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Go online to watch this video of a *Nepali Times* selection of six mayors who have overcome obstructions and delays by Kathmandu to deliver services, upgrade infrastructure and plan for the future of their cities. These mayors are role models for others in the country who are giving decentralisation a bad name.

KUNDA DIXI

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# MODEL MAYORS

When *Nepali Times* decided last month to profile a dozen model mayors, we had no idea how difficult the job was going to be. There were not that many inspiring mayors who had set standards for integrity and vision.

Most are good-for-nothing puppets of their political masters, many are corrupt construction contractors behaving like foxes guarding the chicken coop, while a few who want to improve their cities or villages have no idea how to do it.

Still, we managed to find six mayors and one deputy mayor for special mention in this edition. (*See pages 1, 6, 13-15*) They have struggled against all odds to perform, deliver and achieve. Collectively, they have to fight every inch of the way to force a status quoist bureaucracy in Kathmandu to devolve decision-making and yield more revenue-raising powers. The ruling Nepal Communist Party is not much help because its whole philosophy rests on centralising power, not in devolution.

Yet, despite being in Nepal's culturally conservative western mountains, the people of Jumla last year elected women to be both mayor and deputy. Mayor Kantika Sejuwal is not letting traditional politicians block her efforts to raise living standards and give women more say.



In Pokhariya Municipality of Parsa district, Deputy Mayor Salma Khatun has had to overcome double discrimination for being a woman and a Muslim. Both Sejuwal and Khatun harbour a deep sense of commitment to improve services, and a determination to make things better for the most vulnerable.

In Kathmandu Valley Madan Sundar Shrestha in Madhyapur Thimi stands out for thinking ahead to upgrade infrastructure, improve drainage, build sidewalks and bicycle lanes to enhance traffic safety. The only mayor to be re-elected in last year's local election, and the only one with a PhD, is Dhawal Shumsher Rana in Nepalganj. He is now picking up where he left off in 2002, improving roads and urban management in the western Tarai city as it is poised for growth.

In Waling Municipality, we catch up with Mayor Dilip Pratap Khand, a descendant of former kings, who is inviting talented professionals from the diaspora back home

to train the youth. For Mayor Khand, turning Waling into a 'Smart City' is not just a slogan.

The one thing common for all the mayors profiled, and the vital ingredient that makes them good performers, is that they put the people ahead of personal or party interests.

And non-performing mayors? There are too many to count. The man who is possibly the most inept of them all is Kathmandu's Bidya Sundar Shakya. Just like fellow-communist Prime Minister KP Oli, who is Shakya's godfather, Kathmandu's mayor has a major sense of entitlement and arrogance that comes from commanding an absolute majority in the municipal council.

A hilarious meme on the Nepali social sphere portrayed the mayor dozing off on a heap of garbage, but none of this criticism seems to affect Shakya, who is often flying off on junkets. In fact, whenever Mayor Shakya does something, it turns out to be the wrong thing. He ruined Rani Pokhari and Kasthamandap, and has shown appalling indifference to the need for better roads, drainage and clean air.

Outside Kathmandu, mayors have been fighting it out with female deputies over petty things like who gets to ride the official car more often. One mayor took inaction to extremes when he just looked on as a woman was thrashed for practicing witchcraft, and then prevented the victim from filing a complaint.

We used to blame the absence of locally-elected representatives for the lack of accountability at the grassroots. It seems elected officials are no better because of flaws in the election system that makes them too expensive and discourages honest politicians from contesting. Candidates

forced to accept unethical 'donations' from businesses need to pay back in contracts after assuming office. Mayors know they can ride their party's structure for an election victory and do not need to perform. Also, they cannot be recalled for incompetence, which makes them complacent.

Mayors have their own complaints, some of which are genuine. A conference of mayors and deputy mayors issued the Kathmandu Declaration last week, urging the Centre to not intervene in their local affairs. They want Kathmandu to transfer authority regarding education, agriculture and land revenue.

Kathmandu's myopic leaders must realise that Nepal is now a federal country, and they must devolve power. Also, if local representatives fail to deliver, they will lose the moral authority to fight for more autonomy. The Municipality Association of Nepal can take the lead to make every council follow a code of conduct.

**The one thing model mayors have in common, and the vital ingredient that makes them good performers, is that they put the people ahead of personal or party interests.**

## 10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

*Nepali Times* #416 from ten years ago (5-12 September, 2008) carried an op-ed by UNMIN head Ian Martin, about Nepal's peace process. Many of the issues he address here are as relevant today as they were a decade ago:

*'Nepal's unique peace process has rarely gained outside attention since the guns fell silent two years ago. Yet, amid too many continuing conflicts and failing peace processes around the world, a success story deserves to be recognised and supported.'*

*Expectations are high among diverse groups for greater control of their lives and resources. But what federalism will mean in practice, taking account of the geographic and ethnic peculiarities of Nepal, remains elusive and potentially divisive. Reaching a national consensus will be a formidable task for the Constituent Assembly, and meanwhile the Nepali people cannot be expected to wait patiently until a new constitution is drafted to see real improvement in their daily lives. But there is reason to be hopeful. Nepal's peace process has been truly indigenous: it has not been mediated or managed by any external party. The UN has encouraged and facilitated the process through good offices during the last years of the conflict, human rights monitoring, assistance to the election, and monitoring arms and armies during the transition.*



## ONLINE PACKAGES



### THE GOOD MAYORS

There were high hopes of grassroots development and accountability following last year's local elections, the first in almost 20 years. But very few locally-elected representatives have risen above personal and party interests. This week *Nepali Times* highlights select mayors that have set standards for integrity and vision. Watch them talk about plans for their city and challenges to devolution. *Story: pages 1, 2, 6, 13-15.*



### CHUTNEY MOM

Meet Bhimi and Muna Gurung, the mother daughter duo behind the authentic Amako brand of pickles, and watch them in action as they prepare one of their popular items, *Mulako achar*. Also hear Bhimi Gurung talk about how her pickle-making skills started a successful intergenerational business. *Story: page 7.*



### WESTERN FEMINISM

Gaura is the most important festival of far western Nepal, and it concluded this week. The mountain districts came alive with men and women singing and dancing together. Follow our reporters to Baitadi and Darchula to watch this celebration of gender equality in an otherwise socially conservative region. *Story: page 8-9.*

### E-WASTE SOLUTIONS

The extraction procedure itself is quite expensive and demanding for e-waste, and by no means can be considered a profitable venture for a poor economy like Nepal ('What will Nepal do with its e-waste?', Sonia Awale, #925). Only some form of multinational efforts between consumers and the producers themselves can put a hold on the e-waste.

**Sushant Chaudhary**

### FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Hurrah to both Nepali journalists and artists who have made these timely and eloquent protests of Shahidul Alam's detainment in Dhaka ('#FreeShahidulAlam', nepalitimes.com). Hopefully these protests will help wake the Bangladesh government to the worldwide concern about this infringement of basic freedom of speech.

**Sally Stein**

### KAILASH

There's way too much emphasis on big tourism and "growth" for Nepal ('Nepal gets moving', Kunda Dixit, #925). We need smaller groups of tourists who are willing to pay for high quality services. Mass tourism in the fragile Kailash mountain ecosystem is not a good idea--trash, environmental destruction etc will follow.

**Sushma Joshi**

### BIMSTEC

If I wasn't so disgusted with preparations for the Summit which was proof yet again that the government doesn't give a hoot about its people, I would have laughed out loud at this column ('Hugging HOGs', Ass, #925).

**Kalps Para**

## WHAT'S TRENDING

### Nepalganj gets moving

by Kunda Dixit

With half of the 15,000 Indian pilgrims to Kailash Mansarovar travelling the most direct route via Nepalganj, the city has become a preferred gateway to the holiest Hindu site in Tibet. Visit our website for this widely shared report and watch a short video to see how the city is gearing up for the influx of tourists by investing in advanced infrastructure.



**Most reached and shared on Facebook**



**Most popular on Twitter**



### What will Nepal do with its e-waste?

by Sonia Awale

Nepal's growing e-waste crisis gets worse, and there are no plans in place to recycle the hazardous trash, which is essentially a goldmine. The story generated a sense of urgency among readers about the management of e-waste. Go online to read the feedback and watch a short film to gauge the seriousness of Nepal's hazardous e-waste crisis



**Most commented**

### Gagging the press in instalments

by Sewa Bhattarai

Laws restricting press freedom are inherently anti-democratic, unconstitutional and remove its check-and-balance function. Laws that are broadly defined are even more dangerous, and can be a path to authoritarianism. Read the full report on the new Penal Code and Privacy Bill at nepalitimes.com.



**Most visited online page**

## QUOTE TWEETS



**Nepali Times @nepalitimes**

Kathmandu discarded 18,000 metric tons of electronic waste last year, and the waste is growing exponentially. With no regulation, recycling plant, and India and China imposing ban on electronic waste import, what will Nepal do with its e-waste?



**Sachi Mulmi @sachimulmi**

What will Nepal do with its e-waste? It's high-time we find answers to this question. Good read by @SoniaAwale@nepalitimes#ewaste



**Akash Shrestha @azul\_5\_1**

The #ewaste problem will catch up in #Nepal, not slowly but surely, especially for a country that still does not have solid solutions for waste management.



**PSD Nepal @psd\_nepal**

We're not the only ones talking about waste in Nepal and tackling issues of legislation and government action - thanks again to @nepalitimes - how can we all do our bit?



**Nepali Times @nepalitimes**

The campaign for the release of Shahidul Alam is not just about an individual, but about resisting steady encroachment upon democratic space. @adiadhikari's message to Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina, who will be in KTM for BIMSTEC Summit #FreeShahidulAlam



**Akhilesh Upadhyay @akhileshU**

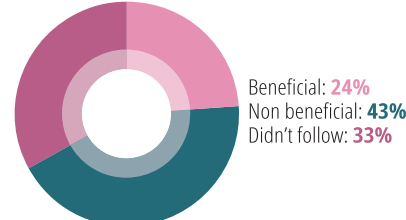
During her visit to Kathmandu for BIMSTEC, PM Sheikh Hasina would do well to realise that her government has only lost international legitimacy by arresting Shahidul Alam. Oli govt is also restricting Nepal's journalists ability to gather news. Timely op-ed by @adiadhikari



Weekly Internet Poll #926

**Q. How beneficial for Nepal was it to host the BIMSTEC summit?**

Total votes: 106



Weekly Internet Poll #927  
To vote go to: [www.nepalitimes.com](http://www.nepalitimes.com)

**Q. One year has passed since Nepal wrapped up its first local polls in two decades. Have the new mayors made a positive difference to your lives?**



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MONIKA DEUPALA

# Actionable Summits

‘You may think I am a dreamer, but I am not the only one...’

Imagine a large warehouse at Biratnagar Airport housing tonnes of high value tea, cardamom, nettle fibre products, rice, lentils and expensive oils and herbs to be flown out in cargo planes to Bhutan, Bangladesh, Burma and Thailand. Imagine a train station at Mechi Nagar bringing tourists on their way to Tibet and Kathmandu on holiday.



1/2 FULL  
Anil Chitrakar

The BIMSTEC Summit last week in Kathmandu got a lot of flak. People complained that it was inappropriate to talk about regional connectivity when Kathmandu’s own roads were

in ruins. Yet, the sub-regional grouping’s emphasis on connecting South Asia with Southeast Asia has a lot of potential.

The distance between member countries is only in the mind. And even within Nepal, it will be Province 1 that can be the gateway to future trade and multi- dimensional cooperation in roads and energy.

What dampens this enthusiasm is the language of BIMSTEC bureaucrats. It’s not really actionable but are just meant to keep politicians talking, the administration and security agencies baffled, the expensive venues occupied and, in the end, nothing tangible ever comes out for the people who were stuck in long traffic jams or had to endure humiliation in the name of VIP security. The document is written by people who have no intention of doing anything, and is signed by heads of government whose political lifespan is so ephemeral that they just want to maintain the status quo.

This lethal combination keeps our part of the world from growing economically. Let us take the three points in the Kathmandu declaration that talk about establishing the BIMSTEC development fund, the point of continuing to talk about creating a BIMSTEC free trade zone, and ending poverty by 2030.

Could the language in the resolution instead read: ‘We will create a BIMSTEC free trade zone across the member countries within one year, increasing the volume of trade by X per cent per year and; Y per cent of this will go to set up a development fund contributing to ending poverty.’ As The Beatles song goes, ‘You may think I am a dreamer, but I am not the only one...’

In the true spirit of devolution and federalism, Province 1 could start working with Bhutan, Bangladesh, and the states of Sikkim, West Bengal and Bihar of India to create a free trade zone in food, tourism and energy, without waiting for the central governments. The chief minister of Province 1, which is closest to the Bay of Bengal, could take the lead on behalf of Nepal and maybe even host the next BIMSTEC meeting there in three years to report back.

Such actionable declarations could also make them much shorter. Could someone also tell us how much the Kathmandu meeting cost? How much did the fencing around Tin Kune cost? The people of BIMSTEC countries are not impressed by the number of expensive cars that are needed to take politicians from the airport to their hotels and their grand banquets.

Why do they need helicopters in the sky to escort motorcades, when the guest could have been in the helicopter. Why do our politicians need a car and security to travel from their suites to meeting venues only 50 metres away?

Nepal desperately needs access to the larger market that BIMSTEC has to offer. Aid will dry up sooner or later, free trade is more tangible and sustainable. It can raise productivity, quality and competitiveness, which will be the big variables. Industry, businesses and farmers will all have to roll up their sleeves. There could be real opportunity here. 🇳🇵

Anil Chitrakar is President of Siddharthinc

# Making Nepal Tranquil

On his two smartphones, with two SIM cards each, Bhuwan Phaiju gets more than 150 calls a day. It disrupts his interviews, meetings, personal life and mainly his wellbeing. With life so hectic, what Phaiju probably needs is a wellness session in his own Tranquility Spa.

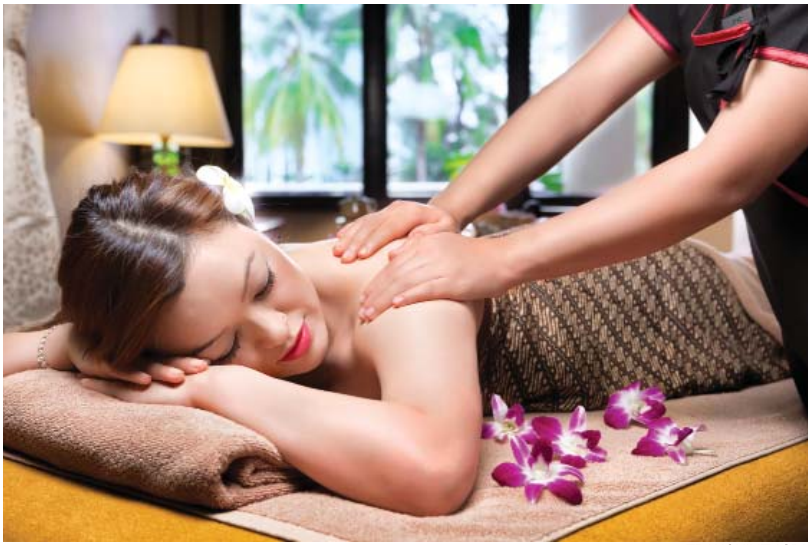
The calls are mostly related to construction of his new facility at Soaltee Crowne Plaza which was delayed by the BIMSTEC Summit last week. As CEO and Chairman of Tranquility, Phaiju is rushing to complete the outlet by first week of October. He says it will be a game changer in Nepal’s spa industry, and he demands perfection.

“We have taken an acre of land in the vicinity of Soaltee Hotel on lease. In the history of the spa industry in Nepal, no one has ever used this much land for spa treatment and a fitness centre,” says Phaiju, and he has reason to be slightly boastful.

Tranquility Spa at Soaltee will have Ayurvedic therapy, a well-equipped gym, a fitness hall for zumba, aerobics, yoga and meditation practice, a swimming pool with reverse osmosis water, a unisex beauty salon, and tennis clay court all under one roof. Employing more than 60 staff, the centre aspires to be a relaxation hub for Nepalis, expats and tourists.

Since its establishment in 2008, Tranquility Spa has expanded rapidly to have 15 outlets, including the latest, in Kathmandu, Pokhara, Chitwan and even in Kuala Lumpur, employing more than 300 staff. Two more hotels in Pokhara will also have Tranquility outlets.

And Phaiju has more coming. He is beginning the search for land



TRANQUILITY SPA

to build a vocational training academy that will prepare personnel in gym, anatomy, physiology and 15 different head-to-toe beauty and wellness treatments. The training will offer a 100 per cent job placement.

Phaiju’s plan is simple: create employment so Nepalis do not have to migrate, and if they do go abroad so they can earn more and send more remittance back to the country.

And there is Phaiju’s dream project: a spa resort away from the hustle and bustle of Pokhara, but not too far. A quiet and serene place surrounded by lush vegetation, a flowing river alongside with an open field where guests can book a stay to treat themselves with relaxation packages.

“We are looking for ways to influence tourists to extend their stay for a day or two. If we can at least influence 10,000 tourists, it means 10,000 more rooms are

booked and 30,000 meals are sold. It links directly with tourism economy. And the best part is it will not be just for international tourists,” Phaiju explains.

During the early spa days in Nepal, 90% of the clients would be visiting tourists or foreigners and expats living in the country. Despite the frequent police raids, high-end spas and treatment centres continue to maintain quality and expand service. More and more Nepalis are now visiting spas with their families and friends, making up to 95% of the clientele.

With hectic modern lifestyles, the trend of staying fit and fresh is becoming more popular. The only reason the growing demand cannot be met is the lack of human resource in Nepal. Says Phaiju: “I have to do my part to slow the migration of Nepalis abroad by creating work here and contribute with productive investment.” 🇳🇵

Sikuma Rai

**BIZ BRIEFS**

### Earlier to Doha

Qatar Airways has announced new timing for its Kathmandu-Doha flights starting this week. Making use of the daily 21 hours operations of Kathmandu airport,



one of the daily four flights will depart Kathmandu at 02:10 and reach Doha at 04:45 to connect major US and European destinations within 3 hours.

### One way discounts

Turkish Airlines introduces an exclusive one-way fares at Rs29,500 (excluding tax) for passengers flying to European destinations from Kathmandu during the whole of September.



### Loan for cement

NMB Bank announced the closure of Rs16 billion project loan syndication under its leadership with Nepal Investment Bank,



Prabhu Bank, Everest Bank and Nepal SBI Bank, for Hongshi Shivam Cement. The loan tenure lasting seven years will capacitate the production of 6,000 tonnes of clinker and cement per day.

### Order online

After eight years bhatbhatenionline.com has been rebranded by F1Soft International and launched as eSewapasal.com. With multiple cash back offers, the e-commerce



site promises to deliver goods with no extra charge on orders placed within 24 hours inside Kathmandu Valley.

### GDC in the West

This week, the Head of German Development Cooperation Claudia Hiepe highlighted cooperation in environmental protection at the Cross-Border Travel and Trade Fair in Halji Village of Humla district. The transboundary



landscape around Mt Kailash includes Nepal’s Humla, Pulan County in China and Pithoragarh District in India.

### Creative businesses

Empowering entrepreneurs in the creative industries, Antarprerana conducted Creative Business Cup Nepal on 5 September at Soaltee Crowne Plaza, where Ambica Shrestha, Abdullah Tuncer Keceli and other judges picked a winner from 15 participating businesses to represent the country in the Global Creative Business Cup 2018 in Denmark.

### Electricity trade

A higher level of electricity trade between Nepal and India has begun with the operations of the first high-voltage Dhalkebar Substation in southern Nepal,



as part of a World Bank project. With this, Nepal has been able to upgrade its network capacity from 132kV to the 220kV voltage levels, which will upgrade to 400kV after completion of ongoing work.

**prabhu Bank**



# Perpetuating patriarchy in Nepal

Treating women as second-class citizens makes them more vulnerable to violence and rape

There is growing public outrage about the recent rise in reported rape cases across the country. The victims of these appalling crimes can be the elderly or babies, and the daily headlines numb us with their cruelty.



**COMMENT**

Deepti Gurung

What is even more shocking is that these cases are just the ones reported to the police, there are many more of which we will never know about: physical abuse, mental torture, threats, molestation, harrassment in the workplace, incest.

Women have to bear the insults silently: being told they are dumb, stupid, good for nothing. But rage against rape has exploded on social media. The most important change that is needed is in the mindset of Nepal's men, who use arguments like nationalism and social harmony to perpetuate patriarchy.

Recently, a photograph on social media showed an activist who had pinned a slogan on her back that read in Nepali: 'Our father is the rapist of our mother'. It was intended to highlight the plight of single mothers trying to get citizenship for their children.

That is when the trolling began. The pundits were outraged that women were so outspoken, and the backlash was unrelenting. Women activists were at the receiving end of vitriolic comments accusing them of being "dollarbad" and trying to turn Nepal into Fiji. That particular accusation has to do with the xenophobic paranoia that Indian men are lining up to marry Nepali women so they can gain Nepali citizenship.

My own support for the defence of women's rights and



DIWAKAR CHETTRI

citizenship through the mother has been greeted with widespread personal attacks. This virtual abuse in cyberspace is an extension of the physical and verbal abuse that Nepali women face every day. The attackers do not even need to hide behind an anonymous account, they are brazen and open— as if misogyny is socially sanctioned and is nothing to be ashamed about.

Women can be crushed, smashed and ripped off their dignity, rights and independence without any repercussions to the perpetrators. To survive in this society, women either become submissive and learn not to rock the boat. Or, they fight back.

If a wife is facing abuse from

in-laws, she is blamed for the trouble. Even if she is married by the choice of her parents, and the in-laws and husband treat her badly, there is no support from her own parents who fear the social stigma.

When I made a birth registration for my daughters after Supreme Court's verdict, the ward secretary filled our 'Daughter of' with 'Mr Thegan Nabhaeko' (Unknown father). I asked why I couldn't use my father's name as my daughter's grandfather and I was told that officially grandfathers can only be from the father's side, and have no connection with the mother's parents.

I have seen a son's endorsement for his mother to acquire a

citizenship at the age of 60 to be very easy— in order that the sons could enjoy the elderly pension from their mother. However, another 60-year-old mother was denied citizenship for her grown up, educated and able sons after her husband committed suicide. She was mocked by the CDO, calling her Mother Mary.

The new citizenship bill requires the mother to declare that she does not know who the father of her children is, if she wants her offspring to acquire citizenship through her name. This provision is now being challenged by MP Binda Pandey in Parliament. The last resort argument used to justify why women should not have the right to confer citizenship to children usually pertains to national security. If you think it is the open border that allows Indians to swarm across to wed our women, then close the border.

Men and women who have married across the border can easily be prevented from getting double citizenship through bilateral negotiations. India can do the same with the people who have citizenship of Nepal. Let us agree to a point where both countries will have equal benefits by sharing strict rules. It is only when women are treated equally in law and practice that men will think twice about inflicting harm on them.

A country where the state itself denies the identity of women makes them vulnerable to abuse and rape. The state's policy requires women migrants to first seek permission from a male family member. This is not empowering women, it is enslaving them. 🇳🇵

## OUTRAGE OVER OUTRAGE

A selection of Twitter posts from the debate generated by the image of an activist carrying the slogan: 'My mother's rapist was my father' at a demonstration against the citizenship bill that was criticised for being discriminatory towards women. Many activists started adding 'Dosro Darji' (Second Class Citizen) to the names of their Twitter handles:



Replying to @DeeptiGurung1 and @sabitraaa

wife भनेर बायोमा लेख्नु भएकै रहेछ । अलि अमिल्दै प्रश्न गरे है माफ पाम है

"के तपाईंका पति बलात्कारी हुन्?" यो पोस्टर पढेर तपाईं कि छेरीले "ममी के मेरा बाउले तपाईंलाई बलात्कार गरेर म जन्मिएकी हुँ?" भनेर प्रश्न सोधे तपाईं के जवाफ दिनु हुन्छ?

Ramesh Nepal @rames\_nepal

Replying to @davis\_advocate @DeeptiGurung1 and @sabitraaa

उहाँको श्रीमान् बाहेक अरुका चै बलात्कारी हुन् ।।।

8/18/18, 9:43 PM

2 Retweets 4 Likes

Avne @sharmad226 · 1h

Replying to @rames\_nepal @DeeptiGurung1 and 2 others

अनि उहाँका बाउ बलात्कारी हुन कि छेउँन कि उहाँको बाउ बाहेक अरुका बाउ बलात्कारी हुन ।

madhav kc @madhavkc2

Replying to @davis\_advocate @DeeptiGurung1 and 2 others

सायद तीजो जन्म नभएको भए, बलात्कार नभई त्यो समझदारी नै थिए।तर.....

8/19/18, 3:37 PM

मिश्रदेवता™ @Tin\_Tong · 1h

को हो त बलात्कारी ? पछा त लगाको बाउ रहेक भैरु अनुमानमा , अर्को को ? हाहा यिन धेरै परीक्षण भै कोको परीक्षण , कस्तुन सम्बिधान या संवैधानमा के भ यस्तो गरिमाया ?

Nagendra Budhathoki @Kanjiroba · 1d

Replying to @alunir and @bishodip

What is "incest" in Nepal? Dollar-baadi word





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Suresh Bidari  
in Parsa

When Nepal held its first local elections under the new Constitution last year, women were seen as the real winners. They secured more than 40% seats, up from 24% in the last local polls in 1997.

But Salma Khatun, deputy mayor of Pokhariya municipality of Parsa district, says this achievement



is only the first of many steps in a long struggle for gender equality in local governments across Nepal.

“We still have a long way to go,” says the 30 year old. “Men tolerate us, as long as we toe the line meekly. But when we want to have our say, they insult us and question our honour.”

Some say the women’s numerical achievement in local elections does not mean much because a majority have been restricted to being deputies in municipalities, villages and wards. But Khatun says at least there are more women now in decision-making positions.

“For me, every deputy mayor to ward committee member is a change-maker post, we have all been elected, and we are here to play a role in improving local governance,” she says emphatically.



# Salma breaks her silence

A Muslim deputy mayor’s lonely struggle against domineering men

But what really bothers Khatun is that most elected women representatives are still treated as “rubber stamps” by the men. Those, like her, who try to assert themselves are victims of character assassination.

Khatun graduated from a college in Bangladesh, and was working as a radio journalist in Birganj when the Federal Socialist Forum Nepal, one of two major Tarai-centric parties, chose her as a deputy mayoral candidate for Pokhariya.

So she went back to the Tarai village where she was born and bred to spearhead an election

campaign. Her husband ran a business in Birganj and could not tag along. The fact that she was mostly by herself during the campaigning was itself made into an issue by rival parties.

Wherever she went, elderly voters would ask her: Why did you leave your husband in Birganj? Why is he not with you all the time? Why have you not had a baby even after five years of marriage? Are you divorcing him? How can you travel with other men?

Khatun knew they had been manipulated by the opposition, but she would calmly tell them that her husband was proud that she was

an independent woman standing for office.

She assumed she would not have to face such awkward questions once she got elected. “But I was wrong,” she says. “We still get the same questions. I don’t know why they are so interested in my personal and marital life.”

Khatun was one among a handful of Muslim women to be elected deputy mayor, and initially she just listened to her male colleagues during municipality board meetings, trying to understand how local government functioned.



But as she got more confident in her role, she insisted on thoroughly reading documents before endorsing contracts, and she spoke up when things were not right. She also asked the board to induct more women into the Judicial Committee.

A male colleague took this as an affront. How dare a woman challenge them? Her associates were put off by her boldness, and began spreading rumours of infidelity, and worse. She once had to travel to Kathmandu with the mayor, and since she returned, there was talk the two were having an affair.

This month marks the first anniversary of her election as deputy mayor. In one year, she has realised women are still not able to play a key role in local governance despite occupying 40% seats.

“Many women in office are uneducated, or even illiterate, and they are dismissed or ignored by the men. They are ordered to sign documents they cannot read, and are told not to ask questions. And if women like me raise concerns, we are branded as indecent,” Khatun told us.

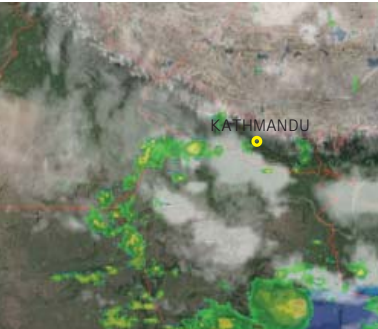
In Pokhariya, most women elected to local government are proxies for their husbands. They either cannot read or write, or have been put up as candidates by dominant male politicians to fulfil quotas. Often their husbands accompany them to meetings. It irks the men that Khatun is always by herself, and speaking up.

Khatun says the past year was a an education, and had been hard to take the taunts. At a recent public event in Birganj, she almost broke down, describing the behaviour of her male colleagues: “How come they never ask male politicians where their wives are?”

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If past years are anything to go by, this is the time the monsoon gets a second wind as it were. Which is what is happening now. Just as with the erratic weather worldwide this year, the precipitation level has been higher than average in Central Nepal this August. Expect more showers over the weekend, concentrated in the evenings and night, sometimes with thunder activity.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
27° 19°	27° 19°	26° 19°

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PHOTOS: MONIKA DEUPALA



Muna Gurung employed designers Bhusan Shilpakar and Bisheshta Dhakwa to do the contemporary branding and packaging of the elegant glass jars which contributes to the exotic image Āmāko has built for itself within one year.

She looks at her mother affectionately, and says: “I now understand my mother better, not just as a mother but as a woman with her own needs and hopes.”

With a sparkle in her eyes Bhimi Gurung also shares her gratitude: “At 69, my life has changed completely. Thanks to my daughter, I am living the happiest and most satisfying moments of my life.” 🇳🇵

Āmāko pickles are available at: Maya Ko China, Jhamsikhel, One Tree Stop, Darbar Marg, Everfresh Café, Pani Pokhari, Le Sherpa's Farmers' Market, Pani Pokhari, Garden's Café, Boudha, Kar.ma Coffee, Thamel, [daraz.com.np](http://daraz.com.np) and [smartdoko.com](http://smartdoko.com).

# The mother of all pickles

Preserving more than food, they're preserving generations-old recipes and want you to try it

Sikuma Rai

Like many Nepali housemothers, Bhimi Gurung spent her life preparing three meals a day and bringing up her children. Still, she felt she had not accomplished much, and one day confided as much to her daughter, Muna, who had just returned from the United States.

The remark affected Muna Gurung deeply. Her mother sacrificed her whole life for her family, and now she needed something else to keep her busy doing what she was best at.

Bhimi Gurung's pickles were famous

among family and friends, so last year Muna started marketing varieties of organic pickles under the name Āmāko (which simply means Mother's). In no time, the pickles started flying off the shelves, first at weekend organic markets, then in stores, and now online.

Āmāko is now an intergenerational company, producing 10 varieties of handmade traditional Gurung pickles, with four more varieties in development.

“My mother's cooking, especially her pickles, used to be admired by Nepalis and foreigners. So, I thought, why not turn it into a business?” Muna says.

It was not easy to persuade her mother to get involved, however. What finally clinched

it was when Bhimi Gurung remembered that when foods are served to the Rinpoche in a Buddhist monastery, the name of the cook is often taken with reverence.

“The cooks are usually thanked and blessed for their kindness and culinary skills,” explains Bhimi Gurung. “I cannot compare myself with the great chefs of the past but the thought of bringing happiness and satisfaction to many people was what pulled me towards this idea.”

Pickles (*achar* in Nepali) are an integral part of Nepali cuisine, a spicy and/or sour condiment that complements the *dal bhat tarkari* staple. Historically, pickles in many societies were a way to preserve vitamin-rich food for the winter before refrigeration was invented.

Bhimi Gurung's most popular Āmāko item is the *khursani achar*, a chilly pickle that is lip-smackingly hot. It is versatile and can spice up omelettes or meat dishes, can be mixed with soy sauce for easy snack dipping, and can even be sprinkled over *dal*.

“My mother experiments with different ingredients for new recipes. She takes charge of the creative department while I manage the marketing and money matters,” says Muna Gurung.

Her easy-going father tends the organic garden, where the ingredients are grown, and does the outreach to the markets. He also strongly pushed his own favourite, the *gundruk achar*, which is another hot favourite among customers.

## CHUTNEY MOM



Meet Bhimi and Muna Gurung, the mother-daughter duo who started the now-popular Āmāko brand of pickles. Listen to how a daughter felt her mother needed to be proud of her life's accomplishments and hear how Bhimi Gurung turned her pickle-making skills into a thriving business.

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# Fasting, feast and festivities of

Western Nepal came alive this week to celebrate its fest

Women join hands to sing along at Malikarjun Temple of Darchula.

**Sewa Bhattarai**  
in Darchula

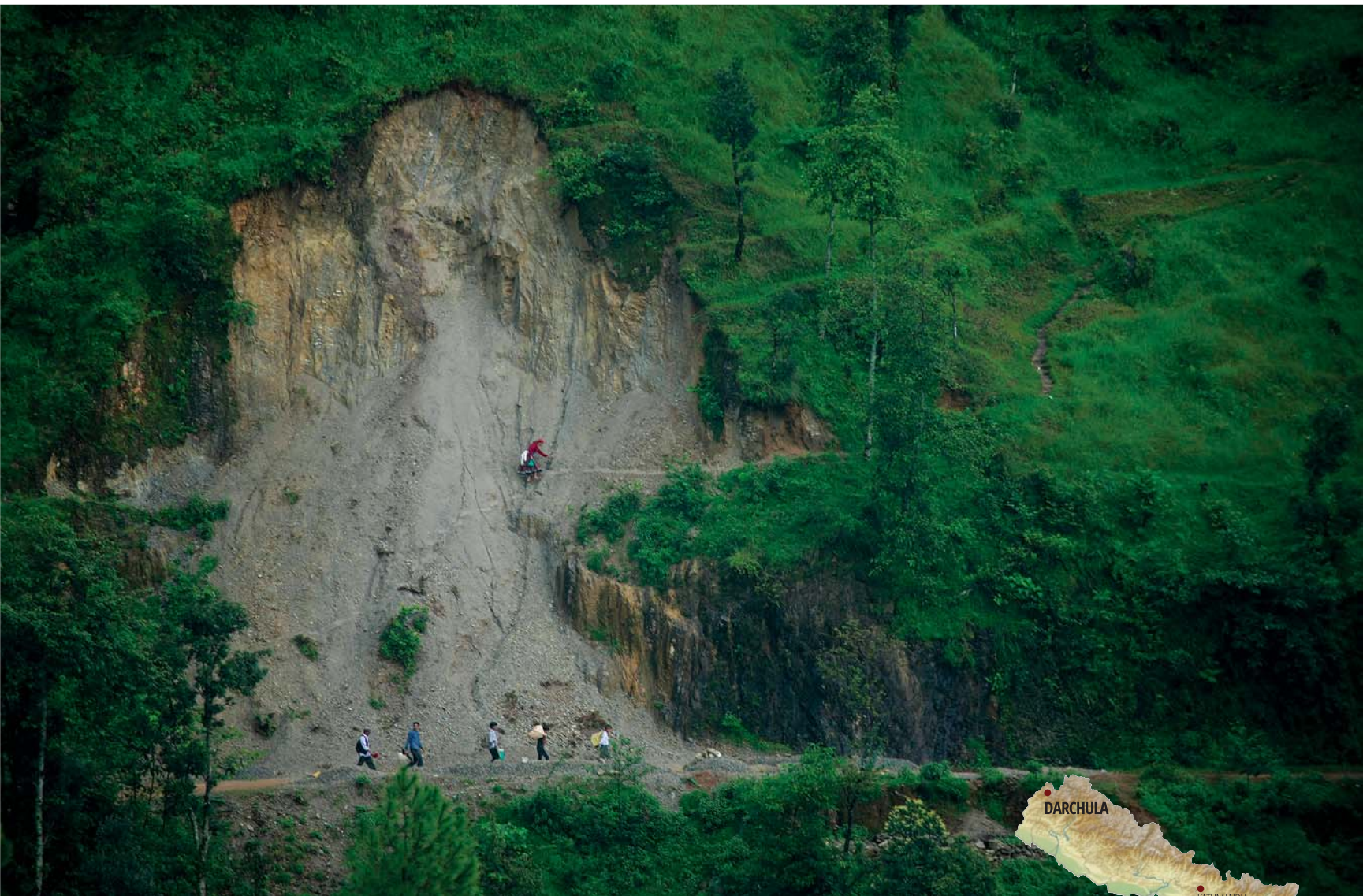
The buses to Darchula, Baitadi, Doti or Dadelhura were all packed last week for the annual Gaura Festival of womanhood, celebrated in Western Nepal, and wherever people from the west of Nepal live.

Across the districts of Far Western Nepal, towns are deserted and villages are abuzz with women engaged in weeklong fasting, feasting and revelry. This religious festival has deep agrarian roots, and celebrates the close ties women have to the land and their crops.

Saraswati Bhatta is shaping an image of the Goddess Gaura from rice stalks, decorating it like a bride with a red dress and jewelry. The doll god is then treated like a woman visiting her maternal home for her family's pampering.

Gaura is another name for Gauri, Shiva's consort. Gaura is more ritualistic than Tij, which will be marked on 12 September in the rest of Nepal. Gaura begins with women soaking grain, fasting, and then eating the sprouts. Unlike Tij, men also fast on Gaura's main day, until their wives' puja ends.

But like Tij, Gaura is essentially a festival of, by and for women. Gaura songs are performed at predetermined times, encapsulating the lifestyle and values of the entire community here in the remote mountains of western Nepal. The songs are about the courtship of Gaura and Maheswor (Siva and Parvati for easterners), women's experience of childbirth, and many other social events.



A woman makes her way home through a dangerous landslide after the celebration at Malikarjun Temple, Darchula.

The lyrics outline social customs like the dates of festivals, and behaviour expected from men and women. Some songs describe which food is found in what season, and even where to find water. The festival served as an elaborate information and communication system, set in songs, long before mass media served that purpose. The songs instill a knowledge of roles, values, and social mores,

and help people feel rooted in the community.

The Gaura platform still gives women living in a society steeped in patriarchy a rare chance to voice their perspective and provide valuable insights into women's lives and thoughts. On the fourth day of the festival, women dance with the image of Gaura and send her off to her husband's home, singing songs of bereavement.

However, the Gaura Festival, like Tij (*see sidebar*), while allowing women to let off steam and serve an emancipating role, also establishes the gender status quo, instructing women about their place in society.

The festival is followed by popular melas, and people from all over the region congregate here in Malikarjun of Darchula, situated amidst lush mountains above the

clouds. Food stalls and shops line the site, damaha players strike drum beats rousing people with deeply devotional music. The strong feeling of community is enhanced by women in traditional clothes and jewelry, who do slow walk-dances while singing in circles for hours.

"Both men and women sing songs of local histories and epic poems, and express their feelings





# Parodying patriarchy at Tij

## Festival of womanhood

ALL PHOTOS: BIKRAM RAI



Ganga Dhami, 75, in traditional livery.

spontaneously. This might seem like simple entertainment, but it is also a way of preserving and passing down our history,” says Mohan Dhami, an expert of local culture.

Despite its continuing popularity, the significance of Gaura in communicating the spirit of community is losing out to modern lifestyles with mobility and mass communication. However, it still carries a strong sense of identity for the people of Western Nepal, wherever they may live. 🇳🇵



Women in Western Nepal spend an entire week celebrating a festival that has religious antecedents, but today has come to mean much more. It is a symbol of the identity of Western Nepal, emancipates women, and lets them express their fears and hopes in a strongly patriarchal society.

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



Women hold hands for circle dances before making an image of Gaura from rice stalks in Rijpala of Baitadi.



A man plays the damaha drum at Malikarjun Temple.



A woman in traditional silver headpiece Jhumjumi celebrates Gaura at Malikarjun Temple in Darchula.



## Parodying patriarchy at Tij

Tij has been called a festival of women, and indeed it is a time Nepali women let their hair down, dance their troubles away, visit their maternal homes and sing bittersweet songs of longing and separation. In times when violence against women, domestic violence and rape are seemingly on the rise, Tij has taken on an added role of social protest.

Yet, critics say Tij is also seen as a festival that has entrenched woman’s secondary status in Nepali society. The ritual fast they are required to undertake ostensibly for the longevity of their husbands is singled out for special condemnation. And lately, Tij feasts and parties have become somewhat decadent and commercialised.

Many, however, argue that the festival has nothing to do with men anyway, and women actually fast to emulate Shiva’s consort Parvati who fasted to rebel against gender discrimination even in heaven.

“The qualities that Parvati embodies is being revered, not the person. At Tij, women aspire to emulate those qualities, not necessarily Parvati the goddess,” explains Nitya Pandey, a PhD student and teacher of literature who observes the festival.

The way Tij was traditionally celebrated had a lot to do with women’s empowerment and freedom: they were free from housework and it was even a chance for them to pass disparaging comments about their husbands and marriage. Tij is a festival in which women infiltrate a patriarchal festival to subvert that very patriarchy.



Indira Acharya Mishra has analysed Tij songs for her doctoral thesis, and says women used to mostly sing about how they did not get to eat good food, and how their in-laws did not let them celebrate Tij. Today, women sing about how much fun they have on Tij, and how they look forward to visiting their parents.

“Traditional songs were sad and full of pathos, now they have become bolder and full of humour,” Mishra explains. “But the sense is the same: women use the songs to parody the patriarchy, and raise their voices for equality.”

What has also changed is that Tij has become more secular, and more commercial, while identity has added a new significance to the festival. “Tij is a tradition of Brahmin Chhetri women, so they want to celebrate it as part of their identity,” says Mishra. “But some aspects of it are also seen as being disempowering, and modern women have removed the more regressive aspects of it.”

Today, everyone is included in the merrymaking: schools celebrate Tij with children’s mothers, offices and organisations hold Tij parties, and women of all ages eat and drink.

“It is good to see women enjoying Tij as a celebration of womanhood, and I enjoy celebrating with them,” says Margaret Donahue, who has lived in Nepal for 40 years and has observed the transformation of Tij.

There will always be criticism of Tij, but women seem inclined to ignore it and have a blast, and use the festival to take a jab at patriarchy.

*Tij this year falls on Wednesday, 12 September*

**Sewa Bhattarai**



EVENTS



BFA Show 2018

27 students graduating with BFA degrees in painting, sculpture and graphic communication from Sirjana College of Fine Arts showcase their final assignments. 7-8 September, Nepal Art Council, Baber Mahal, (01) 4220735

24 Odes

A printmaking exhibition by students from Kathmandu University School of Arts, Center for Art and Design, batch 2016. 7-11 September (except Saturday), 10:30am-5:30pm, Park Gallery, Pulchok

Finding the roots

Nepali visual artists Erina Tamrakar and Sushma Shakya, and Taiwanese multimedia artist Yi Chi Lin and photographer Yi Lun Lu, are exhibiting their work at the ninth edition of Air\_Mcube, curated by Manish Lal Shrestha. 7-15 September, Gallery Mcube, Mitra Road, Chakupat, Pulchok

Himalayan Art Fest

The festival focuses on the artworks of living legends and contemporary artists of Nepal with their paintings, paubha arts, prints, sculptures, installations, ceramic and photographs. Followed by performances of contemporary and theatre artists, musicians, art talk and creative activities for children. 11-15 September, 11am onwards, Nepal Art Council, Baber Mahal, 9841211297



The Comedy Tuk Tuk Show

Book tables for a night of laughter by three amazing stand-up comedians in the K-Town: Ajis Kayastha, Pranesh Gautam, and Aayush Shrestha (headlining). 8 September, 7:30pm onwards, SukraBar, Lazimpat, Rs100, 9841574241/ 9808639657

Amalgam 2018

Ceramic arts, paintings, prints, mixed media works and sculptures by 42 artists. Also learn ceramic raku techniques with Master Artist Gopal Kalapremi. 7-28 September (ceramic workshop: 8-9 September), 12-5pm, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited, (01) 4433930

Godawari Running Fest

Test your strength, stamina and teamwork at Nepal's first obstacle race. Register to participate in one of these: TNF Ultra Run 50k, SUUNTO Trail Run 30k, LA Sportiva Trail Run 15k, TNF Yeti Run 5k, TNF Kids Run 2k. 8 September, 6am onwards, Godawari Football Ground, 9841907889, 9813927909



Trail ride to Lakure

A call out to hardcore mountain bikers for a warm up ride, before a longer ride next week. 85 km route: Koteswor- Bhaktapur- Suryabinayak- Sangha- Banepa-Dhulikhel- Namobuddha - Balthali - Panuati - Lakuri and back. 8 September, 5:45am onwards, The Bike Farm Nepal, Jhamsikhel, 9813806446.

Inter-school competition

Organise a cleanup in September and create a poster to win resources for your school worth Rs50,000. Submit before the end of the month. 7-30 September, Clean up Nepal, Golfutar, Budhanilkantha, (01) 4373175, To register and submit: www.nationwidecleanup.com

Ethos of Surrounding

A solo art exhibition by Ishan Pariyar titled 'Ethos of Surrounding'. His works origins vary from social and environmental contexts through use of different art mediums. 9-30 September, 11am-7pm, GG Machaan, Pulchok, 9849607233

NADA Auto Show

Exhibiting and demonstrating renowned auto brands and components, the show is aimed at publicising technological advancements in the automobile sector. 11-16 September, 11am-6pm, Bhrikuti Mandap Exhibition Hall, 9851033448

MUSIC



Kta Haru

The contemporary band will entertain you with just their funky originals that tell relatable stories. Recently, they launched their single 'Dharan' from their album 'Galat Nirnaya'. 7 September, 6-9:30pm, Wicked Spoon Fork and Rock, Jhamsikhel, 9843471625

Love Juice

A musical group performs traditional and famous music from countries like Norway, Peru, Brazil, Japan and more, along with their originals. Spread love and peace through music. 7 September, 7-10pm, Places Restaurant and Bar, Thamel, (01) 4700413

Sun Down Affair 6

Soak in the stunning sunset view at Sun Down Affair's fifth event this Saturday, with five K-town DJs. 8 September, 4pm onwards, The Foyer, Jhamsikhel, (01) 5536513



North H

Ranked 7th on the ReverbNation International Rock chart after the release of their first album 'Into the Night', the Bhutanese band will be performing for a Nepali crowd. 7 September, 7-10pm, Moksh, Jhamsikhel, 9823306918

Sabin Rai & The Pharoah

Sabin Rai & The Pharaoh will be setting the room on fire with a supporting act by The Sign Band. 12 September, 8pm onwards, Senate Club, Thamel, (01) 4254826

OUR PICK



Opens in Kathmandu on 7 September

Nepali movies are exploring a lot of new avenues, and Ramkahani goes down yet another novel path. A man falls in love with a ghost, but will their love survive? Does she truly love him, or does she simply want his mortal life? Will his love be able to withstand all the obstacles, from this and other worlds? The horror-comedy-love story is a new genre in Nepali cinema. Produced by Pooja Sharma, the movie also stars Sharma with Akash Shrestha and is directed by Sudarshan Thapa.

DINING



Experience Jamaica

Treat yourself to the tropical flavours of the Caribbean islands. The recipes are straight from the land itself. 7-15 September, 6:30-10:30pm/ 11am-10:30pm, Sunrise Restaurant/ Piano Bar, Hotel Yak and Yeti, Darbar Marg. Rs2,250 (+ taxes), (01) 4248999 Extn: 2865

Dad dines free

Make this Father's Day special with the dinner with your dad. Menu includes an assortment of momos, seafood chatamari, Tex Mex, biryani and live barbecue, donuts and chocolate eclairs. 9 September, 6:30-10pm, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, Boudha, Rs2,200 (+ taxes), (01) 4217123

Chez Caroline

Tucked away from the street noise and fumes, this is the place to visit for authentic French and continental cuisine in Nepal. The restaurant now offers catering and takeaway services too. Baber Mahal Revisited, (01) 4263070/ 4264187



The BLVD

Craving for pastries? Royal Singi's lobby cafe Pronto serves a wide variety of cakes, pastries and cookies, along with a diverse selection of coffee and other beverages. 9am-7pm, Royal Singi Kathmandu, Kamaladi, (01) 4424190

Barbecue Brunch

Enjoy Lebanese shawarma, Hyderabad biryani, Mongolian, or Japanese teppanyaki, Tibetan momos, Italian and Nepali thukpa with friends and family accompanied by live music, swimming, raffle draw and exciting door prizes at Gokarna Forest Resort. Every Saturday, 12pm onwards, Courtyard, Gokarna Forest Resort, Thali, Rs3,500/2,500 (adult), Rs3,000/2,000 (children), For prior reservations: (01) 4451212

GETAWAY



A relaxation gift

Give your busy dad a break with the perfectly tailored Father's Day spa package, which includes hairdressing, pedicure, deep tissue massage, lunch at The Café, steam, sauna and whirlpool. 9-30 September, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, Boudha, Rs7,500 (+ taxes), (01) 4217123

Waterfront Resort

View of the lake. Check. Peaceful environment. Check. Luxury guaranteed? Check. Waterfront Resort ticks all the right boxes and is the place to stay in the lake city. Lakeside, Pokhara, (061) 466303

Pamper papa

This Father's Day, pamper your dad at the hotel with a lavish dining, 20 minutes reflexology or head and shoulder massage at the spa, a goodie box and a family photograph. 9 September, Radisson Hotel Kathmandu, Lazimpat, (01) 4411818

Harmony Spa & Health Club

Amongst trees on the edge of a plateau overlooking Gokarna Forest and the grassy valley below, Harmony Spa offers therapeutic care within a natural domain. Included are a variety of rejuvenating courses emphasizing Ayurvedic treatments within Ayura, the Adam & Eve, and Serenity massage rooms. 6:30am-10:30pm, Gokarna Forest Resort, Thali, (01) 4451212

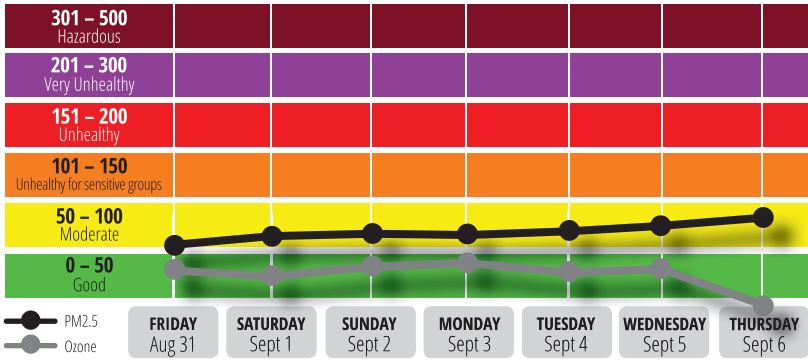


Soaltee Westend Premier

Given the fact humans have influenced the earth's warming, several measures have been taken into consideration to build Soaltee Westend Premier, a Green Hotel. Just two kilometres away, the hotel offers a breath of fresh air in Nepalganj. Bujhgaon, Nepalganj, (081) 551145

AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 31 August - 6 September



It is a sign of things to come that the average daily concentration of PM2.5 in the air in Kathmandu's City Centre was in the "Moderate" yellow band throughout the week. The US Embassy monitoring station at Phora Durbar did register air in the "Good" green band just after the rains, but the pollution level picked up soon after. On Wednesday, the concentration almost reached 'Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups'. Ozone, a more unstable gas formed by vehicular gas pollutants, was however in the "Good" level. Check pollution levels live online at www.nepalitimes.com https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/

- सार्वजनिक निकायहरूले आफ्नो निकाय सम्बन्धी सूचना प्रत्येक तीन/तीन महिनामा विभिन्न राष्ट्रिय भाषामा प्रकाशित गर्नुपर्ने तथा आम सञ्चार माध्यमको उपयोग गर्नुपर्ने कानूनी व्यवस्था छ । यसको पालना भए-नभएको नागरिकले चासो वयक्त गर्नुपर्छ ।
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सूचना तथा प्रसारण विभाग



# Press freedom must be defended by pushing the limits

Shiva Gaunle

In a democracy, all private individuals have a right to privacy. People, after all, are entitled to lead dignified lives without others prying into their intimate affairs.

However, some of the provisions of the new Criminal Code Act and the draft Privacy Bill violate the principles of press freedom in a democracy, and deliberately blur the lines between what is private and public. If these provisions are not amended, they will lead to the demise of journalism in this country. In fact, the laws appear to be designed to do just that.

It is in a journalist's code of ethics that a private individual's privacy should not be infringed upon. However, the Criminal Code twists this right to also include the privacy of those who hold public office. Citizens in a democracy have a right to know what public figures do, what they own, and what they say in public or private.

The new Code and Privacy Bill attempt to gag the media and restrict the journalists' role to hold power to account. For example, they criminalise morphing of images. But the media democracies often employ photo montages as satire to better illustrate a story and to drive home the message more clearly. The Code would also essentially silence cartoonists, since the definition of what can be construed as 'ridicule' is left so broad.

Last week, the editor of Himal Khabarpatrika called me to tell me that he was going ahead with a morphed image on the magazine's

cover. He said he was trying to push the boundaries even though the Bill and Act expressly prohibit photo manipulation. It was a test. Having once served as editor of this weekly news magazine which has historically confronted the absolute monarchy and the extreme left to uphold press freedom, I felt it was important for Himal Khabarpatrika to once more stand up for its core values.



The cover image of Home Minister Ram Bahadur Thapa is photoshopped to show him in police uniform. The message here is the minister's attempt to interfere with Nepal Police at a time when there have been a series of lapses in the way cases of rape, gold smuggling and restriction on people's freedom of movement have been handled.

To be sure, the Criminal Code does not allow the media to manipulate photographs. But our point is that the media here is using the image of a public figure to make an important point about collusion and political interference.

If Thapa was not Home Minister, doctoring his photograph to show him in police uniform could be construed as an infringement of his privacy. But he is a public figure who had made a series of controversial moves that affect the rule of law, and it is the media's role to bring this to the attention of citizens in the clearest possible way. If journalists are denied this freedom, as is being done now in Nepal, the space for civil society will shrink and democracy will be undermined.

Shiva Gaunle is ex-President of Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ) and Editor at the Centre for Investigative Journalism (CIJ). This text is a summarised translation of his speech at an recent interaction program last week in Kathmandu.






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**GOOD NEIGHBOUR:** Prime Minister K P Oli and Indian PM Narendra Modi jointly inaugurated the 400-bed Nepal-Bharat Maitri Pashupati Dharmasala in Kathmandu last week when Modi was in Nepal for the BIMSTEC Summit.



**INTELLIGENT DEFENCE:** Acting Commander-in-Chief Lt Gen Purna Chandra Thapa addresses the 11th Asia-Pacific Intelligence Chief's Conference in Kathmandu on Sunday.



**SWISS HELP:** Swiss Ambassador Elisabeth von Capeller signs an agreement with Finance Secretary Rajan Khanal for the implementation of the third phase of Safer Migration project administered by the Embassy of Switzerland for the welfare of Nepali migrant workers.



**THRIVING CULTURE:** Artists perform Mahakali dance in Sano Thimi. Mahakali is one of the several masked Newari traditional dances that are seeing a revival in this Kathmandu Valley municipality.



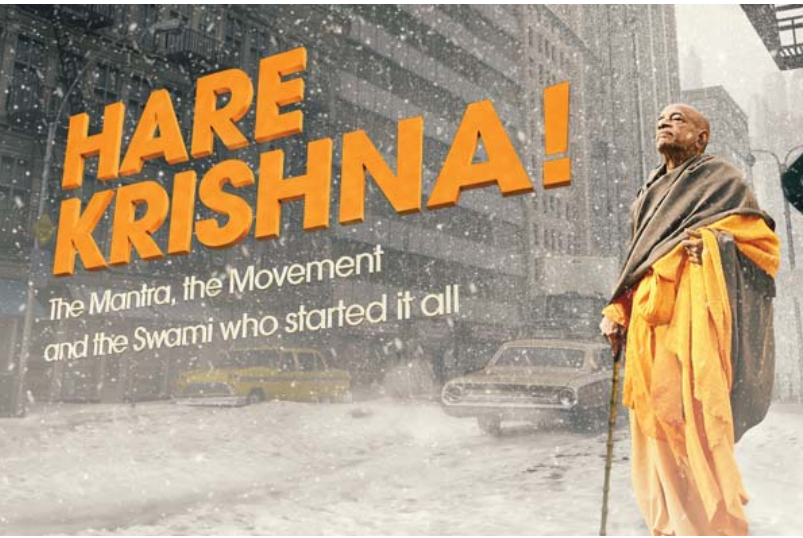
**CONGRATULATIONS:** Winner of the KTMKORA 2018 click2win contest Bibek Shrestha receives a ticket to a destination of his choice anywhere in Europe on Turkish Airlines.

**H**are Krishna is the saga of one man who started a spiritual movement in a land and culture completely new to him. Swami Prabhupada was the initiator of the Hare Krishna movement, and the documentary of his life leaves viewers in awe of the man's audacity. They will also be provoked into thinking about his philosophy, one that touched so many lives globally.

Prabhupada reached New York at the peak of the hippie movement in 1965, when he was already 70. He was alone, without any money or contacts. His only strength was his faith in Lord Krishna and a deep spiritual philosophy that inspired his living.

Director, Writer and Producer John Griesser begins by showing the subtle destruction of cultural barriers as Prabhupada's philosophies inject young American minds. Intermingling with teenagers who sought happiness beyond the drug-induced high of the hippie generation, Prabhupada gradually begins to inspire them to find true happiness through self-realisation. Hare Krishna is a chant he inserts in their minds, and it becomes the collective mantra of his disciples.

Griesser travelled with Prabhupada, filming the movement along with his wife, and in *Hare Krishna*, he brings back black and white footage he shot throughout those years. Through it, you can feel the presence and verve of the man himself as he laughs and preaches. You will hear Prabhupada's philosophy in his own voice -- as he talks about the liberating power of chanting, the need of self realisation above any political ideology, and the transcending of all barriers of



language, caste, nationality to attain the depth of the soul.

The documentary depends greatly on narration of disciples to unfold the timeline of the movement. They have intimate stories to share about how he influenced their lives. In every speaker's voice, you can feel a sincere love for their guru as they fervently express how amicable, welcoming, energetic and loving he was.

Beyond visuals of Prabhupada and his disciples are scenes from the hippie movement of the 1960s, to the extensive green lands of Vrindavan and the churches in the Soviet Union being guarded by police. The depiction of the political and cultural climate of different places during the movement works to zoom out to the bigger picture of the Cold War years, and further illustrates just how extraordinary Prabhupada's achievement was.

In a scene showing the extent of his influence, George Harrison, the lead guitarist of the Beatles, begins with Hare Krishna as he sings *My Sweet Lord*, a song inspired by Prabhupada's philosophy. His disciples struggle in England, shaving their heads and wearing yellow bed sheets to

draw attention, but ultimately triumph. Prabhupada dares to go to the Soviet Union, where the police examine his copy of the Bhagvad Gita because religious books were banned. At one point, the Hare Krishna groups are accused of being part of an organised crime syndicate.

The documentary is not going to immediately transform viewers into followers of Lord Krishna, but it will definitely inspire them to think about the phenomenon of how cults spread before satellite TV, the internet and climate change.

Western soft power holds great sway over the world, including Nepal. The documentary prods us to look for answers to the age-old questions of happiness and spiritual enlightenment in our own eastern culture, and the Bhagvad Gita and Shreemad Bhagvad Mahapuran scriptures. Profound and transformative ideas lie hidden in our own culture.

This is a documentary that transports even secularists and skeptics to at least consider how the Hare Krishna movement helped fill a spiritual vacuum. A must-see on the week of Lord Krishna's birthday.

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GRASSROOTS DEMOCRACY

# Rana regime restored in Nepalganj

As the only re-elected mayor in last year's election, Dhawal Rana picks up where he left off 25 years ago

**Kunda Dixit**  
in Nepalganj

At a recent breakfast meeting in a hotel he owns, Dhawal Shumsher Rana peels a hard-boiled egg while his mobile rings incessantly.

A Muslim elder is inviting him for an Eid feast, and Rana answers in chaste Awadhi. An activist for *labeda suruwal* as national dress wants the mayor's support, he deals with that. There is a call from a hospital where a student wounded in police firing on the anti-rape protests in Mahendranagar is in critical condition, and may need to be helicoptered to Kathmandu. Finally, Dhawal Rana turns his phone face down for an interview with a newspaper for which he was a regular columnist in 2002-2003.

Back then, the war was raging in the mountains of Western Nepal, the army had entered the conflict and casualties were mounting. Local elections had been cancelled, and Rana had just stepped down after his first tenure as mayor when he wrote a seminal op-ed in the 18 April 2003 issue of *Nepali Times* titled 'In a federated state'.

*'Nepal must move towards federalism for the sake of inclusive democracy, social justice, greater responsibility, a responsive and streamlined administration, decentralisation and greater peoples' participation in governance. But this does not mean fragmentation and carving out the country along caste, racial, tribal, religious and linguistic lines.'*

*The answer for Nepal lies in true devolution of power to elected local bodies, with the phasing out of central interference. The local bodies will best accommodate the regional, racial, cultural and social aspirations of the people at the grassroots, and political trickle-up effect will bring this inclusive representation to the national level.'*

This was way ahead of the times, because King Gyanendra was consolidating power in a creeping coup to take the country back to absolute monarchy.

"If we had truly devolved power then by decentralising decision-making to north-south states, we would not have polarised the country between hills and plains, between castes and ethnicities," says Rana, who is fluent in English because of his royal pedigree and education in boarding schools in India. Dhawal's great grandfather was Dev Shumsher who was banished to India in a purge. His grandfather, Mussorie Shumsher, was allowed to come back to Nepal, but not to Kathmandu, and owned rice mills in Nepalganj. His father was an agriculturist, who worked for a US aid agency, and established a farm where Dhawal Rana now lives.



KUNDA DIXIT

Nepalgunj

After studies, Rana returned to Nepal and worked for the Cotton Development Board, but resigned after he found corruption too engrained. He joined the RPP after the 1990 changes, but was thrown out. He fought and lost elections after running as an independent, then joined the UML and was elected mayor in the 1994 elections.

He worked to restore social harmony between Muslims, who form 25% of Nepalgunj's 100,000 population, and the Hindus. He started to improve infrastructure, but the war undid much of it. Soon, local governments were dissolved elections put off, and Dhawal Rana used the time to finish his PhD thesis titled (what else?) 'Nepali Municipalities: A Mayor's Dilemma'. Last year he was elected again.

"Nepalgunj voted for me because people wanted me to continue what I had started in my first tenure as mayor, they remembered," Rana tells us.

Detractors say Dhawal Rana is not corrupt because he does not need to be. However, there are not too many other Ranases with old money who have gone into politics to bring change. In these cynical times, he is rare proof that honesty does pay.

Dhawal Rana says wryly: "In my first tenure, the contractors did not believe I was not corrupt. This time, no one believes I am corrupt."

As Rana drives his Safari SUV through Nepalgunj's main street, locals recognise him and wave or walk over to chat. When powerful local businessmen refused to allow road-widening, he took them to court, won, and bulldozed their shopfronts. His 90km road upgrade is an ADB-supported project,

**TRANSPARENCY NATIONAL:** Mayor Dhawal Shumsher Rana poses last week in front of a two-storey poster at the Nepalgunj Municipality Office that lists all the projects he is undertaking for urban renewal with the budget outlay for each of them. Says Rana: "In my last tenure, the contractors did not believe I wasn't corrupt. This time, no one believes I am corrupt."

and already Nepalgunj's streets are much better than those in Kathmandu.

Rana says his biggest challenge is that people are impatient, and want overnight improvement. There is no dearth of money, he says, but Kathmandu still controls the purse-strings and that delays projects.

Rana wants to retire after mayorship, but does not rule out joining national politics if the triangular tussle within the RPP leadership is resolved. Asked what he wants most of all, Mayor Rana replies simply: "Less interference from Kathmandu." 🇳🇵

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# A breath of fresh air in Thimi

The one mayor in Kathmandu Valley trying to be a role model for good governance

Monika Deupala

Kathmandu Valley has 11 mayors, and the public's perception of most of them one year after they were elected is not very inspiring.

Yet, here in Madhyapur Thimi, situated halfway between Bhaktapur and Kathmandu, Madan Sundar Shrestha is a breath of fresh air. He talks more like a technocrat than some of the populist colleagues from his Communist party.

In a refreshing interview this week, he talked about bicycle lanes, footpaths for pedestrians, and turning his town into a health and education hub. He believes governments and private schools should improve each other's quality.

Mayor Shrestha has got private schools in his city to grant scholarships to 10% of their students, and the municipality has been working to pay tuition fees for another 5% of children from underprivileged families. For government schools, the mayor has taken personal charge of trying to upgrade their quality.

The mayor got Madhyapur Thimi Municipality to take over the Korea Nepal Friendship Hospital by investing Rs80 million a year to run it, and he also wants all residents of Thimi to have health insurance. Thimi is where the Janak Teaching Material Centre and the Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT) were set up decades ago. The city also has the SAARC TB research centre.

"We want at least 80% of the people here to have comprehensive health insurance, and if we can

achieve that within a decade, people here won't have to pay for medical treatment ever again," Shrestha told *Nepali Times*.

Thimi was recently hit by unprecedented floods after the Hanumante River burst its banks and inundated residences and shops. Unlike other politicians in Nepal, Mayor Shrestha was quick off the mark, personally accompanying rescue teams with heavy equipment to take people to safety.

"This is the best mayor we have ever had," local resident Sudin Bajracharya said.

When the mayor found out that the real reason for the floods was not heavy rain but poor draining and haphazard construction along the floodplain of the river, he allocated Rs80 million to unblock and maintain the drainage system and Rs70 million to fix the roads.

Shrestha says he is a firm believer that development does not mean destroying the tangible and intangible heritage of his historic town. Thimi had many ponds that used to recharge ground water, and served as the focal point for many festivals. Many had been converted into basketball courts or parking lots.

Under Mayor Shrestha, the Bishnu Kundal, Bhulakhel and Kamal Pokhari are ponds again, and this week, children were diving into the water to swim. The Municipality is also helping revive dance rituals like the Mahakali Nach, Mayur Nach, Salancha Nach.

Shrestha is working to streamline the taxation system, making it more scientific and practical than before. Property tax is now included with land and housing tax so people do not have to pay separately, and end up paying less. Other Municipality fees are nominal, and the Mayor

is strict about not allowing middlemen to cheat earthquake survivors on their registrations.

Shrestha's popularity was already high, but it has become higher as they see their mayor among them, trying to make the city more convenient for its citizens. In fact, when some assailants attacked him on the Araniko Highway last year, people spontaneously came to his aid and put the attackers behind bars.

Currently, Mayor Shrestha is working with engineers to develop a plan on 'tactical urbanism' in Thimi. This involves many low-cost interventions to the infrastructure to make the roads safer, including making roads more bicycle friendly and adding sidewalks.

Only if the mayor of Kathmandu and Lalitpur would take a few tips from Thimi. 📌

# Jumla's great leap into the future

Kantika Sejuwal says Jumla is already ahead of the rest of Nepal with female mayor and deputy

Krishnamaya Upadhyaya in Jumla

Jumla may be in the heart of culturally conservative mountains of northwestern Nepal, but it has the most progressive municipality because it is the only city in which both the mayor and deputy mayor elected in last year's local election are women.

Kantika Sejuwal was a school principal in Jumla, and not really into politics. But after her husband Manav Sejuwal, who was district president of the Nepali Congress, was killed in a plane crash five years ago, she was persuaded to stand for mayor of Chandannath Municipality and won. Her deputy is Apsara Neupane of the NCP.

"People have an outdated perception of Jumla, it is not the land of uneducated people anymore. Though there are social inequalities, there are also many educated and capable women. The local election has proved that," Mayor Sejuwal told *Nepali Times* in an interview. Sejuwal did have to struggle inside her own party for the nomination, but she won the hearts of Jumla's voters during the campaign. However, one year after she was elected,

there are the usual grumblings, also heard elsewhere, that improvements are not as rapid as promised during election time.

The major problems of Chandannath Municipality, the capital of Jumla district, is still roading, electricity, and communication— the same issues that dominated the last local election of 1997. Although, since then, Jumla has been connected to the Karnali Highway, the airport has been upgraded and the town has more development. Not all ten wards are connected by road even though Sejuwal has opened tracks. There are still power cuts, but these may end when two hydropower plants go into operation.

"There is still a lot to be done here. Yes, roads are being built all over, but they are destroying farmlands and forests. No one has time to think of those things now," says Jumla resident Chudaraj Neupane. There is also concern that Jumla is not prepared for natural disasters like earthquakes, since the new buildings are not seismic-resistant. Sejuwal says she has been trying to balance the need to deliver fast on roads with proper environmental assessments concerns.

Another Jumla resident, Sushmita Thapa, is more concerned about waste management. After the road reached Jumla, it brought packaged foods and single-use plastic, which are just dumped on the banks of the once-pristine Tila River. Sejuwal is aware of the problem, and says a landfill site has been located and the Municipality



BIKRAM RAI

is looking for funds to complete it.

Sejuwal, like other mayoral candidates last year, had promised to make Jumla a 'Smart City'. Many residents don't think the place has become any smarter, and accuse the mayor of just using a catchy phrase. But the mayor says a Smart City does not just mean better infrastructure. "We are trying to focus on improving governance, and a

development model that suits our geography."

Has having a woman in that position made any difference? The people of Jumla say that access to services has certainly become easier, especially for women. The municipality building has also been made disabled-friendly. "Women, people with disabilities and the elderly come to me with problems like domestic violence, education and employment," says Sejuwal, who has started an employment program for 400 women.

The mayor has also been trying to address engrained gender and caste discrimination manifested in crimes like chhaupadi. However, she says: "The government has banned these practices, but they are deep rooted and will take a long time to change."

Since both the mayor and deputy mayor of Jumla are women, some wonder if they are up to the task. But Sejuwal says she is working with her deputy on not just the next four years of her tenure, but for the next 20.

"We don't know if we will be elected to the next term, but we have a vision for beyond our tenures," says Sejuwal, who is in Kathmandu this week to plan for an investment conference in Jumla in September.

"We want to encourage investors to come to Jumla and see that it has much potential in agro-industries, tourism and infrastructure," says Sejuwal. "We hope the infusion of funds will help sustained development of Jumla in future." 📌



YUVARAJ SHRESTHA

# A mayor of his word

Yuvaraj Shrestha in Pokhara

Pokhara's mayor Man Bahadur GC is a man of his word, and he aims to deliver on all his election promises during his five-year term.

On Monday, GC signed a contract with WorldLink to provide free WiFi in the city's 10 major tourist centres and public places like Fewa Lake, Davis Fall, Mahendrapul and Manipal Hospital. GC had already launched free WiFi at Pokhara Airport and the Western Regional Hospital.

He is just honouring a pledge he made during last year's election campaign to turn Pokhara into a

technology-friendly city. The ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP) was criticised at the national level for imposing 13% tax on internet services, against its election promise to expand free WiFi across the country. And although GC belongs to the same party, instead of taxing the Net, he had made it free in his city.

After GC was elected last year, Pokhara Metropolitan City installed fiber-optic internet at all its 33 ward offices, ending local people's ordeal to queue up for hours to pay taxes or have their house designs approved. Now, they can access these services from their own ward offices and do not have to go to the municipality office.

Ever since serving as the chair of Kalika VDC in 1997-2002, GC has been a staunch supporter of

decentralisation. He is critical of his own party in the federal government for not handing over education and land revenue offices to local governments. He does not just want Kathmandu to devolve to provinces and municipalities; as mayor, he has delegated a lot of his authority to the ward committees.

The Pokhara Municipality board recently authorised all ward committees to sanction local development projects worth up to Rs1.5 million. And GC aims to devolve more power to ward committees. Pokhara is Nepal's largest metropolitan city in terms of geography, and it has lots of public landmarks like lakes, forests and other waterbodies which are being encroached upon by businesses backed by politicians. The absence

of locally elected representatives for two decades was a golden chance for the land mafia to grab public land.

GC aims to reclaim Pokhara's public land from the encroachers. He is soft-spoken, and hardly raises his voice during negotiations, but is determined and persistent, some would even call him stubborn. Pokhara has declared this as 'The year of Public Land Conservation' and he wants to give back to the people what is their collective property.

"We will first identify all encroached property, then we will demolish all the illegally built structures," he says firmly.

GC is working to deliver on his other election promises like upgrading roads, conserving rivers, generating jobs and turning women into entrepreneurs. This is why GC always looks like a man in a hurry, and terminates our interview to dash off to another municipal board meeting. 📌

GRASSROOTS DEMOCRACY





MONIKA DEUPALA

# Pro-poor mayor

Jiyalal Sah  
in Parsagadi

Ok Narayan Yadav, 44, served his community as an NGO activist for a decade, but he often felt helpless while dealing with vexing problems like untouchability, inequality and social injustice. So Yadav decided to take a plunge into politics, trying to change the system from within, rather than simply as a development worker dependent on foreign aid and grants. The Nepali Congress fielded him as a mayoral candidate in Parsagadi municipality of Parsa district, but people in the eastern Tarai had to wait for local elections much longer than others. While six other provinces went to the polls in May 2017, Province 2 had to wait until September. The

local polls were postponed twice in this plains-only province due to threats from the Madhes-based parties. It was difficult for Yadav to spearhead a campaign in Parsagadi because his party was described by the Tarai-centric parties as an anti-Madhesi force. What made his victory even more unlikely was Parsagadi's proximity with Birganj, the epicentre of the Madhes movement. At least four people had been killed in clashes with police in Birganj, where anti-Kathmandu sentiment had hit an all time high. But Yadav won, albeit by a narrow margin. He says his narrow victory reminds him every day that he needs to work harder to win the hearts and minds of his people. Yadav's pet project 'the mayor for the poor' has been a hit. As a development worker, he always felt 'limited' whenever he reached the under-served villages of Dom, Musahar, Chamar or other Dalit

communities. His 'mayor for the poor' project is enabling the Dalits to access public services. As part of its activities, the mayor delivers sanitary kits to pregnant Dalit women. Under-served families get free solar panels so their children can focus on studies. Soon after being elected mayor last year, Yadav hit the ground running. He met with Alternative Energy Promotion Centre (AEPD) officials to power his municipality with solar energy. The AEPD subsidises 60% of the solar power installation cost, and Yadav encourages his constituents to make use of these grants. The municipality has decided to provide an additional subsidy for the poor and Dalit families who cannot manage even 40% of the cost of solar lighting. The municipality is also installing solar street lights, and improving rural roads to help farmers get their produce to market. The mayor's office has revived a birthing centre which was out of operation for years, in Harpur of Parsagadi. Sangita Devi Sah, a local social worker, gave birth to her child in the local birthing centre early this year. "If the mayor had not restarted this facility, I would have to go to Birganj for delivery, these little improvements matter for people like us," she says. Detractors say the mayor is 'slow', but Yadav says he is just 'steady'. They say he is not 'charismatic', but he says he is just 'honest'. Brij Mohan Chaudhari, who was the mayoral candidate of the Federal Socialist Forum Nepal (FSFN), accuses Yadav of wasting his budget in unnecessary road projects. But even Chaudhari admits that Yadav has done well to uplift health, education and social welfare in the municipality. "Province 2 mayors like me were elected four months after mayors in other provinces started working," Yadav said. "So we need to work harder to catch up."



OMASTHARA

# Wonderful Waling

Municipality wants Syangja's diaspora to come home to lift up their town

Shashwat Acharya  
in Waling

Waling looks like an ordinary municipality, not much different from any other mountain town in Nepal. But it is poised for complete transformation, if the plans of its passionate mayor are anything to go by. Dilip Pratap Khand is a descendant of the royal family of this Syangja principality, one of the last to fall to Prithvi Narayan Shah's conquests in the mid-18th century. His grandfather and father were both pro-democracy activists, and Khand won last year's local election by a comfortable margin. The mayor is a graduate from Banaras Hindu University and exudes confidence, brimming with ideas to turn his hometown into a Smart City, with the slogan, *Wonderful Waling*. This is one of five municipalities of Syangja district, a two hour drive south of Pokhara along the Siddhartha Highway. Situated amidst lush, rolling hills by the Andhi Khola Valley, the land is fertile and famous for its rice. In fact, the name Waling is derived from a type of folk song about rice plantation called 'Wali'. The central plank of Khand's mayoral election campaign last year was the economic transformation of the municipality. He claims he refrained from campaigning aggressively and making lengthy speeches, preferring to portray himself as a doer rather than a talker. "I briefly told people about my plans for Waling and urged them to exercise their discretion and will," Khand says. He cultivated all-party support for his economic agenda, and seems to face fewer political obstacles than his counterparts elsewhere. Immediately following his election, the municipality organised a workshop where it invited members of various political parties, winners and runners-up of the local polls and town planning experts. They discussed Smart City models in India and other countries, and formulated a five year strategy for Waling's transformation.



OMASTHARA

The two main planks of the strategy focus on tourism and agro products in each village, while the town will concentrate on planned urbanisation, waste management, transportation and innovation centres. Khand expects both to generate up to 12,000 new jobs. "We are already implementing a zero-waste policy and have made a profit of about Rs7 million this year alone just by processing waste, and we have plans to recycle waste plastic for road resurfacing," he says. Khand's vision is to turn Waling into a technological, industrial and touristic hub, and some of the work is already underway. Waling natives working as engineers in Singapore and elsewhere have been convinced to come home to set up innovation labs in schools, so students can work on robotics and other gadgets to do chores like dishwashing. The emphasis on hands-on education, Khand believes, will spur students' creativity and orient them towards technology and business. He plans a Waling industrial corridor to produce cement and coal. Khand is distributing the taxes among local farmers and entrepreneurs as seed money to produce fruits and vegetables. He is also planning to set up agro marts through which Waling's produces can be directly sold to markets in Pokhara, Butwal, Bhairawa and Kathmandu, thus eliminating middlemen. Because transparency and efficiency are key to good governance, Khand wants to deliver, through a mobile app, all 70 public services that the municipality is supposed to provide to its residents. "We are collaborating with an app developer, and will give people tutorials on using the app. We will stop using paper within a year," he says. Asked whether or not he is biting more than he can chew, Khand's reply is typical of the man: "We are a full-fledged government with rights to formulate laws. We can accomplish a lot if we have the will, the management skills and effective teamwork. Five years is a lot of time to completely transform a place."



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