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A top-down view of a white ceramic cup filled with a latte. The coffee foam is decorated with a simple smiley face design using dark coffee powder. The cup sits on a matching white saucer. The background is a dark, textured surface.

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# Breathing space



GOPEN RAI

For the first time in 19 years, the municipalities of the three main cities in the Valley will have a chance to vote for representatives to Wards and Municipal Councils to try and fix these problems. It will not be an easy task, and some candidates have been making wildly unrealistic promises of underground metrorails and flyovers. Tired of established parties botching it over and over again, voters seem to be attracted to younger candidates of alternative parties like Sajha, Bibeksheel and New Force, who are riding the social media wave

"There was no accountability, and corruption became part of grassroots governance," laments Krishna Prasad Sapkota in our Guest Editorial on page 2. "Finally we have a chance to revive inclusive grassroots democracy."

**Kunda Dixit**

**Trial and error democracy**  
BY OM ASTHA RAI PAGE 14-15



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GOING PLACES TOGETHER



# NATIONALLY LOCAL

It is only now becoming clear how close Nepal and its democracy came to a fatal plunge last week as the executive and the judiciary faced each other off at the edge of the cliff.

Finally on Sunday, Nepal will start the arduous process of holding the first of three tiers of elections under the new constitution for Local, Provincial and Federal Councils. Hopefully with greater accountability there will be rule of law, and confrontations like these will be rare in future.

Never before in Nepal's turbulent history, not even in the bad old days of the absolute monarchy, was the judiciary dealt such a severe knock. The fact that two alpha males of Nepali politics went for a constitutional instrument of last resort just because their fragile egos were dented, exposed just how shallow their commitment to democracy is. Going against every principle of the separation of powers, the executive branch got a lapdog legislature to hound the judiciary.



By blatantly undermining a judiciary which has played an activist role on transitional justice cases, the coalition elicited sharp criticism from the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) among others.

The Supreme Court ruled on a writ petition on 30 April to reinstate Chief Justice Karki. Since then, both the coalition partners as well as the judiciary have pulled back from the edge – probably with the intention of not letting the dispute disrupt

the first phase of local elections on 14 May. Parliament has been suspended till after elections and the impeachment motion shelved for now. The Chief Justice, for her part, has reportedly said she will not hear any more cases till she retires next month.

This unnecessary crisis had added another element of uncertainty to local elections but now that both sides have pulled back, voting will go ahead in three of the six provinces on Sunday. As our reports in this issue show (*page 14-15*), there is considerable anticipation among Nepalis that the first local body election in two decades will finally usher in an era of development and inclusion.

This is the first election under the new Constitution and the resulting village and municipal councils will have far more decentralised decision-making power on local revenue generation and budget than the VDCs and DDCs ever had. The nearly 4,000 VDC boundaries were designed for an age when Nepal was largely roadless and there was poor connectivity. The Maoists decimated elected VDC representatives during the conflict, and Deuba, during his second tenure as prime minister, cancelled scheduled local elections in 2002. Now, the new 481 village, 246 municipal and 17 metropolitan councils have the economic and political autonomy to use their economies of scale to fast-track development.

We have seen how the three-party political syndicate, in the absence of elected local bodies, has pocketed development grants and plundered rivers and forests with political protection over the past decades. There is now a danger that the politico-criminal nexus that profited from the lack of grassroots accountability is fielding candidates for village and municipal councils. Combined with the enhanced decision-making powers of local councils, this could spell disaster.

Our only hope is that people at the local level are far more aware of who the crooks are, and will judge wisely when they enter the voting booth on Sunday.

## GUEST EDITORIAL KRISHNA PRASAD SAPKOTA

# Resuscitating democracy

No taxation without representation is one of the universally accepted norms of democracy. But Nepalis were forced to pay taxes without representation in the government for the last 15 years. We declared Nepal a republic, but we ignored the fundamental values of democracy.

After local government bodies elected in 1997 expired in 2002, the people's elected representatives were replaced by a political cartel that worked hand in glove with mafia groups to plunder natural resources. There was no accountability, and corruption became part of grassroots governance.

Better late than never, we are now all set to elect representatives for the first time in 19 years to new enlarged local units with more powers. It is a huge stride towards reviving grassroots democracy, and it will certainly ensure inclusion of our ethnic groups in local governance and development.

But grassroots corruption is now so deeply-entrenched that this malady may undermine accountability in the newly elected governments. Those who plundered local resources without having to answer to the public are now trying to trick people to vote for them. Many local gangsters are candidates. Since the Constitution does not give us the right to recall representatives if they go astray, we have to elect them wisely. If these crooks get to office, they will ruin our environment, our

development and the future of the next generation of Nepalis. This is the third local election since the restoration of multi-party democracy in 1990, but it is a radically different state structure. In 1992 and 1997, we elected local administrative units of the government that had limited authority and resources. This time, we are electing local governments with executive, legislative and judicial authority. The local government budget is going to increase four-fold.

With greater power comes greater responsibility. If they fail, governance fails and decentralisation will be meaningless. If our representatives lack the will to perform, or if they get themselves elected only to continue plundering our natural resources, the results will be even more disastrous.

When people enter the polling booth first on 14 May, they must vote for candidates, not parties. Their votes in local elections affect their lives more directly than their ballot papers in parliamentary elections.



**Krishna Prasad Sapkota** is the former DDC Chair of Kavre, ex-MP and ex-President of the Association of District Development Committees in Nepal (ADDN).

**Nepali Times.com**

## ONLINE VIDEOS



This VDC-wise map of the 1997 Local Election results on page 8-9 was carefully prepared by a *Nepali Times* Taskgroup poring through official records from 20 years ago at the Election Commission and the Association of Village Development Committees. The data was inputted on a VDC map of Nepal over several days. Watch the meticulous process of data mapping on our online vlog.

## UPDATE

### Saving Buddhi Maya

Remember this face of hunger? We met Buddhi Maya Biswakarma, a two-year-old Dalit child from Dang, hungry and crying at a brick kiln in Lalitpur three months ago (*photo below*). Her father Nawaraj and mother Chuna Devi had come from Dang to earn enough to repay a loan they took to buy two goats. Buddhi Maya was severely malnourished, and four other daughters had dropped out of school.



After *Nepali Times* published the story (#850, 17-23 March) many readers offered to help and Rs82,190 was raised, including Rs10,000 from our staff. After repaying the loan, we handed over the remaining Rs58,290 to Sundar Dhoka Sathi Sewa, a Lalitpur-based charity that is paying for nutritional support for the child as well as other medical treatment.

Buddhi Maya has gained 1 kg since then, now weighs 5kg and looks a lot healthier (*photo above*). The remaining funds will be used to send her four sisters to a school near their home in Dang. Sundar Dhoka has already enrolled the girls, and has also helped the family by buying nine new goats.

### SURVIVAL TALE

Dear Editors, this is an uplifting tale of survival and strength beautifully told ('Bridge builders', Sonia Awale, #857). In the final analysis it is always the community that one falls back on when the government is too distant. But with local elections there is at last a glimmer of expectation of a responsive government. Thank you *Nepali Times* for showing us the solution and giving a sense of hope.

**Marie Tillman**

## WHAT'S TRENDING

### Fully booked in the sanctuary

by Shreejana Shrestha

The *Nepali Times* video of the stunning scenery of the Annapurna Sanctuary Trek was widely shared on social networking sites. The film highlights the fact that the number of visitors to the Annapurna Conservation Area has increased three-fold in the last 20 years, but the number of beds has stagnated, leaving visitors sleeping in dining rooms and storage areas.

**Most reached and shared on Facebook**  
(11,732 people reached, 45 shares)

**Most popular on Twitter**  
(67 retweets, 84 likes)



### Bridge builders

by Sonia Awale

Communities in Dolakha are rebuilding 10 footbridges that were either destroyed or damaged in the earthquake. This has become a model for connecting villages, creating jobs and boosting local economies after a disaster. Go online to follow how locals in the Tama Kosi Valley are coming together to rebuild.

**Most commented**

### Exit, the crusader

by Kanak Mani Dixit

Sushila Karki has not been disgraced by the impeachment motion. It is the political class led by Deuba and Dahal that is emitting a bad odour, even as the country goes into local elections.

**Most visited online page**

## QUOTE TWEETS

**Nepali Times@nepalitimes**  
The quake-damaged Nuwakot Darbar is unlikely to survive another monsoon if it is not protected  
Read more: <http://bit.ly/2qyM7P> #Nepal

**David Ways@TLWH**  
Considering its history this is terrible

**Nepali Times@nepalitimes**  
Deuba just couldn't handle the fact that a woman his party was close to was standing up to him.  
More: <http://bit.ly/2qPrWs3> #SushilaKarki

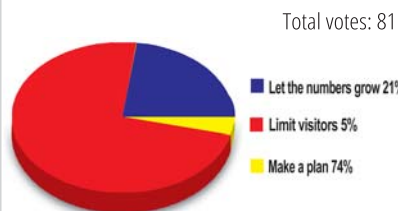
**Sandesh Singh Hamal@sandeshhamal1**  
Deuba is behaving exactly like Girija: all cadres/followers of NC are subordinates of party president & he can do whatever he likes. Shame!

**Divas@hnepalma**  
How does the press see the same corrupt Deuba as the PM-in-waiting? How does the 'democratic' nausea feel?

**Nepali Times**

Weekly Internet Poll #858

Q. What approach should Nepal take to tourism?



Weekly Internet Poll #859  
To vote go to: [www.nepalitimes.com](http://www.nepalitimes.com)

Q. Will local elections accelerate development?

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# Does deliver

The jury is still out

Nepal's local elections are an important first step towards institutionalisation of the federal democratic structure outlined in the new Constitution.

As the first local elections since 1997, they are expected to deliver many positive and ambitious outcomes, such as restoration of citizens' rights to participate in local governance, enhanced accountability, transparency and accelerated development at the local level, the emergence of new and progressive local leaders, and provisions for a strong foundation for provincial and federal elections.



**GUEST COLUMN**  
Sangita Thebe Limbu

However the question remains, will the elections and subsequent process of state restructuring result in much needed socio-economic development? At a broader level, this relates to the debate in comparative politics and development policies: does democracy lead to development? Or is it the other way round?

Development is not just about economic growth or GDP per capita, but also involves social aspects such as health, education and life expectancy, which are commonly captured by the UNDP's Human Development Index. On a radical level, development is also about inclusion, redistribution of wealth and above all, realisation of human rights.

As for democracy, it is a process that goes beyond free and fair elections and includes political and civil rights, as well as accountability of the state towards its citizens. However, democracy does not lead to socio-economic development by default. In fact, until the early 1980s modernisation theorists argued that democracy was the result of economic development, not the other way round, the reason being that economic development creates more middle class families, reduces social polarisation and, with education and urbanisation, societies develop greater tolerance, democratic values and systems.

However, the so called Third Wave of democratisation in the late 20th century in many low-income countries, including Nepal, shows that economic development is not a prerequisite for the emergence of democracy. There is, however, a broad consensus that economic development plays an important role in sustaining democracy.

In contemporary discourse, democracy is considered to be a key ingredient in accelerating economic development. This is largely embodied in the 'good governance' agenda promoted by various donor



## The Fountainhead (of all crises)

Nepal's top political leaders are not just part of the problem, they are the problem

The ruling political cartel hurled Nepal into an unprecedented constitutional crisis last week. An impeachment motion was registered in Parliament against Chief Justice Sushila Karki, seen by many as an anti-corruption crusader deeply committed to strengthening the rule of law.



**CONNECTING DOTS**  
Dinkar Nepal

The grounds for impeachment were so evidently whimsical, and the process so undemocratic and un-parliamentary, that it sparked spontaneous protests from the general public and drew sharp international criticism.

Although the Supreme Court has now annulled the impeachment motion by an interim judgment, the political crisis has laid bare fault lines in the new Constitution, triggering a debate about provisions for the separation of powers. But that may be turning the gaze in the wrong direction.

When the new republic

is striving to ensure that the Constitution gets wide acceptance, this selfish act driven by the pique of top leaders has raised serious doubts about the survival of Nepal's democracy itself. It proved beyond doubt that the top political leaders of the country are not just part of the problem, they are the problem.

The Constitution that is supposed to institutionalise the federal republic is yet to be implemented. The first step would be the three tiers of elections this year. With some of the Madhesi forces ready to be part of the process, with some conditions, the battle was only half won. But at such a crucial time, what the NC's Sher Bahadur Deuba and the MC's Pushpa Kamal Dahal did was utterly reckless.

It is now clear that the impeachment move was a result of a conspiracy to keep Chief Justice Karki off some high-profile corruption cases for the two months that remained of her tenure. It was also an act of revenge on her for hurting the egos of top leaders, especially Deuba, who was prevented by a court order from appointing a

police chief of his choice.

Post-conflict consensus politics, now a decade-long malpractice with intricate and interconnected dark areas, has spawned a culture of opaque decision-making by all organs of the state. This in turn developed a sense of entitlement in top leaders. The silence of civil society and the international community in support of the democratic process has in the past few years made the situation worse. Finally, it was the UN human rights office (OHCHR) that deigned to condemn the impeachment move because of what it meant for the transitional justice process.

Along with the lack of elected local government, transitional politics has created a corrupt eco-system that has turned the country into a nexus of crime and politics, with the top leaders at the helm. Their undemocratic internal decision-making was no secret, but this crisis has shown just how dismissive they can be of international norms, public opinion and the democratic culture.

The choice of candidacies for local elections is another proof of this political decay.

The mayoral candidate of the Nepali Congress for Bharatpur Metropolitan City was forced to withdraw by NC President Deuba. This despite open protests by party workers refusing to help the candidate from the Maoist party, Renu Dahal, the Prime Minister's daughter.

The main political parties have become the root cause of this democratic degradation. The inability of the lower ranks of the parties, as elected representatives of the people, to stand against the whims of the top leaders shows just how much they have let down the country and its people. Mute acceptance by the Young Turks in the main parties of the dictatorial style of top leaders has killed any hope of change in the near future.

The only hope now is for the emergence of a strong, alternative political force. Some of these new entities are fielding candidates in coming elections and could bring about sweeping change to brush away the established parties. That is the only way democracy can be saved. 🇳🇵



# democracy development?

over which comes first: economic growth or an open society



GOPEN RAI

and multilateral agencies such as the World Bank, ADB and UNDP. Democratic regimes, through their participatory decision-making approach, are expected to generate a greater sense of ownership and ensure policy sustainability. In addition, democratic checks and balances with different forms of accountability mechanisms are said to promote transparent and reliable service delivery and inclusive development.

However, in practice there are many challenges to reaching


a consensus among numerous competing and fragmented interests. Such negotiations can be time-consuming and often focus on short-term results to please electorates, which can trump long-term vision for development. Hence, many theorists and policymakers argue that authoritarian regimes might be best suited to deliver economic development, as they can ensure stability as well as take and implement long-term decisions beyond electoral cycles.

Such arguments are largely

based on the experiences of 'Asian Tigers' (Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong and South Korea) that were able to achieve unprecedented and sustained economic growth from the 1960s to the 1980s under strong leadership and/or one party systems. Similar arguments are used to explain rapid economic development in China and Vietnam.

However there are also plenty of countries, including Nepal during the Panchayat system, where authoritarian regimes have failed to deliver economic development and prosperity – while countries like India, Brazil and South Africa have managed to achieve high economic growth despite being democracies.

There is no conclusive answer about which form of regime can best guarantee economic development, as it is highly context specific and largely dependent upon the individual state's vision and strategies for growth. But if development is considered not just in economic terms but also as a realisation of social, political and civil rights, then democracy does offer greater opportunities. Considering the prominence of democracy as the most acceptable form of government in countries like Nepal, it is important to assess how it can be made more effective to deliver inclusive and equitable development.

The contemporary Nepali democratic regime is largely characterised by personality-driven politics, patronage systems, endemic corruption and lack of public trust in formal democratic institutions, including major political parties. At the same time, public dissent is increasingly manifested through grassroots movements, civil society and the creation of alternative political parties. Democratic elections, therefore, do offer an opportunity to challenge the status quo, with wider implications for socio-economic development and consolidation of democratic political culture. 

**Sangita Thebe Limbu** is an analyst at Social Development Direct. [www.sddirect.org.uk](http://www.sddirect.org.uk)

## prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

### Nepal rebounds

Economic growth has rebounded strongly in Nepal, reaching 7.5% in fiscal year 2017, the highest rate since 1994, according to the World Bank's latest Nepal Development Update. The reasons are one of the best monsoons in recent years, increased electricity availability and investment as earthquake reconstruction. This follows a 14-year low of 0.4% growth last year due to the Indian blockade. Rice production this year grew to 4.2 million tons, and 100MW of new hydropower capacity was added. Tourism also reached pre-crisis levels in autumn 2016, and remittances have grown. However, imports have grown while exports remain sluggish and the trade deficit with India continues to rise. While remittances increase, albeit at a slower pace, external sector pressures are building.

### Redmi Note 4

Xiaomi has launched the Redmi Note 4SD in Nepal. It has a 5.5-inch IPS LCD FHD display, metal body, 13MP rear camera, and 5MP front camera with MIUI 8 based on Android v6.0.1 Marshmallow. The smartphone is priced at Rs 28,499. Pre-booking offer is available until 12 May. [www.xiaominepal.com/booking](http://www.xiaominepal.com/booking)

### HTC smartphones

Generation Next Communications Pvt Ltd, the authorised distributor for HTC Smartphone in Nepal, has launched its much awaited new models: HTC U Play, HTC One X9 and HTC Desire 825. HTC U Play is priced Rs. 49,999, HTC One X9 - Rs. 28,600 and HTC Desire 825 -Rs. 18,900. Customers will get a 1-year warranty on all HTC products.

### Deluxe whiskey

Allied Blenders and Distillers Pvt. Ltd (ABD) has launched its deluxe whisky brand, Officer's Choice Blue, in Nepal. Officer's Choice Blue, a premium variant of Officer's Choice, is a unique blend of Scotch malts and select grain spirits.

### TK's laptop service

Turkish Airlines has now started offering its business class passengers the use of laptops on its US-bound flights. Passengers who deliver their personal



laptop to authorised TK staff before the flight can use it during the journey. The same service will be available on the airline's UK bound flights from 12 May 2017.

### New FIFA partner

Qatar Airways has announced that it will be the Official Partner and Official Airline of FIFA, with a contract extending to the 2022 World Cup in Qatar. As an Official



Partner of FIFA, the airline will have extensive marketing and branding rights at the next two World Cups.

### Winning golfers

The first ever Carlsberg Golf Series was held on 6 May at Gokarna Forest Resort. In the event contested by 88 golfers, Ang Dorjee Sherpa and Wang Chen



Dhondup emerged as Nett and Gross winners. The remaining two of the three-series tournament will happen in August and October.

### LED Lounge

SYSKA LED, an SSK Group brand, has inaugurated its biggest LED showroom in Kathmandu. The flagship store will



offer advanced lighting design solutions for residential, commercial, outdoor and industrial lighting. Some of the products on display are large LED ceiling lights, compact LED ceiling lights, LED garden luminaries and wall scones.

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# Preserving our Valley

Professor Eduard Sekler’s enduring legacy of heritage and conservation in Nepal

“Aren’t strawberries in the champagne a bit over the top?” barks Julia Chang Bloch, the petite American Ambassador to Nepal, whirling onto the balcony of her official residence



SO FAR SO GOOD  
Lisa Choegyal

in Kamaladi like a mini tornado. She is just back from the Embassy and the reception is due to start in 20 minutes.

“No, it’s so special,” says Erich Theophile. “I mean your commissary sparkling wine is such a treat, plus the new strawberries from Kakani. Besides, how pretty it looks!”  
Erich leans forward better to convince Julia with his winning smile and floppy blond charm. Nodding, she hurries on to the next detail. “The displays look great but have we got plenty of information leaflets? There must be enough for every guest.”  
Erich and I soothe her volley of queries. We have long been working

together on the Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT) launch to the wider Nepali community and rulers, making sure it goes without a hitch.  
“So first I will say a few words of welcome and then Erich will explain Professor Sekler’s vision and the current restoration plans, right? I am determined that this American organisation will make a significant difference towards the protection and awareness of Nepal’s monuments.” Julia’s heels click commandingly on the marble floor and her words recede as she heads upstairs

to change. “I suppose my husband is still playing golf...” The heat of the humid afternoon begins to dissipate.  
Founded in 1990, the private, non-profit Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust’s mission is ‘to safeguard the extraordinary and threatened architectural heritage of the Kathmandu Valley in Nepal’. It is the brainchild of Harvard architectural historian Eduard Sekler, then team leader of the UNESCO Campaign to Safeguard the Cultural Heritage of the Kathmandu Valley, and a highly-acclaimed colossus of restoration



in Nepal.  
With his endearing Viennese accent, Professor Sekler had asked me to be a founding director of the Trust, and to help Erich, his former student and KVPT’s American director, to establish a program of activities. Erich has assembled a talented Newari team and generated support from the community. Dr Shaphalya Amatya and His Majesty’s Department of Archaeology. Concentrating on Patan ‘the finest urban streetscape in the world’, the Mani Gufa is already restored, and work on Radha Krishna and Uma Maheswor temples is underway.  
It is late May 1992, and the exhibition in the Ambassador’s garden presents the track record of KVPT’s first years to guests and media. Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala and his cabinet head the list of nearly 500 Nepali dignitaries, diplomats and donors who throng Julia’s lawn.  
Erich and I planned the event whilst returning on his motorbike from a visit to our Namobuddha hilltop, a very small space but with a massive panoramic view of terraced fields, deforested hills and white mountains beyond. Bouncing down the bumpy track I cling on tight, shouting to be heard above the noise and dust until eventually we reach his medieval apartment on Bhaktapur Darbar Square. After climbing the narrow stairs, we sit uncomfortably cross-legged on the mud floor beneath the low ceiling, sipping sweet black tea and peering out through the carved windows across the clutter of temple roofs.  
In between our excited KVPT discussions, I persuade Erich to design our new house on land Tenzin recently found in Budhanilkantha. The site overlooks the Valley, bordered by the source of the Vishnumati River lined with alders and bamboo, and huge rocks perforate the terraced fields.  
Erich incorporates Rana, Malla and Newar themes into a design featuring terracotta floors, *jingati* roof tiles and traditional building methods. Styled after elements of Patan Museum and the British residence, Vishnumati House was eventually built with the help of Rohit Ranjitkar, KVPT’s lead architect. We all hoped it might influence the Valley’s plethora of modern concrete homes as an adaptation of Nepal’s unique architectural legacy.  
Today’s KVPT has evolved from strength to strength, attaining accolades and acclaim under Rohit’s local leadership with teams of skilled artisans and a bevy of committed Nepali and international backers, successfully realising the original dream of the inspirational Professor Sekler. Guiding the earthquake rebuilding and still focussed on Patan, the KVPT remains enthusiastically supported by the American Embassy and its successive ambassadors. 🇺🇸  
  
Professor Eduard Sekler died on 1 May 2017 in Cambridge, Massachusetts.



Botschaft  
der Bundesrepublik Deutschland  
Kathmandu

## Bekanntmachung für Deutsche zur Wahl zum Deutschen Bundestag

Am 24. September 2017 findet die Wahl zum 19. Deutschen Bundestag statt.

Deutsche, die außerhalb der Bundesrepublik Deutschland leben und im Bundesgebiet keine Wohnung mehr innehaben, können bei Vorliegen der sonstigen wahlrechtlichen Voraussetzungen an der Wahl teilnehmen.  
Für ihre Wahlteilnahme ist u. a. Voraussetzung, dass sie

- entweder** nach Vollendung ihres 14. Lebensjahres mindestens drei Monate ununterbrochen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland <sup>1)</sup> eine Wohnung innegehabt oder sich sonst gewöhnlich aufgehalten haben und dieser Aufenthalt nicht länger als 25 Jahre zurück liegt,  
**oder** aus anderen Gründen persönlich und unmittelbar Vertrautheit mit den politischen Verhältnissen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland erworben haben und von ihnen betroffen sind; sowie
- in ein Wählerverzeichnis in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland eingetragen sind. Diese **Eintragung erfolgt nur auf Antrag. Der Antrag ist auf einem Formblatt zu stellen; er soll bald nach dieser Bekanntmachung abgesandt werden.** Einem Antrag, der erst nach dem 03. September 2017 bei der zuständigen Gemeindebehörde eingeht, kann nicht mehr entsprochen werden (§ 18 Abs. 1 der Bundeswahlordnung).

Antragsvordrucke (Formblätter) sowie informierende Merkblätter sind online auf der Seite des Bundeswahlleiters ([www.bundeswahlleiter.de](http://www.bundeswahlleiter.de)) erhältlich. Sie können auch bei

- den diplomatischen und berufskonsularischen Vertretungen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland,
- dem Bundeswahlleiter, Statistisches Bundesamt, Zweigstelle Bonn, Postfach 17 03 77, 53029 BONN, GERMANY, oder per E-Mail über das Kontaktformular des Büros des Bundeswahlleiters,
- den Kreiswahlleitern in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland

angefordert werden.

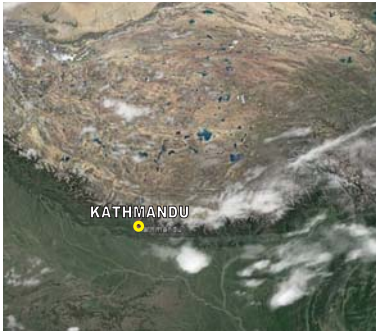
Weitere Auskünfte erteilen die Botschaften und berufskonsularischen Vertretungen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. <sup>2)</sup>

Kathmandu, 05.05.2017

Botschaft der Bundesrepublik Deutschland  
Gyaneshwor Marga 690, P.O. Box 226  
Kathmandu, Nepal  
Tel.: 009771- 4217200 Fax: +977 1 4416899  
Internet: [www.kathmandu.diplo.de](http://www.kathmandu.diplo.de)  
e-Mail: [info@kathmandu.diplo.de](mailto:info@kathmandu.diplo.de)

1) Zu berücksichtigen ist auch eine frühere Wohnung oder ein früherer Aufenthalt in dem in Artikel 3 des Einigungsvertrages genannten Gebiet (Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Sachsen, Sachsen-Anhalt und Thüringen zuzüglich des Gebietes des früheren Berlin (Ost)).





It feels like the monsoon is here already with the steady drizzle and overcast skies. The expectation was that this was a meteorological aberration, but the pressure charts and prevailing wind directions all point to this spell of slightly freakish weather to continue at least till the weekend. Expect patchy clouds throughout the day with build-up towards evening and night bringing lightning and thunderstorms. Heavy snowfall will continue above 5,000m, with the risk of avalanches in the peak climbing season.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
26° 16°	25° 16°	26° 16°

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# Hate is not a Nepali value

The Laramie Project returns to Kathmandu with stories from Nepal



“So what do you remember, Aaron?” is a question posed, 10 years after the incident, to one of the two murderers who beat Matthew Shephard to death in 1998 in a small town in the US.

The question is asked by a member of the theatre group that researched and documented the after-effects of that incident, which has become the iconic hate crime against anyone different, particularly in terms of sexual orientation. The play in question is *The Laramie Project: 10 Years Later, An Epilogue*.

Two years ago, a Nepali production of the anti-homophobic, anti-hate play, *The Laramie Project*, was staged in Kathmandu. The intensity and stinging relevance of that production moved audiences here even though it was performed in English. The play is returning to Kathmandu this month as a sequel of sorts, based on the original follow-up production by Tectonic Theatre.

The original *Laramie Project* presented interviews of family, friends, police officers and the murderers in order to learn more about the victim and the crime itself. The follow-up returns to some of the same people to ask them about changes in attitudes, policies and legislation. But more importantly, this particular One World Theatre production, jointly directed by Bruno Deceukelier and Rajkumar Pudasaini, incorporates LGBTIQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer) stories from Nepal itself.

Presented in Nepali, these stories are based mainly on strong, personal narratives from LGBTIQ authors in *Pride Climbing Higher*, a writing project from Creative Nepal, in collaboration with Blue Diamond Society (BDS). The project provides an opportunity for audiences, students, journalists and policy makers to reflect and debate important social issues like HIV, LGBTIQ rights, anti-hate crime legislation, the role of media and how communities attempt to define themselves and rewrite

their pasts.

The One World production of ‘The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later’ has a cast of 15 (pictured) composed of both professional actors – some of whom reprise their roles from the 2015 play – and members of the LGBTIQ community.

This non-for-profit piece of theatre, made in collaboration with BDS, is supported by Save the Children and UNAIDS Nepal. This particular production is dedicated to Martin Benitez Torres, one of the 49 victims of the 2016 shooting in a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida. It is also dedicated to the victims of ongoing gay persecution in Chechnya, crimes that highlight the work that remains to ensure the rights of the LGBTIQ community.

Nepal is leading the fight against intolerance in this region. It is therefore all the more important for us to become sensitised to issues that affect a significant proportion of people here and world-wide. As we enter a phase of intolerance unprecedented on a global scale, we

must remember that “life is so precious,” as one of the Nepali characters in the production points out. And that we “gotta take responsibility for ourselves, what we think and what we say and what we do,” as the police officer who found Matthew in 1998 rages.

A segment of *Ten Years Later* will be performed on Wednesday, 17 May, the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia, as part of the BDS’s annual event to mark the day. The play itself will run 19-28 May at the Nepal Tourism Board.

Deceukelier’s words ring true: “What can I say but express the hope that *Laramie* will touch you as it did me?” 🇳🇵

**Karno Dasgupta**

The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later  
One World Theatre  
Nepal Tourism Board  
Premiere: 19 May 5:30 PM  
Till 28 May  
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# Political power of the ballot

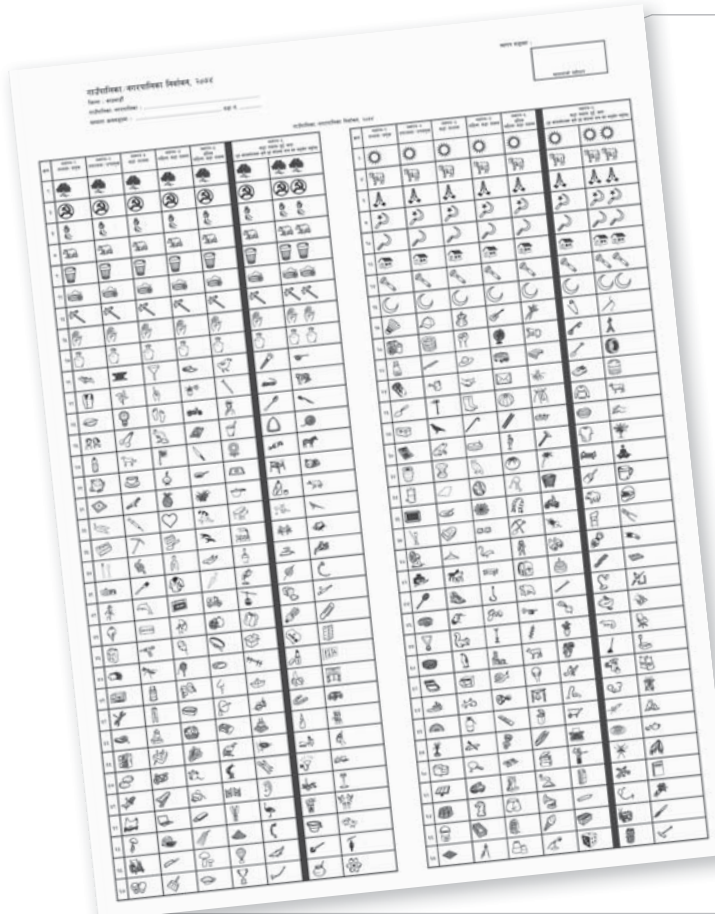
After two lost decades, Nepalis are finally getting ready to vote in local elections for 481 Village Councils, 246 Municipalities and 17 Metropolitan Cities. In the two-phased elections on 14 May and 14 June, nearly 14 million citizens will be casting their ballots for the first time under the new Constitution, for representatives in new local structures.

Many voters were just one year old when the last local elections were held in 1997. Those who were about to be eligible to vote then are today in their 30s. The Maoists decimated elected local councils, and the royal regime cancelled scheduled local polls in 2002. Some 9 million people are voting for the first time in their lives in local elections. The polls will be held in two phases as a compromise, to give time to prepare for Tarai-based parties, who had been threatening to boycott polls unless their demands for amendments to the constitution were met first.



This election is important also because Nepalis will be voting not for Village Development Committee (VDC) and District Development Committee (DDC), which were effectively just local administrative units, but they will select representatives for self-governing Ward, Village, Municipal and Metropolitan councils. Under the new Constitution these are empowered to make laws, raise revenue and fix policy. There are also quotas for women and candidates from the Dalit community, and although more than 90 per cent of candidates to head village and municipal councils are men, parties are obliged to nominate a woman for one of the two senior local posts.

Whatever happens in the provincial and parliamentary elections slated for 2018, the foundations for rural development and grassroots democracy are being laid on Sunday and 14 June.



## No confusion

With Zero Hour in effect, candidates had to stop all campaigning as of midnight on Thursday till polling day on Sunday morning when booths will open in three provinces conducting the first phase of polls.

There is still lingering confusion among voters about how to vote correctly. In Kathmandu, the ballot paper is the size of a broadsheet newspaper. The swastika stamp has to be placed on seven boxes, and the paper folded in the proper way.

Much of the confusion stems from the use of two election symbols in the seventh column of the ballot paper (*pictured*). The Election Commission (EC) published a front page notice in major Nepali dailies on Thursday to try to clear the confusion explaining that the parties that have a seat in Parliament must use one symbol and the EC needed to use two of the same symbols in the seventh column to differentiate one ward committee candidate from the other.

The parties that have no seat in Parliament and independents have to use different symbol for each of their candidates. So there is just one symbol in the seventh column for their candidates. So, voters will have to stamp just once in the seventh column although there are two election symbols.

The EC says it has been using the mass and social media to educate voters, but at least for Kathmandu Valley voters may feel like they are giving a multiple choice exam when they vote on Sunday.

## HISTORY OF LOCAL POLLS

Although the first local elections in Nepal were held towards the end of the Rana reign in 1947, and women got the right to vote in first municipal polls in Kathmandu in 1953, it was not until 1959 that the first party-based local elections were held. The Nepali Congress won the chairmanship of Kathmandu Municipality and the deputy position went to the Nepal Communist Party.

After King Mahendra's coup in 1961 and during the Panchayat System, three-tier Village, District and Municipal elections were held from 1962 onwards. After the People's Movement of 1990, the following local polls were held:

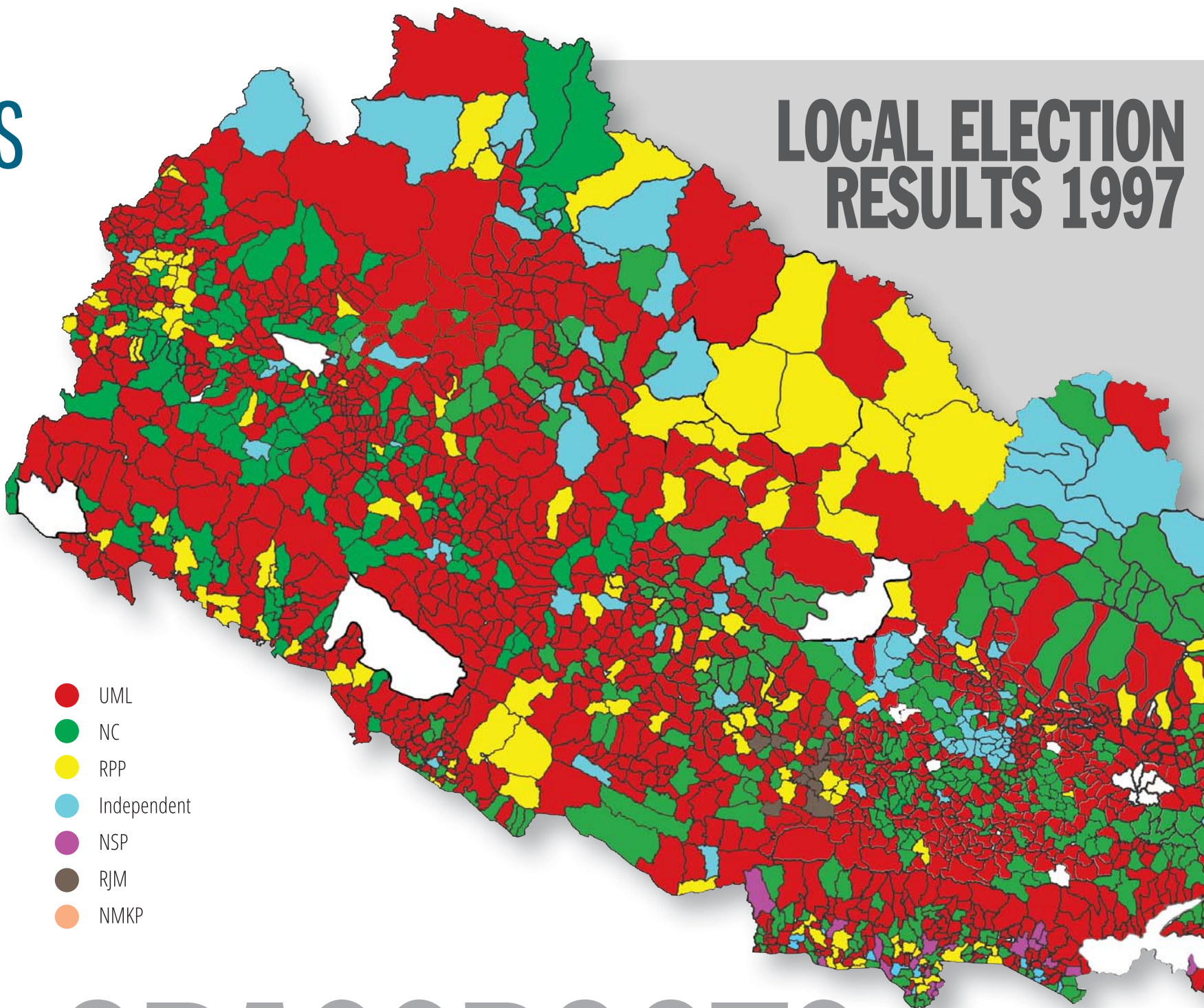


MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

**1992** Village Panchayats were renamed Village Development Committees and elections were held for 3,995 VDCs, 75 DDCs and 33 Municipalities. The Nepali Congress swept the elections, winning 60 of the 75 districts.

**1997** By the time the next local elections were held, the tables were turned and the UML swept 36 of the 75 districts, leaving the NC with only 22. The UML also won 41 of the 50 Municipalities.

**2005** King Gyanendra tried to hold local elections after his coup, but this was boycotted by most parties.



# GRASSROOTS DEMOCRACY





14 May

34 districts

Province **3 4 6**

283 local councils

4,956,925 voters

4 Metropolitan Cities  
1 Sub Metropolitan City  
95 Municipalities  
183 Village Councils

14 June

41 districts

Province **1 2 5 7**

461 local councils

9,097,557 voters

12 Sub Metropolitan Cities  
146 Municipalities  
303 Village Councils

RED  
LETTER  
DAYSLOCAL  
ELECTION  
2017Male voters  
7,069,714Female voters  
6,984,625Third gender  
143Total voters  
14,054,482

■ PHASE I  
■ PHASE II



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

Prime Minister Bharat Mohan Adhikari (centre) with Kathmandu Mayor P L Singh and Vice-mayor Nabindra Joshi of the NC at the old Municipality Building in New Road in 1993.

When Nepal held its last local elections in 1997, the Maoist war had just begun. The insurgents disrupted polls in their 'base areas' of the mid-western mountains, and voting had to be rescheduled. Some VDCs couldn't hold elections at all. There were 12,538,273 voters in 58 municipalities and 3,913 VDCs.

The UML swept local polls, (*see map below*) riding the wave of popularity of its Chair, Manmohan Adhikari, who in his nine-month tenure earned an image of a benevolent and pro-poor Prime Minister.

The Adhikari government's scheme to provide social security allowances to the elderly, widows and disabled persons became so popular that none of his successors from rival parties could outdo it. He launched the 'Let Us Build Our Villages Ourselves' campaign, and increased the budget for local bodies.

In 2002, when the tenure of the last local bodies expired, Sher Bahadur Deuba's government under King Gyanendra did not announce another election, using the insurgency as an excuse. But many believe that the real reasons were that the UML would make a clean sweep, and because the Maoists had killed or chased away many local NC leaders from the districts.

1997  
RESULTSTotal  
Municipalities:

58

UML 45

NC 3

NSP 3

RPP 3

Independent 3

NMKP 1

Total  
DDC:

75

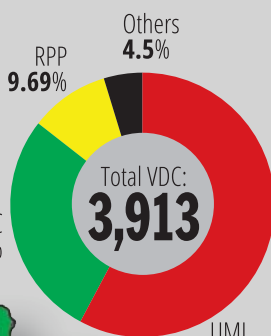
UML 36

NC 22

RPP 8

Independent 8

NMKP 1



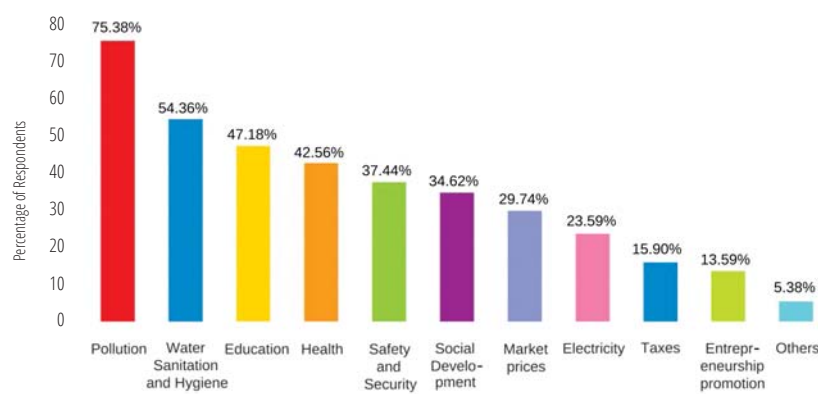
## PUBLIC PULSE

A survey in all 32 wards of Kathmandu Metropolitan City last week by the mobile polling group Rooster Logic found that there is considerable enthusiasm for local polls, but also a lack of knowledge about locations of polling booths and how to use ballot papers. The results showed a worrying lack of interest among young people 18-25, more than three-fourths of whom said they would not vote. However, 65 percent of the 394 respondents in the sample group surveyed through mobile phones said they would vote because it

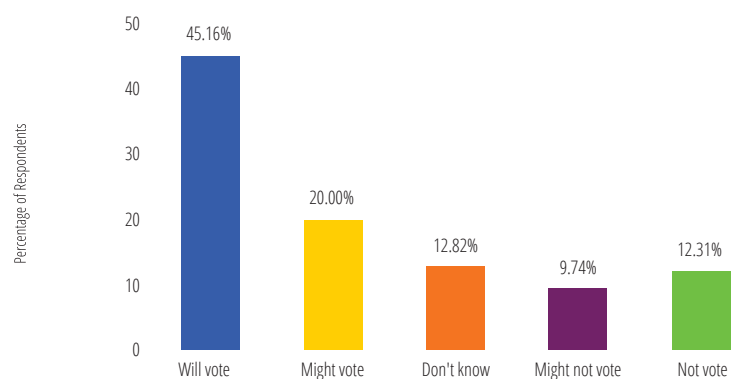
was important in a democracy.

Most respondents didn't know or didn't care about their party preferences. But Kathmandu being a traditional Nepali Congress stronghold, it was not surprising that 61 percent of those who would vote said they supported candidates with the Tree symbol. The UML and Maoists trailed behind, while Bibeksheel showed a small blip. The newly-formed Sajha Party of Rabinendra Mishra and Baburam Bhattarai's New Force did not register in this mobile phone survey.

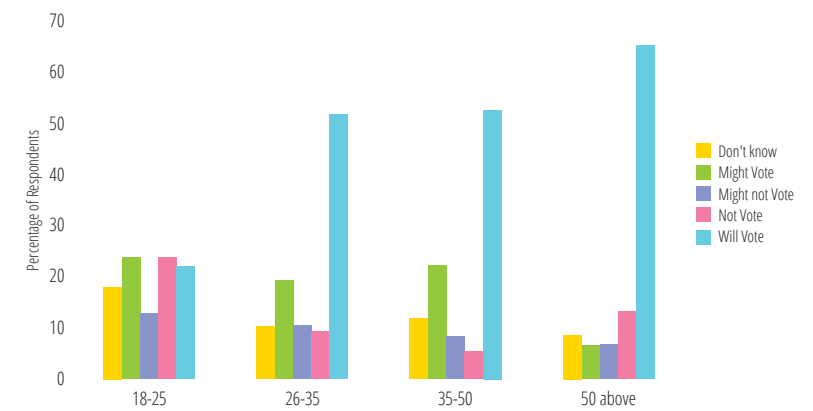
## 1. What are your priority issues in Kathmandu?



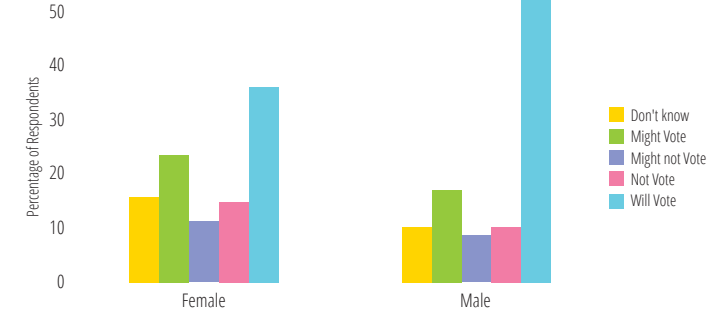
## 2. Will you vote or not? (All respondents)



## 3. Disaggregated data on voting by age group.



## 4. Disaggregated data on voting by gender.



## Methodology

Rooster Logic used a digital tool called REMO (Research and Monitoring) software to work with a network of enumerators called *Sukarmis* to not just collect data from the field rapidly through mobile devices, but instantly aggregate and analyse it. Rooster Logic also conducted exit polls after the 2013 constituent assembly elections. This survey was conducted 25-27 April in all 32 wards of the Kathmandu Metropolitan area, using stratified random sampling of representative proportions of gender, age and ethnicity.

The questionnaire measures quantitative responses for perception and potential voting action of respondents. The questionnaire does not measure, in any way, variables that have direct or indirect impact on the outcome of elections, favour certain parties or personnel or try to create public opinion.

Copmplete survey result: <http://roosterlogic.com/>

This VDC-wise map of the 1997 Local Election results was prepared from official records at the Election Commission and the Association of VDCs by a *Nepali Times* Taskgroup composed of Sahina Shrestha, Shreejana Shrestha, Sonia Awale, Kiran Maharjan, Om Astha Rai and Charu K Raman. ISET-Nepal provided GIS cartographic support.

Watch a vlog of the data-mapping process.



## EVENTS



### Barefoot walkathon,

Participate in the 60-minute barefoot walkathon to support education of children in the Karnali region.  
20 May, 7 to 8 am, Maitighar to Basantapur, (01) 4435268, 9843206582

### Art exhibition,

Take an afternoon out to visit *Augenblick* by German artist Rolf A. Klunter, created from 2003-2017 in Kathmandu.

15 May, 4 pm onwards, Taragaon museum, Hyatt Regency Hotel, Kathmandu, (01) 5178105

### Girls futsal,

Register your team for the first girl power futsal tournament, organised by The Girls Power.

20 May, 8 am to 6 pm, Dhanyentari Futsal, Kalapul, Entry fee Rs 5,000, (01) 4009635.

### Poetry with Alok,

Join a night of poetry, comedy and performance with gender non-conforming writer and entertainer, Alok Vaid-Menon.

22 May, 6 pm onwards, Nepal Tourism Board, Pradarshani Marg, Kathmandu, Rs 500, wordwarriorsnepal@gmail.com



### Vertical University,

Earth Day Crowd Rise Roadmap Challenge KTK-BELT has raised \$48,290 so far. Competition closes 18 May and needs to reach a target for setting up the world's first 8,000m Vertical University to protect biodiversity in eastern Nepal. A seed bank of tropical trees, an ornithology education centre in Kosi Tappu, and support for 10 youth fellows and 100 farmers from proceeds.

<https://www.crowdrise.com/ktk-belt-roadmap2017>

### Bloggers networking,

Sign up for a free networking event for Rising Junkiri. Aspiring bloggers and writers can participate too.

10 June, 2 to 8 pm, Octave Kathmandu, Woodland Complex, Darbarmarg, Admission: Free for members risingjunkiri@gmail.com



### Reflections auction,

Bid to grab the best artwork on the last day of the exhibition, Reflections 25.4.2015. The 10 works of art to be auctioned are based on stories of people affected by the 2015 earthquake.

12 May, 10 am to 5 pm, Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal, 9818307280

### Click away,

Hone your photography skills with a 10-day workshop for beginners. Learn from professional artists and photographers.

6 to 15 May, 7 to 10 am, Artudio, Chhauni Hospital Road, Rs 5,500, 9803779777/9813931488/ 9851180088

### Bird counting,

Make a day out of bird watching and be part of the Urban-Rural Bird Count Phase II, organised by Bird Conservation Nepal. Registration required.

1 to 10 May, (01) 4417805, 4420213

## MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



## MUSIC



### Jazz on the rooftop,

Enjoy your weekend to the beats of jazz with Maria Fajardo and Mahesh Tankukar.

13 May, 7 pm onwards, Alliance Française de Katmandou, Pulchok, Price Rs 400, (01) 5009221

### Musical arts,

Enjoy live music by Mama Disquo and Lazy monk and enjoy the display of artwork by urban artists from Nepal.

19 May, 6 to 10 pm, Friends Restaurant, Thamel, (01) 4700063



### Acoustic Friday,

Catch Triad playing great acoustic music and enjoy a pint of free Hoegarden beer.

12 May, 5 pm to 11 pm, Jingle Restro & Bar, Tripureswor, (01) 4228078



### Open mic,

Grab the mic and sing your heart out at the House of Music every Tuesday. House of Music, Thamel, 9851075172



### Metal night,

Book your tickets to enjoy the metal rhythms of Chepang.

29 July, 1 to 7 pm, Purple Haze Rock Bar, Thamel, Tickets Rs 350 (pre sales), Rs 400 (door), 984-9276214

## DINING



### Hello Café,

Relish a wide range of Korean and Italian dishes this weekend. Don't forget to try the Valley's best Chef's Special Salad. Boudha, (01) 4916218

### Lhakpa's Chulo,

Nepali dal bhat, Newari khaja, Swiss Rösti, Italian Risotto, and Thai green curry - take your pick.

Jhamsikhel, (01) 5542986



### Fresh Cup,

This coffee-culture café is the place to go for excellent americanos and mochas. Try their grilled chicken sandwich, among other selections.

Kamaladi, Kathmandu, (01) 4428040

### Wunjala Moskva,

Treat your palette to Newari and Russian dishes in the lush garden with ancient trees and trickling streams.

Naxal, (01) 4415236



### Tasneem's Kings Kitchen,

A charming restaurant proposing the unique flavours of distinctive Bohra Muslim Food.

Jhamsikhel, 9801282727, (01) 2239532

### Embassy,

Away from the hustle-bustle of the streets, enjoy the variety of multi-cuisine dishes at a place ideal for business meets and casual rendezvous.

Panipokhari, (01) 4424040



### The Vesper House,

Stop by for the best in Italian and all local favorites, in their breezy outdoors seating. Also a great venue for wine connoisseurs. Jhamsikhel, (01) 5548179, www.vespercafe.com

## GETAWAY



### Solid Rock,

Enjoy a relaxing stay in this traditional Nepali farmhouse away from the hustle and bustle of Kathmandu city.

Solid Rock Lodge & Restaurant, Dollu, near Pharping, 9823233093



### Gokarna Forest Resort,

A forest sanctuary to help you relax, breathe and meditate. Just a 20-minute drive from Kathmandu.

Gokarna, (01)4451212, info@gokarna.net

### Buddha Maya Gardens Hotel,

Add value to your travel in Lumbini with a stay at probably the best hotel in the area.

Lumbini, (071)580220, 9801033109, info@ktmgh.com

### Pataleban Vineyard Resort,

16 km west of Kathmandu city, the resort is a perfect place to spend your weekends with food and wine. It offers astounding views of the sunset and mountains.

Chisapani Baad Bhanjyang Road, (01) 4316377



### Raniban Retreat,

Situated at the other end of Phewa Lake and nestled inside the Raniban forest and the World Peace Stupa, this retreat has one of the best views of the Annapurna range, Phewa Lake, and Pokhara.

World Peace Pagoda, Pokhara, (061) 692136

### Famous Farm,

Wake up to the sounds of chirping birds and a fresh morning breeze wafting in through the aankhijhyal.

Nuwakot, (01)4700426, info@rural-heritage.com



### Shivapuri Cottage,

Escape the pressures of Kathmandu and enjoy peace, tranquility, good food, and fresh air.

Budhanilkantha, 9841371927



# Silver linings

Radheshyam Adhikari in *Kantipur*, 8 May

The new year has brought a silver lining in the form of local elections. Public opinion is firmly in support of defending the role of the judiciary. Voters have put political parties on notice. This is no longer the prerogative of the elite, but the concern of the wider citizenry, which is a good thing for democracy.



Local elections are taking place because the people want them. Nepalis have long felt the absence of local polls: services and development both suffered. The basic level of democracy, which allows people access to government, did not exist for 15 years. Unelected bureaucrats and local movers and shakers monopolised decision-making. There is great anticipation about the elections. The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court was ambushed guerrilla style by an impeachment motion in Parliament. It became an issue that directly affected ordinary Nepalis, one that was not confined to the halls of Parliament. Those behind the impeachment move should have proven that it was the proper

thing to do, not just to Parliament but to the people, who want answers. The proponents are becoming defensive, and civil society has united against the move. This proves that Nepali democracy has become more resilient. Democracy gains strength after facing threats like these. Debate on the doctrine of the separation of powers is no longer confined to experts of constitutional law, but is held in households across the country. When the people stand up to support the pillar of an independent judiciary, it becomes stronger. This puts added responsibility on the shoulders of all those who play a role in the judiciary. There have been many cases in the past where mistakes have been made, but there is no alternative to an independent and free judiciary: that is the message that has spread across the country in the aftermath of the impeachment motion. The parties are busy campaigning, but also forging alliances across party lines. It remains to be seen how voters will take this. However, if it indicates that there is now more tolerance in politics then it must be seen as a good thing. Established parties have another challenge from new groups like the Sajha Party and Bibeksheel Nepali. We will see how well they do at the ballot box, but the very fact that they can affect the elections will prove that they are needed. If it is true that through the Internet and social media younger citizens are being attracted to vote, this can only provide more energy to our democracy. All such encouraging trends are positive and prove that there is a silver lining to our democracy.



BHAKTA RAM LAMICHHANE

# New Korean prez in Nepal

*www.himalkhabar.com*, 8 May

South Korea's newly-elected president Moon Jae-In volunteered to provide relief to earthquake survivors in Nepal's Nuwakot district and went on a trek to the Langtang Valley last year. Moon helped in the reconstruction of Arukharka Secondary School in Belkot, joining others to carry bricks and material for repair work. He also provided science equipment to the school. "He is a very simple and humble man, and mixed well with the local people," recalls Bhakta Ram Lamichhane, who is affiliated to labour unions assisting Nepali workers in Korea and helped organise the trip for Moon. He himself spent three years working in Korea. The trek to Langtang was along trails that had not yet been repaired after landslides triggered by the earthquake, and Moon joined other Korean and Nepali

colleagues to remove rocks and clear the trail. "I was surprised that a person who was to become the president of his country was so friendly and generous," Lamichhane said. Moon represented the Democratic Party and got 41.08 per cent of the votes when results were announced on Tuesday, defeating his nearest rival Hong Jeon Pyo, who got 24.3 per cent. Moon also contested elections in 2012, but was defeated. He has been sensitive to the needs of migrant workers in Korea. Moon said he came to Nepal and Bhutan to "seek happiness and peace," and spent two weeks in Nuwakot and Rasuwa trekking to the village in Langtang buried by an avalanche in 2015 and to Gosainkunda Lake. But he also spent time with Nepali returnees from Korea to inquire about their well-being.



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I am the first to admit that I watch everything: aside from the overtly masculine dude-oriented comedies, I can usually stomach almost every genre. That being said, this year's *xXx: Return of Xander Cage*, the third instalment of a deeply silly, but kind of enjoyable franchise, was too much even for my lowered expectations.



**MUST SEE**  
Sophia Pande

Part of the reason why the *xXx* franchise has done so well is the inexplicable charisma of Vin Diesel, the extraordinary stage name of 49-year-old American Mark Sinclair, who has made his name on the *Riddick*, *xXx*, and *The Fast and the Furious* (listed in order of fame) franchises. Unfortunately, even Diesel's significant screen presence cannot save this ridiculously trite film, which attempts to

emulate the elements that have made *The Fast and the Furious* films so successful, namely the jaw-dropping, frankly unbelievable, but highly entertaining action sequences, the multiculturalism, the strong gender equality in casting, and a riotous, unabashedly tongue-in-cheek sense of humour, all tied together by Diesel's leading character.

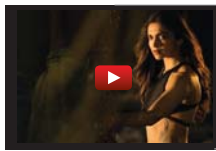
Trained as a theatre actor from a young age, Diesel is much more talented than one might guess from his chosen niche as macho action hero, and it is painful to see this very likeable protagonist flounder in such an ill-written, sloppily directed film. Unfortunately *The Return of Xander Cage* has made an awful lot of money at the box office, all but guaranteeing another instalment, and one can only hope that it somehow manages to reiterate in a more creative, less insulting manner.

The plot of the film is so silly it is not worth

a summary, yet the film boasts an astonishing cast of international renown, including Toni Collette and Donnie Yen, and marks the debut in Hollywood of the lovely, talented Bollywood star Deepika Padukone: one cannot help but feel sorry for her in a role that does very little justice to her acting abilities, ogles her physical beauty and, frankly, does not bode well for her future in English language films.

I'm not saying you cannot enjoy this new *xXx* film. I'm just warning you that stepping into this interminable film (yes, it is boring) will guarantee you stupid jokes, a clichéd plot, hackneyed action scenes, banal bad girls and not even a single surprise. With *The Fast and the Furious* films as an example of what to do, *xXx* is an example of what not to do, ever.

You will be seeing more of Diesel as Xander Cage, a \$356-million box office gross assures us that. But when we struggle to be able to find and watch films like *Hidden Figures* and *Arrival* (both of which were nominated for Best Picture this year) it is always a bit of a shame when our cinemas can only make money while carrying the likes of Xander Cage's ignominious return.



Watch trailer online

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

**HAPPENINGS**



GOPEN RAI

**BACK TO THE BENCH:** Reinstated Chief Justice Sushila Karki (*right*) hosted a ceremony at the Supreme Court on Monday to mark Law Day. Prime Minister Dahal, who last week tried to impeach her, skipped the event. President Bhandari and Vice-President Pun attended.



RSS

**MR MINISTER AGAIN:** Nepal Democratic Forum Chair, Bijay Gachhadar, joins the government as Deputy Prime Minister on Monday after the RPP quit the Maoist-NC coalition over the Chief Justice affair. This is the 12th time Gachhadar is a minister.



PRABIN K MAHARJAN

**TO A UNITED EUROPE:** Vice President Nanda Kishore Pun and EU Ambassador to Nepal Rensje Teerink raise a toast to mark Europe Day 2017 at an event in Kathmandu on Tuesday.



BIKRAM RAI

**BATTLE FOR KATHMANDU:** Mayoral candidates for Kathmandu Metropolitan City at a debate at Kumari Hall on Monday.



PRAKASH DAHAL FACEBOOK PAGE

**WE-FIE:** Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal and NC President Sher Bahadur Deuba fly to Chitwan on Thursday to jointly campaign for Dahal's daughter Renu, who is a mayoral candidate in Bharatpur. The NC gave up its own candidate, sparking protests.

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# It's party time on the Internet

... but still doubtful if the wave of digital campaigning in this local election will translate into votes

SONIA AWALE

An 8-second video on Instagram shows a middle-aged female voter approaching immaculately dressed **Bibeksheel Nepali** candidate for Kathmandu mayor, 21-year-old Ranju Darshana, on a roof terrace overlooking Darbar Square and says, "I came all the way here looking for you." Darshana returns a shy smile and says, "Thank you."

**Sajha Party** Chief Rabin Mishra starts a 45-minute video on Facebook with his party's candidates Kishor Thapa and Nirupama Yadav by noting how he is conducting a "slightly different" interview than when he was a journalist for BBC Nepali. Mishra's public Facebook account has nearly 650,000 followers, while his party's page has only 65,000.

**YouTube** Folk duo Raju Pariyar and Priya Bhandari perform a jaunty election music video on YouTube that clocks 500,000 views within a week of being posted. The lyrics: "Vote for **UML**, the people's party that never kowtowed to anyone and lifted the blockade." There is lots of flag-waving and unabashed nationalism.

The **RPP**'s Kamal Thapa has over 361,000 followers on Twitter and pins a tweet of a slick animated video extolling the glory of his party and exhorting all to vote in local elections. In other posts, Thapa addresses throngs in his home district of Makwanpur and canvasses for the RPP's mayoral candidate for Hetauda.

Health Minister Gagan Thapa is not standing for local elections, but does a live discussion on Periscope on 'Liveable Kathmandu'. It can be played back on his Facebook page including Thapa's not-so-subtle plug for his own **Nepali Congress** party's candidate for mayor, Raju Raj Joshi, extolling his commitment to improve Kathmandu's environment.

With limited time to campaign in two-phased local elections, Nepal's political parties are fielding their candidates for village and municipal councils on social networks like never before.

The first local election in 19 years starts Sunday and will include nearly 9 million youthful first-time voters. Even those who have never voted in local polls are already 38. The new parties, especially, believe they can reach potential voters through smart phones rather than street rallies.

Digital native start-ups, like Bibeksheel Nepali, Sajha Party and New Force, are making full use of digital platforms to spread their good governance messages and take support away from the established parties.

Although the 2013 constituent assembly election was the first in Nepal's digital era, Sunday's contest is the first time 'social' has been used extensively. Half of Nepalis have Internet access, 7 million are on Facebook, and most are logging on through mobile phones. So, even the stodgiest political leaders have realised they also need a digital podium.

"One of our best selling points is the innovative way in which we present ourselves in social media," says Anusa



Thapa, CEO of Bibeksheel Nepali. The young party is vigorously promoting Ranju Darshana on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and attracting thousands of viewers to live online interviews and other events.

The party also has an animated video, with a rap soundtrack, which fulminates against corruption, mismanagement and urban bedlam, promising that Bibeksheel's young mayor will usher in a new era of clean and efficient Kathmandu.

However, it is not clear if the message works, even with younger voters in the capital. At 21, Aviv Adhikari is a media studies student at Kathmandu University and the same age as Darshana. But he is not completely convinced that the candidate has the maturity or experience to be mayor, adding: "I don't think the rap works with young voters. It is the wrong genre. Colloquial folk songs are much more effective."

As an established party that



traditionally used celebrity musicians at campaign rallies, the UML is doing just that. It has released music videos of folk duets by well-known singers, replacing colloquial lyrics with thumping nationalism and an anti-incumbent message.

Ajaya Bhadra Khanal of Sajha Party, launched this year by fellow former journalist Rabin Mishra, says digital platforms are much more effective than mass meetings in reaching large numbers of voters.

"Being a new party, and given the limited time for campaigning, social media is a must for us and is our main medium to communicate about our election symbols and candidates," adds Khanal. "In the long run, I am sure social media will gradually help transform Nepali politics."



The established parties are catching on. The Hindu-right RPP has set up a nine-member social media team that has posted promotional messages and two election videos, and features celebrity members like Rekha Thapa and Komal Oli.

The Maoists have replugged some of their war-era videos to revive a bit of their revolutionary verve, and the NC appears to mistakenly think that streaming central committee members giving speeches will somehow appeal to young voters.

Corporate CEO and social media critic Ashutosh Tiwari uses online posts himself to

encourage young candidates like Darshana, and says the new parties have been much smarter in exploiting the Internet to enhance their credibility as well as gain voters. "The new generation is looking for alternatives to the old party system and for candidates with a new way of doing politics. They will certainly make a dent," he argues.

But candidates have found the Internet is a double-edged sword. For every post supporting them, there are many more rude responses from flammers and trolls. For example, a YouTube video ridiculing Rabin Mishra of Sajha has got far more views than his official promo video. Being a young woman, Darshana is trolled mercilessly, reflecting the more sordid side of social media globally. It is also doubtful how effective Internet campaigning can be compared to old-fashioned mass meetings, street rallies and door-to-door flesh pressing.

"Nepalis have one of the highest digital engagements in the world. But we have seen it's not as easy to dissuade people from party loyalty in elections," says media columnist Dharma Adhikari.

Social media expert Ujjwal Acharya doubts that online campaigning alone will convert into votes, but may do so in future once politicians realise its full potential, rather than using it to bad-mouth rivals.

His conclusion: "Most social media followers of political parties are already their voters. The real question is if they can influence people outside their circle."

 [nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com)  
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# TRIAL AND ERROR DEMOCRACY

Nepal is experimenting with radical decentralisation in local elections, and does not have the luxury of failing

OM ASTHA RAI

When new mayors and village council chiefs assume office after the first round of elections on 14 May, they will confront a citizenry with very high expectations of good governance and development.

These are the first elections to local councils since 1997, and people are desperately waiting for their chosen representatives to make up for two lost decades. But newly-elected ward, village and municipal council members and mayors will face multiple challenges trying to solve long-neglected problems. Voters will be impatient, and the parties may not be able to make a difference right away.

To start with, most new village and municipal councils will not even have desks and chairs. They will have to work out of what used to be VDC buildings, which will have to be converted into ward offices.

“The first round of elections is taking place where earthquake survivors are living in temporary shelters,” says Krishna Prasad Sapkota, ex-president of the Association of District Development Committees Nepal. “And in most of these villages, the newly-elected local council chiefs will also have to work out of temporary shelters.”

The 744 new municipal and village councils will have many more powers and will need at least 70 staff each, up from the present 10. The Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development is working to transfer former VDC and DDC staff to the new local councils, but this is not going to happen even by the time the next round of local elections are held on 14 June.

Damodar Rijal of the Association of VDC Secretaries says most councils will need more than 70 employees: “If a village council is to perform all its tasks, it needs at least 150 employees, so our new representatives will have neither proper offices

nor sufficient staff to deliver services.”

The Constitution has given municipal and village councils 22 exclusive rights to draft their own laws, hear legal cases, collect taxes and issue licenses for new schools and radio stations. Former municipalities and VDCs were local administrative units, the new units will be real local governments with the powers of the executive, legislative and judiciary rolled into one. “Greater responsibilities mean greater challenges,” says Ghanshyam Khatiwada of the National Association of VDCs. “If newly-elected representatives are not trained to understand their roles and perform their duties, they will be lost.”

These logistic shortcomings, however, pale in comparison to the challenges newly-elected local bodies will face from the feudal hierarchies within their own parties, who will want to centralise decision-making.

“The political parties that are at the centre are not willing



## Electing for a better

A village in Kavre is using Sunday's election to make up for two lost decades of development



KUNDA DIXIT

**17 YEARS APART:** Bhim Neupane speaking at the inauguration of a microhydro plant at Gudgud Khola in Kavre in 2000 (left) and addressing a campaign rally on Monday in Panauti Municipality, where he is standing for mayor.







GOPEN RAI

to devolve power,” says Mukti Rijal, an expert on political decentralisation. “They tried their best to prevent local elections, and will grab every opportunity to prevent real devolution.”

After the 1997 local elections, the government said it would give local bodies quasi-judicial rights to resolve property disputes. But that never happened. A high-level committee was set up to make decentralisation more effective, but it hardly met, and Rijal says the mindset of the main political parties has not changed: they are “essentially anti-decentralisation”.

When the five-year tenure of the last local bodies expired in 2002 during the Maoist conflict, the royal government did not announce another election. After 2006, the political cartel ran local councils and divided up the spoils, neglecting development.

When the government finally announced local elections in February this year, uncertainty lingered due to opposition from Tarai-centric parties. They initially wanted constitutional amendments and provincial elections to precede local polls and finally agreed to participate only when the government decided to do local elections in two phases.

Sunday’s elections are taking place in only 283 out of the 744 municipal and village councils in three hill-only provinces. The remaining four provinces will vote on 14 June. Madhesi parties are expected to participate in the second round.

“This is our new wave of

decentralisation, and it is very radical. If we succeed, it will transform the country, and we cannot afford to fail because we have wasted so much time in experimenting with one after another form of local governance,” warns Rijal.

New municipal and village councils will have a total annual budget of Rs 400 billion – a four-fold increase from the current total budget of all local bodies. The problem is that politically-connected businesses that had benefited from the absence of elected councils over the past two decades to wrest permits for mining and quarrying are now standing for local elections so they can control local budgets.

Dor Mani Poudyal, former mayor of Hetauda and now President of the Municipality Association of Nepal, says: “We have many challenges to make decentralisation work, and the biggest is undoubtedly to elect the right representatives.”

Nearly 9 million voters are taking part in local elections for the first time, including people born 18 years ago, when Nepal held its last local polls. Those who were teenagers in 1997 are now in their 30s and will also be voting locally for the first time. A majority of candidates are also contesting local elections for the first time (*see page 8-9*).

Lack of experience and overly complicated ballot papers could mean many votes will be disqualified. The Election Commission has found voter education ‘just satisfactory’.

Says Ghanshyam Khatiwada: “It will be a learning-by-doing process, and mistakes will be made. But what is important is that we are on the right track.”



# future



SAMMAN HUMAGAIN

## KUNDA DIXIT

The bucolic village of Kushadevi offers vivid proof of how grassroots democracy can unleash development, and how the prolonged absence of elected local officials can undermine it.

Located just over the eastern rim of the Kathmandu Valley, the village has in the past decades emerged as a major source of vegetables, dairy products and manpower for the capital city. Since 1990, Kavre has become a success story for community forestry and a model for how accountability through elections can lift living standards in Nepal’s villages.

“We lost the last 16 years after our VDC councils were dismantled, and what was left was destroyed by the Maoists. We have started rebuilding democracy again from the grassroots,” says Bhim Neupane, who was elected in 1992 and 1997 to head the Kushadevi Village Development Council and is now standing for mayor.

This time, Kushadevi has been merged with Panauti Municipality and 10 other surrounding rural VDCs. The issues are also different, says Neupane: while many of his constituents are still farmers, there is a growing urban middle class.

The council he is being elected to is also

much more powerful: it can make local laws, raise taxes and decide on projects.

One rainy morning this week, with just days to go before elections, Neupane was campaigning door-to-door, meeting voters, many of whom he knew by name. Even though he had to step down when the government of Prime Minister Deuba cancelled scheduled local elections in 2002, like many VDC members across Nepal, Neupane did not stop serving his constituency. His electors looked up to him as if he was still their leader.

“Just look at them: there is so much enthusiasm for this election here. That is because they know how far development was pushed back because of the absence of elected officials, and how our rivers and mountains were looted by the mining mafia,” Neupane says.

Neupane’s UML is riding a nationalist wave from his party’s vigorous opposition to the Indian blockade during KP Oli’s prime ministership last year, but many locals say the development agenda is much more important to them.

“We suffered a lot during the blockade, but now with local elections we are looking forward to making up for lost time. It doesn’t matter which party the candidate is from, what we are looking for are honest leaders who can fulfil their promises,” says Laxman Humagain from Kushadevi, who works in a school in Kathmandu.

Seventeen years ago, the newly re-elected Neupane was interviewed by this newspaper while inaugurating a micro-hydro project in a remote ward a day’s walk south of Kushadevi. He said: “People are now aware, they are able to plan and work together to improve their living standards.”

But soon, the Maoists demolished Nepal’s fledgling grassroots democracy, which was beginning to deliver basic

services to the people. In Kushadevi itself, Neupane’s comrade Krishna Sapkota was beheaded by the Maoists and his decapitated body displayed in the village square to terrorise locals. The Maoists also bombed the VDC building, which housed a health post and a school support unit. Throughout it all, despite threats, Neupane remained in his village.

In his campaign speeches, Neupane doesn’t make wild promises of railway lines or superhighways. He promises to continue where he left off to create jobs in tourism and the service industry, set up health posts and provide free checkups every six months for his constituents.

Krishna Prasad Sapkota was the elected chair of Kavre DDC when Neupane was heading Kushadevi VDC in 2000. The two worked well together and both were determined to make democracy work. When the VDCs were disbanded, Sapkota went on to become MP. He now fears that there is a danger of local elections being hijacked by the mining mafia that has grown rich and powerful in the past 20 years (*see Guest Editorial, page 2*).

“Grassroots corruption is now so deeply entrenched that this malady may undermine accountability in the newly elected local governments,” he says. “Those who plundered local resources without having to answer to the public are now trying to trick people to vote for them.”

Asked about this, Neupane admits that the lack of accountability allowed Kathmandu-based businesses to establish quarries and crusher industries and to mine sand along the Rosi Khola. But he says the election is an opportunity to set things right.

“This is the beauty of democracy: people now know exactly what is going on and they can vote for the people who they think are most qualified to better their lives.”







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# Bad Ass

It is now finally becoming clear to The Ass why we have such a long and glorious history as an independent nation state never colonised by a western power. (We are currently colonised by a southern power, and Kathmandu colonises an entire chunk of the country, but that's another story.) The long and short of it is that every prospective invader since Alexander the Great took one look at Nepal's formidable terrain, our happy-go-lucky khukuri-waving people, and our national side-dish of *gundruk ko achar*, and they concluded we were ungovernable and left us alone. "Nope, ain't going there," Genghis Khan is reported to have told reporters on condition of anonymity.

Which is why Nepal has the dual distinction of being South Asia's oldest country and youngest republic. Since age is respected in this part of the world, Nepalis are a bit thin-skinned when we are not treated with the honour and esteem we deserve. It makes us mad as hell when others do not take us seriously. One way to be held in higher regard by the international communitarians is to lobby to gain membership in the Axis of Evil by backpedalling faster than we are currently moving backwards in our evolution towards full-blown democracy.

How can we expect to be treated with reverence when we fail to declare a national nationwide nationalistic holiday when the President is flying off to Sri Lanka on Friday? For decades we were known as a country that would shut itself down when a foreign or domesticated Head of State was coming and going, and it is clear that our standards are slipping. It is time to set our clocks back by a couple of centuries, while ensuring that we are always 15 minutes ahead of Indian Standard Time.

We have two breeds of politicians. We have someone like Lotus Thapa who resigns as deputy prime minister and stays resigned. Such consistency and integrity will never advance us in our march to being a failed state. We need more people like Bimalendra Needy who also

resigns as deputy prime minister and immediately rejoins the grovelment. That is the kind of quick decision-making we need if we are to be admitted into the Evil Empire.

If we are serious about becoming a pariah nation and remaining one, we can't pussyfoot around anymore. If we are to hobnob with King Kim of DPRK we have to adhere to some of the basic norms of international naughtiness. No one is going to take us seriously if we are half-hearted and reinstate a Justice-in-Chief we sacked just because there was a writ. We cannot go around pretending to be bad anymore, we have to be a real Bad Ass.

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The Ass

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