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GOING PLACES TOGETHER

STATE OF CONFUSION

Democracy comes with a warning label: it has to be handled with care, is always a work in progress, it is prone to abuse and demands patience.

The 2017 elections were a case in point: a lot of proven non-performers got voted out and some crooks won again by employing their old tricks. Party stalwarts suffered shock defeats, and some aparatchiks worked the vote banks to be re-elected. The alternative anti-corruption parties started from zero to garner sizeable votes, but not enough to win seats or become national parties.

It has been six months since the mayors, village chiefs and ward committees were elected. By now we should have started seeing some improvements in living conditions. Yet, the old woes are worse: the cities are still dust bowls, the highways are death traps and earthquake reconstruction hasn't picked up. In Far-Western Nepal, as our story on page 13 shows, wrangling between local governments and district administrations over budgets is actually costing lives. Another report on page 14 reveals how local governments have to start licensing groundwater, as aquifers across the country dry up due to over-extraction.

Kathmandu's newly-elected mayor is a disgrace: of the 101 tasks he grandiosely vowed to complete in his first 100 days he has not even carried out one. On the contrary, Mayor Bidya Sundar Shakya of the UML has desecrated heritage sites like Kasthamadap and Rani Pokhari (*see page 11*).

Who would have thought a Newar mayor would devalue the living traditions of the Valley, and work to actively destroy them? The only tradition Shakya seems to be upholding is incompetence, greed and corruption, which have become the hallmarks of Nepali politics. The mayor has let his voters down, with his priorities appearing to be acquiring a gas-guzzling SUV, a plush office and the other material trappings of his post.

Shakya had promised to rid the Kathmandu Valley of air pollution and traffic jams and remove dust, mud and potholes from the streets. He also made other sweeping promises, like opening subsidised restaurants for the poor and a parking mall. But he has not even delivered on basic promises.

Air pollution this winter is consistently in the danger zone, and this week it was in the 'Dangerous' purple band most days, as shown in the weekly chart based on measurements from monitoring stations in the city centre (*see page 10*).

In July, when Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba ordered all government authorities to expedite fixing the streets, Shakya refused, arguing that money spent in repairs during the monsoon would be wasted. The rains stopped four months ago, yet nothing has been done.

The problem is not that problems still exist, but that Mayor Shakya has not set in motion any coherent strategy to deal with them. He seems to think the historic Rani Pokhari can be converted into a commercial centre, Rana-era buildings should be torn down and replaced by concrete blocks and that he can build underground parking and office towers, instead of making Kathmandu more habitable and preserving its priceless past.

With the Left Alliance doing victory rolls, we can expect the mayor to be even more supercilious and bulldoze decisions. Prime Minister-in-waiting KP Oli is Shakya's godfather, and we dread to think what the next five years will mean for Kathmandu.

Meanwhile, more honest and accountable mayors and village chiefs across the country have been in legal limbo as the political parties try to hang on to their decision-making and revenue control powers. Things are even more messy because of the confusion over the jurisdiction and division of powers of the new provincial governments.

Added to all this is the corrosive post-election national politics in which what remains of the decimated Democratic Alliance is playing sore loser, while the triumphalist Left Alliance thinks it can now do anything it likes. The President has been caught in the middle of this tug-of-war, with her UML antecedents making the NC suspicious of her intentions. She is in a dilemma because the ordinance has such large legal holes they can easily be challenged in the courts.

It is a chicken-or-egg about which comes first: the Upper House of Parliament or when Prime Minister Deuba is going to hand over to Oli (*see Dinkar Nepal on page 4*).

In a democracy, people are sometimes swayed by populism to make mistakes and elect despots. In Kathmandu, people made a blunder by electing an incompetent mayor, who is loyal and accountable only to his party boss. Even elsewhere in the country, where people voted for stability as the avenue to prosperity, there are already early signs of disillusionment because nothing seems to have changed.



ONLINE PACKAGES



13 YEARS LATER

Sobendra Kafe was killed in a Maoist attack on a bus in Mainapokhari in Dolakha in 2004, but his wife Nani Maiya and their 20-day-old daughter Sona survived. Moved by the story, Nepal's foremost folk-rock singer, Amrit Gurung, penned a 25-minute ballad in his album *Ghatana*. Watch our video with Gurung's original soundtrack and clips from 13 years ago, and follow the singer's return to Charikot to meet Sona, now a teenager. Related article on page 8-9.



THE LAST DANCING BEARS

Even though it was banned in 1973, families in the Tarai have been using performance bears to make a living. The last two bears were rescued this week in Gaur after being followed by animal welfare activists and the police across the Tarai. The bears have been taken to a shelter in Amlekhganj, but the Khan family has lost its only source of income. The tradition will now die out, and the community will need a more sustainable, pain-free means of making money. Follow us to Siraha district to watch a video of the rescue.

HISTORICAL SITE, NOT FUN PARK

If you turn historical sites into fun parks, they will be treated as such, seekers will find peace elsewhere ('Cranes replace cranes in Buddha's birthplace', Om Astha Rai, #888).

Sameer Khanal

THE FALL OF THE NC

The NC lost because of its gross incompetence and role in the instability of the past 26 years ('The Promised Land', Editorial, #888). This election marks not just the end of a never-ending transition but also the end of the NC as the mainstay of Nepali politics. We are entering uncharted constitutional territory as the monarchy and the NC are either gone or becoming irrelevant.

Pankaj Nepali

NEPAL AND THE WORLD

I read *Nepali Times* and wait to see how Nepal relates to the rest of the world ('Into a state of uncertain stability', Om Astha Rai, #887). It seems that they face all the same problems and the same globalisation sweep that goes around the world. Energy matters, women's problems and such are all on the globalisation agenda. All in all, it reminds me of the elections in Germany, only you do not have a Merkel and you possibly have more corruption.

Mars

CHAOS AND INSTABILITY

Mark my words: we're nosediving further into chaos handing over power to the notorious Maoist and UML coalition. ('Bullet to ballot', Santa Gaha Magar, #887). I don't think we'll settle into prosperity yet. The 2017 election result was the stupidest thing since King Gyanendra gave up the throne.

Swapnil Acharya

HEARTY CONGRATULATIONS

Happy Anniversary, Kathmandu Chorale. ('The Kathmandu Chorale turns 35', Lucia De Vries, #887). Nice to read the history. I sang with you in 1996 and 1997, and now sing with a choir in Australia.

Bill Pigott

WHAT'S TRENDING



Cranes replace cranes in Buddha's birthplace

by Om Astha Rai

A proposal to build luxury hotels inside Lumbini's core area threatens to mangle the master plan and disturb the sanctity of the Buddha's birthplace in Nepal. Go online to read our investigative report, which created a worldwide wave on social media, and watch how one monk is fighting a lonely battle to save the Sarus cranes that have lived here since the Buddha's time.

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Mustang's prehistoric rock paintings

by Sahina Shrestha

Recently discovered cave paintings in the eastern part of Mustang could rewrite the history of the people of this part of Nepal, and indeed the country's art history. If you missed this most-read story of the week, visit nepalitimes.com

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QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
The new #Constitution stipulates that 33% of the members of both houses of Parliament have to be #women. However, only 6 of the 275 members are women – only 2.2%. <http://bit.ly/2B1XQJA> #NepalElections

Sushma Joshi @joshi_sushma
We should just rename it "The Patriarchy of Nepal." I assume none of the parties have read the Constitution.

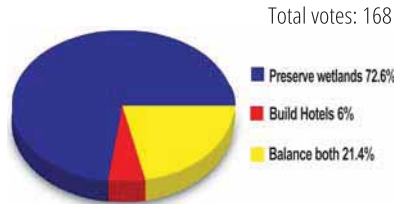
Nepali Times @nepalitimes
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david seddon @pigreen
powerful call to observe the Buddha's own wisdom, treasure the physical environment and wildlife, and constrain rampant luxury hotel building — join the movement to preserve the living heritage that makes Lumbini special



Weekly Internet Poll #889

Q. Should wetlands be preserved at Lumbini or are more hotels a priority?



Weekly Internet Poll #890
To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Do you believe the current deadlock over the Upper House is the final hurdle to political stability for Nepal?



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A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER  



Rising from the ashes

If the Nepali Congress doesn't overhaul its leadership, it will soon be extinct

After being ravaged by the Left Alliance in recent elections, the Nepali Congress is fighting tooth and nail to cling on to a few seats in the 59-member Upper House.

The new Constitution has adopted a bicameral system with a mix of FPTP and proportional system of representation for the Lower House, and purely proportionate



CONNECTING DOTS
Dinkar Nepal

elections through the heads and deputies of local bodies and members of provincial assemblies for the Upper House.

But the Constitution is not explicit on the process for the Upper House, and that ambiguity has created a post-election deadlock. Tweaking the rules may actually lead to a difference of about eight seats for the two main alliances in Nepali politics. These may be the only seats the Nepali Congress ends up with in the Upper House.

If the majority voting system is followed, as demanded by the Left Alliance, the NC will have no representation at all in the Upper House. A stable government with a strong mandate is a desirable outcome, but an opposition as weak as this is bad news for our democracy.

In politics, like in war, heads roll after a major defeat. Or at least, they are supposed to: an organisation then regains vitality so it can live to fight another day.

Which is why the NC young turk, Gagan Thapa, has demanded a special convention of the party, a call supported by many. But even after the devastating results, party president and Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba seems to be in no mood to let go.

"The responsibility of a loss of such magnitude cannot be put only on the party president," said Deuba loyalist Balkrishna Khand, displaying shameless sycophancy. "Each and every member of the party is responsible for this loss. There is no question of change of leadership."

Even if Deuba is removed through a special convention, there is a real danger that the quest for change of leadership will go in the wrong direction. There is already a call for heeding dynastic credentials for leadership among the members of the party.

The Grand Old Party of Nepal was formed in India in 1950 by BP Koirala after merging the Nepali National Congress with the Nepali Democratic Congress. He remained in charge of the party for 25

years, his brothers, Matrika and Girija, were at the helm for 4 and 14 years respectively. Cousin Sushil Koirala took over after Girija's death and presided for 6 years.

In the 77-year history of the NC, the Koiralas have been in charge for more than 49 years. Even now, if the change of guard really happens, there is a likelihood that the present general secretary, Shashank Koirala (B P's youngest son), will claim the leadership. Another aspirant is Sujata Koirala (Girija's daughter).

A dynastic succession at this stage will make the party even weaker. Although charismatic leaders like Gagan Thapa are still reluctant to claim leadership, many supporters feel it is time for leaders like him to take bigger responsibilities. With the benefit of hindsight, some have even gone to the extent of predicting that had Thapa been promoted as prime ministerial material, first-time voters could have voted for the NC in the recent polls.

More than half of Nepal's population is under 25, and in the next election in five years more than 20% of voters will be new. That is a huge chunk of the electorate, and because they will all be young they will look for fresh, youthful leaders. This is why the NC needs to rejuvenate itself.

Analysing the voting pattern in the three sets of elections this year gives an indication of what is in store in 2022. The 'cloud judgment' has voted for stability at the centre, while voting was for individuals at the local level. Successive elections since the end of the conflict have proved that Nepal has an unforgiving swing vote constituency.

Lal Babu Pandit, the UML leader popular for his honest frugality, defeated Shekhar Koirala on the home turf of the Koiralas. This should also prove that a dynastic succession will send the wrong message to Nepali youth. The Congress needs new hope, and hope can move mountains. 🇳🇵

prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

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To Zaporizhia

Turkish Airlines inaugurated its first flight to Zaporizhia, the airlines 6th destination in Ukraine, from 28 December. To celebrate the expansion, Turkish is offering a special introductory fare.



World Bank support

The World Bank has provided the Government of Nepal with US\$300 million in addition to a 2015 US\$200 million credit to assist in the Earthquake Housing Reconstruction Project. The earthquake's impact is estimated to be equivalent to 35% of Nepal's GDP, with recovery needs totalling about US\$7 billion.

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ALL PHOTOS: RYAN HENG CHANG

RYAN HENG CHANG
in PARSA

Sloth bears Rangeela and Sridevi had their noses pierced with a hot iron rod and a rope tied through the cavity when they were both seven months old. But thanks to the efforts of the Nepal police their years of torture and captivity have ended. Authorities apprehended the last two known dancing bears in

Nepal and their owners at 9pm on a foggy winter night Tuesday on the outskirts of Gaur. They had been on the run for four days, travelling 160km across the eastern Tarai from Sukhipur of Siraha District. With the use of sophisticated cell-phone tracking by the Central Investigation Bureau and information from animal welfare activists, the Rautahat police in Gaur were able to geolocate the bears' owners, before moving in to make the arrest this week. The Jane Goodall Institute

Nepal provided crucial ground intelligence on which the local authorities in Simara could act. Two trackers from the foundation had been following the bear owners from Siraha pretending to be buyers of herbal remedies. Gaining the trust of the owners, the trackers were able to obtain video footage of the dancing bears and maintain close contact with family members and the owners themselves. Rangeela, a 19-year-old male, and Sridevi, 17, were fed a diet of milk and rice two times a day. They

Dancing to freedom

Nepal's last two remaining dancing bears are rescued from owners



were controlled by the nose with a piece of rope while the owners carried sticks to keep the bears in check. Poached in the wild in India as cubs, the bears had their canine teeth removed, and suffered trauma and injuries throughout their lives because of harsh training methods. Dancing bears are forced to perform in front of crowds, standing on their hind legs and swaying left and right. The pace of the dance is controlled by tension on the rope through their nose. Performing bears were banned

in India in 1972, and in Nepal a year later. Rescued bears in India are often sent to sanctuaries in Agra and Begaluru in India. At the Gaur police station after being rescued, the bears showed visible signs of stress and aggression, cowering, pacing and sucking their paws. "They are clearly upset: pacing up and down, making noises and jumping on benches," said Neil D'Cruze of World Animal Protection (WAP), an expert on captive sloth bears who has rehabilitated bears in India. "It's really tough, watching the condition of the bears. The only positive note is that very soon the bears will be off to somewhere they can live the rest of their lives happily," he added.

Nepal's National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1973 banned the possession of sloth bears for dancing, however on the fringes of society in Nepal and India the illegal practice continued because law enforcement turned a blind eye. Anyone caught with sloth bears faces a Rs10,000 fine and Rs40,000 bail upon arrest, but in this case the bear owners cooperated with the authorities and were released. Rangeela and Sridevi were taken to Parsa National Park, where they will be temporarily cared for. The two are believed to be the last dancing bears in captivity in Nepal. Said Police Superintendent Yagya Binod Pokharel in Gaur: "This is not a deliberate, organised crime, but rather the remnant of a practice that has been going on even though it was criminalised over 40 years ago."

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BEAR RESCUE

Watch an eye-witness video of the rescue of two sloth bears from captivity this week, and follow the plight of their owners of the dancing bears who have now lost their traditional livelihood.

nepalitimes.com

Along the porous, Tarai border between Nepal and India, owners of illegal dancing bears have been dodging the police ever since the practice was banned in 1973. Yet on both sides of the border, circus bears have been performing, moving from the cities to the hinterland.

Over the years income from bear dancing fell, and some animal owners abandoned their ancestral profession while a few holdouts remained. The organised practice of bear-dancing faded out in India in 2009, and in Nepal this week (*see story, left*).

Under cover of the impenetrable Tarai fog Saturday morning, four bear owners left their home village of Sukhipur in Siraha District and led Rangeela and Sridevi onto a public bus on the East-West highway. They had been using performing bears as a source of income for generations.

Contacted by animal welfare activists from the Jane Goodall Institute, who were offering a friendly handover of the bears in return for compensation, the suspicious owners decided instead to flee westwards with the bears.

Mohamad Saabir, Mohamad Momtaz, Mohamad Salman and Mohamad Afzal Khan, aged 13-21, belong to one of the last families in Nepal to have dancing bears as a source of income. The Khan family are Madari Pathan people, and are closely related to the Kalandar bear-keepers of North India.

Although the women and older men of the Khan clan are sharecroppers near the town of Lahan, the younger men never settled, living a nomadic, hand-to-



A dying practice

mouth lifestyle unchanged since the 16th century, taking the bears from town to town.

"We only work with bears, it is passed down from my grandfather," says Rijwan Khan, a brother of the detained bear owners, who says people pay him Rs10 to see the animals, but some tourists give him up to Rs500.

Year-round, the bear owners travelled throughout the Tarai, between Mechi and Birganj, sometimes even hitch-hiking to Pokhara. As recently as 10 years ago it was socially acceptable to see bear-dancing on the side of highways, but the practice began dying out. Bear dancing was the

Khans only stable source of income but now even it is gone.

Ownership of the bears was more than a source of income, it also provided a sense of pride. Mohamad Saabir was weeping as the bears were led away at the Gaur police station. "Will you look after the bears?" he pleaded with the police. "Please be kind to them."

Despite the pain and confinement, the bears have been a large part of the owners' lives. They have been companions, pets, and a major part of the Madaris' reputation as travelling entertainers. With generations of bears passed down from father to son, and as brutal and barbaric as

the practice may seem, it is their heritage.

"What do we eat and how do we eat now? All of our earnings are gone," said 13-year-old Afzal, who had been following his brothers' footsteps and would have been a future bear owner himself.

"Confiscating bears from their owners is like telling a touring rock star to part with his favourite guitar," says sloth bear expert Neil D'Cruze of World Animal Protection, who was involved in this week's rescue.

Manoj Gautam of the Jane Goodall Institute Nepal pulled Afzal aside and told him that the confiscation of the bears may be

"the best thing to happen" to a boy of his age.

Gautam told us: "This is not the future: he should be in school, learning and being exposed to new things, and choose his own path."

According to Gautam: "It's not about separating particular groups from their livelihoods, but making them realise they have many other options that do not involve inflicting pain and cruelty."

The Jane Goodall Institute has rehabilitated two of the bear owners as legitimate bear-carers at Parsa National Park. They will earn Rs 700 a day until the bears are permanently resettled.

Ryan Heng Cheng

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Coming full circle

Nani Maiya and baby survived a Maoist attack 13 years ago in which her husband was killed



SONG OF LOSS AND HOPE: Krishna Maya with her 20-day-old granddaughter Sona (*top*) in a picture in the *Kathmandu Post* taken by Gopal Chitrakar at Chhauni Military Hospital after the family was airlifted from Mainapokhari by helicopter on 9 May 2004 after the firefight.

Rajesh KC's photograph of Nani Maiya breastfeeding Sona in 2005 (*right*) and Nani Maiya after opening A People War Photo Exhibition in Jiri in 2007 (*middle, top*).

Rajendra Manadhar's photograph of Nani Maiya and Sona (*middle, below*) was included in a follow-up book of conflict images, *People After War*, published in 2010.

Amrit Gurung (*at left, overleaf*) with Nani Maiya Kafle and Sona in Charikot last week — 13 years after he composed a folk-rock ballad about the shootout in Mainapokhari in which Nani Maiya's husband, Sobendra, was among 15 people killed.

AMRIT GURUNG

I revisited Dolakha last week to meet Nani Maiya Kafle and her daughter Sona, about whom I had composed a song that told the story of a tragic event during the conflict.

Sona, just 20 days old, was travelling with her parents in a bus from Jiri to Kathmandu on 9 May 2004. When they reached Mainapokhari of Dolakha the bus suddenly stopped at a Maoist roadblock. Soldiers in civvies were travelling in the bus, and fearing they would be found out, started shooting at the Maoists.

The firefight was brief, but at the end of it at least 15 people



RAJESH KC / A PEOPLE WAR

were killed, 7 of them civilian passengers. The family of English teacher Sobendra Kafle, his mother Krishna Maya, wife Nani Maiya and baby Sona, were trapped inside the bus.

As bullets ricocheted all around, Nani Maiya pushed Sona under the seat in the driver's cabin and ducked. When the shooting finally stopped, Nani Maiya, herself wounded, found her daughter. But her husband Sobendra was lying lifeless in a pool of blood.

The Maoist insurgency was at its peak, and our Nepathya band was in Birganj on a Peace Concert Tour that week when I came across Nani Maiya's poignant story in *Kantipur*, written by Rajendra Manandhar with a photograph by Gopal Chitrakar of Sona in her grandmother's lap at Chhauni

Hospital.

My promoter Kiran Krishna Shrestha and Arpan Sharma of nepa~laya immediately tracked down Nani Maiya and we drove to Dolakha. The trip was risky because the highway had many Army and Police checkpoints, and between them there was no government presence.

As we approached Mude, we passed the Horse Shoe Resort, run by Mohan Khatri who was hacked to death by the Maoists in 2002. The charismatic retired major was popular in the area for building schools and health posts, but the Maoists suspected he was a spy. We passed his van, burnt and abandoned in Mude.

We then picked up Rajendra Manadhar in Charikot and drove down to the Tama Kosi and up



KIRAN KRISHNA SHRESTHA



RAJENDRA MANANDHAR / PEOPLE AFTER WAR

the other side to Mainapokhari. There were still blood stains on the asphalt where the firefight took place. Such was the fear that no one wanted to speak to us, but a group of children innocently told us all the details. They took us to see the bullet-ridden bus, which still had bits of abandoned clothing.

Once I got back, I collected my thoughts and started composing and recording the 25 minute folk-rock ballad that was released as the title track of the album *Ghatana*, in 2005. We performed this song as our opening act in concerts in Nepal and abroad in the year that followed. Audiences were visibly moved because it was a vivid musical portrayal of the tragic reality of Nepal at the time.

I met Nani Maiya and Sona for the first time in 2005 in Charikot,

during our Sundar Shanta Nepal Peace Concert Tour. Ever since, whenever in Dolakha I have made it a point to see them, including during the inauguration of nepa~laya's A People War Photo Exhibition tour in 2007. Rajesh KC's portrait of Nani Maiya breastfeeding two-month-old Sona was included in the book on which the exhibition was based.

Kiran and I offered to sponsor Sona's education in a boarding school in Kathmandu, but Nani Maiya was reluctant to let her daughter go. We then arranged for her to accompany her daughter and work and live in the same school. She refused this offer as well.

Last week, Kiran and I travelled to Charikot to meet Nani Maiya and hand over the financial



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Times.com

e at Mainapokhari

band was killed. This week she had to congratulate the Maoist in-charge who won the election.



KIRAN KRISHNA SHRESTHA

support we had promised her. Sona is now a bright 13-year-old in Grade 6. Nani Maiya is still a teacher. She said she regretted not taking up our offer to work in the city. "Kathmandu may be dirty and crowded, but it would have been far safer than the village," she said.

We wondered why she said the village was not safe but then

learnt that the Maoist guerrilla commander at the time of the Maina Pokhari encounter, Comrade Bishal, had just been elected to the provincial assembly. After the election results came out, the winners of the Left Alliance organised a victory rally in the village. Nani Maiya was asked to congratulate the victorious

candidates. She garlanded Parvati Gurung and Pashupati Chaulagain of the UML, but when it was the turn of Comrade Bishal her hands shook, and tears rolled down her cheeks.

"For a moment I was overcome with emotion, and I froze," Nani Maiya recalled. "I finally put the garland on him, and couldn't

believe how I brought myself to congratulate a person whose party was responsible for my husband's death. I hope we never have to see another war: I don't wish it on anyone to experience what I went through."

We passed Mude again on the drive back to Kathmandu. The Horse Shoe Resort looked

run down, but the surrounding scenery is still as stunning as when Major Mohan Khatri and Sarbendra Kafle lived among these mountains. 🇳🇵

nepalitimes.com

Go online to watch video and listen to Nepathaya's album *Ghatana*



EVENTS

Christmas Goodies



Sweet Delights,
A box of sweetness never hurt anyone. An array of Christmas bakes for your dear ones awaits at The Shangri-La Bakery. Traditional Yule logs, minced pies, cakes, plum pudding, cookies, chocolates and many more.
Hotel Shangri-La, Lazimpat, (01) 4412999

Hyatt Hampers,
An elegant custom-made Christmas hamper full of festive treats and handcrafted confectionaries is available for takeaway at The Lobby Lounge.
Daily, 12-9pm, Hyatt Regency, Boudha, (01) 5171234



Local Mini Market,
Take a stroll around the stalls of local vendors at the mini market. Find new lifestyle products, hand-crafted goods and organic foods that make unique Nepal-made gifts perfect for your loved ones.
23 December, 10am-4pm, The Local Project Nepal, Jhamsikhel, 9808110115



Christmas Adventure,
Compete in Slack Line and the Pump Track Ride and have an adventurous Christmas this year. Visit for the arts & craft stall, food, music, games bingo and many more.
23-25 December, 10am-6pm, Amrit Marg Bhawagwan Bahal, Thamel, (01) 4433515

Online Food Fest,
Gather your foodie friends to play various online games on Facebook and Instagram and win exciting prizes and discount coupons. It's part of the Foodmandu Online Food Festival, where foods from 33 different restaurants are delivered free of charge.
22 December- 5 January 2018, Log on to www.foodmandu.com/foodfest



Sculpture Exhibition,
A collection of 22 sculptures, Amulya Thopa, by Shyam Krishna Shrestha, presents realistic expressions on motherhood, war, natural disasters, feelings and many more. Mahadev, Prashab and Amulya Thopa are some of the sculptures that will leave visitors in awe.
22-23 December, Nepal Art Council, Baber Mahal

Secret Santa,
Purchase locally made gifts worth Rs200 at the KJC Christmas market and join the Secret Santa game to exchange gifts. Registration is compulsory to play.
23 December, 12pm onwards, Moksh Bar, Jhamsikhel, (01) 5013554, 9813556945, info@katjazz.com.np

MUSIC



House of Music
Unplugged Aawaj with Ranzen on the deck is all set to keep you moving with good music. Accompanied by Naaga cusine from Dzukou Tribal, your Christmas will be delightful.
24 December, 7-11:30pm, Amrit Marg, Thamel, Rs 500, 9851075172

KJC Bigband,
Pump up for Christmas with a musical performance by KJC BigBand and other international artists accompanied by the Christmas Chorale. Tickets at Moksh and Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory; for discounts, book in advance.
23 December, 12pm, Moksh Bar, Jhamsikhel, Rs 400, (01) 5013554, 9813556945, info@katjazz.com.np



Royal Fusion,
Experience live fusion music performed by one of the best guitarist of Nepal, Anil Shahi, and the band, followed by a special dinner with a Turkey barbeque.
24 December, 5-10pm, Crown Multi-Cuisine Restaurant, Royal Empire Boutique Hotel, Subarna Shumsher Marg, (01) 4000538/4000542

Acoustic gig
Singer Rajesh Nepali and pianist Ayub Bhandari will be playing some great acoustic numbers.
29 December, 7-10pm, Evoke Café and Bistro, Jhamsikhel, 9851111051

DINING



Hyatt Regency,
Reserve your seats at The Café or Rox Restaurant at the Hyatt for a lovely Christmas dinner accompanied by a glass of mulled wine or a brunch with family.
Hyatt Regency, Boudha, (01) 5171234

Pauline's Garden
Morel mushroom roasted chicken, grilled salmon steak and morel & shitake risotto with a paneer papillotte: a special menu with live piano for Christmas Eve.
Aarek Marg, Baluwatar, 7pm onwards, For reservations: 9823747524/9843531985

Gokarna Resort
A lavish buffet and unlimited glass of mulled wine awaits you on Christmas day at The Courtyard.
Ranikunj, For more details: (01) 4451212

Shangri-La
A musical dinner on the eve or a brunch the other day, the choice is yours for Christmas. A piece of advice: don't miss out on the traditional turkey dinner with pies and pudding.
24-25 December, The Last Horizon Café, Hotel Shangri-La, Lazimpat, Rs2500-3333 per person (Nett), For reservation: (01) 4412999



Fairfield by Marriott
Dive into the Christmas spirit with a carving station of roast turkey and cranberry sauce or pork loin, while grooving to a live performance.
24-25 December, KAVA, Keshar Mahal Marg, Thamel, R 3000/5000, For reservations: (01) 4217999

GETAWAY



Rupakot Resort,
Make your reservations to celebrate this year's Christmas in nature's lap. The package at Rs 8,625 (net per person) for Nepalis only, includes three meals. The offer is valid till 31 December.
Rupakot, Pokhara, 9856038043

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

Fairfield Marriot,
Avail a package at Rs 10,000 (single) and Rs 12,000 (couple) to make this Christmas meaningful.
Fairfield Marriott, Tridevi Sadak, Thamel, (01) 4217999



The Last Resort,
You can make this Christmas adventurous by doing Bungee or Swing Jump over the Bhote Khosi river 160 metres below or mountain bike to the Tibetan border.
Mandala Street, Thamel, (01) 4700525

Park Village,
For those who are looking to escape the hustle bustle of the city. Spend a night at this hotel and enjoy a brunch package this Christmas.
25 December, 11: 30 am-3pm (brunch timing), Rs 2,200 (exclusive of taxes), (01) 4375280



Temple Tree Resort and Spa,
For those looking for a peaceful Christmas celebration. Pamper yourself with a massage parlour and sauna. It'll be hard to leave once you enter.
Gaurighat, Lakeside, (061) 465819

MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI

You are the sky.
Everything else -

it's just the weather.

- Perma Chidran

OUR PICK

Opens in Kathmandu on 29 December

Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle
This action movie by Columbia Pictures is based on the lives of four high school kids and their discovery of an old video game — Jumanji. In the movie directed by Jake Kadsa, the kids are drawn into the game's jungle setting and take up the adult avatars. To win the game, they have to go make an adventurous journey in the jungle and discover what Alan Parrish left 20 years ago in the original *Jumanji* movie.

AIR QUALITY INDEX**KATHMANDU, 15-21 December**

301 – 500 Hazardous							
201 – 300 Very Unhealthy							
151 – 200 Unhealthy							
101 – 150 Unhealthy for sensitive groups							
50 – 100 Moderate							
0 – 50 Good							

FRIDAY
Dec 15

SATURDAY
Dec 15

SUNDAY
Dec 17

MONDAY
Dec 18

TUESDAY
Dec 19

WEDNESDAY
Dec 20

THURSDAY
Dec 21

Readers will be shocked by this week's day-by-day graph of the average air quality in the city centre of Kathmandu. Except for Tuesday, the concentrations of particles smaller than 2.5 microns reached the purple 'Very Unhealthy' band daily. These are the most dangerous pollutants because the particles can cross the air-blood barrier in the lungs. These readings mean that it is actually harmful to take morning walks or undertake any outdoor activity in the morning and evening peak pollution times. The measurements are taken at the US Embassy's monitoring station in Phora Darbar. For more details, and comparisons with other Asian cities go to: <https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>



GOPEN RAI

SAHINA SHRESTHA

It was 11.30 one morning this week as people started filing into the sixth-floor office of Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC) in Bagh Darbar. The new mayor had not arrived yet, and the waiting crowd soon overflowed into the corridors.

Among them was conservation advocate Alok Tuladhar and heritage architect Sudarsan Tiwari, with a dozen or so young activists. The group wanted to lodge a protest about the much-delayed and controversial reconstruction of the historic Rani Pokhari, where a contractor had started building a concrete wall.

“I don’t know if it is worthwhile meeting him, but last time we

got some results,” says Tuladhar, referring to a citizen-led protest to stop the use of cement in the reconstruction of Bagopaleswor Temple in the middle of Rani Pokhari last year.

It was on the first anniversary of the earthquake a year ago that President Bidya Bhandari launched the National Reconstruction Campaign from Rani Pokhari, amidst much fanfare. The KMC started rebuilding the temple in the middle of the pond but had to stop after a public outcry over the use of cement pillars. The Department of Archaeology has since taken responsibility for the temple, while the KMC is responsible for the pond and its periphery.

While the activists waited for the mayor, a kilometre away workers were busy pouring concrete into the perimeter of the

dry pond. The activists wanted to exercise their right to information to inspect the designs and to push for the temple and pond to be restored using the original design, traditional technology and materials.

“One year ago, we had protested the use of concrete and other modern materials in the reconstruction of the Balgopaleswor temple and it was eventually stopped. But only the temple was taken as a heritage site and not the pond,” says Tiwari.

The KMC says it wants to “beautify and modernise” Rani Pokhari, complete with a *son et lumière* fountain, a park and coffee shop. This violates Nepal’s Ancient Monument Preservation Act which says historic sites over 100 years old have to be preserved in their original form.

On Queen’s pond



(Above) An image of Rani Pokhari from the German publication “Die Reise Seiner Königlichen Hoheit des Prinzen Waldemar von Preußen nach Indien in den Jahren 1844 bis 1846” (The journey of His Royal Highness Prince Waldemar of Prussia to India: in the years 1844 to 1846).

KMC is currently building a concrete wall and an amphitheatre on the south side of Rani Pokhari (left). Heritage experts say this will decrease the size of the pond by 20%.

The KMC has already scraped off the impervious black clay soil that prevented the water from seeping out of the pond, and is building a concrete retaining wall. The first phase involves beautification and building toilets: the pond will be filled in the second phase.

Back at KMC there was still no sign of the mayor, so the activists spoke to engineer Uttar Kumar Regmi, who was in a combative mood. “The construction is a part of protection and conservation so that the pond lasts for a long time,” he says. “Cement has been used before and a musical fountain was added during the SAARC Summit, how come you were not protesting then?”

The activists finally locate the mayor at the City Hall and two hours later, Mayor Bidya

Sundar Shakya finally meets them. The activists lay out their case, saying KMC is not showing any commitment to respect the Valley’s cultural heritage, and Rani Pokhari is just the latest example.

Shakya looks defiant. After listening to the activists, he replies: “There are more than 140 such projects going on in the city, I am not aware of the details of this one. But we need to do more than what our ancestors did.”

The mayor’s plan is to turn religious sites into tourism destinations by modernising the facilities. He assures the activists that he will take up the case with locals and experts.

As the activist group gets up to leave, what Mayor Shakya says next give them little hope: “But Rani Pokhari will need a coffee shop. We will build it.” ☑

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Star Wars: The Last Jedi

It's not easy to write about a film that you really like, mainly because the task of reviewing, in my mind, should not include savaging the hard work of others (unless there is a clear ethical issue at hand), but to give an insight into the motivations behind why something was made, and, if it went wrong, how or why.



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

To compensate for the above overly lofty paragraph, I will go on to say that the latest Star Wars film is categorically pretty awesome, and hard to dislike, unless, as can sometimes happen, you've reached the theatre in a foul mood, and had a very bad day to boot. My personal

experience in the cinema here was one of the best I've ever had, that too, with a full theatre: the fans were wildly enthusiastic, but not obnoxious, clapping and cheering with the iconic opening title sequence that is now so essential to the Star Wars films.

Two and a half hours fly by with jokes, homages, great action sequences that are designed as set pieces but are so organic to the film that they fit right in, and a few very memorable new characters, including Laura Dern as Vice Admiral Amilyn Holdo (resistance NOT empire), who elevate this already rather good film to the realm of the truly great.

These new Star Wars films were rebooted when Disney bought the rights to Lucasfilm, and while there was initial trepidation, the three films released so far — the first of a new trilogy, *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (2015), and *Star Wars: Rogue One* (2016) have been very good, with this second installment of a planned trilogy being the best so far.

Directed by the talented, original Rian Johnson, who made the distinctive *Brick* (2005) and *Looper* (2012), this film gains a

certain holistic universe through his sure, innovative direction, including a renewed attention to the meaning of 'The Force,' a marvelous visual potential never really developed after the first trilogy.

There is also a welcome goofy inclusion of the loveable flora and fauna that made the Star Wars universe so endearing, memorable, and, hilarious. After all, Chewbacca (Joonas Suotama, taking over from Peter Mayhew), R2D2 (Jimmy Vee) and the Ewoks are all terribly hammy, but what would the Star Wars films be without the BB-8s (puppeteers Dave Chapman and Brian Herring) and, in this particular film, the emotive little begging birds on Luke Skywalker's (played by the now formidable Mark Hamill) craggy island and the curious, gorgeous, crystal foxes that take a final stand with the rebels on a bleak but beautiful planet full of salt flats.

There is character development here, with both Rey (Daisy Ridley) and Kylo Ren, aka Ben Skywalker (Adam Driver) giving performances that send chills down the spine, a trait shared by all the good Star Wars films. To say more would be to give too much away.

The performances here are deeply moving, made particularly so by the death of Carrie Fisher, who played Princess Leia and justly takes on the mantle of General Organa in this film. Every other line seems to celebrate her life and mourn her passing, and so it should be in a series of films made great by such an individual performance, one that will haunt us for decades to come.



Watch trailer online

nepalitimes.com

HAPPENINGS



GOPEN RAI

COMRADES-IN-ARMS: Chairman of the CPN-UML, KP Oli (*right*) congratulates his colleague Madhav Kumar Nepal at a program to facilitate victors in provincial and parliamentary elections from the Left Alliance in Kathmandu on Wednesday.



RSS

MULTI-DIMENSIONAL STUDY: Swarnim Wagle, Vice-chair of the National Planning Commission, launches Nepal's first National Multi-dimensional Poverty Index survey in Kathmandu on Wednesday which showed absolute poverty is down to 28.7%.



JICA NEPAL

BETTER PREPAREDNESS: Lalitpur Mayor Chiribabu Maharjan (*left*) and Chief Representative of JICA Nepal, Jun Sakuma (*centre*) lay the foundation stone on Friday for Guita Domar Disaster Management Park in Lalitpur.



SAHINA SHRESTHA

70 YEARS: US Ambassador to Nepal, Alaina B Teplitz, and Nepal's former ambassador to the US Shankar P Sharma, answer audience questions during a discussion on the US-Nepal Bilateral Relationship: The Next 70 Years and Beyond, in Kathmandu on Tuesday.



BIKRAM RAI

FOCUS: Bhairawa Gladiators take on the Kathmandu Kings 11 in an Everest Premier League (EPL) Twenty20 cricket match in Kirtipur on Wednesday.

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PRAKASH SINGH in BAJURA,
TULARAM PANDE in KALIKOT

Local governments were given responsibility for health care after elections earlier this year, but here in remote western Nepal the change has left people without medicines and essential services, like check-ups for pregnant women, because of wrangling between new local governments and the district health offices (DHO).

The central government handed over responsibility for health posts, primary health centres, community health units, urban health centres and ayurved centres to local governments on 26 August, and now sends funds to local governments to operate these facilities. But many municipalities and village councils have failed to procure drugs and medical equipment. Rana Bhandari, for instance, went to the Rugin Health Post in Bajura with fever, but there were no medicines. He had to

trek three hours to Kawadi Bazar and buy them from a private drugstore. Gangaram Luwar was taken to Kolti Primary Health Centre with high fever, but had to return without treatment. Dharma BK took his 10-year-old son to Barabise health post with severe diarrhoea but there was no medicine. Deputy Mayor Shristi Regmi of Budhinanda Municipality in Bajura admits that health centres have been without drugs due to their inability to plan on time. “The municipality has no staff, and

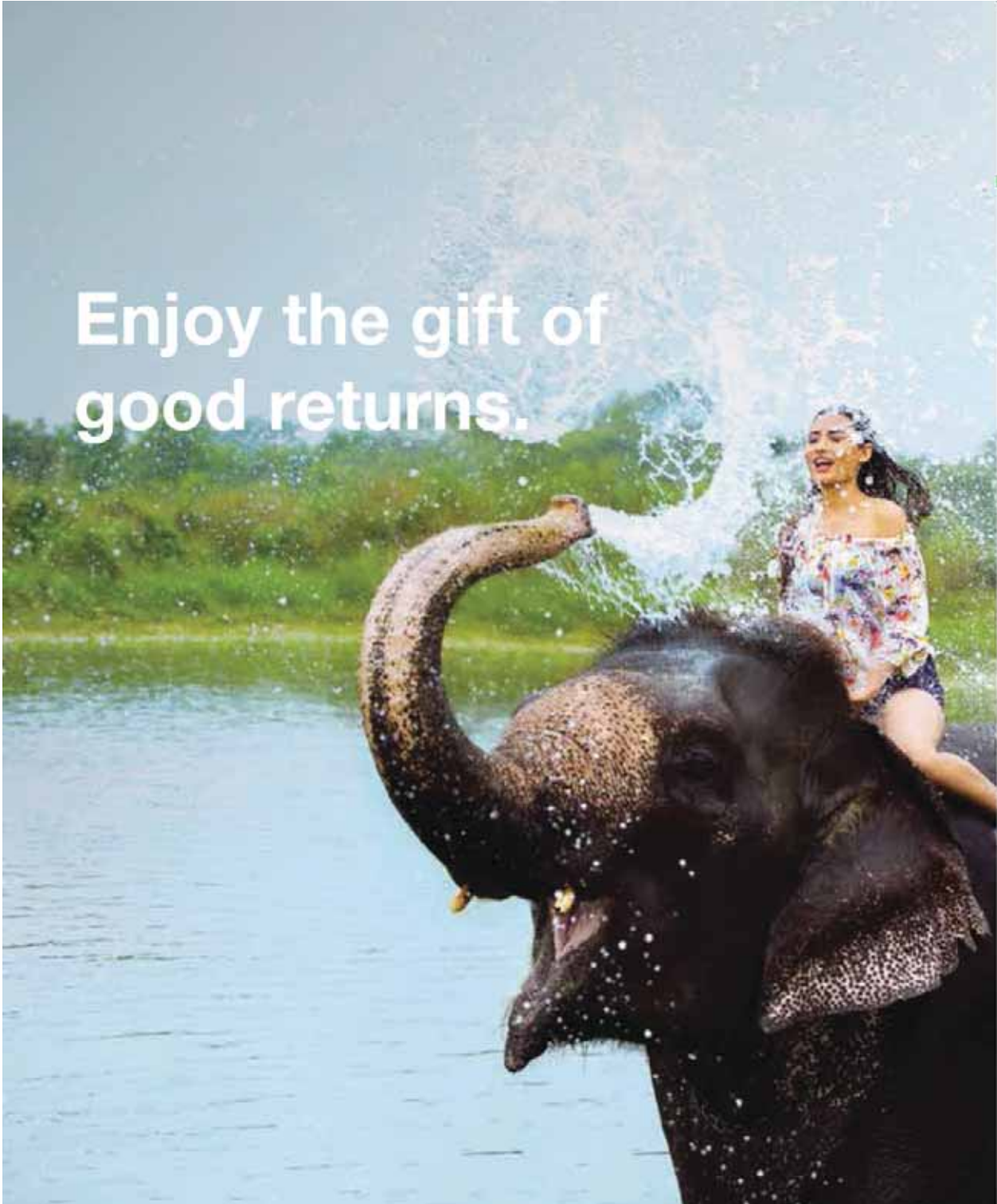
POST-ELECTION NEGLECT: Gangaram Luwar (left) was taken to Kolti Primary Health Centre in Bajura with high fever, but returned without treatment because it had no medicine because of post-poll confusion about jurisdiction.

since it doesn’t have a plan yet, the budget has not been released,” he said. Health facilities in Baitadi are no better off. DHO Chief Gunaraj Awasthi said the Dasrath Chand Municipality had not heeded calls to provide essential medicines and health materials. “We submitted a 61-page form to the municipality to replenish supplies after facing a shortage of drugs and health equipment,” said Awasthi. “We made our requests in writing and verbally but the people’s representatives ignored us.”

Kalikot grapples with similar problems. DHO Chief Kaushal Ali said the local level receives funds from the centre but does not pass on the money to the health office. “The local units say the funds are meant for particular localities. There’s no budget for the district hospital,” said Ali. They argue that the operation and management of the district hospital is the responsibility of Khadachakra Municipality, he added. At Khadachakra Municipality, Mayor Pande says all local authorities should contribute, since the hospital serves patients from across the district. Mohammad Daud, chief public health administrator at the health ministry and coordinator of the federalism implementation unit, stresses that coordination is key to ensuring availability of medicines since health organisations have been handed over to the local level

and provincial governments are yet to be formed. Yet, problems multiply, with the result that people in remote hill districts must walk for hours to private hospitals to buy basic drugs, paying high prices for medicines meant to be available at public health facilities free of cost. Following complaints, the health ministry on 18 September directed the local governments, DHOs and health centres to make necessary drugs and health equipment available, ordering federal units to immediately create stocks of 70 essential drugs for free distribution. But local governments in Bajura and Baitadi have not followed these instructions. “Stocks have run out. We need money for fresh purchases but the local governments do not release funds,” said Baitadi DHO’s Awasthi. Daud says both the local governments and DHOs are responsible for supply management until the provincial governments takes shape, and stressed that the government has already released the necessary funds. Health facilities in Bajura are now relying on medicines donated by non-government organisations like Phase Nepal. Public Health Officer Ramesh Kunwar at DHO Bajura said other health schemes had been affected since the municipality has not released the budget. For example, the Rs400 allowance for regular check-ups for pregnant women, Rs1,500 to encourage women to deliver in health facilities and Nyano Jhola warm clothes initiative, have been withheld. Said Kunwar: “We try to use our internal resources as far as possible, but they cannot be given to everyone this way.”

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AQUA GUARD: A technician inspects filters for a deep tubewell that pumps water up from 200m below the ground for a neighbourhood in Patan.

KUNDA DIXIT

Kathmandu Valley's water table is falling fast as demand for water empties aquifers

SONIA AWALE

Every morning, Kathmandu Valley's neighbourhoods wake up to the sound of clanging jars as people queue up for water. That is the visible manifestation of the worsening water crisis, but beneath the city there is another invisible emergency: the water table is falling at up to 1m per year because of over-extraction.

The Valley used to be a lake bed, and the only source of water here is what falls as rain and seeps underground. The soil beneath our feet is a gigantic sponge, and it is going dry because more water is being pumped out than is naturally replenished.

Kathmandu's 3.5 million people need 360 million litres of water per day: half of that is met through groundwater extraction. This is

causing the water table to fall an average of 80cm per year, exposing the Valley to dangers like sinkholes, dying forests and contamination. Users also have to drill deeper every year, and need more energy to pump the water up.

"We have been measuring the water table every month for the last 20 years, and there is no doubt it is falling sharply everywhere," says hydro-geologist Surendra Raj Shrestha at the Ground Water Resource Development Board.

He says if groundwater depletion continues at the present rate, Kathmandu could face the kind of land subsidence seen in Bangkok and Mexico City. The remaining underground water will also have an increased concentration of ammonia, nitrates, iron and even arsenic, making it unsuitable for human consumption.

The bowl-shaped Kathmandu Valley was naturally designed for groundwater storage. Every monsoon, most of the rain falling on the hills and the Valley floor percolated down into the shallow layers, while deeper aquifers collected geological water over millions of years. Kathmandu's hospitals, hotels and factories are now extracting this 'fossil' water.

The geological formation of

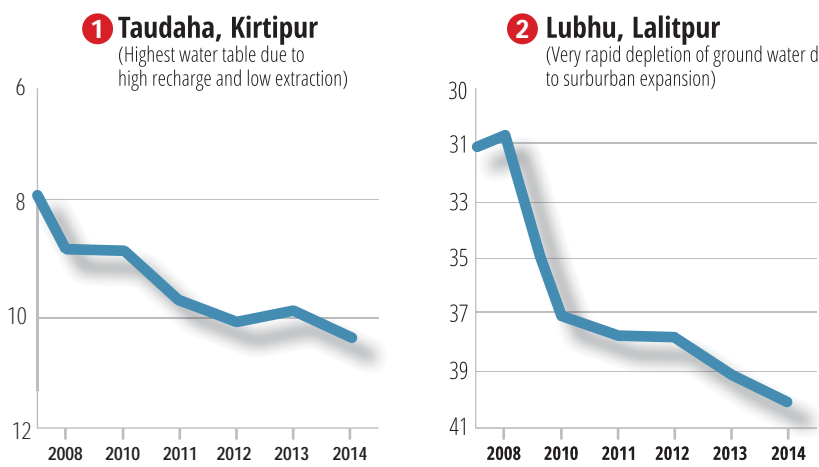
Kathmandu means the soil on the northern and southern edges of the valley floor is most permeable. The soil under Kathmandu and Patan, where the demand for well water is highest, however, is made of clay, which does not allow water to seep down.

The problem is that the northern and southern suburbs of the Valley are getting heavily built up, and quarries and sand mining have reduced groundwater recharge. At the same time, heavier rainfall due to changes in the precipitation patterns means water cannot seep into the ground and drains off.

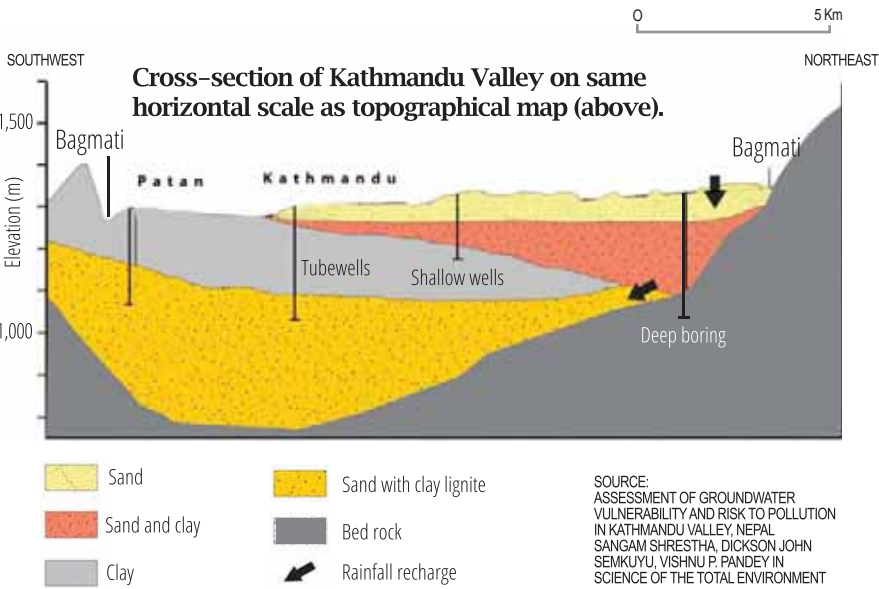
"We are extracting excessively from the ground, and human activity has reduced natural recharge. The solution is to replenish groundwater: it is foolish to let rainwater drain away," explains Padma Sundar Joshi of UN Habitat. "We have to aggressively promote rainwater harvesting and the new local governments should make it mandatory for households and public buildings to recharge groundwater."

Tyler McMahon of Smart Paani, which advises customers on water management, adds: "Recharging won't only replenish groundwater, it is also a cheaper way to manage waste water and control pollution."

Rate at which Kathmandu's water table is falling (in metres below ground level)



GROUNDWATER WORLD



The most reliable study of Kathmandu's ground water was done by Japanese aid agency JICA as far back as 1990. The Kathmandu Valley Water Supply Management Board is now updating it with a census of shallow and deep tube wells so it can fix the extraction rate and better regulate pumping. At present, institutions and service sectors with deep tube wells pay a license fee of Rs20,000 per year. But many large hotels and industries extract unlimited water free of cost.

Anuj Khanal, a hydro-geologist at the board, says the study is the first step in identifying aquifers, determining the exact extraction and recharge rates, and the proportion of groundwater that is fossil water. He adds: "It is true that groundwater is depleting in some places. But Kathmandu has a heterogeneous geology, so an observation of a place can't be extrapolated for the entire Valley. The building code needs to take inputs from the groundwater recharge study."

The new mayors' offices in the Valley now have an important role in coordinating zoning laws, urban planning, road construction and groundwater regulation. For instance, construction needs to be minimised in areas of the Valley

that are important for recharging aquifers and households, schools, hotels and factories need to have mandatory rain-water collection and recharge systems.

However, with the Melamchi Project coming online in 2019, complacency has set in again: many Kathmandu residents now believe that there will no longer be a water shortage, and are unwilling to invest in things like rainwater harvesting, says Anisha Karn of Smart Paani.

Hydrologists say the situation in cities like Dharan and Tansen and the Tarai towns are much worse because extraction far outstrips natural recharge.

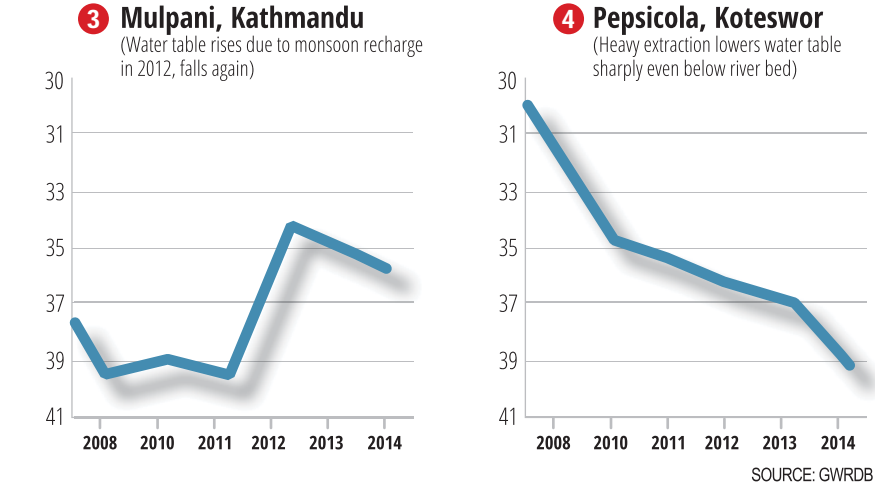
Sajal Pradhan of water conservation group Best Paani adds it is unwise to enforce the centralised pipe-water system that has failed Nepalis. She advises prioritising rainwater harvesting for a consistent supply of water.

"Melamchi will not be enough for everyone and we will still have to collect rainwater and use the unused portion to recharge groundwater," explained watershed expert Madhukar Upadhyay.

"Groundwater isn't just for pumping out, it is a vital part of the Valley's ecology. We have to maintain it so people have access to water in the coming decades."

pump out

at sites across the Valley.



SOURCE: GWRDB



SONIAAWALE

Topping it up

Recharging groundwater is a bit like topping up your mobile phone. There are three simple ways:

1. Recharge Pit

A soil test will determine the best location for a recharge pit to infiltrate rainwater into the ground. The soil should be porous enough, and the pit should have a stone base so it doesn't overflow.

2. Recharge well

Rainwater is first trapped, settled and filtered through sand and gravel. Households or institutions can use the water, and the overflow goes into a well lined with perforated concrete rings to let the water seep slowly out from the sides.

3. Boring recharge

The same pipe that used to pump up groundwater can also be used to send collected rainwater and surface runoff back underground after some basic filtration.

Transboundary aquifers



PRASHANT RAVI / DOWN TO EARTH

Just like rivers do not respect national boundaries, the Tarai's vast groundwater aquifers span the ground beneath Nepal and India. Over-extraction by farmers

in India who get subsidised diesel and electricity for irrigation pumps (*above*) is affecting the groundwater table in the Nepal Tarai as well. "Groundwater depletion in the

Tarai is alarming," says watershed expert Madhukar Upadhyay. "India is drawing out so much that even our water table is falling at a much higher rate than can be replenished naturally."

The Tarai aquifers are naturally recharged by monsoon rains every year, but deforestation and quarrying in the Tarai mean that rains do not seep into the ground but wash off into silted rivers. Surendra Shrestha of the Ground Water Resource Development Board in Kathmandu says although aquifer depletion in the Tarai is not as rampant as in the Valley, it is extensive and directly linked with mining of sand and boulders from streams and rivers. When streams go dry, there is also less recharge of ground water.

Extraction of sand and gravel (ironically for export to India) is therefore lowering the water bed in India.

DEAR DROPS

Next time you buy a soft drink, remember that the water used to make it could be millions of years old, and pumped up from the deep aquifers below Kathmandu. For a mere Rs20,000 a year, many of the factories, hotels, hospitals and schools in the Valley can pump an unlimited volume of groundwater. Even the government's KUKL water utility does it, leading to a serious depletion of Kathmandu's aquifers.

With greater environmental awareness, several companies have started recharging ground water at their premises to make up for the water they use. Standard Chartered Bank and Shanker Hotel in Lazimpat have set an example for others by replenishing groundwater with surface runoff and harvested rainwater.

"One day I came across a particularly long queue of *gagris* in my neighbourhood that prompted me to Google about its implication. I was shocked to find that the water table in Kathmandu is lowering by 1m a year," recalls Niraj Pokhrel of Standard Chartered. "It made me realise we have to replenish groundwater, not just use it."

Working with the group Smart Paani, the multinational bank installed a rainwater harvesting system that provides 40% of its demand, and collects the surplus as well as surface runoff to recharge 2.38 million litres of water a year.

"Even if it is a small contribution to Kathmandu's water resource, it is the bank's contribution to protect the

environment," said Pokhrel.

Next door at Shanker Hotel, Prajwol Shrestha worked with the group Best Pani to harvest rainwater. A year since the system's installation, the hotel now uses rainwater for its laundry and vehicle washing, which makes up a large part of its 60,000 litre daily consumption, and the surplus water is sent back underground.

"We are recharging groundwater as part of our corporate social responsibility, and the good thing is that our neighbours in Lazimpat are benefiting because the wells are not going dry," said Shrestha. Tribhuvan University Hospital is installing what is probably the largest rainwater harvesting and recharging system in Kathmandu. It can replenish up to 30 million litres of water a year.

The Kathmandu Valley Water Supply Management Board wants to put a price on ground water so that it is seen as a public good. After completing its current study, it hopes to start strictly enforcing licensing of drilling pumps and to meter the water extracted.

Today about 420 institutions are licensed to extract ground water, and 250 more have applied. Depending on the area, there is a limit to the amount of water that users can extract. In safe areas like Gongabu, Dhapasi, Tokha, Kapan, Mulpani, Sundarijal and Gwakarna, users can pump 2-15 litres per second, while in Sitapaila, Naikap, Kupandole, Jwagal, Satungal, and other areas termed semi-critical, extraction is limited to 2-7 litres per second. Critical areas like Dakchinkali, Chaimale, the rest of Lalitpur and some parts of Bhaktapur limit extraction to 3 litres per second.



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ERRATUM

It is our duty, as journalists, to adhere to the truth as far as humanely possible. But, now and then, we make mistakes. Who doesn't? And when we do, it is part of our strict journalistic Code of Ethics to lie low and hope no one noticed. Just kidding. Actually, we issue a correction at the bottom of page 37 in such small fonts you need a microscope to read it.

It may be a tiny typo or we may have got the name of the prime minister wrong, either way the important thing is to alert unsuspecting citizens about the blunder, acknowledge our short coming, and learn from our mistake so we can move on to make even greater ones in future. Such is life.

Since this is a newspaper of record, we have broken all world records rectifying our erratum by promptly publishing corrections like the following:

- A typographical error crept into an article last week about Kathmandu being developed as an International Humour Centre. Sorry for that funny mistake. LoL. In actual fact, the city is turning into an International Tumour Centre.
- A caption in the Entertainment Section of our online edition misidentified a new eatery in New Road as the Revolting Restaurant and Bar: it is in fact the Revolutionary Restaurant and Bar run by Comrade Big Plop's faction of the ANNUS(R). The terror is regretted.
- We apologise to the UML's Comrade Makuney for the major national crisis triggered by our

headline on the Sports Page of yesterday's edition, 'Nepal Thrashed Badly'. The report was actually about Nepal's soccer team being beaten 8-0 by Oman in the Asian qualifiers.

• An op-ed by Prof Chicken Little last week gave the impression that the world had ended. We are happy to report that the world is still very much around, according to a higher authority. "We'll let you know if and when we decide to terminate the world," The Almighty said in a statement, read out by a spokesperson.

• Due to confusion in the newsroom, the prime minister was incorrectly identified in yesterday's editorial as Sher Bahadur Oli. The present premier is actually the Right Honourable K. P. Deuba. We apologise to both prime ministers.

• Several readers were hospitalised after trying out the weight-loss formula in the Backside column last week: 'Visit Nepal and Lose Weight: Drink tap water and the ensuing diarrhoea will guarantee you will lose 10kg in one week or your money back.' You were not supposed to take that literally, silly. Any incontinence regretted.

• Due to a fact-checking error, our Obituary Section yesterday announced the death of Mr Mark Twain. The report was exaggerated.



The Ass