

GOING PLACES TOGETHER

CORROSIVE CONDUCT

There is an argument that there has not been an abrupt rise in the number of rape cases in Nepal, it is just being reported more now. It is difficult to say what is worse: that it used to be hidden, or that victims and their families are coming forward to complain to the police.

That is because the high profile cases of rape and abuse in the past few months have shown that the police is actually involved in protecting perpetrators, falsely accusing the innocent, destroying evidence, and covering up the truth. Combined with cases of recent encounter killings, the actions have led to a serious erosion of the public's confidence in the police. In fact, there may be many victims now who are not going to file a complaint because they fear harassment and fabrication.

As we reported last month, the number of reported rape cases in Nepal has increased by 30% in the past year. It has multiplied four times in ten years. There have been 408 rape and attempted rape complaints brought to the police since the horrific murder of Nirmala Panta in Kanchanpur on 26 July. A special committee assigned to investigate the case, while accusing the district police chief of covering up, came no closer to naming the suspects.

The police have been equally ineffective in tackling a surge in copy-cat acid attacks in the past two weeks. The shocking case of Samjhana Das in Rautahat has once more exposed the culture of misogyny, patriarchy and impunity that corrodes our society. Men perpetrate these heinous crimes because they are brought up with a sense of entitlement and the conviction that they will never be convicted. There are also mothers-in-law and women who commit gender crimes, but by and large, it is a male-dominated activity.

Acid attacks are especially horrific since they disfigure the victim for life, even if they survive. Pouring acid on a person is like burning them alive. In most cases, the root cause is the same as in rape, and often it is to take revenge for rebuffing an advance.

We have reported in the past decades in this paper about how acid attacks and bride burning are also perpetrated by in-laws for insufficient dowry.

The survivors often lose their sight and are maimed because the acid burns through the skin down to the bone. They suffer months of excruciating pain even if they do not survive, like Samjhana Das, who died on Monday two weeks after an acid attack. Her 15-year-old younger sister, Sushmita Das, was also injured. A neighbour, Rambabu Paswan, has confessed he used acid on them because Samjhana had rejected him. (See page 14-15)

Three years ago in the heart of Kathmandu, a fellow-student squirted acid on a class mate, and because it happened in the capital, the crime got wide play in the media. When the perpetrator was finally caught, it turned out to be a case of someone taking revenge against the girl's family, who lived next door, for being taunted for being a Dalit.

The case illustrates how in Nepal there are layers upon layers of pent-up grievances against injustice and discrimination. Stricter measures on the purchase of acid, and monitoring its use may be a deterrence, but as long as the root causes of gender-based violence remain, potential perpetrators will simply use another tool to attack girls and women.

There is also urgent action needed to make the laws against acid attacks at least as strict, if not stricter than the ones for rape, bride-burning and other heinous crimes against women. At the moment, perpetrators only get a maximum of eight years in jail if convicted of carrying out an acid attack.

Violence against women is a manifestation of the pervasive patriarchy in our culture. Misogyny is sanctioned by religious texts, folklore, movies, songs. Insulting women is taken as a joke. We have to look deeply inwards as a society to question values that we as a people seem to have come to accept as normal.

Despite the new Constitution, the scale of justice in Nepal is still skewed. The persistence of gender based violence is the result of pervasive impunity, where men, powerful people, upper castes, urban dwellers, appear to have more protection from prosecution for crimes than women, lower castes, the poor, and weak.

It should be the state's responsibility -- to protect with prevention, investigation and justice -- the most vulnerable section of society. Alas, in our case, it is the most influential who are protected.

It is meaningless to boast that Nepal's Parliament has one of the highest representation of women in the world when we have such a poor record in granting women equal citizenship rights, and in protecting our mothers and sisters against crimes.

Pouring acid on a person is like burning them alive.



10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Writing in the #416 issue of *Nepali Times* of 5-11 September 2008, the head of UNMIN Ian Martin wrote about the successes of Nepal's peace process, but warned that Nepalis should not have to wait till the new Constitution (which was still long six years away then) to see an improvement in their lives. Excerpts from Martin's op-ed:

Nepal's unique peace process has rarely gained outside attention since the guns fell silent two years ago. Yet, this 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



GOD ON EARTH

One of the biggest festivals of Kathmandu Valley, Indra Jatra, is in full swing this week with feasts and festivities. The eight day long carnival is observed with chariot processions with the living gods Ganesh, Bhairab and the living goddess Kumari, masked dances. Watch this video and get into the mood.



AN ACID TEST

News of rapes, acid attacks and domestic violence make it to the front pages of the media every day. They expose a deep-seated misogyny, patriarchy and culture of impunity in the country that sends the message to criminals that they can literally get away with murder. Go online to watch a visual story of the challenges ahead. Coverage in this issue on [page 1](#), [2](#), [14-15](#).

FOR & AGAINST NIJGAD

The new airport plan should trigger alarm to anyone with common sense ('Economy & ecology of Nijgad airport', Om Astha Rai, #928). With 60 million passengers, global international hub, world class superhighway along one of the most difficult terrain in the world? It's just a clever distraction to cut down those trees. Imagine the sweet kickbacks!

Bijendra Shrestha

■ Development is a far cry for doubters. We should argue about mitigation plans, quality control and timely completion. Nijgad is a must to promote tourism and meet the growing demand for more flights. We can't stop development efforts because of corruption.

Suhrid Sharma

■ 'More' is not necessarily 'development.' It is obvious that the social costs far outweigh the benefits of Nijgad. TIA can be upgraded, and Bhairawa and Pokhara can absorb increasing air traffic. Nepali politicians have been ransacking forests for personal economic gains since the days of Jang Bahadur. Deforestation on such a massive scale will be an ecological tragedy for Nepal.

Shyamal Krishna Shrestha

■ Better improve the existing airports instead of felling millions of trees. In fact, Nijgad is not needed at all with new international airports at Bhairawa and Pokhara, and upgrading of some domestic airports.

Bhaskar Gautam

Cap for Caption Contest



The winning caption for this photo of Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali with the Nepali delegation at the UN General Assembly is: 'Boo, Trump. Boring!' by Jan Petersen. Please collect your *Nepali Times* cap at the office.

WHAT'S TRENDING

East - West City

by Mukesh Pokhrel

With expanding urbanisation, Nepal's Tarai today has become an east-west swathe of asphalt and concrete with few patches of paddy fields and forests. It is only a question of time before it becomes one big city spread across the plains. Visit [nepalitimes.com](#) for this widely shared report, and watch a video about how the plains are turning from a vast forest to a vast concrete jungle.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Most popular on Twitter

Economy & ecology of Nijgad airport

by Om Astha Rai

Instead of allowing Nepal's economy to take off, aviation experts say the proposed Nijgad airport may actually tie future generations into a debt trap. This report that explored the viability of Nijgad airport generated heated debate online. Log on to [www.nepalitimes.com](#) to read the feedback and join the discussion.

Most commented



Heli rescue fraud tarnishes Nepal's image

by Robert Skinner

By accusing everyone of being in the heli rescue scam, Nepal's government may have jeopardised tourism with negative publicity and botched the investigation by implicating everyone, but punishing no one. You can still read this *Nepali Times* investigation online.

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
In Delhi Pushpa Kamal Dahal was granted a meeting with PM Modi, other top leaders, and a banquet. The only thing missing was a guard of honour. No such fanfare in Beijing. He was welcomed by a Chinese deputy minister wearing a polo T-shirt.

Gaurav Rana @gauravshumsher
Wonderful article and the most keen diplomatic observation made in ages.

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
EDITORIAL Is Nijgad viable? Although the ecological argument against Nijgad is known, the real reason against the \$6.7 billion project is actually economic.

Amy Aung Myat Bhaddamanika @AungmyatAmy
Nepal needs to preserve its nature for its future generations through international standards of protection.

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
Nepal set double tiger number by 2022. Latest tiger census puts the total number of wild tigers at 235. @WWFNepal @WWF @LeoDiCaprio @dicapriofdn #wildlife

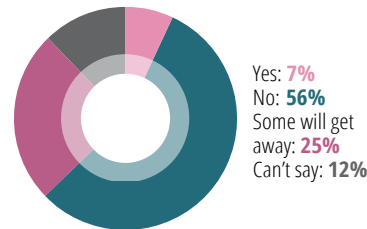
Kiri Jackson @kigster76
A fantastic result so far for Nepal and the tireless team of people dedicated to stamping out wildlife terrorism and saving Nepal's majestic cats.



Weekly Internet Poll #929

Q. Do you think the government's investigation into trekking scams will hold guilty parties to account?

Total votes: 117



Weekly Internet Poll #930
To vote go to: [www.nepalitimes.com](#)

Q. What is the main reason for gender based violence?



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Where are you going this Dasain?

Dasain-Tihar used to mean family and feasting, but more Nepalis are now travelling abroad for the holidays

Sikuma Rai

When immigration officials at Dubai or Kuala Lumpur airports saw a green Nepali passport they automatically used to look for the work permit. But with the number of outbound Nepali tourists on the rise, they now turn the pages for tourist visas.

Kathmandu airport is busy these days: the arrival concourse is packed with Nepali migrant workers who have started returning home for holidays, and across the hall there are throngs of Nepali families flying out for foreign vacations.

It is not just individuals and families taking flights to Malaysia, Singapore, Bali or the UAE, Nepali companies are also offering employees subsidised Dasain-Tihar holidays as an incentive.

One of many such groups this week is a Kathmandu company taking its 104 employees, divided in two groups, for a five nights and six days retreat to Vietnam.

“The vacation season has just started and we are pretty busy. No holiday for us,” jokes Banney Shrestha of Natraj Tours and Travels, which recently organised that tour, and a trip for 125 Nepali employees of a health care company in Bangkok.

Many travel agents, which used to specialise in organising sight-seeing and trekking for inbound foreign tourists in Nepal, now say more than half their business is from Nepalis spending holidays abroad,



EELUM DIXIT

Nepal tigers now number 235



The Nepal government announced the total number of wild tigers in the country had reached 235, nearly double of what it was in 2009. This means Nepal will be the first country to attain the TX2 target of doubling its wild tiger population adopted at the St Petersburg Tiger Summit in 2010.

Nepal conducted a tiger census between November 2017 and April 2018 with camera traps. The last tiger survey in 2013 had estimated the tiger population at 198.

“Our commitment to the Global

Tiger Recovery Programme gains new ground with Nepal’s growing tiger numbers and a successful implementation of Nepal’s Tiger Conservation Action Plan, and protecting tigers is a top priority for the government,” said Bishwa Nath Oli, Secretary of the Ministry of Forests and Environment.

However, the number of tigers in Chitwan National Park has recorded a decrease, mainly because of overcrowding and overlapping territories.

However this was more than made up for by the increased wild

tiger numbers in Bardia, Banke Sukhla Phanta, Parsa

“Every tiger counts, for Nepal and for the world, and Nepal is only a few tigers away from our goal to double tiger numbers by 2022,” said Ghana S Gurung, Country Representative of World Wildlife Fund.

Nepal’s tiger conservation program is being helped in Bardia National Park by the Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation. DiCaprio is also chairman of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) US.

Said DiCaprio: “Nepal has been a leader in efforts to double tigers within its own borders and serves as a model for conservation for all of Asia and the world. This significant increase in Nepal’s tiger population is proof that when we work together, we can save the planet’s wildlife – even species facing extinction.”

Nepal was the first country to achieve global standards in managing tiger conservation areas, an accreditation scheme governed by the Conservation Assured Tiger Standards (CAITS).

With four more years to go, the TX2 goal of doubling tiger numbers globally can only be achieved if all the tiger range countries step up and commit to a similar level of excellence.

In May this year, Nepal celebrated a new benchmark with the achievement of 365 days of zero poaching of rhinos on five occasions between 2011 and 2018. 🇳🇵

prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

Turkish delights

Awarded many times for its in-flight catering services, Turkish Airlines has introduced a new facility for online meal selection before flight for business class



passengers flying intercontinental. It also allows passengers to dine at their preferred time during the flight. More details online.

Fam trip

As a part of its 50th anniversary celebration in Nepal, Thai Airways organised an entertainment and educational tour at Bangkok, Samut Songkhram and Hua-Hin



in Thailand. The participants shared their travel stories with media at a storytelling event on Tuesday.

Mahindra adventures

Mahindra & Mahindra marked the flag off of Summit Drive 2018 with a convoy of 29 vehicles consisting of the Mahindra Scorpio, the XUV500 and the Scorpio Getaway, on Saturday. Driving through

the Tibetan Plateau to Lhasa, the convoy will reach Everest Base Camp and return to Kathmandu on 4 October.

Dabur mountain

Dabur Nepal and ICIMOD signed a MoU to collaborate on sustainable mountain development activities through responsible business practices and research and



innovation, such as bee keeping, medicinal herbs plantation, and agro forestry.

Slowing economy

Nepal’s economy is anticipated to grow by 5.5% (at basic prices) in fiscal year 2019, down from 5.9% a year earlier, says the latest Asian Development Bank Nepal Macroeconomic Update. The limited capacity at subnational levels and challenges to smooth implementation of federalism are believed to be slowing down expected progress as the contry rebounded from the earthquake and Blockade.

Food awards for Qatar

Qatar Airways was named winner of the ‘Best Food and Beverages’ and ‘Best Cabin Service’ award categories at the Airline Passenger Experience Association’s 2019 Passenger Choice Awards in Boston on Monday.

prabhu BANK

and the volume is growing. Many travel agencies reported up to 15% growth in outbound passengers from last year, while 50-year-old Natraj saw 30% growth.

In the last fiscal year, Nepali outbound travellers spent Rs80 billion against Rs67 billion spent by foreign tourists in the country over the same period. The travel industry expects this year to be even better than last year for both inbound and outbound tourism.

“People have started making use of their savings to explore and travel to new places in the region and beyond,” explains Shrestha.

One of the most popular destinations is Bangkok because of its combination of shopping, recreation and beaches. Cheap air fares offered by Nepal Airlines, Thai Airways and Thai Lion are a factor, although the need for Thai visas is a downer. Natraj says that more than half the inquiries by Nepalis on social media about spending their holidays abroad this season are about Thailand.

Singapore is the number 2 most popular destination because of its rich offerings for families, shopping and visa on arrival. With Indonesia now also offering visa

on arrival for Nepalis, Bali has also become popular for its exotic Hindu culture and famous beaches.

Europe and the US were popular this summer, and many have booked autumn holidays in London over Dasain-Tihar. Nearly 40% of tickets to and from Kathmandu on Qatar Airways in August were to the UK, and 26% to the US. Students and families settled abroad often call their parents over on visit visas. Airlines which arrive full in Nepal for the trekking season offer discounted fares on their return flights, making tickets affordable for Nepalis.

Turkish Airlines carries Nepali outbound tourists mostly to Istanbul, Greece and Paris (with a return ticket from Zurich) for which the demand is increasing every year, says the airlines' Reshu Singh. “We have added connections to more destinations, and cheaper fares make more holiday travel possible for Nepalis,” she adds.

Because of a direct seven hour flight, Istanbul has emerged as a popular destination and is in the bucket list of many Nepali tourists. Turkish culture and the Bosphorous bridging Asia and Europe are the attractions. Nepalis

have even discovered Cappadocia, the historical region in Anatolia, famous for hot air balloon rides.

Turkish now offers daily direct services to Istanbul, and being the only European airline serving Kathmandu offers no-visa entry for Nepalis travelling on to Europe or the United States wishing to spend a few days on their way out. Turkish has bookings from two Nepali tour groups of 20 passengers each for this Dasain period alone.

The other surprising destination is Russia, with Nepalis are still going there to see the World Cup stadiums. “Moscow is popular among Nepalis, and the chief attraction is Lenin's mausoleum,” says Padam Kattel of Ace Travels, which is taking 200 customers there with stopovers in Dubai this Dasain. While a holiday in western Europe can cost more than Rs300,000, Russia is only half of that.

Along with Moscow, Ace Travels introduced Baku in Azerbaijan as an affordable new destination for Nepali holidaymakers last year when it handled 1,500 outbound Nepali tourists to Russia and Central Asia.

There was a time that the only Nepalis on ocean cruiseliners were the Gurkha guards and housekeeping staff. More and more, Nepali passengers can also be seen on ships. The most popular holiday cruises are from Singapore to the Malacca Straits, the Mediterranean and the East China Sea. ZETS Holidays is the sales agent for Star Cruises and Norwegian Cruise Line, and it says there has been an exponential growth in Nepali passengers.

As for those who insist on spending Dasain-Tihar with families in Nepal, travel agencies are offering winter holidays in the Southern hemisphere: Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. 🇳🇵



२०७५ साल भदौ १ गते लागू भएको देवानी तथा फौजदारी संहितामा रहेका मुख्य व्यवस्थाहरु

- विवाह गर्नको लागि पुरुष र महिलाको उमेर बीस वर्ष पूरा भएको हुनु पर्ने,
- दर्ता विवाह (Court Marriage) जिल्ला अदालतबाट हुने,
- एकासगोलका पति पत्नीले आफ्नो सम्पत्ति, आम्दानी तथा हैसियत अनुरूप आपसी सहमतिको आधारमा घर व्यवहार चलाउनु पर्ने,
- छोरा छोरीले आमा बाबुको आज्ञा, आदेशको पालना गर्नु पर्ने,
- छोरा छोरी उपरको कर्तव्य र जिम्मेवारी आमा बाबुको बराबरी हुने,
- अंशवण्डा गर्दा गर्भको शिशुलाई समेत अंश छुट्याउनु पर्ने,
- स्याहार गर्नेले अपुताली पाउने ।



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Hanging out with the headhunters

How experience in eco-tourism development in Nepal came in handy in Borneo

I was not at all concerned about the rising wind but my headhunter companions were alarmed. They hurried with increasing urgency along the blustery forest trails, glancing nervously up at the swaying treetops. It took me some time to appreciate the danger of falling



SO FAR SO GOOD
Lisa Choegyal

branches from the towering trees of the Borneo rainforest. Strong winds are rare, and loose foliage crashing to the forest floor would be lethal.

I picked up my pace behind their inky tattooed calves, but it was not until we reached the riverside clearing and their longhouse home that they relaxed. That stormy afternoon was the only time I observed these consummate forest dwellers ill at ease in their environment.

The former warriors of Sarawak, one of two states that comprise Malaysian Borneo, had skulls decorating their tribal homes, especially the ones visited by tourists. To survive in the remote rainforests along the mighty river arteries of tropical Borneo required communal living under one roof in wooden longhouses – extra rooms were added as the family expanded and everyone shared the wide veranda.

The ritual practice of headhunting, displaying enemy scalps as a rite of passage and



prestige, had long been eradicated under the rule of James Brook in the mid-nineteenth century, an eccentric British adventurer who appointed himself Rajah of Sarawak. His white castellated fort on its green manicured mound still dominates the riverside capital of Kuching.

My indigenous headhunting friends, more correctly known by their Malay Iban and Dayak tribal names, were disappointingly dressed in modern t-shirts and shorts, their longhouses modernised with single bulb electricity and corrugated iron roofs. They did still carry intricately woven baskets as backpacks and traditional gourds for water, and used blowpipes for hunting birds and small animals in

the rainforest, although there were no longer any naked tattooed torsos, animal skin loincloths, beaded bodices or colourful headdresses decorated with tall feathers.

Their self-sufficient lifestyle included collecting medicinal plants and leaving secret messages along the path – a knotted grass or broken twig – to signal local conditions such as “I am hunting in this tract” or “two cows are grazing nearby”, and we came across leafy offerings to appease the jungle spirits, despite the influx of Christian missionaries post World War II. Baggy cotton ‘Mary dresses’ worn by Iban women betrayed their influence, and we came across painted statues of Jesus and an occasional church -- even a newly constructed ‘cathedral’

on a hillside clearing close to the Kalimantan border.

It was 1992 and the reason we were walking the backblocks of Sarawak was to research potential adventure activities for tourists – longhouse visits, caving, river trips, waterfalls and wildlife walks – to supplement the beach resorts and quirky colonial history and Chinese culture. We had been asked by the State government to prepare a tourism master plan for Sarawak. Les Clark and Dave Bamford, founders of Tourism Resource Consultants Wellington, had just won their first major contract, and asked me to be responsible for the marketing aspects. My experience with Nepal eco-tourism had helped us win,

along with their New Zealand national park tourism planning backgrounds, but it was my maiden consulting job and I was terrified. Les was the brains of the team, nudging me past my blank-white-board panic, and Dave the adventurer was an energetic kindred spirit in the field. As Dave and I negotiated the stream on a tenuous bamboo-pole bridge, we were distracted by the whoosh whoosh sound of a flock of hornbills and a dazzling flash of bulbous yellow bills – Borneo has eight species of hornbills, their straight wings and wedge-shaped tail look like a child’s drawing of a bird in flight.

Trying to sleep on the longhouse floor that night, after a meagre meal of rice and bananas with our headhunting hosts, deafening rain hammered the tin roof and the hard floorboards were unrelenting, but it was the cold that bothered us most as the temperature plummeted during the night. It never occurred to either of us to cuddle up.

Next morning, we visited the remote border post between Malaysia and Indonesia, not much more than a village of wood houses with thatched roofs, where a desultory guard in a hot concrete office told us that precious few foreigners tried to cross here. These clammy jungles, tangled riverine and dripping dipterocarp forest had been the scene of fierce warfare during the Indonesian Konfrontasi of 1965 and 1966, where Nepali Gurkhas distinguished themselves fighting alongside British forces. It must have felt a very long way from home. 🇳🇵

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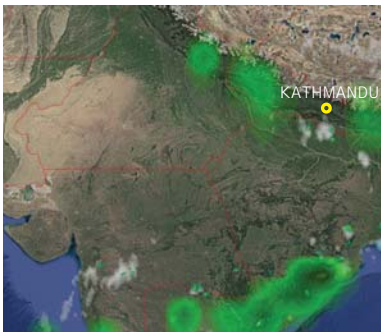


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The monsoon is now on its last legs, the prevailing wind direction is from the west – the clearest indication that the jetstream has begun its migration southwards. The monsoon clouds are being pushed back, and while some still linger over eastern Nepal, most of Nepal will be clear and dry. The only cloud cover and possible showers will be from condensation of daytime transpiration. Still, this means there would be some wind and rain in the higher altitudes. Mornings will be hazy in Kathmandu with some afternoon buildup.

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Miss Nepal's mission

Sewa Bhattarai

Shrinkhala Khatiwada is on a whirlwind tour: to the remote village of Bharta in Makwanpur (pictured) where she is building a health post, on to London for a fundraising dinner, and stopping over in Kathmandu en route to China.

Nepali Times caught up with her to find out what Miss Nepal 2018 has been up to since her coronation in April.

The reason Khatiwada is into post-earthquake reconstruction is because she is also an award-winning architecture student. She wants to complete a health post in the Chepang village of Bharta before the Miss

World pageant in November as her entry for the subtitle 'Beauty with a Purpose'.

"I have always been passionate about architecture, and the earthquake opened up a huge need for architects. While we rebuild, we have to take care to preserve our traditional architecture and make sure the cities are well planned," says Khatiwada.

She expands on the concept of healing by design: how a well ventilated hospital room makes a patient feels better. The Makwanpur health post is a learning experience, as she finds out the nitty-gritty of transforming this concept into reality. She had initially hoped to finish construction for Dasain, but the cost has doubled because the site is so remote that it is expensive to transport construction materials there.

So, she is busy with fundraising dinners and approaching corporates, while the costs keep going up. Now, she is helping build a road to the village which had none. The village is now accessible, but the monsoon has delayed work. The foundation for building has finally being laid, and Khatiwada hopes to complete it soon and hold a health camp before the Miss World pageant.

"A health post is for treatment, but prevention of diseases is just as important," explains Khatiwada, who herself spoke to villagers about basic hygiene like hand washing, showering, and building latrines. The village has a high level of malnutrition



PHOTOS: THE HIDDEN TREASURE

among children, complications from early marriages and rampant superstition.

At present, villagers have to walk for two hours to reach the nearest health post, and Khatiwada knows there are many villages which are as much in need as this one. "This is just the beginning of my work in philanthropy and architecture. Eventually I want to use my fame to build more of what Nepal needs, whether it is health posts in remote areas, or schools and homes in disaster zones," she adds.

After her year as Miss Nepal ends, Khatiwada plans to focus on philanthropic architecture through her One Home Foundation. This is actually what attracted

her to Miss Nepal, to use the celebrityhood for a good cause, not necessarily its glamour.

"This is a platform where you get famous overnight, and then it is up to you how you use that fame," she explains. "I want to use it to become a change maker. In fact, the whole reason I am excited about participating in the Miss World pageant is so I can make global contacts to help me continue my work in architecture."

Nepal has never won the Miss World title, though Ishani Shrestha bagged the Beauty with a Purpose title in 2013. This year, all eyes are on the competent and confident Shrinkhala Khatiwada, and Nepal will be cheering her on. 🇳🇵

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A villager in Maspur, Humla weaves a *doko* basket from strips of bamboo.



Shubalal Budha pounds and winnows rice by hand in Yuna village of Bajura.



During the monsoon, herders bring livestock to these stunning meadows below Mt Saipal.



Maspur village is made up of only 18 households.



Oxen ploughing paddy field, there is little irrigation here.



Iswarlal and Lachhi Budha dream that their daughter will one day go to America to study.

Life and living in remote

Easing the daily struggle of families in a

Jocelyn Powelson
in Humla

“*ai grihasthi***”** is a greeting heard often in the Far West and Karnali regions of Nepal, and is a way to wish each other success in life, livelihood, household and family.

Here in Maspur village above Kawadi Khola, on the border between Humla and Bajura districts, a strenuous two-day walk from the nearest road, it is a daily struggle for people to meet basic needs.

Historically, people here flourished as traders, using goats and sheep as pack animals to carry grain from the plains up to Tibet, and bartering it for salt on the plateau. But the region now suffers from food insecurity, health problems, and lack of livelihood options.

The reasons include the end of the Tibet

trade, the emergence of roads and markets, a decrease in livestock numbers caused by new grazing restrictions, the destruction of local infrastructure during the Maoist insurgency, and an increase in population.

Most now farm for a living, but agricultural yields are low because of the steep terrain, lack of irrigation, destruction of crops by pests, and antiquated technology. Most families can grow enough food to last only four or five months of the year. For the remaining, they must purchase or borrow food. But cash is scarce, so people rely heavily on subsidised food and loans.

The nearest health post is a two-day walk away, time that farmers cannot afford, particularly during the busy harvest seasons. Tuberculosis and gastrointestinal illnesses are pervasive and exacerbate the symptoms of malnutrition.





Upari Budha from Maspur displays her bean harvest for the year.



Lama women from Baudi of Bajura take a break from work to drink homemade *chhang*.

livelihood te Nepal

a village far, far away from Kathmandu

Many homes do not have toilets, and hygiene is poor.

Women and the 'lower' castes are especially disadvantaged. Women have limited mobility and control over household resources, and Dalits have very little land or education, and suffer discrimination.

"I do not even know if we are Nepali citizens ... we Dalits are neglected and oppressed. We have little property, nobody looks after us, not the government, not the organisations, not the gods," says Romalal Lwaar.

Kathmandu has neglected this part of Nepal, abandoning its people. The elected village council chairman Bagdal Malla said, "We have little budget, but a lot of work to be done. We do not have roads, and transport makes things expensive."

Everyone's priority

here is more roads so farmers have access to services and markets. Roads will also make it easier for government and NGO staff to be more effective.

Said local Rajbahadur Budha, "We have a lot of resources, from our fields and natural resources. If there was a road, we could sell them. There would be more people travelling here, and more business. Without the road, there is no development."

As roads and markets become more accessible, communities here need to add value to their products so they are marketable. Some possibilities include cultivation and processing of medicinal and aromatic plants and high-value mushrooms or herbs, production of wool handicrafts, cheese, honey, and sustainable harvesting and processing of forest products. These activities need minimal external inputs, and can be achieved through skills

trainings, mentorship, and micro-grants.

Subsistence farmers need help to improve work efficiency and reduce the labour burden. Harvests can be increased with irrigation, bio-pesticides, greenhouses, and community seed banks. Improved technology such as better water mills, electricity, reliable mobile network, and fuel-efficient stoves will make work easier.

There is an urgent need for better health care and education. Existing health posts need maintenance and medicines, and additional health posts are required in remote areas. Hygiene education and encouraging women to use health services for deliveries and check-ups are also important.

Women and members of 'lower' castes must be prioritised in these activities and in accessing technologies, micro-loans, and other resources.

Currently, service delivery and other development activities are sporadic and ad-

hoc. Sufficient resources must be allocated to allow for long-term, consistent engagement with the community. Outcomes should be regularly monitored and evaluated for lasting improvements.

As Nepal urbanises, fewer and fewer people in the rest of the country understand the struggles in places like Maspur village. The first step to rectifying this is education and awareness of the living conditions of rural Nepalis and the acknowledgement that they, too, have the right to a secure and healthy life.

It is only when the needs and hopes of Nepalis who have been historically and systematically disempowered are properly incorporated into national policies and development plans that we can wish the people in places like the Kawadi Khola valley '*Jai grihasti*'. 🇳🇵

Jocelyn Powelson is a Fulbright researcher from the United States who spent three months in Humla this year.



Despite hardships, children in Chyachaur of Humla are full of smiles.



A Lama woman from Gumba of Bajura prepares a chili paste for cooking.



Harvesting crops, in this case wheat, is considered women's work.

EVENTS



Base Camp beer market
In light of the festival season, here is a beer market to cater to your celebratory needs. Choose your beers from famous brands of Thailand, Japan, USA, Nepal, Denmark, India, and Australia.
28 September, 3pm onwards, Base Camp: Outdoor Lifestyle, Jhamsikhel, 9841226397

Moonshine Affairs VIII

Aura, an exhibition with five artists, a musician and the team of Kaalo.101, explores the power and the mysterious position money and art have in contemporary society as part of the weekly Moonshine Affairs.
29 September, 4-9pm, Kaalo. 101, Nagbahal, Patan, 9803553123

Blockout

The first edition of ‘live screen printings on t-shirt’ event featuring t-shirts, printers, artworks from around the block: Mymcha Tees, 108 wear, Ritual, Ke.Offixial. Meet designers, live art with posters and artworks on sale, and a chill ambience to spend your Saturday.
29 September, 11am-5pm, Mymcha, Thamel, 9865070272

Memory Truth and Justice

A multimedia project to document, archive and share personal stories of survivors and families of the victims of the armed conflict in Nepal from 1996 - 2006.
2-6 October, 2pm onwards, Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal, (01) 4220735



Thai festival

Enjoy sensational flavours of Thai cuisine and experience beautiful cultural performances and products from Thailand.
29 September, 10:30am-6pm, Shangri-La Hotel, Lazimpat, free entry, (01) 4412999

Ride to Nala

On International Heart Day, spend a day riding amongst the Newari village of Ugrachandi, Nala with Nepali cyclist community. Funds raised will be donated to Ganga Lal.
29 September, 7am onwards, Mangalbazar to Ugrachandi, Nala, Rs500, 9803989440 / 9841295605

Shifting Values and Sirani

Exhibitions of mixed media works including Bidhata KC 's *Shifting Values - Expectations vs Reality*, and Manish Lal Shrestha's *Sirani -The Headrest*.
30 September- 24 October, 11am-5pm, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited, (01) 4218048



Muay Thai fight

Organized by Nepal National Muay Thai Association, the international event sees fighters from Nepal, India and Australia. Come to support your favourite.
1 October, 10am-6pm, Club Déjà vu, Darbar Marg, For tickets: 9841246725

Agro Mart & Meet

An exceptional platform for interaction, exchange and trade for all agriculture stakeholders, beneficiaries, sellers and buyers. 150 exhibitors, 3 thematic pavilions, 2 entertaining live events and an educational conference.
29 September- 10October, 9am onwards, Bhrikuti Mandap, National Assembly Hall, (01) 5543018

Books and movies

A movie night with Alfred Hitchcock’s trademark spy thriller Foreign Correspondent on Sunday and readers’ circle with conversation on the book you read on Monday.
30 September and 1 October, 6:30pm and 4pm onwards, Bikalpa Art Café and Bar, Pulchok, 9851147776

MUSIC



KTM Blues and Roots 3

Blues and Nepali folk with Mukti and Revival, The Well from the USA, Newaz, Abhishek S. Mishra and TMR Trio.
29 September, 12:30pm onwards, Tangelwood, Naxal, Rs300, (01) 4428655

SU.RI.LO Music Fest

An evening full of blues, folk and jazz hosted by Katjazz with Voodoo U, Majipa, Rato Tato Chilli Peppers, DJJD and more.
29 September, 4pm onwards, Summit River Lodge, Kurintar, (01) 5543554, 9841558140

Switch On 3

Enjoy the sunset with great live music, a bottle of chilled beer and local market. Iris Kolodji, Marta Del Grandi, ZeroMile and DJ sessions to accompany.
29 September, 6pm till midnight, Moksh, Jhamsikhel, Rs1,000



Sun Down Affair 8

Soak in the stunning sunset view at Sun Down Affair’s eighth volume this Saturday, with Arjun Vagale and Ash Roy.
29 September, 2pm onwards, Malla Hotel, Lainchour and Club 25, Tangel, Rs500 (including a cocktail)

World music night

Love Juice, a musical group performing traditional and famous music from Norway, Peru, Brazil, Japan, and Korea, along with their originals.
28 September, 7-10pm, Places Restaurant and Bar, Thamel, (01) 4700413



Opens in Kathmandu on 28 September

Sui Dhaaga is the story of entrepreneurship: how one couple become tailoring entrepreneurs. It incorporates a lot of issues in rural India like unemployment, a lack of intimacy for young couples, indigenous textile industries, and struggles in international marketing. This movie is directed by Sharata Katariya who has *Jor Laga ke Haisha* to his credit, which took a close look at an unusual but everyday couple. The authentic small-town looks of lead actors Varun Dhawan and Anushka Sharma have generated buzz for *Sui Dhaaga*.

DINING



41 Martinis

Celebrating Yak & Yeti’s 41st year, the hotel presents a list of carefully selected all time favourite Martinis, cherished by all generations. Come and enjoy.
28-30 September, 11am-11pm, Piano Bar, Hotel Yak & Yeti, Darbar Marg, Rs401 (+taxes)

The Taste of Thailand

Revel in an array of signature Thai delicacies from the diverse state of Thailand, specially curated by Chef Kroongtana Nimnu. Som Tam, Pad Thai, sweet sticky rice and many more are available.
30 September- October 9, 6:30-10:30pm, Kava Restaurant, Fairfield by Marriott Kathmandu, Thamel, Rs2,199 (+taxes), (01) 4217999, 9801227613

Autumn Beer Fest

Plenty of offerings from Australia, USA, Belgian, Indian, Mexico and Nepal along with delicious food. Dress yourself up in complimenting attire for the theme of the day ‘Old school rock n’ roll’
29 September, 12pm onwards, The Yard by Oasis Garden Homes, Sanepa, (01) 5532965



Oktoberfest

Celebrate Oktoberfest with live music by Midnight Walkers, savouring rich Bavarian cuisine and beer. The 82ft freeform pool is also open.
29-30 September, 12:30pm onwards, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, Bouddha, (01) 4217123

The Brunch Club

A scrumptious brunch that includes chef’s special menu and a lot of fun.
29 September, 11:30am-3pm, Opium, Sherpa Mall, Darbar Marg, Rs1,500 (pre-sale), Rs1,700 (door), (01) 4231258

GETAWAY



Hotel Heritage Bhaktapur

A Newari-style boutique hotel that incorporates the rich art and architecture of the ancient city of Bhaktapur. The culture starts and ends at the gate of the hotel.
Suryabinayak, Bhaktapur, (01) 6611628

Atithi Resort & Spa

Continuously on the top ten lists of hotels in Nepal by TripAdvisor, the resort is a quiet sanctuary that fuses Nepali tradition with modern amenities. Spend a night or two here to make it remarkable.
Lakeside, Pokhara, (061) 1466760



Raniban Retreat

A unique boutique hotel located on the secluded hillock of Raniban forest, offering an eco-friendly environment specifically tailored for guests. A must visit for peace and serenity and views of Himalayas.
Pokhara, (01) 5185435

Park Village Hotel

Enjoy the services of Himalayan wellness centre – a one-stop centre to relax your mind and body.
Budhanilkantha, 9801066661



Green Valley Resort

Located 5.5km away from Budhanilkantha Temple, the resort is a perfect getaway for city people. The first ray of sun warms up autumn’s cool breeze, making way for a perfect stroll around the Tamang Valley.
Shivapuri National Park, (01) 5248091

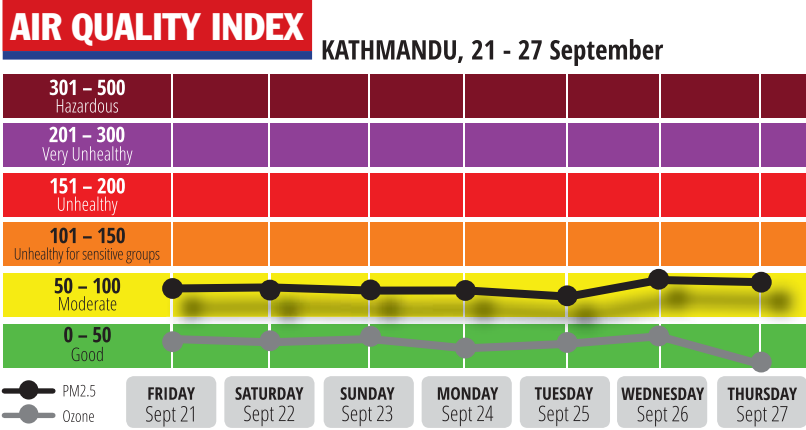
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With the monsoon now in full retreat, Kathmandu Valley’s pollution levels will rise steadily because of the city’s vehicular emissions and the soot particles from open garbage burning. It will rise further when the brick kilns resume operations following the paddy harvest. The daily average of concentration of particles smaller than 2.5microns is still in the yellow ‘Moderate’ band, and the ozone concentration is ‘Good’ for now.
<https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>

Kathmandu's Little Kabul

Afghan refugees struggle to rebuild their lives in Nepal

Gopal Gartaula

When Mohammed Daoud fled Afghanistan in 2014, he did not know where he was headed. All he wanted was to keep his family safe from the never-ending violence in his motherland.

Daoud, a 44-year-old motor mechanic from a village near Kandahar, first came to India with his wife and four children and then on to Nepal. He paid \$6,000 to an agent who brought his family to Kathmandu by bus.

Daoud owned a sprawling house and a garage back home. Here in Kathmandu, he works as a mechanic for someone else. His family lives in a congested room near the Kathmandu bus park. Despite this, he is happy his family is far away from bombs and bullets.

"I may not be able to feed my family well here, but I do not have to live in a constant fear of losing them," he says.

His four children were born after the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2011, and grew up caught in between American bombings and Taliban terror. They watched many die in gun battles, bombs and in drone attacks. It was rare for them to see someone die of natural causes.

"Only after coming to Nepal did my children know that people can also die naturally," Daoud explains.

Most Nepalis have heard about refugees from Tibet. Few know that



PHOTOS: GOPAL GARTAULA

there are also Afghans who have settled in Nepal. Like Daoud, most have come to Kathmandu from New Delhi after hearing from others that life is relatively easier in Nepal.

The UNHCR has identified 53 Afghan asylum seekers belonging to 13 families in Kathmandu, and all of them live in the Samakhusi neighborhood of Kathmandu, which has become Little Kabul.

Murtaza Zahfary, 34, owned a welding machine factory in southern Kandahar, and was doing brisk business until he was forced to close it down because security

forces saw it as a place where the Taliban insurgents could make weapons.

Three years ago, a relative was killed in an American drone attack in another village. His father and brother reached there to pay their last homage. On the way back home, their car was blown up by Taliban insurgents.

Zahfary lost all hope, and paid \$10,000 to a trafficker to get him to Nepal via New Delhi. He says: "Had I not left Afghanistan, I would have probably committed suicide by now, if not killed in an attack. I



KABULIWALAS: Mohammad Arif Ahmadi (above) was a jewelry artisan in Kandahar, but says he now has no home to go back to.

Mohammed Daoud's family (left) paid an agent \$6,000 to get to Kathmandu.

AFGHANISTAN



regular jobs or run their own business.

Most Afghan refugees in Kathmandu are from Kandahar, but there are some from Helmand and Kabul as well. In an unfamiliar city, nearly 2,000km from their homeland, Afghan refugees miss their homes, friends and relatives.

Mohammad Arif Ahmadi, a 53-year-old jeweller from Kandahar, says: "We do not have homes to go back to. They are gone." He made gold necklaces, bracelets, anklets and earrings, but his shop was blown up four years ago.

Ahmadi wept the day he left his hometown for good, and his eyes welled up as he told us in his rented room in Kathmandu: "Everything was reduced to ashes. I now just have memories. And I am learning to live in a new place, remembering the times when Afghanistan also was at peace." 🇦🇫

Oktoberfest

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NEPAL MISSION TO THE UN / TWITTER

ON THE WORLD STAGE: Prime Minister K P Oli addresses the 'Action for Peacekeeping' conference in New York on Tuesday, where he called for greater cooperation for international peace and security.



MOFA

ALL THE GLITTERS: PM K P Oli and wife Radhika Shakya with President of the United States Donald Trump and First Lady Melania Trump during a reception for world leaders participating in the 73rd UN General Assembly.



SURENDRA BAHADUR NEPALI / RSS

GURKHA CONNECTION: Prime Minister K P Oli and his British counterpart Theresa May met at the United Nations headquarters in New York on Wednesday.



JUSTIN TRUDEAU / TWITTER

SMALL TALK: Prime Minister K P Oli and Canadian PM Justin Trudeau signed an agreement to establish a 'bilateral consultation mechanism' between Nepal and Canada at the 73rd UNGA in New York on Tuesday.



ARJUN KARKI / TWITTER

ROAD TO DEMOCRACY: Prime Minister K P Oli speaks on Nepal's transition to democracy during an interaction program organised by the Asia Society and moderated by former Australian PM Kevin Rudd in New York on Tuesday.

New life for Khagendra B Basnyat

Some people cast a shadow larger than life, and Khagendra Bahadur Basnyat was one of them. Not only did he establish Nepal's first organisation for people with disabilities, but was also responsible for entities that we take for granted today, such as a Ministry for Social Welfare. This week, his brother and former ambassador Singha Bahadur Basnyat released his biography of this extraordinary Nepali, illuminating a life full of struggle and compassion.

Organisations Basnyat founded, the Nepal Disabled Association (NDA) and Khagendra New Life Center (KNLC), have earned renown for sheltering people with disabilities. In Jorpati, the KNLC complex provides a facility for treatment and rehabilitation so they can live an independent life.

The premises have also sheltered other organisations like the Ryder Cheshire Home, where severely disabled people can live, SOS Children Village, Nepal Orthopedic Hospital and Rehabilitation Center for Disabled Children, and the Spinal Injury Rehabilitation Centre.

The journey was not easy, and the book reveals the struggle of the early days when Khagendra Basnyat was afflicted with a rare hip disease that confined him to bed for the rest of his life. He was a man of humble means but had a sharp intellect, and made a living as a private tutor. It was in a meeting of the NDA in 1973, in the dingy confines of his residence, that 'New



SONIA AWALE

SIBLING MEMORY: Former ambassador Singha Bahadur Basnyat launching a biography of his brother, the social activist Khagendra Basnyat, who helped establish a care facility for those with disabilities in Nepal.

Life Model House' was launched for people with disabilities.

"Khagendra taught us to never beg for money. If someone wants to donate to us, that is fine. But if not, then we do what we can, and do not beg," remembers Dibyashree Malla, a member of the founding team who helped establish the Jorpati facility of the Khagendra New Life Centre.

Khagendra Basnyat went on to create such a strong movement around his work that the government helped with the

buildings, and established a Ministry for Social Welfare. He died in 1977, but his friends and families gathered on Monday at the launch of his biography to remember the man with fondness.

"He was full of compassion, and it was this quality that led him to achieve so much in one lifetime despite his limited physical abilities," said Buddha Basnyat, a nephew.

In his book, Singha Bahadur Basnyat sheds light on that compassionate side of an intelligent, curious and persistent man. He remembers how his brother was inspired by benevolent personalities such as Florence Nightingale, by Albert Einstein who said that the purpose of human life was to serve mankind, and by the life of the Buddha who espoused compassion.

He often quoted the Gita ('good deeds lead to more success') which motivated him to accomplish things that have far outlived his life. This book tribute by his brother gives us a glimpse into the enduring strength required for such outstanding deeds, and is a source of inspiration.

Sewa Bhattarai

The Life, Works and Legacy of Khagendra Bahadur Basnyat (1928-1978)
by Singha B. Basnyat, PhD
Jagadamba Press 2018
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Fox guarding the coop

Kantipur, 24 September

कान्तिपुर

Three contractors, who have violated multiple deadlines and failed to complete government projects worth billions, are now members of a parliamentary committee responsible to monitor and evaluate progress made in government infrastructure projects. It was already a case of conflict of interest when Hari Narayan Rauniyar of Pappu Construction, Jipchhiring Lama of Lama Construction and Bahadur Singh Lama of Hindung and Thoker Company were elected MPs last year. Now, these three MPs-cum-contractors have been nominated by their respective parties as Members of the Development Committee of Parliament whose job is to monitor infrastructure projects and take action against contractors who fail to finish work within deadlines. We have an absurd situation where Rauniyar and the Lama duo control a parliamentary committee which is supposed to punish the very companies they own. Rauniyar is an elected MP representing the Federal Socialist Forum Nepal (FSPN), a Tarai-based party supporting the KP Oli government. The Lamas were nominated MPs by the opposition Nepali Congress.

Rauniyar's Pappu Construction has recently become a notorious symbol of non-performance, especially after a boat carrying 29 people capsized in Lalbakaiya river of Rautahat district in August, where Pappu took the money but never completed the bridge over the river four years ago. As luck would have it, the ill-fated boat hit a concrete pillar left uncompleted by Pappu. Five people were killed and 21 others were rescued alive. Pappu has left many other government projects incomplete, or is taking too long to finish them. An arrest warrant has been issued against Pappu's Chair Sumit Rauniyar for negligence that caused the Rautahat boat tragedy. But his MP-father and the company's real owner, Hari Narayan Rauniyar, is now in the parliamentary committee. Jipchhiring Lama's company bagged the contract to repair the Chabahil-Jorpati-Sankhu road, but it was never completed, forcing thousands to wade through the muddy road every day. A retreat hosted at Gokarna Resort for BIMSTEC leaders was cancelled last month after Thailand's Prime Minister refused to travel through this crater-filled road. But Lama is now in the

powerful parliamentary committee, and his company is unlikely to be ever punished for this and other incomplete projects. Bahadur Singh Lama's company was supposed to complete construction of a bridge in Nuwakot last year. But only 25% work has been completed so far, and he has not met deadlines in other projects as well. The Department of Roads says he has not completed projects worth Rs 12 billion even after multiple deadline extensions. He is also in the committee that is supposed to investigate contractors like him. Parliament's guidelines and Code of Conduct bar the MPs from participating in parliamentary debates over the issues related to them. With these three contractor-MPs, there is a clear case of conflict of interest.



Blaming capitalism for rapes

Kantipur, 27 September

कान्तिपुर

Home Minister Ram Bahadur Thapa has blamed capitalism for increasing rape cases in Nepal, prescribing socialism as the only way to effectively control such crimes. A parliamentary committee had invited Thapa on Wednesday to share the progress made in the months-long investigation into the Nirmala Panta rape and murder in Kanchanpur on 26 July, and dozens other rape cases reported thereafter. Thapa did not inform the committee about perpetrators in the Nirmala murder, or how close police are to catching them. Instead, he delivered a long speech about feudalism, capitalism and socialism as if he was addressing a meeting of his own Communist cadre.

Thapa, an ex-Maoist guerrilla commander, said: "There are still remnants of the feudal culture in Nepal, and capitalism is thriving, which are promoting rapes and violence against women." He went on to add: "Capitalism treats and sells women as commodities. In capitalist countries, there are rapes and prostitution. Look at the US and India, for example." He added: "Rapes are not new in Nepal. It is not that such crimes are occurring only after this government was formed. More rape cases are being reported these days because there is now more awareness." Thapa argued that Nepal must be a socialist country to stop rapes. "We do not have a self-sufficient economy yet, and comprador capitalism is on the rise. We must break these existing socio-economic structures. The government alone cannot control rape, people also have to be aware." After denouncing capitalism as the root cause of rape culture, Thapa argued that technology, alcohol and drug abuse were also contributing factors. "We must control pornography and drug abuse. Crimes are often hatched when people are drinking," he said. A few female MPs from Thapa's own party seconded his argument. Nepal Communist Party (NCP) MPs Rekha Sharma and Yashoda Subedi argued that capitalism objectifies women and breeds rape culture. MP Bijaya Subba demanded that Miss Nepal and other beauty pageants be banned to protect women from being raped. MP Sujita Shakya sought a law allowing the government to castrate rapists to prevent rape. In response, a smiling Home Minister said: "That is a creative idea."

On TV: Another rape! Another murder! Another rape! Another murder!
Man: Watching tv is Western decadence, it spreads capitalism! Turn it off. Problem solved.
Abin Shrestha in Kantipur, 27 September

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DAUGHTER SLAUGHTER

More unspeakable crimes
against women drown
Nepal in sorrow



Monika Deupala

It was raining hard that Tuesday night on 11 September in Chandrapur of Rautahat. In the Das family home, teenage sisters Samjhana and Sushmita told their parents they were going to bed. The thatched roof, single-storey house had three rooms, one where the two sisters slept and another for their step-mother and younger sister. Their father, Jadolal Das, and his son walked to the family's pool room that they rented to locals. Sushmita remembers being woken up about midnight by her sister's screams. Then she felt a burning pain in her own hands and body. Neighbours rushed to the house on hearing the sisters' cries, their step-mother was confused and did not know why the two were screaming. After the neighbours figured out that this was an acid attack, they took the sisters to a tap and washed the burns. The girls were rushed to Kirtipur Hospital in Kathmandu after a local hospital said treatment was not possible. Both sisters writhed in pain throughout the bumpy seven hour ride all night to reach Kathmandu at 9AM. Sushmita remembers her sister's blistered face contorted in pain, and her hair scalded. "I was so scared the whole time," she said.

SAMJHANA'S MEMORY: Samjhana Das lies covered in a blanket in a Kathmandu hospital last week as doctors tried to treat her burns (*left*). She died ten days after the acid attack by her neighbour, Ramdas Paswan (*right*). Her sister, Sushmita was also hurt in the acid attack (*below*). Samjhana in happier times (*above*).




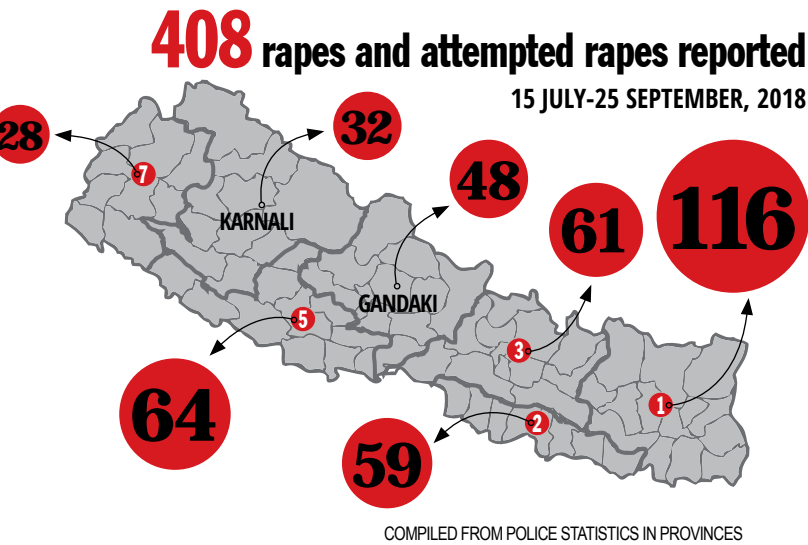
The burn ward in Kritipur Hospital reeked of disinfectant. Sushmita was at the corner of the ward with bandages on her right hand and neck. Her sister lay bandaged and covered in a blanket in the Intensive Care Unit nearby. The heart monitor was beeping, and there was the sound of rough breathing. A visitor called out her name. She replied "*hajur*" in a trembling voice. It was too painful for her to talk. She had burns over 35% of her body, including her head, chest, back and face. Plastic surgeon Surendra Basnet had already performed one operation on Samjhana that



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morning, but warned the prognosis was not good. The nurses were dressing Sushmita's wounds, which were not as serious. She was crying, praying for her sister. "I did not even know what acid was, I did not know it could burn you like that," she said, in a weak voice. Outside, in the corridor was the girls' father Jadolal Das. But also hovering around making phone calls and holding hospital bills was a neighbour, Rambabu Paswan. When quizzed about his relation with the family he said: "I am a neighbour, but I am like a father to the girls. I watched them grow up." Asked if he suspected anyone, Paswan told us Jadolal Das had a long-standing feud about property with his elder brother. He added: "She had just straightened her hair a few days ago, and was looking very pretty, I cannot believe she will not look like that anymore."

The sisters' mother, whom Jadolal Das had divorced, was working in Malaysia. Samjhana had dropped out of Grade 10, and Sushmita was in Grade 8. The family had some savings, but friends in Chandrapur raised money for the sisters' treatment. A few days after *Nepali Times* visited the hospital, police arrested Rambabu Paswan, the neighbour who had told us the sisters were "like daughters to me". Police found that he had made 180 calls to Samjhana over the fortnight prior to the attack. Samjhana confirmed to her father that Paswan was the attacker, and he would call her often to propose sex. (*See box*.) On Monday 24 September, at the age of 18, Samjhana died of multiple organ failure. Doctors had performed three surgeries, and although they tried their best, they could not save her life. She was taken back to Chandrapur and cremated on the banks of the Bagmati, the same river that flows down from Kathmandu Valley. The girls' mother is back from Malaysia and is looking after Sushmita in Kirtipur Hospital. Police have detained Paswan, and are conducting further investigations to charge sheet him. 



Another day, another acid attack

On the very day that Samjhana Das died because of her burns in a Kathmandu hospital after ten agonising days, Basanti Pariyar was coming home from Kawasoti market of Nawalparasi when she was attacked with acid and stabbed multiple times. The mother of two was set upon by her neighbour, Bimal Sripali, 37, and she is being treated at Bharatpur Hospital for stab wounds in her abdomen and head and acid burn injuries in her face, chest and hands. Police said Sripali had started divorce proceedings against his wife, and may have been making advances on Pariyar, 26, which she rejected. Basanti was with her sister and another woman when they passed Sripali, who grabbed her by the hair and poured acid on her face. Sripali has confessed to the crime, and said he went to Birganj to buy the acid. On the same day in Pokhara, Shriya Sunar, 10, was found dead in Kodi village. She had gone to the market to buy biscuits. The post-mortem report states that the girl was raped, choked and hit on the head with stones. A Kusum Poudel, 27, and four other suspects have been arrested. Poudel confessed to the crime, and said he was drunk and stoned. Two days earlier, in faraway Jumla, a teenage girl was raped while returning home from festival. The police caught two teenage suspects. A *Nepali Times* investigation shows 408 girls and women have been attacked or raped in less than three months all over Nepal (*see map, above*). But those are just the ones reported to police, the real figure may be higher.



A father's story

I own a Pool Centre which is about a kilometre away from the house. My son and I sleep there because there isn't enough room at home. That night, I said bye to my family after dinner and left for the pool room with my son. It was raining heavily and I could barely sleep because of the noise on the roof. At midnight, I got a frantic call from my wife and all I could hear were her cries. I woke up my son and we rushed home. The room was full of a smoky, stinky smell. I saw the dread in the faces of my daughters. I had no idea what had happened there. The neighbours had already called an ambulance, but it was late so I took my injured daughters in a borrowed scooter to nearest Chakor Hospital. For two hours, the doctors applied medicines and bandages on the burns, but then suggested that I take them to Kathmandu. An ambulance driver helped me out. The doctors gave my daughters painkillers and we drove off at 3AM. Rambabu Paswan, my neighbour insisted that he come along. It took us seven hours to reach Kathmandu and my daughters were finally sent to the operating rooms. Sushmita had suffered 4% burns in her body, but Samjhana had 35% and was kept in the ICU. I wept when I saw her there. The Rautahat police called me up after a few days and asked me about the relationship of my daughter with Rambabu Paswan. I said we were neighbours, but the police sounded suspicious. They told me he had called her 180 times in the 15 days before the attack, but that his phone was now switched off. So, in the hospital in Kathmandu, I asked Paswan where his phone was, and he said he had lost it while sleeping outside the ICU. The next day, detectives found acid burn marks on Paswan's fingers. I went to the ICU and asked Samjhana if Paswan was the culprit. She nodded, "Yes." She told me haltingly how Paswan used to stalk her, and call repeatedly to proposition her. Paswan was arrested from the premises of the hospital in Kathmandu the next day, but that was no consolation for us. Samjhana died. We took her back to her hometown for her funeral so her friends could say their last goodbye. All I want now is for Paswan to be punished. Why is the government not doing anything when crimes like these are happening every day to daughters like Samjhana? (*As told to Monika Deupala*)



MONIKA DEUPALA



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Thinking big



DIWAKAR CHETTRI

Himalayan Bullet Train, East-West MALEV Railway, and the mammoth Gezhoubu Dam. The gobblement has decided that Big Is Not Just Beautiful, But Also Rewarding in More Ways Than One. Which is why we do not need any more distractions about Pappu Deconstruction Private Limited not completing the bridge at Tin Kune despite being given an

Nepal may be a small country, but we don't have small minds. We dream big, mainly because our rulers are day-dreaming a lot. These are vivid hallucinations and extraordinary nightmares which they immediately take to the implementation stage upon waking up. Now that he has met Trump, PM Oli has no time for piddly little things like completing the Melamchi project, fixing the Jorpati-Baudha Swamp, tarmacking the Wring Road at Balkhu, or picking up the garbage in Lagankhel. He is focused on much larger things. Being a country with vibrant crony-Communism, Nepal is poised to take The Greatest Leap Forward So Far into the wild blue yonder with projects Kneejgad International Aeropolis, the Republican Tower, the Trans-

advance of 54 corrodos and 82 lacks. Or, of Lama Erections GmbH not repairing the Nagarkot road for five years. State secret: it is a deliberate government strategy to make Nepal known the world over as challenging proving ground for off-road vehicles and hovercrafts. Being a visionary, the PM gave the Nepal Shipping Corporation the target of sailing a Nepali vessel to Kolkata and back by December. With only two months to go, the Corporation has issued a global tender for a paddle boat. Nepal has also announced plans to send senior comrades from the ruling Communist Party to Mars to plant the hammer and sickle there. Since it is called The Red Planet.



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