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inter-like weather has because of foul air. more than the permissible limit of come early to Kathmandu soot and gases in their exhaust. In an online survey by Code for Nepal, more than three-quarters "We are now cracking down on Valley this year, and with of respondents said Kathmandu's air pollution, and have launched it the temperature inversion layer that traps pollution. Already in air quality was undermining their a drive to fine vehicles with early October, visibility has been health. In written suggestions and smoky exhausts. We have fined 80 so poor that there are massive responses, some actually said their vehicles in the past week alone,' says Sarbendra Khanal, Chief of the Metropolitan Traffic Police. delays in flights in and out of decision to emigrate abroad was Kathmandu airport. Suspended based on deteriorating air quality. (Read more: page 8-9). dust particles from unfinished The Metropolitan City has road work, increased emissions also pedestrianised Thamel's Last winter, there was unprecedented public outrage main streets (pictured above on from the growing number of Wednesday evening), and plans to vehicles and brick kiln emissions as pollution levels stayed at in Kathmandu have added to

dangerously high levels for weeks on end. The reason was dust particles from road expansion and building reconstruction. Dust was visible, but the really dangerous pollution was from diesel fumes. In one year, the number of vehicles in Kathmandu has grown from 923,000 to 1,042,000, meaning that this year the concentration of toxic emissions will be even worse.

trans-boundary pollution from

blown in from northern India by

A study by the Energy Policy

crop fires and soot particles

Institute at the University of

about how air pollution is

Chicago last week added proof

shortening the lifespan of people

in Asia's most-polluted cities.

Given that Kathmandu Valley's

air quality is even worse than in

New Delhi and Beijing on most

winter mornings, this should be

of Kathmandu, the Tarai and

Chitwan could have their lives

cause for grave concern. Residents

shortened by as much as four years

prevailing winds.

Kathmandu's municipalities and Traffic Police have proved they can end drinking and driving and honking and require vehicles to stop at zebra crossings by enforcing strict fines. They are planning to do the same now to punish vehicles that spew out

extend this to congested areas like Asan. Patan and Bhaktapur are also expected to follow suit by restoring car bans on roads leading to their Darbar Squares.

Public anger about poor air quality and worry about its impact on health forced the authorities to act. However, a lot more needs to be done to reduce the number of vehicles in Kathmandu and experts say that will only happen if public transport is made more reliable and convenient.

As environmentalist Bhusan Tuladhar told this paper: "Better public health is directly linked to better public transport."

Kunda Dixit



Findings released this week by the Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago add further proof that air pollution is emerging as the world's single largest environmental health threat, shortening lifespans in cities across Asia. In Nepal, many people living in Kathmandu Valley, the Tarai and Chitwan have their lives cut short by up to four years because of poor

PAGE 8-9



| PRIDAY | SATURDAY | SUNDAY | MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY | Oct 24 | Oct 25 | Oct 26 |

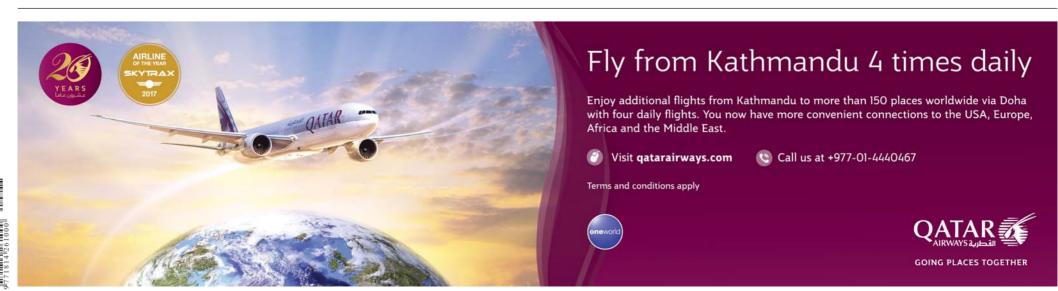
Starting this issue, Nepali Times and the US Embassy in Nepal are collaborating to produce this weekly graph of air pollution based on measurements from monitoring stations in Kathmandu so readers can make informed, health-related decisions. This week, the concentration of fine particulates was consistently above 100, indicating that air quality was already at hazardous levels. The graph will appear on page 10



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## WHAT'S IN IT FOR US?

n in-depth report by Om Astha Rai in last week's edition of this paper (*See page image, below*) on plans to build large reservoirs on Nepal's rivers showed how water and geopolitics makes a volatile mix. Joint river projects between India and Nepal have always been a political hot potato, even bringing down governments in the past because of accusations by the opposition that they sold the country down the river. And when the opposition gained power after elections, it went on to repeat exactly what its predecessor in government had done.

Politicians have discovered the hard way that water is an inflammable topic. Yet, a coolheaded analysis of Nepal's domestic power requirement shows that the country's need for extra electricity generation capacity to meet seasonal and daily peak demand cannot be met with existing run-of-the-river schemes.

The time has come to think big dams, while minimising their environmental and social cost. Surplus peaking power from Himalayan rivers could in future also be sold to India at a premium, and multi-purpose reservoir projects have other benefits like irrigation, flood control, fisheries, river navigation and tourism.

Unfortunately, Nepal's experience with border barrages like the Kosi, Gandaki and Mahakali have left a historical legacy of distrust of India. Till today, the public perception is that the irrigation schemes on Nepal's three big rivers are asymmetrical and iniquitous. The strategy of Nepal's planners, policy-makers and rulers over bilateral river projects for the past 40 years, therefore, has been to do nothing. Our cunning plan has been to not propose any projects, and delay as much as possible what has been agreed. We are so certain we will be bamboozled that we would rather just let our bounty of water flow unused down to the sea.

Most of the flow of the Ganges is from Nepal's four main rivers, which start beyond the mountains in China. The Chure rivers are also tributaries of the Ganges, but these are dry most of the year and turn into raging torrents during the monsoon. It is estimated that 70% of the annual flow of the Ganges is from tributaries in Nepal and most of that goes down down in three months: July, August and September. It makes sense for India, therefore, to consider trapping monsoon runoff in large reservoirs to regulate the flow of Nepal's rivers for flood control and dry-season irrigation downstream.

Planned well, these projects can also generate power and benefit the Nepal Tarai with irrigation and flood control.

Nepal and India need to start on a clean slate on bilateral river basin cooperation, for the benefit of the peoples of both our countries. Make that trilateral, since regulated

flow of the Ganges will also ultimately benefit Bangladesh. But such cooperation has to be proportionate. It is in India's national interest to ensure that the Nepali people accept the building of reservoirs that will permanently submerge their valleys, but they first need to be convinced that the benefits will make inundation worth it. For its part, the Nepal government must abandon its dog-in-themanger policy, and respect international law as it pertains to the rights of the lower riparian.

during his visit to Nepal in 2014 was able to restore the trust of most Nepalis that India would not act like a bully, and instead try to be a benevolent and magnanimous elder brother. In a speech to Nepal's Parliament he announced that the flagship Pancheswar Project on the western border river would be a

Mahakali since then: there was the Blockade and there have been four prime ministers in Nepal. Prime Minister Deuba signed the original Mahakali Treaty during his first leadership tenure 20 years ago. During a visit to New Delhi in August he said that the detailed project report for Pancheswar would be finished within a month. But negotiations are still stalled over sharing irrigation water on the Sarada Canal downstream on the same

governed by such perennial paranoia. Enlightened self-interest should allow people in India and Nepal to benefit from closer economic, cultural and political ties. Indian investment can kickstart Nepal's infrastructure and energy development, boost tourism, manufacturing and services to create jobs here. But it takes two hands to clap, and cooperation is only possible with mutual trust based on principles of fairness. Successive rulers in Kathmandu have kept up a level of suspicion about India for political advantage at home. Nationalism is synonymous with India-bashing, and New Delhi has often obliged by playing Big Brother.

bureaucrats and politicians in Kathmandu who actually understand water issues in general, and the technicalities of large reservoirs in particular, so that they can safeguard Nepal's long-term interests.

Hydroelectricity generation in Nepal will be inextricably linked with downstream benefits of regulated flow of rivers, and both have to be factored in when there are future bilateral negotiations. From here on, Nepal's strategy for hydro-diplomacy with India over river reservoirs has to result in an answer to the question: "What's in it for us?"

# just, fair and the cost-benefit sharing should be

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi,

symbol of this new start. Much water has flowed down the

Nepal-India relations should not be

Balanced negotiations also means we need

## 14 NATION NATION 15 Reservoirs of suspicion Storing w Pancheswar pending Dam them

#### Times.com

#### ONLINE PACKAGES



With the early onset of winter, Kathmandu's air pollution is already getting worse due to vehicle emissions, dust from earthquake reconstruction, endless road widening, brick kiln smoke, and transboundary pollution from India. Watch this video of how the city's residents cope with dirty, gritty

This week, Nepali Times launches an Air Quality Index weekly graph from the US Embassy monitoring stations in Kathmandu. Turn to page 10 every Friday for the week's pollution measurements

Also this week, check out the online survey of what Kathmandu residents think of pollution and its impact on their health. Go online for interactive infographics and charts with the results.



Watch a Nepali Times Studio interview with Canadian Ambassador to Nepal Nadir Patel, who announces new support for the survivors of the 2015 Nepal earthquakes.

#### **DISASTROUS POLITICS**

Large capital intensive projects inside Nepal 'naturally' suffer delays because of corrupt politics ('Reservoirs of suspicion', Om Astha Rai, #880). This is so not only in hydropower but even in sectors that do not involve major construction or international procurement contracts. For the 28 years of post-1990 'democratic' Nepal there is, therefore, very little to show in terms of development projects, say Melamchi drinking water project, now 'under construction' for nearly a quarter century, being one of the most notorious. There is no hope unless Nepal's corruptionprone politics is revamped to structurally force politicians to be clean, transparent and accountable. When such projects also involve the uppity regional power, India, it is worse, because its policy towards its

neighbours has all along been that they don't mind hurting themselves as long as it also hurts a neighbour. Bihari Shrestha

Unfortunately, our foreign policy has always been 'party centric', with the interest of the country lying at the rock bottom. We feel sorry for not having anyone with the calibre of King Mahendra.

**Anupam** 

#### **LIKED THE MOVIE**

Contrary to this unkind review I personally liked the movie, and the whole audience in the hall were also throughly enjoying ('Chhakka Panja 2', Sahina Shrestha, #880). The humor may not appeal to the politically correct judgmental snobs from Kathmandu's educated elite, but it tackles head-on the main message of the outmigration of Nepalis as a satire. In cinemas all over Nepal people are laughing while watching the film, and in doing so they are also forced to reflect and laugh at their own predicament.

Sheila D



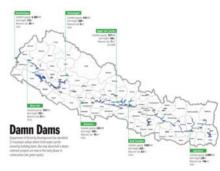
#### On the road

by Sonia Awale

In last week's most watched video, we took viewers on a road trip from the lowest point in Nepal, in Jhapa, to the lap of the world's third highest peak, Mt Kangchenjunga, in Taplejung. You can still go online to ride with us through Tarai forests, tea gardens, cardamom fields and more enchanting scenery of postmonsoon Eastern Nepal



Most reached and shared on Facebook



#### Reservoirs of suspicion

The geopolitics of water is complicating Nepal's plans for large storage dams for electricity, flood control and dry season irrigation. This in-depth report was last week's most read story, and was widely shared on social media, generating strong engagement online. Visit nepalitimes. com to read feedback and to let us know what you think.



Most popular on Twitter



Most visited online page

Most commented







Report @omastharai Read http://bit.ly/2yCk8RS Himamshu Ghimire @Himamshu

For our drinking water & energy needs, we



need many more small to medium dams. like Kulekhani, in the mid-mountain region along



Seventeen years later, the war is a distant memory in the first district headquarters to be attacked http://bit.lv/2vraAst @kundadixit

david seddon @pigreen



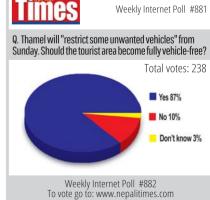
the war may be a distant memory for some but not for those victims of war crimes & atrocities who remain without recognition & compensation



Nepali Times @nepalitimes Join us on a road trip from the lowest point in #Nepal to near the world's 3rd highest peak Kangchenjunga Full video http://bit.ly/2zngloz



Mark Pickett @DrMarkPickett Wow, that road has improved since I travelled on it on the top of a bus in 1989.



Q. Will you take further steps to protect yourself from air





Publisher and Chief Editor: Kunda Dixit





# Lhotshampa, Rohingya

Burma's pernicious populism and a preoccupied world abandon the Rohingya



GOPAL GARTAULA

**¬**he Rohingya tragedy should resonate much more in Nepal than elsewhere in South Asia, because its genesis is nearly identical to the tragedy of the Lhotshampa.

The main difference is one of scale, as Bhutan too carried out state-sponsored de-population of its Lhotshampa Nepali-speakers.



ON THE WAY UP Kanak Mani Dixit

More than 100,000 were booted out under the son-of-the-soil 'Drig Lam Namzha' banner, to live as refugees for nearly two decades in Nepal before they were fortunate enough with third-country resettlement in the West.

Like the Rohingya, the Lhotshampa, too, were regarded as Bhutanese citizens until the harsh state decided to generate statelessness, with a scorched earth policy that spread fear among the targeted community. The fleeing Lhotshampa entered India, which for its own considerations facilitated the transfer of the refugees to Nepal where they were put up in camps by the UNHCR.

The bulk of the Lhotshampa were invited to the largely uninhabited southern hills of Druk



Yul by the Bhutan nobility, the settlers providing revenue to state coffers. But as the economic and strategic value of the southern hills became apparent in the modern era, and as fear of cultural inundation built up alongside the 1985 Citizenship Act and 1988 census, the Druk government activated its depopulation machine as directed by the then king, Jigme Singye Wangchuk.

In 1992, I was on the ground watching the desperate Lhotshampa arrive by the banks of Mai Khola in Jhapa from their homes in Samchi, Chirang, Gelegphug and other parts. The scale of eviction of Rohingyas is exponentially more horrendous as the fleeing mass of humanity was filmed on land and sea and by airborne drones. The tragedy is ongoing, and the number of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh is hitting the one million mark even as this is being written, which includes those here since 1992.

The Rohingyas' historical home has been the Rakhine region on Burma's west coast, and they were regarded as citizens when the country became independent in 1948, and thereafter as well. Things began to go sour following the military takeover of 1962, and the 1974 Constitution and Citizenship Act of 1982 ended up wresting citizenship from the Rohingya.

The tragedy escalated to

unbearable proportions because the Rohingya are friendless within Burma. The non-Muslim Rakhine people, the countrywide Buddhist clergy, the other nationalities of Burma, the military, bureaucracy, political class or civil society, all seem to be agreed they are 'Bengali' foreigners.

Anti-Rohingya populism within Burma is so vicious that the stand-alone leader and Nobel laureate Aung San Suu-Kyi seems incapable of resisting. Or it may be that her mindset is at one with the chauvinists, which has her ignoring calls for reversal from Desmond Tutu, the Dalai Lama, Malala Yousafzai, the UN Secretary General, as well as the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the last terming the Rohingya tragedy a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing".

Suu-Kyi, evidently in isolated existence at the capital Naypyidaw, cannot even bring herself to mouth the term 'Rohingya'. On the day she delivered her Nobel address in Oslo back in 2012, her response to the rape, arson, lynchings and mass displacement of the Rohingya was (as I wrote then in "Lady Liberty and the Ethnic Cauldron in Himal Southasian) 'to equivocate rather than speak directly to the human tragedy'. She took refuge in the absence of proper citizenship legislation, a 'faint-hearted response of a politician (who was) insensitive to their enforced statelessness, human rights, and the right to life and livelihood'.

The rounds of violence and the exodus to Bangladesh began in 1978. There was another bout of depopulation in 2012, and the latest and ongoing tragedy began on 25 August, following reported attacks by Rohingya militants which killed 12 Burmese border police. In exactly two months, 604,000 Rohingya have fled to Bangladesh after their houses were torched by the military, the inhabitants violated and killed. Within Burma, there are said to be another 150,000kept in internment camps, with

international humanitarian agencies denied access and support.

The Rohingya people are looking into an abyss of statelessness, within Burma as well as in the Bangladesh refugee camps. The international reaction is muted. While the Dalai Lama has spoken on the basis of humanitarian principle, Buddhistic societies by and large are silent, be they Mahayan or Theravad adherents. The West is in geopolitical confusion ever since the advent of Donald Trump in the international arena, even as crimes against humanity are committed by the Burmese security forces. If one were to look to India as the largest regional democracy, we have the shocking absence of empathy that has state functionaries talk brazenly of 'refoulment' (forcible return of refugees to where they are apt to face persecution).

The Lhotshampa, faced with Thimphu's rejection of repatriation, were lucky that the international geopolitical configuration made third country re-settlement available. No such luck for the ten times more numerous Rohingva. One of their 'faults' - being born Muslim. 💟

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#### Bosphorus experience

Turkish Airlines has launched the 'Istanbul Bosphorus Experience', specially designed



passengers who have transfer time of seven or more hours in

the Turkish capital. The program enables transfer passengers to experience the beauty and cultural facets of Istanbul and the Bosphorus before continuing to their target destination. A guide will accompany participants throughout the program.

#### Best cargo carrier



Cargo has won the 'Overall Carrier of the Year' award in the

Qatar Airways

industry choice category at the Payload Asia Ceremony held recently in Singapore. The Doha-based company also received the

'Best Cargo Airline in Customer Services' award at the India Cargo Awards in Ahmedabad, India last week.

#### Festival winner

Agni Group, the authorised distributor of Mahindra vehicles in Nepal, has announced the lucky



draw winner Mahindra Big, Bigger,

Biggest Dasain-Tihar offer. Kathmandu's Bimala Poudel was the lucky customer, winning a Mahindra Mojo 300cc off-road motorcycle.

#### Selfie with Al

Oppo is set to launch its latest selfie expert in Nepal, equipped with industry-first Al technology, named 'Al beauty technology', which uses artificial intelligence to beautify selfie photos. The

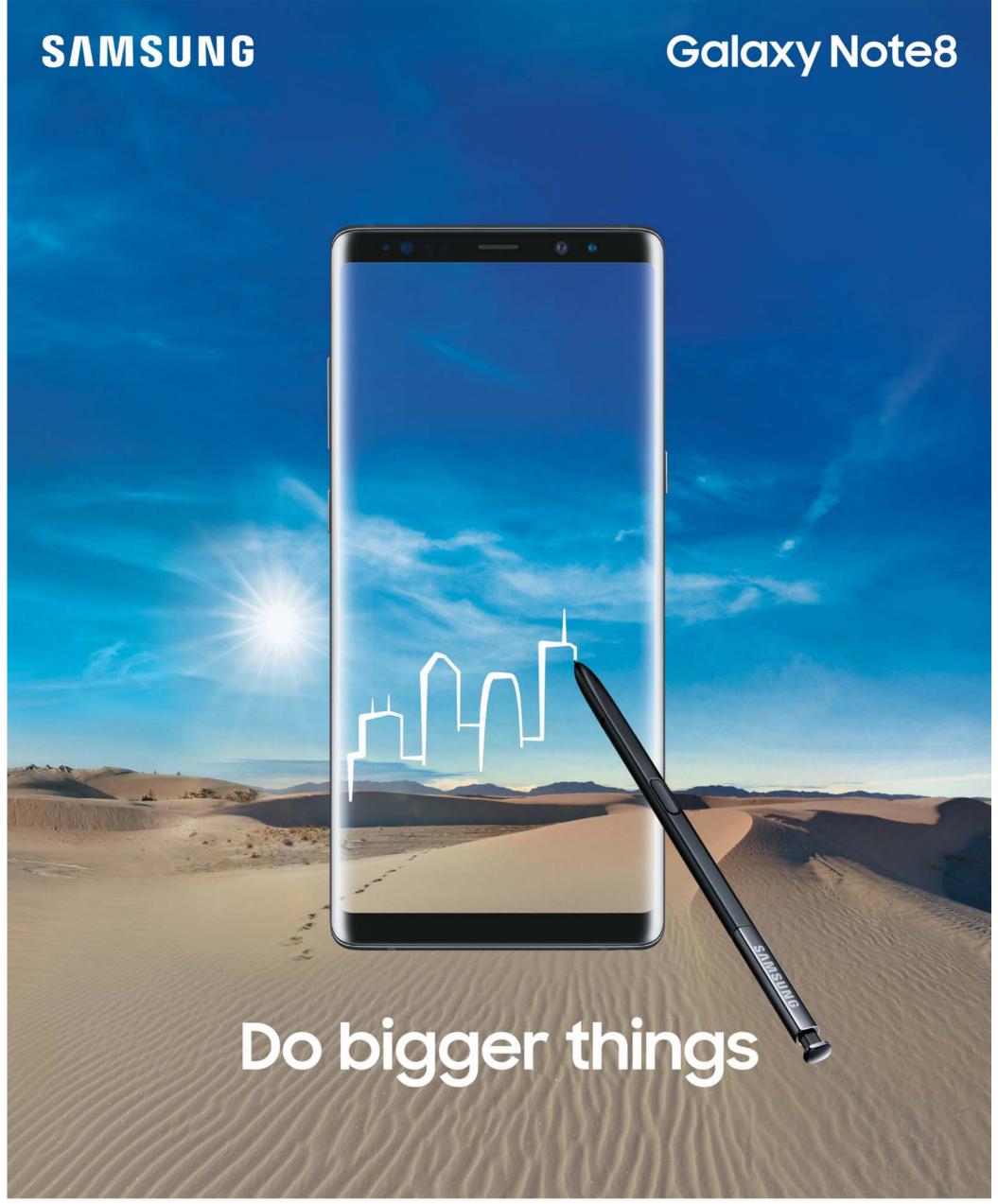
device, which will also feature full-screen FHD+ display and an upgraded operating system, will be for sale from mid-November, says the company.











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**Born Behind Bars** 

Prisons are for punishment. Part of the

price that incarcerated mothers pay is

losing their right to bring up their children

till they are six. The film explores the trials

and tribulations of such children, who are

living the first phase of their lives inside the

Special Prison for Women in Hyderabad.

As the jail organises a school and attempts

to educate the children to reverse the cycle

of crime and misery, the kids learn their

own lessons of life and moral ambiguity.

The film offers a passage into the lost world

of children living inside prison walls for no

to make sense of it despite the odds.

fault of their own and their tentative journey

into the outside world. In India, children

can accompany their mothers in prison

**Malati Rao** 

# **Documenting South Asia**

The 11th edition of Film Southasia begins on 2 November

#### **SAHINA SHRESTHA**

nce relegated to an obscure corner of the film world dominated mainly by commercial feature movies, documentaries are now drawing more attention from both audiences and wider society.

In this part of the world, Film Southasia, whose 11th edition unspools 2-5 November in Yalamaya Kendra, Patan, has been showcasing the best non-fiction in and about the subcontinent.

As the cultural capital of South Asia, Kathmandu has been hosting the biennial event since 1997. Over the past two decades, not only has the festival grown and provided a platform for documentary makers, it has also served to nurture and develop a generation that loves and seeks to understand the medium.

Mitu Varma, the director of Film Southasia, still remembers when the festival first came to town. "Back then, I remember we had people but we had empty screenings for some of the films in the Russian Culture Centre," she recalls. "These days we have a dedicated audience in Kathmandu who wait for the fesitval, are willing to pay and fill up halls to watch documentaries. This rarely happens in other venues."

While the audience for documentaries is growing,



#### Save Gangamaya Gopal Shivakoti

Gangamaya and Nanda Prasad Adhikari, a couple from Gorkha, held a hunger strike in front of the residence of Nepal's Prime Minister demanding justice for the 2004 murder of their teenage son Krishna Prasad Adhikari. Authorities reacted by forcefully admitting them to Bir Hospital in Kathmandu. On 22 Sept 2014, Nanda Prasad died after 333 days of fasting. On 19 Oct 2014, Nepal's government promised justice to Gangamaya and persuaded her to end her own 359-day fast-unto-death. The murderers of Krishna Prasad still haven't been brought to book, and the last rites of her husband haven't yet been performed. Gangamaya sought justice through the courts as citizens should, but the administration was not up to providing it. So, despite deteriorating health, Gangamaya once again began her indefinite hunger protest and is being force-fed intravenously.

screening opportunities are still limited. And although film-making has become less expensive, making a profit is still difficult. "Nonfiction is something that needs a lot of encouragement," says Varma, "because even today if youngsters are going into it as a career they need a lot of dedication because the money lies in either features or advertisements."

With the goal to encourage new filmmakers and bring others from around the world to discuss nonfiction film and promote mutual understanding, Film Southasia is back with a new edition.

This time out it will showcase 63 films from Nepal, India,

Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Burma. Of them, 12 will be shown under the noncompetitive 'Documentaries of Dissent' category, introduced this year with a special focus on India. Six others will be screened under the 'Student Films' category, which showcases works by the next generation of film makers.

The 45 films in the competitive section will vie for five awards. The Ram Bahadur Trophy will go to the best film, along with a cash prize of \$2,000, the runner-up will be awarded \$1,000. The best debut film will merit the Tareq Masud Award and \$1,000, the UNICEF Award will go to the Best Film on

Children's issues (\$1,000) and the award for Best Student Film will merit \$500. To make it easier for the audience to choose what to watch, organisers have grouped the films by theme. For example, on Day 1 the audience can watch six films around feminism, gender, sexuality and rights at the Majlis Hall of Yala Maya, followed by a panel discussion. Organisers are also launching an app this year to make it easier for the audience to keep tabs on the schedule.

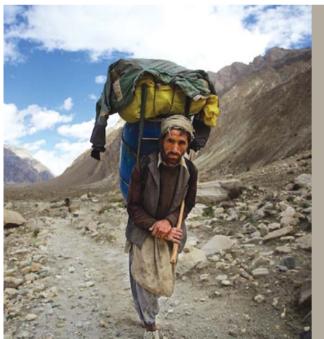
"It is difficult times for everyone across South Asia so I think the filmmakers are also sharper and more insightful, and they are doing wonderful films," says Varma.



### **The Scar** Pradip Ghosh

Year 1999: The 12th National Conference of the country's largest cultural organisation, Bangladesh Udichi Shilpigosthi, was going on at the open arena of Town Hall in Jessore. On the last day of the three-day event, 10 people were killed in a bomb attack by communal terrorists. The attacks haven't stopped since, targeting on a regular basis either a political party or the public. On 8 December 2005, the district branch office of Udichi in Netrokona came under attack and cultural activists were killed again. The communal terrorists' first, and last, attacks have targeted Udichi. As a result, thousands of people have been disabled for the rest of their lives. This documentary depicts the painful stories of Bangladeshis affected by the violence between 1999 and 2005.

Visit **www.filmsouthasia.org** for the complete schedule for the festival.



### **K2 and the Invisible Footmen** lara Lee

In *K2* And *The Invisible Footmen*, filmmaker lara Lee and team chronicle the lives of Pakistani porters and Nepali Sherpas. The film also follows the first official all-Pakistani climbing team, made up of former porters, who successfully summited in 2014 in celebration of K2's 60th anniversary. Amid breathtaking scenery, the film depicts the every-day sacrifices of porters and the courage of those indigenous climbers who choose to return to scale K2 in spite of past tragedies. In striving to perfect their craft, these mountaineers provide a fresh look into the cultures and national traditions of Pakistan, a country typically portrayed in the foreign media as merely a land of conflict and sectarian strife.



## **Burma Storybook**Petr Lom & Corinne van Egeraat

Burma Storybook is a creative documentary about a country emerging from years of dictatorship, told through Burmese poetry. The film circles around the story of the country's most famous dissident poet living today, as he waits for his long-lost son to return home.







The autumn chill has arrived early with the minimum temperature in Kathmandu plunging to 11C. This is due to a change in wind direction from northwest ahead of the advance of a moisture-laden westerly disturbance. The low-pressure system is fast-moving and will bring precipitation and the first snow flurries to the higher regions of Nepal late Saturday into Sunday. Even Kathmandu will see the chance of a passing drizzle with further reduction in ambient











#### **SONIA AWALE**

in UDAYPUR

n a town where the sight of Tharu women in saris carrying Learthen pots on their heads is commonplace, a woman in a red polo t-shirt and dark jeans riding noisily down the street on a 125cc Enticer raising a cloud of dust seems a bit out of place. But the people of Gaighat have got used to Najbul Khan Nilam zooming around on her two-wheeler.

On a short bike ride from Triyuga Bridge into town recently, dozens of people waved to her as she roared past. Policemen beckoned her to stop and chat: the discussion was about upcoming elections and the health needs of local women.

"A lot has improved here in the last few years: the maternal mortality rate has declined, girls are not trafficked as much anymore,' Nilam explains, shouting to the pillion rider on the back.

The 37-year-old Muslim

woman has battled gender, class and religious discrimination all her life, rescuing women victims of domestic violence, or rushing pregnant women to hospitals.

As a rebellious teenager, Nilam was thrown out of her house when she expressed her desire to study. Her brothers set fire to her books and school uniform. That is why she has worn shirts, jeans and sports shoes ever since as an expression of her freedom. She taught herself to drive a Tempo and plied the Gaighat-Jaljale route to earn a living, while attending adult literacy classes.

She set up Muldhar Mahila Sewa Kendra, which provides 24hour help and shelter to battered women and victims of trafficking. Her motorcycle isn't just a symbol of her independence, but serves as an ambulance and a rapid-response rescue vehicle.

But Nilam's activism against abuse has left her ostracised by her own community as she continues to try to convince Muslim, Dalit and minority families to protect and educate their girls.



"I don't want young girls to go through the same hardships I did. I would like them to have the support of their family. Despite my past, I'm happy that I have been able to send my younger cousins to school and be looked upon as an inspiration by the same society that once cast me out," she says.

In the past decade, Nilam has seen the needs of women in this

rural inner Tarai district change. With social media like Facebook, many girls are now falling victim of cyber predators waiting to abuse young women or lure girls to migrate. She sees an urgent need for media literacy, especially among young rural women.

Nilam finally graduated from high school after multiple attempts, and is now an undergraduate

student of rural development and social work. "This is the happiest day of my life," says Nilam, leafing through the question paper she attempted earlier that day (*left*). "I never thought I would be going to college one day. Now I feel like I can do my masters too.'

Nilam's organisation is no longer confined to Udaypur, but is running a nationwide campaign for gender equality and inclusiveness with the slogan 'Asan ma mahila, bhasan ma mahila, sasan ma mahila (Women in charge, women in the mainstream, and women in government). The campaign is spread over 24 districts, and has recently been trying to encourage women's participation in elections.

"The government has to be much more serious about the involvement of women in policy making and local governance, and we need to keep fighting for equality and equity," she says with conviction.

"There is still a long way to go, but I know from experience that every obstacle can be overcome," she adds.



A social media survey reveals the true extent of the health impact of Kathmandu's deteriorating air quality

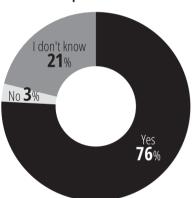
#### **AYESHA SHAKYA**

Whith winter approaching, Kathmandu Valley's air pollution gets worse as the inversion layer traps dust and vehicle emissions. The mountains disappear, flights are delayed and city-dwellers develop persistent coughs.

It didn't use to be like this.
Winter was the time of deep blue skies and dazzlingly clear views of the Himalayan peaks to the north. This year, Kathmandu did not even have to wait for winter for the air pollution to become hazardous thanks to a combination of smoke from crop residue burning in the Indian plains, and dust from Kathmandu's earthquake reconstruction and never-ending road-widening project.

What is most alarming is the looming health catastrophe triggered by this perpetual pollution. Hospitals report a surge in patients

#### % of Kathmandu residents who say their health is impacted by air pollution



SOURCE: CODE FOR NEPAL



# Breathing is hazardous to health

Athmandu's poor air quality has become so serious that with the onset of winter there is growing public outrage about its health implications.

Findings released this week by the Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago add further proof that air pollution is emerging as the world's single largest environmental health threat – and Asian countries are most at risk.

The study has mapped air pollution data to show where it is worst.

Deteriorating air quality in Kathmandu Valley due to suspended roadside dust particles, vehicle emission, brick kiln soot and transboundary pollution from India is shortening the average lifespan of people here by up to four years. Pollution levels in Kathmandu are sometimes worse than in cities in China and India.

The findings were published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* last month based on an analysis of pollution data from 154 Chinese cities from 1982-2012 compared with mortality data covering 78 million people from 2004-2012. Researchers found a strong correlation and concluded that life expectancy is reduced by about seven months and one year with every additional  $10\mu\text{g/m}^3$  of partciles that are 10 and 2.5 microns diameter respectively.

Increase in life expectancy in Nepal,
China and India if WHO air pollution standards are met.

INDIA

Reduced life expectancy (in years) due to air pollution

0.1 0.3 0.6 0.9 1.2 1.5 2.5 3.5

SOURCE: ENERGY POLICY INSTITUTE / UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

The results greatly strengthen the case that long-term exposure to particulate air pollution causes substantial reductions in life expectancy," said Michael Greenstone, an author of the paper and director of the Energy Policy Institute (EPIC) at the University of Chicago.

Researchers studied China's Huai River Policy, which has provided free coal for indoor heating during winter months for residents in cities north of the Huai River since the 1950s. They found the policy lead to an increase in cardio-respiratory diseases that have decreased life expectancy in Beijing by 3.1 years, compared to cities to the south. The policy contributed to the increase of particulate matter concentration over time, with PM10 concentrations five times higher that the World Health Organisation (WHO) safe limit  $(20\mu g/m^3)$ .

China is now engaged in an aggressive policy to reduce air pollution. It is switching to electric vehciles and changing its main source of heating from sulfur-rich coal to gasfired boilers and electric units. It has shut down polluting thermal powerplants near

cities. As a result, the concentration of 2.5 micron particles in Beijing and other cities has decreased, and it is expected this will now improve average lifespans.

India has 13 of the world's 20 most-polluted cities, and despite efforts the problem appears to be getting worse every year. The crisis is compunded in winter when water vapour condenses on suspended particles leading to thick smog over the Indo-Gangetic plains, which in turn increases the burden of seasonal lung ailments.

The researchers also developed the Air Quality-life Index (AQLI), a tool that will allow people in different countries to learn how much longer they could live if the air pollution was reduced to meet WHO or national standards for smaller and more harmful PM2.5 particles. In Nepal, people in the Tarai, Kathmandu and Chitwan on average lose four years of life to pollution (see map, left).

Rising PM2.5 levels have shortened lifespans of South Asians. In Bangladesh, where PM2.5 concentration is often above 60µg/m³, people could live 5.16 years longer if air quality met the WHO standard, while Pakistanis live 2.49 years less than their average lifespan because of air pollution.

In 2012 in Nepal alone, 315,230 'person years' were lost to people getting sick from ambient air pollution.

Sonia Awale

**——** 1 January 2017

**─**● 1 March 2017



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with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, emphysema and even lung cancer

An online survey by Code For Nepal, #BreatheFreely, sheds light on the negative consequences of breathing this toxic air. Not surprisingly, most of the responses were from Kathmandu Valley.

Of the 789 answers collected earlier this year, a staggering 76% stated that their health has been affected by the air pollution. Most cited were breathing problems, chest pain and eye infection.

'I can't walk or ride my motorbike freely. I have to cover my whole body, from head to toe, just to block out the dust. If I don't use a mask, I'll have to suffer from the ensuing tonsilitis and dust allergy,' wrote one respondent.

The situation is even more difficult for people with existing respiratory problems: 'I am an asthma patient and also have an allergy to dust and cold. So I have to think twice before I go out for a walk or even ride a scooter. Because of the pollution I have increased my meds to twice a day.'

One respondent even stated that the primary motive behind his decision to study abroad was to get away from Kathmandu's worsening pollution. Others noted that it is not only physical health that is impacted: 'The pollution increases my stress level and I become irritated very easily when travelling between home and work.'

Nearly 64% of respondents stated that they used masks on a daily basis. While air pollution is a round-the-clock problem, most said the period between 12-4pm was when the air quality was worst, probably because that is whenthey were out and about. A survey by the group, Drishti, (above)

showed daily peaks in PM2.5 (the most harmful particles less than 2.5 microns in diameter) in the mornings and evenings in winter at 10 measurement stations in Kathmandu Valley.

Drishti's data also show that PM2.5 levels were highest from January to March 2016, reinforcing how inversion during winter months creates a dust-bowl effect, increasing the concentration of pollutants. The levels of fine particles were significantly higher between 8-11am.

On 1 January 2017, PM 2.5 levels saw a high of 170.28µg/m³, much higher than the universally-accepted level of 15µg/m³. Between 7am-11am, PM 2.5 stayed consistently above 104µg/m³.

With 10% more vehicles on the roads than last year, pollution will be even worse this winter.

One respondent pointed out: 'There isn't a single hour when Kathmandu air is clean, except while it's raining.'



See more tables and interactive graphics online.



With the early onset of winter, Kathmandu's air pollution is already getting worse due to vehicular emission, dust from earthquake reconstruction, endless road widening as well as transboundary pollution from India.

nepalitimes.com

# POLLUTION SOLUTION

People from Kathmandu are used to complaining, but they also have solutions to the pollution crisis. The Code for Nepal online survey elicited suggestions, including the ones below:

- Minimise vehicle emissions. (odd/even number-plated alternate days for petroleum engines)
- b. Minimise re-suspension of roadside dust. (proper collection and disposal of dust generated)
- c. Avoid partial combustion and open burning. (Enforce the polluters-pay principle)
- Complete all the infrastructure development projects happening in Kathmandu asap (Melamchi project, road expansion, etc).
- b. Motivate citizens to use public transport.

Most of the pollution comes from dust due to the ongoing road expansion, old vehicles and, recently, from digging roads for Melamchi. The government needs to do the following:

- a. Ban old vehicles (15 years and above)
- b. Black top roads as soon as possiblec. Bring in policies so that road expansion,
- Melamchi are finished

Ban generators, severe punishment for garbage burners, phase out petrol/diesel vehicles, subsidise electric vehicles, make the city cycle and pedestrian friendly

- Better management of road construction, contractor should be severely fined for mismanaging the site and causing health hazards
- b. Zero tolerance of polluting vehicles with emission checks.
- A mass awareness campaign through media and ground level volunteers highlighting health hazards.









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- Dr. Satbir Golar, dentist practising in the UK.



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\*Offer valid on 130g packs of Sensodyne Fresh Gel and Fresh Mint in select cities/outlets till stocks last. Price depicted above is in Indian currency.

\*Retail Value Sales data 12 months ending 30th April 2016.



**GETAWAY** 

## **EVENTS**

#### Film Southasia,

Save the date to watch your favourite films from the list of 63. SAARC country entries include 12 documentaries of dissent and six student entries. 2-5 November, Yala Maya Kendra, Patan, http://www.filmsouthasia.org, (01) 5552141, 9841908528





#### The True Stories Mural,

An art exhibition that seeks to highlight the stories of women and child victims whose lives have been uprooted. Includes an exhibition of murals on the themes of objectification, mythology, exploitation and the empowerment of women. 23-29 October, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited,

Entry free, 9818239744, sgamatya@gmail.com

#### Rock climbing,

Gauge your own strength by trying your hand (and feet) at rock climbing on the Astrek Climbing Wall. The package includes lunch, bottled water and climbing and safety gear. No previous experience required. Every Saturday, 8am-5pm, Rs5,500 per person (01) 4419265, 9841313561 www.facebook.com/astrek.climbing



#### Korean Film Fest.

Watch your favourite Korean movie at the 13th Korean Film Festival. Collect tickets from Labim Mall before seats are gone. 26-28 October, QFX Cinema, Labim Mall Free entry, (01) 5529924, http://www.qfxcinemas.com/

#### Bodhi Chhaya,

music, written and directed by Kavita Srinivasan. Daily, 6pm onwards, Rastriya Nach Ghar



#### Saxaphone workshop,

Learn to play the saxophone with talented teacher Mathias Hagen from Norway. 27 October, 5:30-6:30pm, Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory (01) 5013554, 9813556945, info@katjazz.com.np

#### Tradition subverted,

An exhibition that explores self-identity and gender identification while engaging viewers in a dialogue about urbanisation and ecology, by artists Erina Tamrakar and Asha Dangol.

13 October-3 December, 11am- 10:30pm, Yala Mandala, Kwalkhu Road, Lalitpur, (01) 5536690

#### Cinemagraphs,

Learn to create cinemagraphs with Bangladeshi fine art photographer Ashraful Arefin. The workshop is an opportunity to learn to build concepts, shoot and record footage, and other commercial uses of living photographs.

28-29 October, 10am-1pm, KITHUB, Kupondole, Rs800, 9860041091

Experience this artistic and cultural extravaganza combining theatre, dance and



Book your seats for a musical evening with your very own Diwas Gurung, featuring Suncha, Avaya and Kismat from Albatross. Seats are limited. 27 October, RS MOTO, Gairidhara, Rs 500, 9865135937

Songs of the Himalayas,

Moitra.

Don't miss this musical treat featuring

the Singing Nun, Ani Choying Drolma,

and Bollywood music director Shantanu

19 November, 6pm, Rastriya Naach Ghar,

Kantipath, Rs10,000 (includes dinner and

and Rs2,000 (Balcony), 9801141261

meet and greet with artists), Rs5,000, Rs3,000

MUSIC

#### Classical concert.

Diwas Gurung,

A group of talented classical artists will perform as part of the Gharana Musical Festival 2017, which runs until 4 November in selected venues.

1 November, 5:30 onwards, Around the corner, Bansbari, Rs700, Rs350 (students), 9861631197



#### Saturday Night Live,

Make your weekend exciting with selected food and beverage, and a live musical performance by The Octave band. 28 October, 7-10pm, Ai-La Lounge Restaurant, Kumaripati, Lalitpur, 9801018681

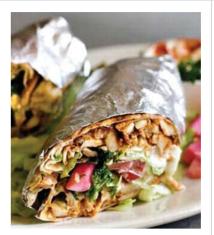
#### **OUR PICK**



#### Opens in Kathmandu on 26 October

In this quintessential film noir from 1947 that set the standard for the genre, the past catches up with a former private investigator, now running a small-town gas station, forcing him to return to the world of danger and double-crossing. Robert Mitchum, Jane Greer and Kirk Douglas star in this dark, complicated story featuring a classic femme fatale, based on 1946 novel Build My Gallows High, by Daniel Mainwaring.

# DINING



#### Bubbly brunch.

Book your seats and enjoy Saturday brunch with friends and family for only Rs1500 per person (net). The amazing shawarma and pasta won't let you down. Every Saturday, 11am to 3pm, Shambala Garden and Club Sundhara, Shangri-La Hotel

#### Saigon Pho.

Spacious interior with authentic Vietnamese Lazimpat, (01) 4443330



#### Creole cuisne,

For exotic and tantalising dishes from New Orleans, Italy, Spain, Africa, Germany, the Caribbean and Portugal Rs2,000 per person 27 October-5 November, 6:30-10pm,

#### Capital Grill Restaurant & Bar,

Tantalise your taste buds with the best thakali khana set, known as Jimbu Thakali, in town. Tangal, (01) 4437674

#### Café Jireh.

For a peaceful evening and the best firewood pizza. Bhaisipati, (01) 5592102

#### 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

# For amazing mountain views and refreshing weekend escapades, special packages available. Nagarkot, 4410432

#### The Last Resort.

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



#### Hotel Mystic Mountain,

Plan a weekend trip to this newly-opened exquisite resort located in the forest of Nagarkot hill. Nagarkot, (01) 4426646

#### Chhaimale Resort,

Enjoy the beauty of nature and a peaceful weekend. Perfect for BBQs, picnics and family hangouts.

Dakshinkali, (01) 4628121, 9851181409



#### Thamel Eco Resort

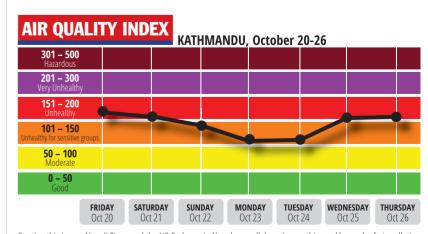
For a relaxed weekend, book a room with yoga, meditation and spa at this eco-friendly

Thamel, Chibahal Club, (01) 4257505

#### Dwarika's Hotel,

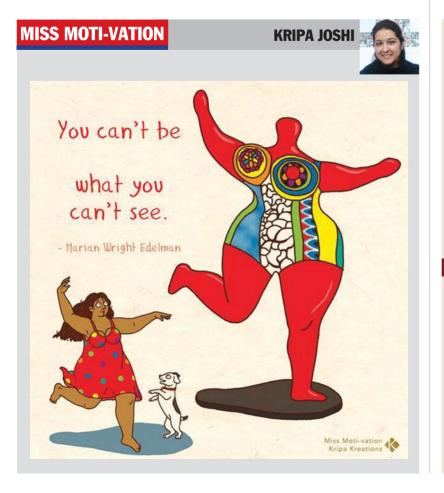
A little slice of paradise hidden in the middle of the city. Start the day off with yoga classes in this grand heritage hotel.

Battisputali, Kathmandu, (01) 4470770



Starting this issue, Nepali Times and the US Embassy in Nepal are collaborating on this weekly graph of air pollution in Kathmandu based on measurements from the monitoring stations at Maharajganj and Phora Darbar in order for readers to make informed health-related decisions. The Air Quality Index values in the graph represent the concentrations of small, airborne particulate matter of 2.5 microns and less which are the most harmful to health. Higher AQI values indicate higher air pollution levels and greater health risks. For example, this week the concentration of fine particulates was consistently above 100, indicating the onset of winter inversion and greater vehicular emission after the holidays in Kathmandu Valley.

https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/



#### **Times**

# **Modinomics falters**

Are the Indian Prime Minister's economic reforms on track or too slow? Find out in this preview of the author's new book.

Plected in 2014 on a platform of economic reform, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's reform agenda is being hotly debated three years on. Business publications are not too bullish.



The Economist ran a cover story recently arguing that Modi is not really a reformer and lamented the missed opportunity to harness the low price of oil, an important import. The Financial Times argued that the economic boom of the past two years is now wobbly, with the main reason being India's serious structural problems.

Government officials disagree. Amit Shah, the president of the ruling BJP, said recently: "(We) have completely transformed the thought process of the people and have been successful in creating brand India." Finance Minister Arun Jaitley claimed: "No government in India has reformed as much as this one."

Who is right? If one's focus is on macroeconomic reforms then Modi deserves credit. His 'Make in India' campaign, together with Skills India, Digital India and Smart Cities campaigns, have helped attract record foreign direct investment (albeit from a low base) despite there being many hindrances to doing business in India. The country ranks 130 among 189 countries in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Indicator.

Modi was also instrumental in pushing a national biometric system (known as Aadhar), which has made it easier to dole out subsidies directly to the needy, bypassing intermediaries who in the past pilfered up to threequarters of the amount.

The Prime Minister's most talked-about, and boldest reform, was the surprise demonetisation of large-value bank notes in November 2016. However, recent evidence suggests that the costs (lower economic growth) have outweighed the benefits (digitalisation and control of "black money" and corruption).

The introduction of the Goods and Services tax (GST) had been

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under discussion for several years, but it was Modi who pushed it through in July. In principle, the GST is an excellent idea because state taxes hindered the free movement of goods and services, fragmented markets, and raised the cost of doing business. The compromises and complexity of the system have, however, led some analysts to reduce projected growth estimates to only 0.4 per cent.

Macroeconomic sectoral and second generation reforms in governance had underpinned Modi's campaign pledge of 'Minimum Government, Maximum Governance'. During his visit to the US in June, Modi boasted that 7,000 such reforms had been initiated. This was an exaggeration.

The much-discussed privatisation of state-owned enterprises has been slow. Bad debts of banks need to be worked out. The government has also lagged in the provision of basic



Jumpstarting South Asia: Revisiting Economic Reforms and Look East Policies

Pradumna B Rana and Wai-Mun Chia Oxford University Press (India), 2017 Hardcover, 251 pages services to the private sector, such as an efficient and clean public administration system, education, healthcare and a functioning market for land and labour.

A new bankruptcy law introduced in May 2016 is an area where some action has occurred, but even this law cannot be fully effective until the judicial system is reformed. There is a huge backlog of pending cases: 24 million, nearly 10% of which have dragged on for over a decade.

Aside from strengthening the Prime Minister's Office, Modi has done little to reform the public administration and the civil service system. The World Bank's governance indicators show India ranking far behind many East Asian countries in government effectiveness, control of corruption, rule of law and regulatory quality.

Educational standards are poor and the country lacks a capable and healthy workforce. Much education and healthcare is provided by the private sector because of the poor quality of public services.

In many Indian states, firms with more than 100 workers must seek government approval to hire and fire workers. As a result, many resort to contract workers or simply choose to forego economies of scale by remaining small. During Modi's first year in office, states such as Rajasthan, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh had sought to partially liberalise their labour markets. But it now looks like these efforts have stopped.

Slow progress in microeconomic reforms means that the government has not been successful in creating an enabling environment for the private sector, and investment could dip further. The economy grew by only 5.7% in the quarter ending 30 June, the lowest since 2014. As in the past, an inefficient public sector will continue to be all-pervasive in the Indian economy.

Pradumna B Rana is Associate
Professor at the S Rajaratnam School of
International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang
Technological University, Singapore.
This article is based on his co-authored
book, Jumpstarting South Asia: Revisiting
Economic Reforms and Look East
Policies, which will be launched in
Kathmandu on 3 November.







enis Villeneuve is possibly the only director working today who could take on the enormously nerve-wracking task of making a sequel to the most important science fiction film of all time: the original Blade Runner from 1982. Made by the intrepid, visionary Ridley Scott and featuring a young Harrison Ford as the titular "blade runner," the first film is a noirish meditation on the moral quandaries involved in hunting down humanoidrogue replicants made to simulate humans.

In his futuristic vision for the first film (set in 2019), Scott created an extraordinary, now iconic amalgam of cultures, styles, and aesthetics that combine to show a future that is a simulacrum of our own world - but all smushed together emulating the essence of postmodernism: with many leveled domains on top of each other, sleek art deco buildings housing huge corporations, and a darkness that can come from the

dystopia that is inevitable when humans start creating AI that think and feel but are created as slaves.

Blade Runner 2049 continues the story of the replicants' struggle to realise their own humanity even as the people around them adjust their own to suit this new evolution: there is loathing, but also wonder and fear, a natural but not original trope when encountering an "other" so closely related to us and yet so different.

The plot of the first film weighs heavily on its sequel, and while Ryan Gosling plays another memorable part as "K," a blade runner who is a replicant himself, there is little in this new film that truly breaks ground. Replicants are still going rogue, and the mantle of generating ever more humanlike slaves has been taken on by Niander Wallace (Jared Leto) and his nefarious corporation.

K plods along on his rather sad existence as a sub-citizen, treated like insects by his employers while he must ruthlessly kill his own

kind and return day after day for the now infamous but slightly altered Voigt-Kampff test that ensures his feelings have not evolved beyond the baseline - of relative

of control when it is replicants may be able to procreate. To tell you anything further would ensure that an plotline would then be just too tedious to sit through – for indulgent script by who also wrote the

perhaps more flawed but far more stimulating original.

Runner 2049 is essentially the problem of Denis Villeneuve - a director who is extremely talented at creating gravitas without an iota of humour to leaven his ongoing love affair with the themes of love, death and procreation.

While this is a good film it is not a great one, neither visually nor in terms of plot or introduction of new character. Even the entrance of Harrison Ford in the latter half of the film cannot really leaven its self-involved grandeur and while the film is supposedly visually stunning it is not even close to Villeneuve's other, far better sci-fi film Arrival (2016) which while heavy, is truly beautiful. 💟



emotion lessness.Things spin out

discovered that certain

already fairly clichéd this is a long, self-Hampton Fancher,

The problem with Blade







HAIL TO THE CHIEF: US Ambassador to Nepal Alaina B. Teplitz called on Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba at his residence on Tuesday.



**KNOW THE RULES:** Election officer Basanta Raj Poudel briefs candidates of Gorkha-1, Narayan Kaji Shrestha (far left) of the Maoist (Centre) party and Baburam Bhattari of Naya Shakti (far right) in Gorkha on Monday on the election code of conduct.



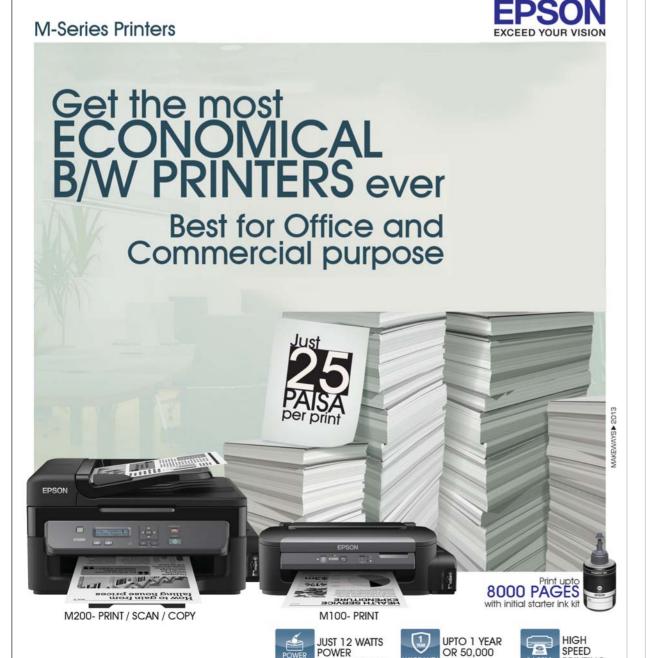
FOURTH CEO IN TWO YEARS: The newly-appointed chief of the National Reconstruction Authority, Yuvaraj Bhusal, assumes office in Kathmandu on Tuesday.



**POLICE SCHOOL:** Locals in Khotang giving a written exam for temporary police positions on Wednesday. Some 75,000 temps are being hired for provincial and parliamentary elections to be held on 26 November and 7 December.



**SELFIE LAKHEY:** A woman poses for a selfie with Lakhe masked dancer during this week's Jyapu Museum festival in Patan on Wednesday.



CONSUMPTION

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# **Insult to women**

Editorial in *Kantipur*, 25 October

कान्तिप्र

The 2015 Constitution has **■** guaranteed 33% of seats in the federal Parliament and provincial councils for women, but it does not specify how many of them should be elected directly. So political parties intend to fulfil this constitutional requirement by nominating women mainly under quotas for proportional representation (PR) seats, excluding them from a fair chance to contest elections and be endorsed by the people. Parties seem to think that women cannot contest and win elections, which is an insult to women.

Political parties have fielded 802 candidates for the first phase of parliamentary and provincial elections on 26 November. Of them, only 42 (roughly 5%) are women. For the 37 parliamentary seats up for grabs, the NC and the Maoist (Centre) have fielded just 2 and 1 women candidates respectively. The UML has not fielded a single woman candidate. For the 74 provincial council seats, the Maoist (Centre) has



fielded 3 women. The NC and the UML have fielded 2 women each.

It has been a decade since Nepal constitutionally designated one-third of seats for women. But it seems that political parties are still stuck to the Constitution of 1990, which stipulated that women had to have 5% of seats.

If political parties try to justify the disappointingly low number of female candidates, it will be just a lame excuse. If they argue that there are no competent women, it only reveals that they have failed to empower their women leaders/cadre. Political parties must make amends for this mistake by fielding more women candidates in the second phase of polls on 7 December. It is not a matter of being kind to women, but of giving them what they deserve.

Editorial in *Naya Patrika*, 25 October

गयाँ पत्रिका

The disappointing number of women candidates in the first phase of parliamentary and provincial elections raises a question: what is the status of women in Nepali politics?

Despite fielding only 5% women andidates, political parties can still fulfil the constitutional requirement of reserving 33% of seats for women in both the federal Parliament and provincial councils. For this, they have to nominate more women under proportional representation quotas. This will send a message to women that it is not their right, but they owe their represention to the kindness of the menfolk.

This situation shows how deeply entrenched patriarchy is in Nepal politics. During the Maoist war, many women challenged this patriarchy by standing shoulder to shoulder with male guerrillas. In the wake of the war and the Democracy Movement 2006, the first constituent assembly guaranteed 33% of seats for women. A significant number of women fought and won elections. As the battle for equality weakened, the second CA did not turn out to be as inclusive.

The 2015 Constitution requires political parties to field women to

the post of either head or deputy head of local councils. The parties could not blatantly violate this provision, but they distorted it, by choosing women mostly as deputy chiefs. This time, they have further marginalised women, disregarding the spirit of the Constitution and fuelling social discord.

Editorial in Nagarik, 25 October

नागरिक

One of the reasons Nepal's new Constitution is described as progressive is its emphasis on women's representation. But political parties have found it difficult to fulfil the constitutional requirement that women hold onethird of seats.

The UML has not fielded a single woman candidate for Parliament. The NC and the Maoist (Centre) have fielded two women each. If they repeat this mistake in the second phase of elections on 7 December, it will send the wrong message: elections are for male politicians only, women can make do with proportional representation (PR) seats.

It is not true that political parties lack competent women leaders/cadre, but the parties have no faith in their abilities. This state of affairs utterly disregards the Constitution's inclusive provisions.

# No stopping elections

Naya Patrika, 26 November

**ा**याँ पत्रिका

After the Supreme Court (SC) made it clear that the Election Commission (EC) must print two separate ballot papers for parliamentary and provincial elections under the first past the post (FPTP) system, there is speculation that these elections, scheduled for 26 November and 7 December will be postponed, and the country will face a constitutional crisis after 21 January 2018 – the constitutional deadline to elect a new parliament and provincial councils.

But the EC cannot use the SC ruling as an excuse to postpone elections. The commission was already planning to print ballot papers for the FPTP polls only after 27 October. So it still has time to re-design those papers, without wasting much time and resources.

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Even if re-designing ballot papers takes time, it should not be a problem because the first phase of polls will take place only in 37 of the total 165 constituencies. The balance of ballot papers can be printed later. The EC has also argued that it may need more ballot boxes if it is to print separate ballot papers. But this is another lame excuse. If ballot papers are printed separately, their sizes will be reduced by half. So whether ballot papers are separate or not, it will not require more room in the ballot box. If two different colours are used for two separate ballot papers, it will be easier for enumerators to count the votes.

The EC has already printed two separate ballot papers for the proportional representation (PR) vote, but that is not a cause of concern for the SC. The PR polls will go smoothly. So should the FPTP polls.



# Caught in the middle by





**PAYING THE PRICE:** This undocumented worker paid a few thousand Malaysian ringgit to agents to legalise his status but got duped (*above, top*). Failed migrants from Dubai await justice in Kathmandu (*above, right*). Migrants crammed into an apartment in Dubai where space was so tight that anyone who got up to go to the bathroom or for a walk would lose his spot (*above*).



Migrant workers learn to face exploitation and abuse from recruiters at home and abroad

#### **UPASANA KHADKA**

Ram was sent to Malaysia by an agent from his village in Dhanusa, and is currently in Kathmandu en route to Dubai. When asked if he used the same agent for Dubai as he did for Malaysia, he replied: "Despite arranging a good job for me in Malaysia, I did not trust him because his involvement in unsatisfactory migration cases while I was away had marred his reputation. So I changed my agent."

Ramesh, a Qatar returnee also from Dhanusa, says migrant workers like him often exchange information they have on recruiters. "We can contact current migrants easily at destination countries through Facebook Messenger and IMO to get up-to-date information. We ask about the kind of job and the salary that the agent has arranged for them before making a decision," he explains.

Tarai-based migrants prefer agents from their own community to protect them from cheating. Still, Jugnath from Siraha knows of a recruiter named Ramesh who ran away with workers' advances. He is now in Delhi and runs a momo shop. "He has not dared to come back even when his wife died two years ago," Jugnath says.

While cheating by agents

While cheating by agents remains common, migrants are being more careful in their selection. Hira from Dhanusa says he investigates the assets of agents to gauge whether they are trustworthy. He says: "Agents with land and houses are tied down and cannot run away and it could

signal their ability to return our recruitment costs if our migration attempt fails."

International migration offers middlemen both in Nepal and abroad myriad opportunities to cheat prospective workers. Given the information asymmetry between an employer in Malaysia or the Gulf and an aspiring migrant, there are many stories of contract substitution upon arrival at the destination with less favourable terms of employment and rent-seeking by agents.

However, migrants and even repeat migrants, knowingly continue to rely on middlemen despite the risks and the higher costs. Information regarding job demand is only one of the services provided by middlemen, and there is a love-hate relationship between migrants and their agents.

In the Tarai district of Siraha, greater accessibility, familiarity and proximity to agents than with the Kathmandu-based manpower companies makes local recruiters a more convenient option despite their gouging.









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#### **Times**

# middlemen



UPASANA KHADK

While agents continue to play a prominent role in migration, conversation with migrants reveal that unlike in the past, when agents were relied upon blindly, migrants have become more careful selecting agents these days. Trust and reputation, asset ownership and demonstration effect emerged as key considerations.

Trust is key, which is either built through personal relationships with the agent or through referrals of trusted community members. However, trust in an agent is not permanent and migrants update their beliefs about them constantly based on recent migration cases.

In addition, migrants also look for other clues to gauge an agents' credibility based on how well their clients have done while abroad. The demonstration effect of factors like property and the kind of schools a current migrant's children go to can be important clues.

But labour recruiter Hari says such evidence can be misleading. "Migrant workers just see the money and not the hard work and overtime under challenging circumstances put in to earn that much," he says. "This can wrongly shape their expectations about the foreign dream because most migrants tend to downplay the difficulties faced abroad."

Manpower companies in the capital subcontract their work to local agents because it is not physically possible to follow up the process with each worker. But they are also outsourcing the need to deal with complaints.

"When manpower companies rely on us, they know that migrants or their families will contact us if things don't go as promised," says Rati from Ilam, who started working as an agent after successfully sending his son abroad. "It is our phones that ring incessantly when migrants or their families are unhappy."

A tainted reputation can be irreparable in the community and local agents often find themselves stuck between migrants and manpower companies. But there are also Nepali agents working in host countries supplying workers to big recruiting agencies.

"I got paid a commission

for each worker I brought to my security guard supply company, and given that many migrants are not happy with their jobs, it is not difficult to attract workers," says a Kuala Lumpur-based Nepali agent named Hari.

The role of agents also increased significantly in Malaysia when it started sending back undocumented migrants on special travel passes. While the process officially costs \$360, migrants end up paying twice as much since agents know how to grease the wheel.

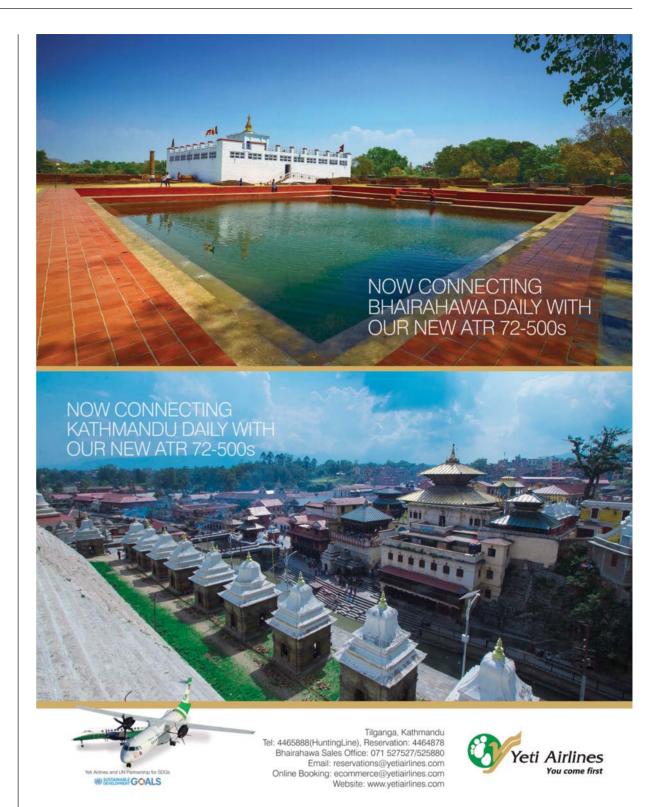
"Of course we would prefer to get the paperwork done ourselves, but given that they made the process easier for us at a markup, we rely on them," shrugs Tirtha, a recent returnee from Malaysia, who worked as an undocumented security guard.

Migrants choose foreignbased agents on the basis of trust and referral by social networks, but still get duped. They don't have the same level of accountability that they expect from Nepal-based agents from their own communities. Unanswered phone calls and visiting cards with fake office names are the norm.

Jana, an undocumented worker in Malaysia, was duped by an agent who charged him to legalise his status. "Even though I have the receipt, there is nothing I can do with it because of my undocumented status," he says.

Fourteen Nepalis were recently deported from Dubai after being sent by agents on visit visas instead of worker visas, on the pretext that it was a quicker way to go abroad. The agents paid Rs28,000 per migrant to Kathmandu airport staff to let their clients pass through.

They were promised that a Dubai-based agent named Prem would get them jobs as lifeguards. One of them, Padma, recalls his sinking feeling when he saw a large number of flipflops outside Prem's Dubai apartment, where there were 22 other workers crammed into a small room for months. Instead of finding them jobs, the agent started abusing them verbally and physically, and they returned when their visitor visas expired. The 14 were cheated by agents in both Kathmandu and Dubai, and now await justice.









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SongsofTheHimalayas

# All my troubles seem far away

know many of you are worried about the state of the country. The garbage piling up on the streets bothers you, there is doubt even at this late stage whether or not there will be elections, and if so, what proportion of candidates will be convicted serial killers, and then for those of us who are adherents of quantum mechanics, there is always the overarching uncertainty about the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle that gives us sleepless nights.

In a futile effort to deal with the mental tension many of you have tried reducing your caffeine intake, gone on 15-day Vipassana retreats, had an acupuncture performed on your cerebral cortex, and some of you have even darted yourselves with tranquiliser guns meant to be used to translocate Asiatic One-horn Rhinoceri.

there God? If so, is it a he, she, or it? Is there life after death?

#### **Asteroid Hit:**

Last week, a spinning rock the size of Labim Mall whizzed past our Home Planet. There are a couple of million other near-Earth asteroids out there just waiting for the opportune moment to drop in on us unannounced.

Geologists reckon 90% of the species on Earth, including the dinosaurs, were wiped out in a mass extinction after a meteoroid strike 65 million years ago. It is likely to happen again.

Brood twice a day, while emptying your bowels, over the likelihood of the Earth being hit by a haemmorhoid, and nothing scary about Nepal's politics will ever spook you again.



Which is why, in the interest of sanity, it may be advisable to take your mind off mundane day-to-day worries about politics, pollution and potholes, and fret about much more frightening things. Thinking about some of these impending global catastrophes will make all your current troubles seem far away, and petty everyday concerns that presently loom large in our lives will pale into insignificance.

So, ready? To take your mind off the Supremo Court restoring the head of Nepal Oil Corruption, let us plunge right in to list the even scarier stuff you should really be agonising about:

#### Are We Alone?

Are we alone in our Milky Way Galaxy? Is there intelligent life on other planets and if so, do they have higher IQs than Donald Trump? Are there parallel universes and if so, how many? Is

#### **Nuclear Winter:**

Atomic scientists have just adjusted the Doomsday Clock because the likelihood of all-out thermonuclear war has increased with the ongoing contest between Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un about which one has more sinister-looking hair on his warhead. It is not enough to destroy the world only once, we have arsenals to obliterate it many times over. Think about that, and relax.

#### **Global Climate Change:**

When you're down and troubled about the state of Nepal, turn your attention to melting polar ice caps,

Iceland turning into Greenland, the Maldives becoming an Underwater Republic, Khumbu Waterfall replacing the Khumbu Icefall.

See? Didn't I tell you you'd feel much



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