospital bed with a fractured right leg, palms and spine. But her willpower is intact, and she is determined to fly again.

She takes her inspiration of another flight attendant Vesna Vulovic, who was the sole survivor of a Yugoslav Airlines DC-9 crash in the Czech Republic in 1972. The plane plunged to the ground from 33,000 ft, and was found in a coma. She died a natural death last year.

Pragya Maharjan says there is no reason for her to change her profession. “I met with an accident, why should I change my aim in life? I am lucky I got another life to accomplish many things, and I will fly even higher.”

The 24-year old is undergoing treatment at Grande International Hospital, where surgeons are still operating on her. She can’t walk yet, but the young woman already wants to fly.

The flight attendant was inspired by her friend’s sister, Mina Maharjan, to join the aviation sector. Mina herself was killed in the Nepal Airlines Twin Otter crash in Arghakhanchi in 2012.

“Mina encouraged me to become a flight attendant, she is still my role model,” says Maharjan from her hospital bed. As soon as Pragya completed her higher secondary education she took aviation




DIPEN SHRESTHA / PAHILO POST

training, and has been with Goma for the last two years.

Both Pilot Parash Kumar Rai and Co-pilot Shreejan Manandhar were killed in the crash of the cargo plane while landing at Tenzing Hillary Airport in Lukla in poor visibility. Maharjan was rescued and flown to Kathmandu a day after the crash.

Her parents are thankful she survived, and have given their full support to her future plans. Says father Ishwor Man Maharjan: “Life should be lived to the fullest. Death is fated. You could fall on the street and die.”

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

For full story in Nepali and pictures on Pahilo Post: <http://www.pahilopost.com/content/-35103.html>



First Phase Polls
Placard: Boycott

Second Phase Polls

Third Phase Polls

करोबार
Karobar Daily, 2 July

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“If constituencies are not delineated by 30 July, provincial and parliamentary elections by 21 January 2018 will be difficult

Election Commission of Nepal in *Kantipur Daily* 6 July



SHREEJANA SHRESTHA

Bureaucratic hurdles

Editorial in *Baahrakhari*, 4 July



Nepal is an example of how weak political leaderships result in bureaucratic obstructions. Many government employees create hurdles to influence the government’s program and policies. It is one of the malpractices Nepal has learnt from its southern neighbour, India. Most of the time, employees don’t want to work until it benefits them personally. And it is because of this negative culture that Managing Director of Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) Kulman Ghising is not getting support from the government.

Ghising ended years of load-shedding, a feat deemed almost impossible. NEA has increased electricity imports and internal generation during his tenure. However, these are not the sole reasons for uninterrupted power supply in Kathmandu Valley. Reforms in demand and supply side management, and reduction in power leakage facilitated the process, but credit goes to the incumbent NEA Chief. He publicised a strategy to reduce electricity demand in this winter by replacing incandescent bulbs with efficient light-emitting diode (LEDs). The NEA estimates up to 200MW energy could be saved if 20 million such bulbs were swapped.

The proposal to buy LEDs under the government-to-government deal dragged Ghising into controversy instead of garnering government support. He has said he “longer cares” for the LED

replacement scheme.

High ranking government officials might have satisfied their egos by discouraging an utterly honest and competent employee like Ghising, someone who is rare to find in the government mechanism, but the state will have to bear the brunt of this. Employees who are as capable and sincere as Ghising have also fallen prey to such malpractices in the past. People are aware about such conspiracies because of information technology, and awareness. And it is not easy to discourage dutiful staff despite continuous plots to make them fail.

LED bulbs are available in Nepal but they cost double the price of the bulbs NEA wants to import. This means customers can buy an LED bulb for just Rs150 if they are paying Rs300 now. all this also shows that people who are making hefty profit from the LED bulb business are resistant to NEA’s plan. These syndicates must have ganged up with the bureaucracy to foil Ghising’s mission.

Motives of political leaders are tested in situations like these. It is the government’s duty to understand the conspiracies of bureaucracy and help NEA Chief Ghising. If NEA was allowed to import LEDs last month, we could have started replacing them already. If Ghising is found to be involved in corruption, he could be punished when caught. But until there is a proof, he should be allowed to work without any hurdles.

Taking the lead on LEAD

Nepali children are exposed to alarmingly high levels of lead, which is slowing their intellectual development

SONIA AWALE

Concerns about air pollution and unsafe drinking water have overshadowed another health hazard with a pernicious long-term impact on Nepali children: the alarmingly high concentration of lead within homes, schools and outdoors.

Two recent studies that analysed blood samples of children in Kathmandu and Birganj showed most of them had a Blood Lead Level (BLL) several times the threshold deemed safe by the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention. In Kathmandu, 64.4% of children aged 6 months-3 years had a BLL above the danger mark of 5µg/dl (micrograms per decilitre). Children aged between 10-15 in Birganj fared much worse: all had an elevated BLL, with 84% showing lead in blood > 10 µg/dl.

“This is a frightening scenario indicating that two in three children in the Valley will grow up to be individuals with limited mental and intellectual capacity,” said Imran Ansari, a paediatrician at Patan Hospital. “Imagine what this will do to our country.”

Scientists have found a strong correlation between elevated BLL and decreased IQ. A survey of primary school children in Kathmandu in 2013 estimated every additional 10 µg/dl lead concentration in blood resulted in a drop in IQ of 2.35 points.

“The situation is particularly serious because lead gets bio-accumulated in the human body and is rarely discarded, and when pregnant women are exposed to lead it can affect the unborn child,” said Sujan Raj Panthi at the Nepal office of the World Health Organisation (WHO), which commissioned one of the studies. “Our major concern is that the sources of lead are easily accessible to children, in paint in the school and household, in dust and in shiny, colourful toys.”

Although lead is no longer an additive in petrol sold in Nepal, it is still widely used in enamel paint and toys, plumbing joints, batteries, ceramics and cable. Effective June 2015, Nepal set the standard for maximum lead concentration at 90ppm, however, paints sold here still have lead

levels much higher than the limit, some with concentrations several thousand times more than the safety threshold.

Multinational paint companies in Nepal comply with international standards for lead, but poor enforcement means many local and Indian brands flout the rule (*see box, page 15*). Nepal’s toxic chemical standard for toys, including lead, comes into effect on 15 July. However, there are few facilities for routine testing, kits are not available, and warning labels are not enforced.

Many households and schools surveyed in Kathmandu recently were found to have unacceptable concentrations of lead indoors. Dust pollution and post-quake debris containing chipped old paint (*right*) are just two reasons why it can be hazardous for children to play outdoors as well.

“Lead contamination is not a priority because it doesn’t have immediate impact, but in the long-term it can have damaging consequences. We need more test kits and screen children regularly,” said biochemist KD Mehta at the BP Koirala Institute of Health Sciences in Dharan.

Imran Ansari at Patan Hospital agrees that more testing kits and regular nationwide lead inspections are needed. His clinic gets children with abdominal pain every day and although he suspects lead toxicity, the hospital lacks kits for proper diagnosis. “Lead toxicity doesn’t have a defining symptom, but we don’t have predefined diagnostic tools for follow-up,” Ansari said.

Experts stressed public awareness about lead in the environment alone will not do the job when the overall environment is full of lead paint and paint dust. Existing regulations on lead content in paint, disposal of batteries must be monitored for compliance.

UNICEF Nepal representative Tomoo Hozumi said: “Lead can cause permanent adverse effects on children’s health, cognitive functions, even academic performance, impacting on the nation’s human resource. To prevent this silent calamity, national regulatory frameworks need to be urgently established to stop lead paint and products coated with lead paints in Nepal.”



CHILDHOOD LEAD POISONING

A Blood Lead Level (BLL) study this year of children aged 6 months to 36 months in three Kathmandu hospitals showed that 64.4% had BLLs greater than or equal to 5 µg/dl (micrograms per decilitre). Even at low levels, lead exposure can cause learning and behavioural difficulties. Children with BLL equal to or more than 5 µg/dl can suffer irreversible neurological disorders.

Results published last month in the journal *PLoS ONE* indicated children from poor and Dalit families were most susceptible because they slept and played in rooms with high levels of enamel or chipped paint. Children who regularly played outdoors had BLLs 4.5 times higher than those who didn’t. Other findings:

- Children aged 13-24 months were most likely to have BLLs >5 µg/dl
- Children of literate parents from the same socio-economic class had more lead exposure
- Parents of babies with BLL >5 µg/dl said their children stood and walked later than others



Risk Factors

- Living near heavy traffic
- Homes with high-lead enamel paint
- Chipped paint
- 'Holi' powders and dyes
- Dust of demolished buildings
- Discarded batteries
- Socially disadvantaged families
- Boys more at risk than girls
- Children with anemia
- Undernourished babies

Prevention

- Enforce laws on lead level in paint
- Lead information label on paint cans
- Proper disposal of lead batteries
- Spread public awareness
- Declare schools lead-free zones
- Unleaded substitutes



KUNDA DIXIT



GOPEN RAI

T for toxic

Even at low levels, exposure to lead is known to affect intelligence quotient (IQ), and cause learning and behavioural difficulties in children.

Most paint products in Nepal have more than the legal 90 ppm of lead, according to recent surveys by the Centre for Public Health and Environmental Development (CEPHED). Another study, by the Society for Legal and Environmental Analysis and Development Research (LEADERS), found one paint brand with lead concentration as high as 200,000 ppm.

Some paint companies sell products with lead levels below 90 ppm outside of Nepal, but bring the same brand with higher concentrations in the domestic market, a 2011 CEPHED inspection showed. When Nepal set its 90 ppm standard for lead in paint in 2015, it stipulated each product should include a label stating the amount of lead it contained along with safety information. But the government's own report last year revealed many Nepali companies do not comply.

"Most paint brands imported, produced, marketed and used in Nepal still contain above 90 ppm lead," Ram Charitra Sah of CEPHED told *Nepali Times*. "It is very important that there is effective implementation of the standard and regular monitoring of paint companies."

Multinational paint companies have more than 70% market share in Nepal, which means most

paint, sold by volume, is below the 90 ppm requirement. But the remaining brands, mostly Nepali, are flouting the rule. (*See below*)

Asian Paints, which has a manufacturing base in Nepal and 40% market share, says the lead concentration in its products is much below the government requirement.

"We are happy that the Government of Nepal has brought in a statute for maximum lead content of below 90ppm in paints," said Budhaditya Mukherjee of Asian Paints, "but we also need a wide campaign of stringent market monitoring, a



punishment mechanism, and the rule should be applicable for import as well as local manufacturing."

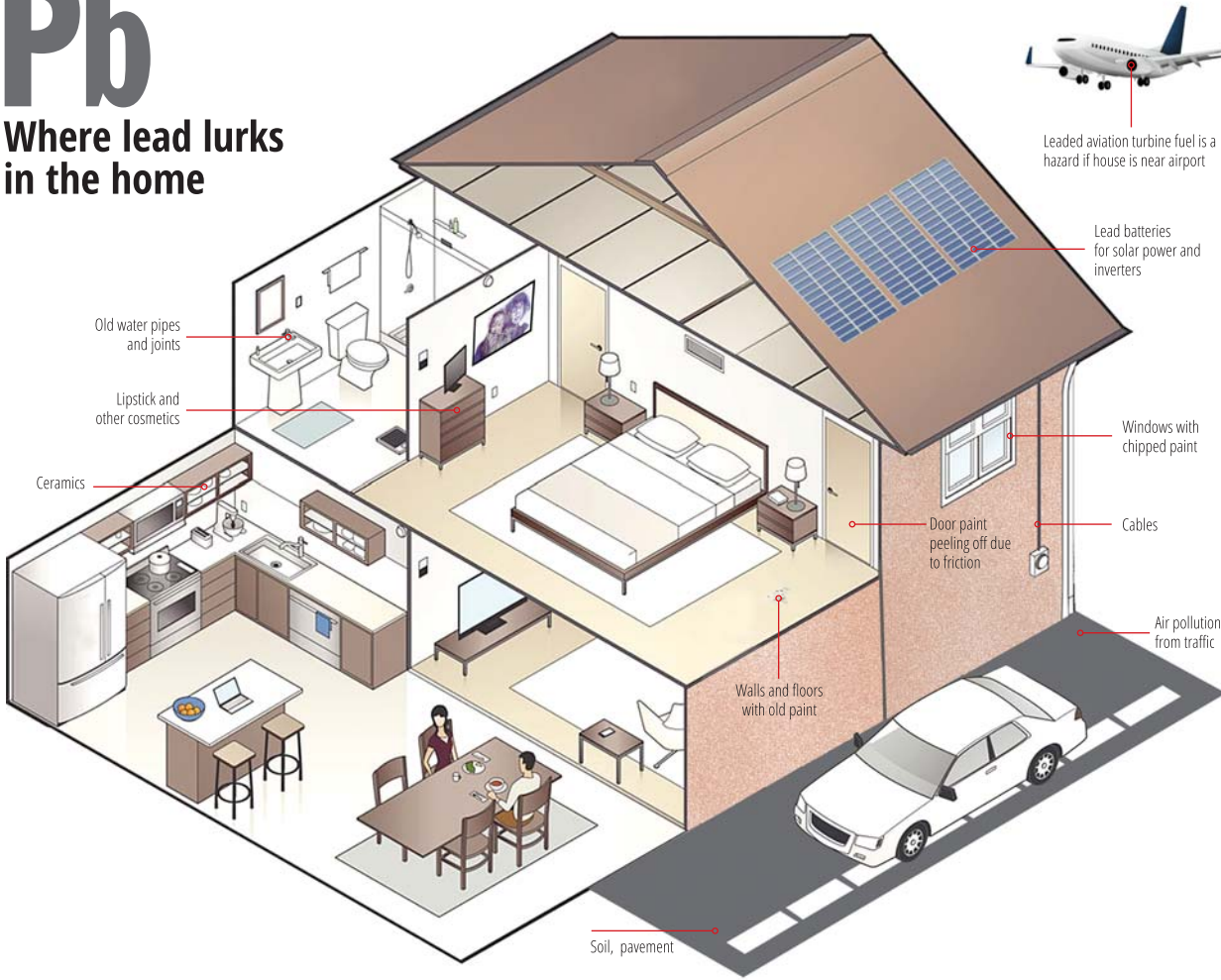
Most bright paints contain lead-based pigment, but some companies also add lead for more gloss and texture and to make paints dry faster, spread more evenly and last longer. Paint cannot be completely lead-free, but unleaded substitutes are now available to bring down toxic concentrations.

Says Dhiraj Pokhrel of LEADERS: "Children are most vulnerable to lead exposure and yet our schools and hospitals use lead-rich enamel colours which can poison them."

Lead levels are consistently high in toys and cosmetics. In June 2015, the government stipulated the 90ppm threshold in paints, and has set a toxic chemical standard for lead in children's toys from this month.

Pb

Where lead lurks in the home



Painting a grim picture

Results of a survey of selected paint colours in the market conducted for the Ministry of Population and Environment last year showed that even after the government set the upper limit of 90ppm for paint in 2015, many brands that have lead at higher than the permissible concentration.

Note: Lead concentration in a paint brand differs widely depending on its colour.

| Brand | Lead Concentration, ppm |
|------------------------|-------------------------|
| Asian Paints | 4.7 |
| Nepal Paints | 1925 |
| Berger Paint | 1.8 |
| Yeti Paint | 1531 |
| Pashupati Paints | 140 |
| Kansai Paints | 541 |
| Baba Paints | 11.2 |
| Mahalaxmi | 874 |
| Nandani Paints (India) | 1244 |
| Rakesh & Co (India) | 1094 |



Not remotely possible

Many of you would be forgiven in the past week for wanting to take control of the remote to change the channel. PM of neighbouring country giving a beefy-looking Prez Trump a bear hug [Switch] DPRK launches an ICBM but no one has any idea where it hit [Switch] Bella Hadid suffers a wardrobe malfunction on a catwalk [Switch] PM Deuba loses it on Sajha Sawal [Wait, wait, wait stay there].

Finally there was something worth watching as Comrade Brave Lion dismembered prey on national television. It was even more riveting than aforementioned beefeater wrestling Mr CNN down to the ground. NaMo should learn from SBD that the trick is to rant so angrily that no one can understand what you are saying, and if they can't understand what you are saying then you can say anything you want.

A long, long time ago, when the world was still young, and our forefathers had just learnt to walk erect with their tails between their legs, they discovered that one needn't actually get up and physically transport oneself to the tv set in order to change channels. One could do it from the comfort of one's prehistoric sofa while balancing a juicy mastodon femur one on one's belly. Necessity being the mother of all inventions, the wireless wand was discovered. The rest is history. This gizmo had a profound impact on evolution and the current average midriff diameter of the male hominoid.

The possession of a remote control was a symbol of where executive authority actually resided among our cave-dwelling forebears. In our patriarchal society it was the Alpha Male who held the laser sceptre. His grandchildren had been taught to respect elders so they tolerated this for a while, but soon realised that the only way to change such a hereditary feudal system was to rise up and watch what they wanted on Youtube. Which is what they did, little realising that Saija Sawal

was on Youtube too.

But thanks to advances in modern science and our new federal secular constitution, remotes are no longer restricted to tv sets. There are now remotes to control the home aircon, the microwave, laundry machine, garage door, dishwasher, vacuum cleaner and even the remote controlled toilet seat so that one needn't physically be present in the bathroom while attending to calls of nature anymore. Come to think of it, there was really no need for *Homo erectus* to learn to walk upright at all, we can regress to all fours and grow back our tails.

But the real challenge these days is how to control all the remote controls in the house. It is getting out of control, and finding the right remote for the right gadget is a challenge for the expanded human brain. Here are some ideas:



Mother of All Remotes: This device allows you to control all your remotes so you can turn on your remote toothbrush while having a remote shave.

Husband Remote:
Modern wives can use this like a taser to

zap their husbands in the
to get up in the morning.

Remote Remote: Even when in Bajura, you can use your phone to count votes in Bharatpur Municipality.

Geopolitical Remote: Allows the Foreign Hand to control Nepali politicians remotely.



The Ass

