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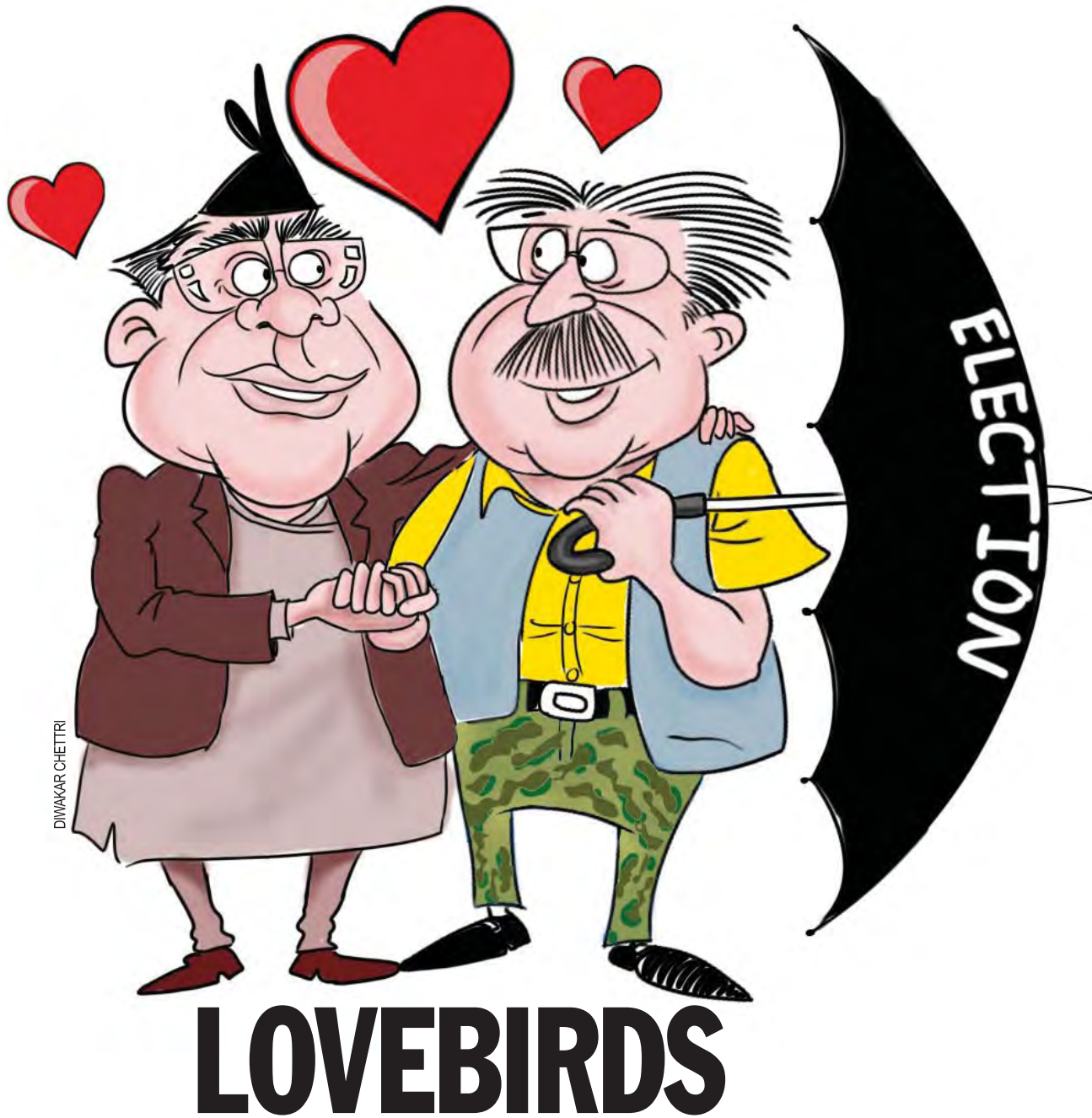


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Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal has proven himself a true gentleman by keeping his promise to step down, and install NC President Sher Bahadur Deuba as new Prime Minister.

In August last year, Dahal made a "gentleman's agreement" to hand over the PM's chair to Deuba after local elections in return for the NC's support to the Maoist-led government. But such agreements have often been broken in Nepali politics, and there was speculation Dahal would do the same. But after the first round of local elections this week, the prime minister said he will resign "in a few days".

Maoist Centre Secretary Barshaman Pun confirmed that Dahal will step down at the next parliamentary meeting, and the party will back Deuba to become

Prime Minister for the fourth time.

"Deuba will be Prime Minister, but the Maoist-NC ruling coalition will remain the same," Pun told *Nepali Times* on Thursday. "The cabinet will be reshuffled, with induction of new faces."

As the ruling coalition enters a new phase, the alliance of Madhesi parties, Rashtriya Janata Party Nepal (RJPN), looks anxious that it might be left out once again. It is still backing the ruling coalition, hoping the government will amend the Constitution as a face-saver so it can participate in the second phase of local elections on 14 June. RJPN leaders met Dahal and Deuba and asked them to amend the Constitution before the PM swap.

But NC leader Amresh Kumar Singh told us Thursday amending

the Constitution is unlikely even before the election – a line that Indian ambassador Manjeev Singh Puri is reported to have conveyed to Madhesi leaders. *The Hindustan Times* reported this week that Puri told Madhesi leaders to drop their demand for the amendment and participate in the 14 June vote.

But RJPN leader Brijesh Kumar Gupta is adamant about not taking part in elections without the amendment even if India tells them to. "How can we go for elections without amendments, and make the sacrifices of so many Madhesi lives worthless?" he asked.

Still, it is unlikely the RJPN will ignore India's advice. The success of the first round of elections is also too tempting to resist. The Federal Socialist Forum Nepal (FSFN), another

Tarai-centric party, took part in the first round, and is preparing for the second one. If the RJPN boycotts the second phase, the Forum may emerge as the biggest Madhes-based party.

With less than a month to go for the second phase, and the ruling coalition still unable to secure the two-thirds majority needed to amend the Constitution, Maoist and NC leaders are trying to persuade Madhesi leaders with other offers. On Thursday, a cabinet meeting recognised recent Madhes and Tharuhat strikes as "political movements". Outgoing PM Dahal also directed the Law Ministry to table a proposal in the next cabinet meeting to withdraw criminal charges against those arrested by police during Madhes-Tharuhat agitations last year. 🇳🇵

Om Astha Rai

RADIO WAVE EDITORIAL

REVOLUTION THROUGH DEVOLUTION

GUEST EDITORIAL
BY BHARAT DUTT KOIRALA
PAGE 2

buzz



1968




2017

Imagining Bungamati

A half-century and an earthquake later ...

BY SAHINA SHRESTHA
PAGE 6-7



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THE RADIO WAVE

One of the enigmas of Nepal's development saga is that despite the absence of local elections for two decades, ten years of violent conflict that left 17,000 dead, wobbly politics and poor governance the country has been cited by the United Nations as a country that has taken the most dramatic strides in health, education and poverty-reduction among developing countries.

Most Nepalis have no idea about how much progress we have made in socio-economic development in the past two decades. So, our national past-time is to run our country down every chance we get. What is it about our people, culture and government that in spite of all the glaring shortcomings, including a lack of national self-appreciation, we have achieved so much. And it is tantalising to think how much further ahead we would have been had politics been more stable, our governance cleaner and more efficient.

It has been said here before that everything that has worked well in this country in the past three decades has the word 'community' attached to it: community forestry that has restored canopy cover over a large part of the midhills, traditional community-run irrigation systems, schools and health posts managed by local communities, rural cooperatives.

But one of Nepal's greatest showcases is the community radio movement that next week marks 20 years since the pioneering Radio Sagarmatha got its broadcasting license. That decision in 1997 firmly established the radio spectrum as being a public domain, putting Nepal far ahead of other countries in the region. As our report on page 14-15 shows, Radio Sagarmatha opened the floodgates for decentralised radio in Nepal with more than 400 FM stations now all over the country.

One of the reasons that Nepal did not backslide in development despite a war and 20 years without elected local government was that the vacuum in grassroots democracy was partially filled by radio. It allowed people's indirect participation in decision-making and compensated for

the absence of accountability. Radio also fostered inclusiveness, and engendered progressive values. Being locally-run, community FM radio stations helped spread tolerance about Nepal's ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity, blunting social discrimination.

Perhaps understanding the power of radio, King Gyanendra prohibited FM stations from broadcasting news for six months after his 2005 military coup, only music was allowed. Some stations ridiculed the ban by singing the evening news bulletin. Radio proved to be resilient enough to survive threats from left, right and centre.

Bharat Koirala received the Magsaysay Award in 2002 for his contribution to the establishment of community radio in Nepal. As he argues in the Guest Column (below) Nepal's radio revolution seems to have strayed from the original mission, and is now commercialised, syndicates centralised content, and many are owned by local politicians.

There is an urgent need to revive the values of public service broadcasting that saw the birth of Radio Sagarmatha 20 years ago so that it continues to buttress grassroots democracy and local development.



GOPEN RAI

GUEST EDITORIAL BHARAT DUTTA KOIRALA

Revolution through devolution

It has been 20 years since we won our fight to get the government to allow the public to have its own community radio station in Nepal. When we finally got the license in May 1997 after four years of struggle, it was a landmark not just for Nepal but the whole of South Asia.

We had to work hard to try to convince politicians, the bureaucracy and even the Army that devolving radio to communities would not bring anarchy, but actually help strengthen grassroots democracy and development. Our slogan was 'Communication for Development', and that is what Nepal's radio revolution has achieved, given communities a voice and forced local government to be accountable and responsible.

As South Asia's first independent FM station, Radio Sagarmatha has been a success story, and role model for public service broadcasting. It has enabled the common people access to information and strengthened democracy. Scenes like porters tuning in to radio while trudging up mountains or women listening to radio while cutting grass for cattle became common after FM stations spread in Nepal.

The other model station was the second independent FM to get a license, Radio Madanpokhara. While Radio Sagarmatha is a community radio in the capital where there are at least 30 other commercial FMs, Radio Madanpokhara is in a rural setting in Palpa and is owned and operated by the local community. It has had a direct impact on lifting rural living standards, encouraging entrepreneurship, helping

farmers market produce and spreading the message of development.

This shows that the biggest impact of community radio is on socio-economic development, it allows people to share ideas with each other, and use that information to help others. It demystifies development jargon to empower women, remove caste discrimination and encourage tolerance of diversity.

However, rulers in many South Asian countries have not understood this. Even in countries with a long tradition of democracy and free press, radio is in the tight grip of government. Many of these licensing regulations are obsolete in the age of the Internet with live streaming and pod-casting, yet the rulers think they can exert control by keeping radio shackled.

Many broadcasters from across South Asia have tried to emulate Radio Sagarmatha and Nepal's success, but their governments haven't allowed them. Nepal's self-supporting radio stations are an important tool for social and economic development. And it all started this week 20 years ago with Radio Sagarmatha.



Bharat Koirala was awarded the Ramon Magsaysay Award in 2002 for his role in promoting the community radio movement in Nepal.

Times.com

ONLINE VIDEOS



NHUCHHE MAYA'S HOME

The 2015 earthquake destroyed Nhuchhe Maya's home in Bungamati. Two architecture students from Denmark, who first visited the village 50 years ago, want to help her rebuild her house and the community. Go online for a digital feature package with videos and before-and-after pictures of people and neighbourhoods half a century apart.



20 YEARS OF SAGARMATHA

The first independent community radio station in South Asia, Radio Sagarmatha, is celebrating its 20th anniversary next week. Watch to hear from its founders why this FM radio station in Kathmandu was a landmark for Nepal and the region. Accompany our reporter into the studio where journalists are covering the results of local elections in Nepali, Newari and Tamang languages.

PEOPLE'S LEADER

I have been travelling to Rayale VDC and observing Bhim Neupane ever since he was elected Chairman of Kushadevi in the 1992 local elections and was a key force in propelling the PDDP project that used Decentralisation and Self-Governance Act to push rural development ('Electing for a better future', Kunda Dixit, #858). I have not seen a more committed Nepali public official, and it has always been my hope that local leaders like him would rise up the ranks to national politics. If the conflict hadn't interrupted the process and local elections had not been postponed in 2002, we could very well have seen even more progress in rural areas. Now, we have to start all over again.

G Humagain

TRIAL AND ERROR

Trial and error democracy has been going on for the last 26 years ('Trial and error democracy', Om Astha Rai, #858). It may go on for yet another 26 years, because we don't seem to have people who can discern what really works and what is just based on hope. With old set of politicians there is no hope. But if new, upcoming parties emerge, there will be hope for development. Let's see.

K K Sharma

■ Nepal has received billions in aid, taken up state loans, received vast sums from migrant workers. Yet 20 years later we read of deaths on roads, pollution, havoc in education and health, corruption at every level. When will it end?

DD

UNDERSTANDING LGBT

Great news, from my experience of a westerner living in Nepal there is a lot of understanding from your politicians for LGBT issues, however the Police Force do not hold any understanding or tolerance ('Hate is not a Nepali value', Karno Dasgupta, #858). Projects like this can help bring the issue into the public domain. I am not gay, but believe if you stand for equality you must support these people.

roddy

WHAT'S TRENDING



14 May

Glimpses from the first phase of local election on 14 May. After two lost decades, there was 73% turnout among 5 million Nepalis eligible to vote for representatives to new local structures.

Most reached on Facebook
(7,360 people reached)

All politics is local

Unusual alliances in this local election, like the one between the NC and Maoists in Bharatpur, the UML and RPP in Kathmandu and Lalitpur, and the UML and Maoists in Lamjung prove again that there are no permanent enemies or friends in politics, and that all politics is local.

Most shared on Facebook

New Korean prez in Nepal

South Korea's newly-elected president Moon Jae-In was in Nepal last year, joining others to carry bricks and material for reconstruction of a quake-hit school in Nuwakot.

Most popular on Twitter
(244 retweets, 105 likes)

Trial and error democracy

by Om Astha Rai

When new mayors and village council chiefs assume office, they will confront a citizenry with very high expectations of good governance and development.

Most commented

xXx: Return of Xander Cage

by Sophia Pande

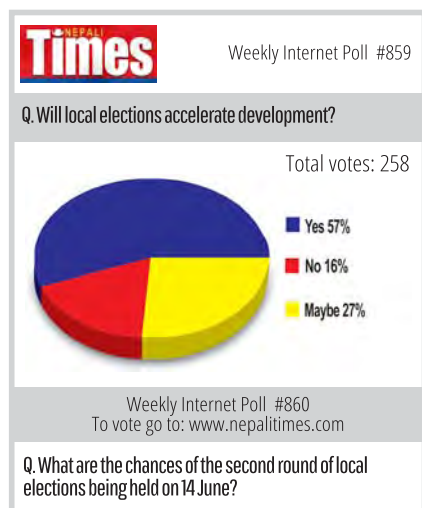
The movie has made an awful lot of money at the box office, all but guaranteeing a sequel, and one can only hope that what follows will be more creative.

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times@nepalitimes
After 2 lost decades, Nepalis cast their ballots for representatives in new local structures.
#nepalvotes Pics: @gopenR @Rumdaleerai & RSS

Nepali Times@nepalitimes
GUEST EDITORIAL: When people enter polling booth on 14 May, they must vote for candidates, not parties <http://bit.ly/2r0bKbc> #NepalVotes





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Say something, or say nothing

Comparing three press releases of Kathmandu-based embassies this week



Press releases are used by embassies in a considered manner to express nuance that the spoken word may not be able to carry. Hence, we must read them as trying to get across an intended meaning, which allows us to analyse the urge and tilt of the embassies and incumbent



ambassadors. Three press notes of the past week, from the Indian, UK and US embassies, need to be taken up vis-à-vis message as well as tone of delivery.

On 3 May 2015, Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi delivered an address on

Buddha Purnima, where he spoke with concern about the grave challenges facing Nepal following the earthquake of the week previously. That video resurfaced on YouTube last week, presented as a fresh speech by Modi, which if true would have amounted to grave intervention in political affairs in the context of local elections.

The *Annapurna Post* daily carried an editorial on 14 May saying as much, and many in Kathmandu believed that the video displayed Modi's attitude towards Nepal's political process. The Indian Embassy was rightfully incensed and on the very same day produced a strongly worded press release condemning the editorial, which it stated was 'inappropriate and

mischievous' representing 'yellow journalism at its highest'.

But the air did not clear as much as it should have, because the Kathmandu press as a whole failed to report the Embassy statement. This may be partly ascribed to the reluctance of media outfits to critique a competitor, but it also reflected poor news sense. The fact that Modi's speech was being read in the wrong context was news in and of itself, and editors should have sought to correct the mis-impression on their own. But even the release was not picked up.

The media also did not register a brewing resentment among some Western embassies for not being allowed to observe last week's local elections. The British Embassy came out with an irate

statement on 15 May, which after perfunctorily welcoming the commencement of local elections, added: 'We are not commenting on the process at this stage.'

If the embassy was not commenting, why was it commenting? The country has gone through such heartburn and heartache to finally get to this point of local elections after a period of two decades, there have been so many unconscionable compromises made, and the exercise was so enthusiastically embraced by the voters, that Nepalis deserved something more than a 'no comment'.

'We urge progress from all stakeholders to work to create the necessary conditions to ensure that the people of the remaining four provinces are also given the opportunity to exercise their democratic right to directly elect local representatives on 14 June,' the statement continued.

Other than the awkwardness of the 'urge progress', the substantive problem here is with the diplomatic code that is impossible to decipher. We know where the knot is: the Rastriya Janata Party demanding amendment of the constitution (on province delineation, electoral college, local entity numbers) the willingness of the government coalition to go through with it, and the refusal of the parliamentary opposition to concur. If it has to speak, the embassy could tell us where it stands on the matter, rather than send out a statement that can be interpreted any which way.

The U.S. Embassy press release of 16 May also is niggardly when it comes to praise that is rightfully deserved. The embassy 'recognizes the efforts of all stakeholders ... in conducting what appears to have been a largely peaceful and broadly supported first round of local elections in Nepal'. The term 'recognizing' is rather like the Indian government 'noting' the promulgation of the new

Constitution last year, a pointed refusal to say 'welcoming'.

The phrase 'what appears to have been' obviously refers to the Embassy's inability to observe the elections by itself. Granted, the Election Commission should have allowed Western and other embassies to have free range of hill, dale and plain – the way it has in the past and the way no other country in South Asia allows you to – but there are many ways that the ambassadors could have confirmed the enthusiasm and participation in the first round, and there were thousands of poll observers in the field.

A substantive press release rather than one emanating from a sense of loss of personal entitlement would have cited the importance of local elections after two decades of vacuum, that it will give rise to the birth of local political leadership. If a critique were required, how about the lack of women and Dalit candidatures on the non-reserved seats, so that mistakes are not repeated in the second round?

The embassies could/should also have weighed in on the compromises made by the political parties and Election Commission to get to the first phase, and how internationally acceptable principles were diluted. Should we have announced the first phase results before the second phase? Is it correct to amend constitutional provisions relating to local level entities in midstream, between the two phases?

There will be sensitive subjects which the embassies may not breach nor broach, but universal democratic electoral principles should surely be open to discussion? Say something, or say nothing, should be the goal, and one could sign off by suggesting that perhaps Nepal should be having public positions on elections being held, with far less turnout than our 73 percent, in the lands of the triumph of Trump and the Brexit vote. ('Smiley.') 🇳🇵



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SAMMAN HUMAGAIN

From subjects to citizens

Reconnecting Nepalis with a democratic political process

For too long in Nepal, local-level needs have been set aside, first to cope with the insurgency during the 1990s and then to implement the transitional political process that followed the comprehensive peace accord in the late 2000s.



COMMENT

George Varughese

During the decade-long transitional period ending in September 2015, Nepal's interim Constitution sought to ensure that all political parties had a say in governing the country, while a final political settlement was being negotiated around a new Constitution.

However, the cacophony of interest groups represented by the multitude of political parties caused political instability and policy volatility. As a consequence, sub-national governance was grossly neglected. Disasters like the earthquakes of 2015 have laid bare the tattered remains of government at the local level, where centrally orchestrated relief and recovery mechanisms have heaved and strained for two years to help survivors. Local elections come at a time when the gap between state and society is critically wide.

Over the past two decades, this distance from Kathmandu has been exacerbated by the alienation of Nepalis from government because of a dysfunctional process of consensus politics that has percolated from national to local levels. From the dividing up among local party elites of block grants meant for local development and party-based appointments of public servants at all levels, to impunity in policy decisions and criminal neglect of those who suffer, the perverse results of this political process manifest daily in stupefying actions that serve the narrow interests of a tyrannical minority who have usurped representation of the Nepali public.

While this minority's credibility is in shambles, their legitimacy will be tested in ongoing local elections and constitutionally-mandated provincial and national elections later this year. It is unsurprising that independent candidates and those from newer parties have done relatively well in the first phase of elections held on 14 May.

Of these three elections, the local polls are perhaps the most salient, not least because of constitutional provisions that allocate significant unconditional financial support for the newly-elected local governments. Although put off for 15 years (local elections should have been held every 5 years), there is a promise in these polls that surpasses the exercise of electoral choice by millions of Nepalis.

To be able to choose from among their own communities a fresh cohort of representatives who are empowered through jurisdiction and funds to serve their own local needs is certainly part of that promise. However, the exercise of choice through elections is alone insufficient for productive democratic politics and democratic citizenship.


For these elections to deliver more than a set of local elites schooled in collusive, extractive behaviour by their Kathmandu-based patrons, it's critical that Nepalis reconnect individually and associationally in civic artisanship in their local political communities. That is to say: Nepalis have to move beyond just a commitment to the common good and public service expressed through participation in elections. They must also regularly and consistently participate in a form of politics that centres on public problem-solving, recognises and clarifies legitimate interests, and, through broad civic initiative, constrains the process of elite domination.

There are many lessons from efforts at self-governance in Nepal (community groups engaged in forestry, irrigation, micro-hydro, etc.) that can illuminate how to collaborate with local government to achieve beneficial outcomes. These were durable civic initiatives that encouraged

the public to together frame community problems, align individual interests with group interests, craft their own rules of association and collaboration, monitor and penalise rule-breakers, and partner with local authorities to agree mutually productive outcomes at least cost to all.

We failed to adequately recognise and institutionalise these valuable lessons. Thus, while for a brief period in the 1990s Nepalis did lead the world in demonstrating how communities could govern themselves, the transformation from a longstanding, state-sponsored political culture of ruler-subjecthood to that of accountable citizenship was given neither sufficient attention nor consistent and balanced support.

Fresh competition and negotiation among a multitude of local governments and between provinces in the restructured governance order brings additional challenges. Clearly, placing citizenship at the centre of this new order will require going beyond the idea of citizenship as a form of membership, to be constantly kicked about as a political football between those who seek and those who deny equality, for example. Or by those who think the provision of rights and the execution of duties is the standard for measuring accountability and political progress.

After these local elections and into the future, how do we attain a state of political engagement where citizen-mayors and citizen-publics both work to reform and improve their political community? How will accountability get co-produced by both instead of being demanded by one and supplied by the other? Dedicated effort and investment are required to promote civic capacity, culture and agency such that the Nepali public reset their connection with the state. Only then will *res publica* become more than just part of Nepal's new title. 

George Varughese is The Asia Foundation's country representative in Nepal.

prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

Raut heads BBC Nepali

Radio journalist Jitendra Raut has been appointed the new head of the BBC Nepali Service to succeed Rabin Mishra, who left two months ago to start the new Sajha Party. Raut started his career at Radio Sagarmatha and has been with the BBC Nepali Service for the past 17 years, reporting from the studios in London and later from the Kathmandu bureau.



iPhone prices drop

Generation Next Communications Pvt Ltd, authorised distributor for Apple in Nepal, has announced a drop in prices for a range of iPhones. For example, the new price for the iPhone 7, 32GB, black, is RS86,000, while the iPhone 7 with 128GB in a variety of colours is now RS99,800.



All the iPhones come with a special offer, which includes 1GB Ncell data per month for up to 6 months, a back cover, a tempered glass front cover and EMI option.

Generation Next advises customers to buy genuine Apple products from authorised channels only. You can check if a product is genuine by going to the company's website and entering the serial number or IMEI number.

NIC branches out

NIC ASIA Bank inaugurated nine new branches on 17 May. They are located at Sau-Pharsatkar and Dhakhahi in



Rupandehi, Bhumahi in Nawalparasi, Bangadhi in Bardia, Dulegauda and Bhimad in Tanahun and Parsa, Tandi and Hakimchowk in Chitwan. NIC ASIA Bank is now providing services in 107 branches across the country.

Gyan's new products

KL Dugar group, manufacturer of popular wheat flour brand Gyan Chakki Atta, has launched three new products: Gyan Maize Atta, Gyan Maize Grit and Gyan Lito. They are available in all major department stores and local general stores in 5kg and 2kg packs.



Gyan Maize Atta is made from clean and yellow/white maize grains while Gyan Maize Grit can be served as a tasty porridge snack or main course with vegetables. Gyan Premium Lito is a cereal-based fortified food made from pre extrusion cooked wheat, rice and soya, together with whole milk powder, sugar and corn oil. It is fortified with 16 vitamins and micronutrients.

Ready for emergencies

Qatar Airways recently completed its annual emergency exercise, a simulation of a crash in the sea adjacent to Hamad International Airport (HIA), in Doha. It involved more than 28 government agencies, stakeholders and partners, including Hamad International Airport, Qatar Coastguard, Internal Security Forces, Qatar Navy and the Qatar Emiri Air Force.



In accordance with requirements of the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), airports are required to hold an emergency exercise every two years. As an airport located directly beside the sea, HIA is also required by ICAO regulations to ensure adequate emergency procedures are in place in the event that occupants have to be rescued from an aircraft that has crashed into the sea.

Fly a million miles

To celebrate its 20th anniversary, Star Alliance and its member carriers will name 21 'Mileage Millionaires'. You can enter by going to the Star Alliance website and sharing your favourite cultural experience with other travellers. One winner will be selected from each Star Alliance Frequent Flyer Program.



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The prolonged monsoony weather over the past week has been the result of a series of low pressure circulations sweeping northern India, riding the westerlies. The troughs suck in moisture from the Arabian Sea along the way and when they hit the mountains, rise to form enormous storm cells. Riding the jetstream, they move west to east. We haven't seen the last of these systems: expect more afternoon buildup on Friday, but the weekend should be relatively calmer. The monsoon is running a week late, and the ETA in eastern Nepal is third week of June.

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 27° 16°	 27° 16°	 28° 16°

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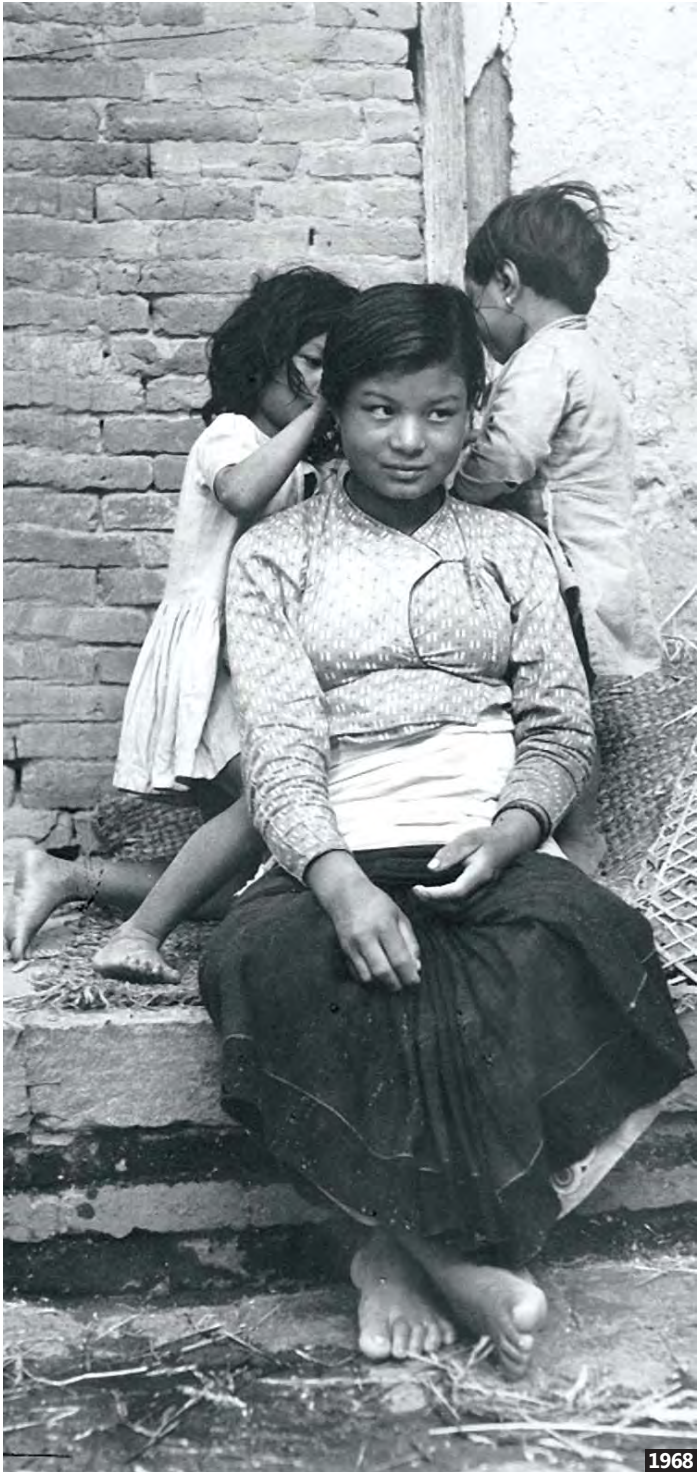
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Rebuilding together the cooperative way

When news of the earthquake in Nepal reached Jens Waerum and Jorgen Thomsen in Denmark, their first thoughts were of a little village outside Patan where they had spent a year studying local architecture and society nearly 50 years ago. What had happened to their host families and the sleepy old village and its rows of clay-mortar houses with delicate roofs? What had happened to Nhuchhe Maya, the 15-year-old girl who had helped them in 1968?

When they reached Bungamati a few months after the earthquake, they saw that that most of the old houses were destroyed or damaged, including Nhucche Maya's three-storey clay brick home. "The village where we had spent a year studying and surveying in 1968 did not exist anymore," recalls Thomsen.

Even before the earthquake, the Danes had been worried about the rapid, uncontrolled urbanisation that was eating into Bungamati's charm and unique way of life. They felt the earthquake was an opportunity to rebuild better,

while preserving the town's original physical grammar. "Even till 2012 much of Bungamati's traditional architecture was still intact, but after that new concrete blocks were replacing the old façades, and the earthquake has made everything worse," says Thomsen. Borrowing from Denmark's

own urban renewal projects that preserve history and society, the two have come up with a Bungamati rehabilitation plan through cooperative housing. The idea is to build two houses that will function as a single unit, with a communal staircase, shared bathroom and space for livestock in the yard. Each house will have

five flats for rent. The houses will have traditional Newari façades, with earthquake secured corners. The use of wood will be minimised and replaced with steel rods and a concrete ring beam on each floor. A cooperative housing association will manage the project, including land acquisition and financing. Funding will be raised from private donors, investors, the buyers and as loans from banks.

In a society that values land ownership, Thomsen and Waerum know that convincing people to live in a space that they do not own will be difficult. But there is precedent in post-earthquake community housing



projects, like Pilacchen in Patan. Now 72, Thomsen says as he walks Bungamati's cobblestone streets: "We are here out of our love for this town and its people, but we know the project cannot move forward without genuine and strong local ownership from the beginning." 

Sahina Shrestha



SISTERHOOD: Nhuchhe Maya Shaky, 68, and her sisters Bekha, 56 (*left, below*) and Hira, 53 (*right*) in front of the ground floor of their 3-storey home in Bungamati which was destroyed in the 2015 earthquake. The three sisters in 1968 (*far left*) in a picture taken by a Danish architecture student.



GOPEN RAI

Nhuchhe Maya's home

With a little help from her friends: 50 years later Danish architects return to help rebuild Bungamati



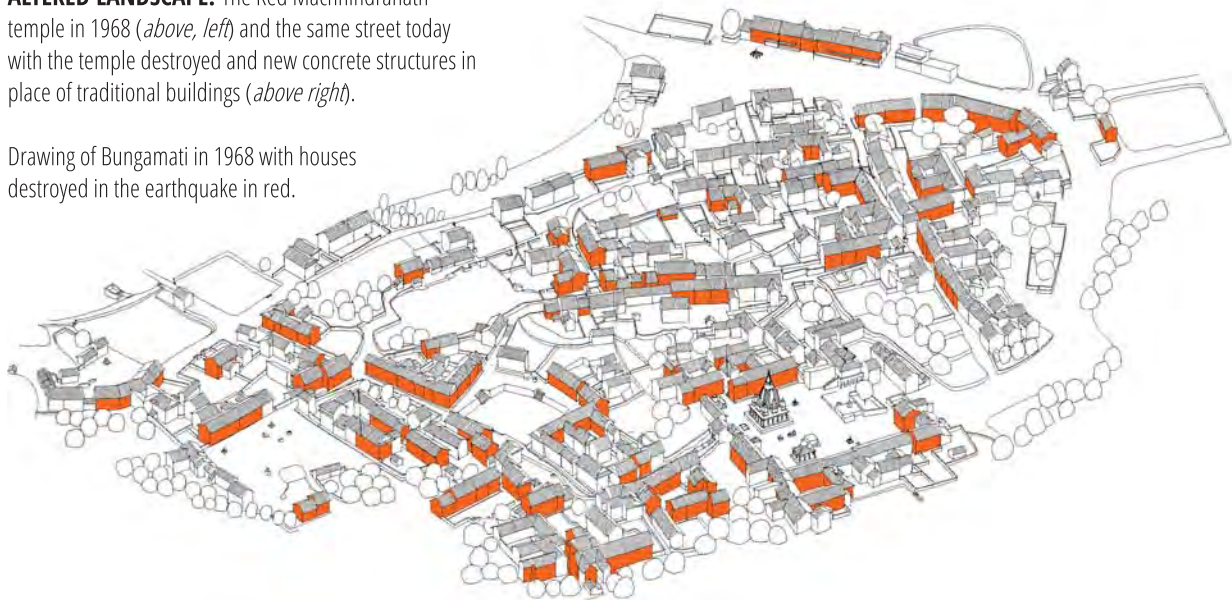
1968



2017

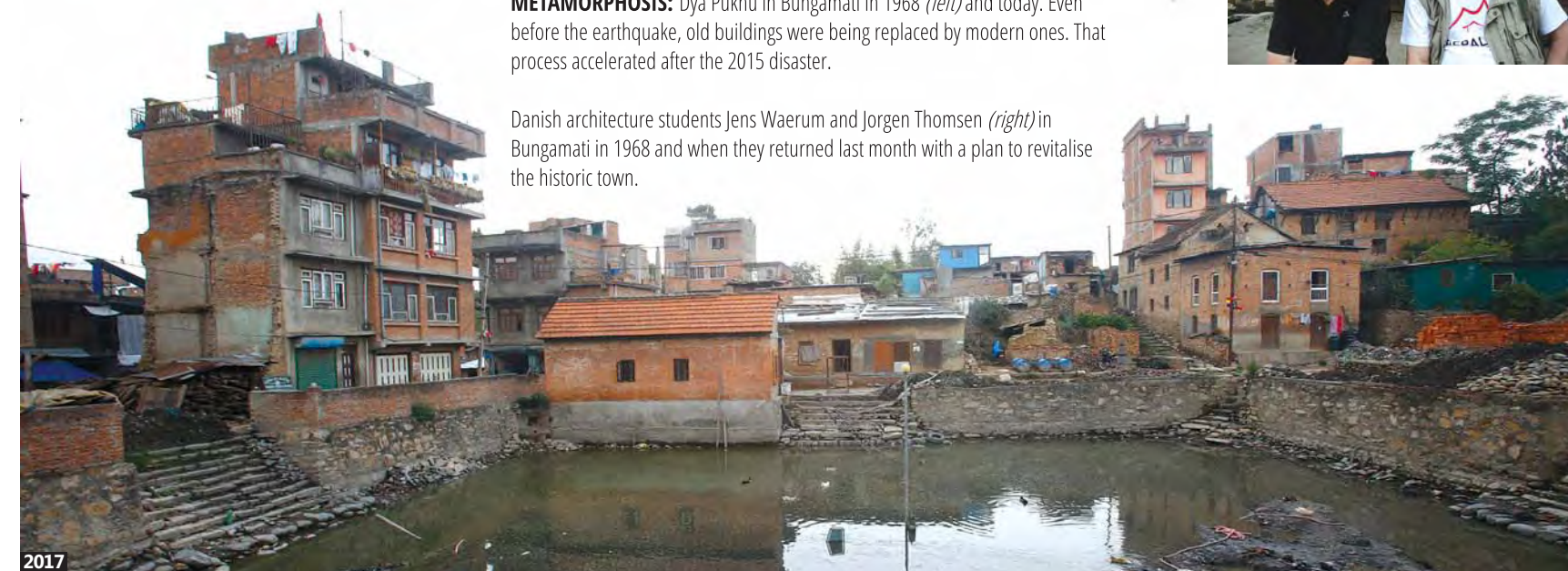
ALTERED LANDSCAPE: The Red Machhindranath temple in 1968 (*above, left*) and the same street today with the temple destroyed and new concrete structures in place of traditional buildings (*above right*).

Drawing of Bungamati in 1968 with houses destroyed in the earthquake in red.



METAMORPHOSIS: Dya Pukhu in Bungamati in 1968 (*left*) and today. Even before the earthquake, old buildings were being replaced by modern ones. That process accelerated after the 2015 disaster.

Danish architecture students Jens Waerum and Jorgen Thomsen (*right*) in Bungamati in 1968 and when they returned last month with a plan to revitalise the historic town.



2017

GOPEN RAI



1968



DOUBLE VISION: Jayaram Tuladhar (*below*) has been living in a rented room after his house in Bungamati was destroyed in the earthquake. That his him (*left*) at age two in 1968, posing for the Danish students.



2017

SAHINA SHRESTHA

On 25 April 2015, Nhuchhe Maya Shaky was giving her grandson an oil massage when her house started shaking. Thinking it was another older grandsons being mischievous, she didn't give it much thought. But as the room started swaying, she heard her husband Buddha Ratna Shaky shout from upstairs and the family ran down the stairs and out.

Buddha Ratna couldn't make it out on time and the house collapsed on top of him. Their sons ran to his rescue and although they saved him, he had horrendous injuries and is still paralysed. Only the ground floor of the three-storey house remains, and the extended family of 13 have lived separately in temporary shelters for two years.

"It feels like the earthquake not only took our house but separated


the family," says Nhuchhe Maya, 68. "I wish we could rebuild faster and live together once again." Her three sons work as woodcarvers in a town known for its artisans. Although they are registered in the earthquake victims' list, the family hasn't received government aid because of delays in getting proper land titles.

Although the disaster separated Nhuchhe Maya's Nepali family, it has brought help from far-off friends. Danish architects Jens Waerum and Jorgen Thomsen (pic, left) are raising Rs 500,000 to renovate the ground floor of the old house.

Waerum, Thomsen and six other architecture students from the Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen had taken a year off from courses in 1968 to study Bungamati's unique semi-urban heritage. They rented the house of Nhuchhe Maya's father, Prem Lal Bare, and at 15 she ran errands for the Danish guests and showed them around town. She didn't speak English, they didn't speak Newari, but they seemed to have no problems understanding each other.

In the past 50 years, every time the Danes visit Nepal, they make it a point to seek out Nhuchhe Maya and see how her family is doing. They have come back after the earthquake with a community renewal plan.

"I am happy that they still remember us and want to help us out," says Nhuchhe Maya, who still remembers the names of all eight Danish students, and even their quirky habits..

Nuchhe Maya's family wants to rebuild with concrete because their traditional mud and brick building collapsed. But with limited income, rebuilding will take time. Says her son Bhaju Ratna: "If we rebuild in the old way, there will not be enough space for all of us. The family is growing and we all want to live together." 

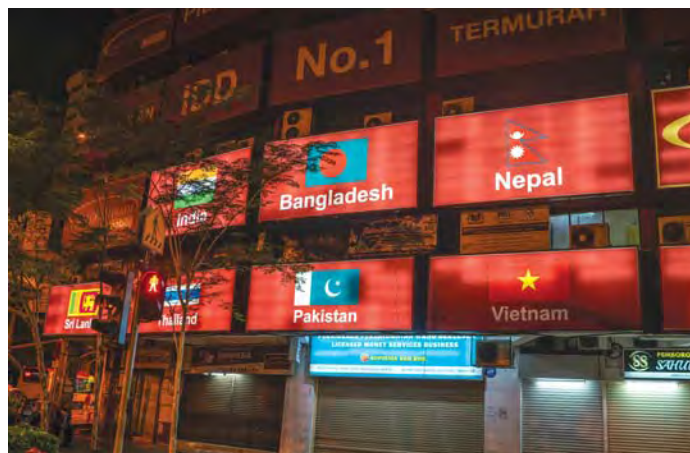
 nepalitimes.com

■ Click for detailed digital package on Bungamati with video, and a before-and-after gallery.

Best years of their



Photo book about Bangladeshi migrant workers in Malaysia could very well have been about Nepalis there



ALL PICS: SHAHIDUL ALAM

Bangladeshi photographer Shahidul Alam's book, *The Best Years of My Life*, helps us see through the numbing numbers about overseas migrant workers. The images humanise their hopes and hardships.

The statistics are staggering: an estimated 3 million Bangladeshi workers (95 per cent of them men) work in the Gulf, Malaysia and Europe, sending home \$14 billion every year, making this a major source of revenue for the country of 161 million.

Although the earnings figures

for Nepal are much less, the \$6 billion in annual remittances sent home by an estimated 3 million Nepalis abroad form a much larger proportion of our population and economy – making the revenue equivalent to nearly a third of Nepal's GDP.

The analysis of the macro trends of our migrant economies makes us forget the individual stories of the foot soldiers of this mass movement of people for work abroad.

Being a world-class photographer with a social

conscience, Shahidul Alam is perfectly placed to tell the stories of his compatriots, and has done so with expected sensitivity and empathy – focusing on the single biggest reason migrants migrate: to change their destiny.

Alam meets Bangladeshi migrant workers like Ali Hossain, who sells roses at intersections along the boulevards of Paris, Abdul Hossain (*pictured above*), who works in a Malaysian construction site, and follows Mamun as he flies out of Dhaka for the first time to a job

the middleman promised in Malaysia. He meets officials at the Bangladesh High Commission in Kuala Lumpur, profiles activist Glorene Das, whose organisation Tanaganita helps workers in trouble in Malaysia, and even gets an interview with former prime minister Mahathir Mohamad.

The pictures, words, tales of exploitation by agents, of trafficking, and of hopes for a better life are all wrenchingly familiar – we hear them all the time here about Nepali migrant workers.

It is the universal story of the rich and powerful taking advantage of the desperately poor and vulnerable. They can cheat and abuse with impunity because of weak and corrupt governments who are often in cahoots with the recruiting agencies. Even the Bangla word for manpower middlemen is the same as in Nepal: *dalal*.

In Paris, Ali Hossain stops awhile to talk to Alam while sprinkling water on the roses he has parked in a bucket in his bathroom before heading out to

lives



BANGLADESH TO BANGSAR:

Abdul Hossain works in this construction site in Kuala Lumpur (*left, above*). The picture of him with his mother Nurjahan Begum and wife Amena Akter was taken when he came home to Comilla to get married last year. Amena says the money he'll send home will help, but he worries about his dangerous job in Malaysia.

Mamun arrives in Kuala Lumpur airport (*above*) with other Bangladeshi workers who are herded to a different part of the terminal meant for migrant workers. Later, his passport and money were stolen by another Bangladeshi worker, he was extorted by his recruiter and did not earn the salary promised.

Virtually all migrant workers from Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan in Malaysia use WhatsApp, Viber or Facebook, but telecom companies employ street vendors at the Bengali Market in Kuala Lumpur (*left, below*) to offer special SIM card deals for migrant workers.

Some Bangladeshi and Nepali migrant workers are taken to the tea gardens on the Cameron Highlands (*left*) straight from the airport. Although the climate is cooler, the 12-hour working days are hard and involve dirty, demeaning and dangerous work that locals are not prepared to do.

the streets. 'He didn't mind the job ... or that he was giving away the best years of his life to secure a future for his family. He didn't bear a grudge, but it hurt,' Alam writes.


The photographs in *The Best Years of My Life* depart from the full-blown bleeds of Alam's earlier coffee table books: he downsizes them, their smallness almost emblematic of how unimportantly everyone treats migrant workers.

If a Nepali photojournalist brought out a book, it would look and feel the same, with identical

stories of overworked and underpaid workers mistreated by employers and cheated by compatriots. Only their names would be different.

Nepali photographers have not forayed to the Gulf or Malaysia to bring out a book like this yet. However, there have been powerful, award-winning documentaries, notably *In Search of the Riyal* and *Saving Dolma* by director Kesang Tseten.

The plight of migrant workers is featured in many recently released Nepali language novels, and two non-fiction works in the past year: Devendra Bhattarai's *Registan Diary* and *Kahar* by Janak Raj Sapkota.

These words by Alam in the Preface would be equally applicable to Nepali migrant workers: 'In the end, each one of us is a migrant of sorts. It is only when the migrant stops being the other, and we embrace the reality of migration, taking on board all the joys and trepidations that they face, that we shall build the open society that beckons us.'  **Kunda Dixit**

Helping migrants make the grade

A country that sends half a million workers abroad yearly prepares to certify vocational education

Sumita Aryal has 10 years of expertise in cosmetology, but it is not recognised by Nepal's education and training authority. The Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT) has graded her decade-long experience as Level 2, equivalent to higher secondary school by international standards.

"I have enough experience to get certified as Level 4 in technical education if we are to follow international standards. But we don't have a proper grading system that recognises my vocational education," says Aryal.

Another problem facing the 33-year-old beautician is lack of recognition for her Bachelor's level studies in management, after which she switched to the vocational sector. She was not allowed to transfer those credits to technical education.

With more than 500,000 young men and women leaving for work abroad every year, Nepal is one of the major source countries in the international labour market. Through the proposed National Vocational Qualification Framework Authority (NVQFA), the government is working on a vocational qualification certification system to provide international recognition to technical and vocational education.

"If I decide to go for jobs abroad again, I will be paid less as I don't have proper recognition of my work. Sometimes I feel my efforts are being undervalued," said Aryal, who runs Serenity Parlour in Kathmandu and has already worked as a cosmetologist in the UK for two years.

Plumber and trainer Dambar Bahadur Thapa is an aspiring migrant worker who wants to gain international experience. His CV to date is sufficient to qualify him for a skilled job in the destination country, but he won't get it because he lacks certification.

"Most Nepali migrant workers I have trained have ended up as labourers abroad even though they went with skill and experience. I will have to do the same if I opt for foreign employment because my skills cannot be certified to match international criteria," says Thapa.

The Ministry of Education (MoE) and CTEVT have collaborated with SwissContact to design the NVQF certification system, a 10-year project focussing on the construction and hospitality sectors.

"Nepal's technical education is in dire need of regulation and international recognition," says the NVQF's Devi Prasad Dahal. "The new system will help people document their vocational skills and develop profiles."

The proposed NVQF goes up to Level 8, equivalent to a PhD in formal education. The current system goes only to Level 4. To date it has certified the skills of 350,000 people.



GOPEN RAI

Prof Pramod Bahadur Shrestha agrees that the new framework would benefit people with technical skills looking to work abroad. But he sees big challenges to implementing the NVQF: "This is an extremely ambitious goal for a developing country like Nepal as private and public employers, being the key players, need to participate in the entire process."

Adopting the international system would require revamping the existing system entirely and establishing numerous training institutions, including with modern equipment.

In order to provide vocational education equivalence to studies in general education like Sumita Aryal's Bachelor's degree, Nepal's Ministry of Education needs a fair and effective qualification framework that allows credit transfers between general and vocational education.

Shreejana Shrestha

Socio-political impact of migration

The findings of a new study on the remittance economy hint that migration, besides contributing to the economy, has facilitated broader social and political changes in Nepal that have affected local politics and elections.

Despite remittance being the mainstay of Nepal's economy, few researchers have looked at how labour migration is changing social and political dynamics at the local level, and the impact of remittance on social structures, political participation and contestation.

Labor Migration and the Remittance Economy is published by the Centre for the Study of Labour and Migration for The Asia Foundation and USAID, and clarifies that the rise in political autonomy doesn't have significant impact on voting patterns. The study looks at how the migration experience abroad can influence how politics is conceived by migrants and family members at home.

"Due to the changes in political behaviour, an increasing proportion of left-behind members and returnees are voting over the years," the report says.

Although political disenchantment is one of the push factors for migration, a significant number of returnees participate in political parties. Only 9.9 per cent of prospective migrants were engaged in political parties

whereas 13 per cent of returnees were engaged in parties, according to the survey.

This could mean that migration has played an important role in providing migrant households with the economic means to consolidate changes in relations between the poor and landless with landed patrons.

"The change has been achieved by reducing the dependency of the poor and landless on their landlords for needs such as land, loans and employment," it explains.

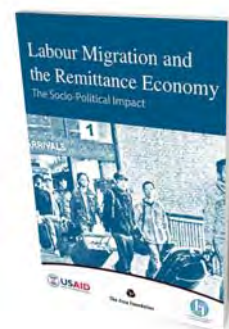
Interviews were conducted in 401 households in Panchthar, Dhanusa, Nawalparasi, Kaski and Kailali in 2016 with returnees, left-behind family members, prospective migrants and non-migrants. Questions covered the relationship between political parties and voters, gender, differences in political aspirations between the younger and older cohorts and the impact of migration on local institutions.

The study suggests that efforts like better protection of migration workers at home and abroad, safer working conditions, easier access to credit and enhanced investment opportunities for remittance will amplify the benefits of migration.

Shreejana Shrestha



The Best Years of My Life: Bangladeshi Migrants in Malaysia
Photographs and Words by Shahidul Alam
Drik Picture Library, Dhaka 2016
ISBN: 978-984-34-1347-5



EVENTS



EU film festival,

Come and explore an array of movies at the 6th edition of the European Film Festival.
19 to 23 May, QFX Kamal Pokkhari, Tickets: free, (01) 4442220, qfxcinemas.com

The LGBTI tales,

Book your seats to watch *The Laramie Project: ten years later*, a play based on the iconic hate crime: the murder of Matthew Shepherd in Laramie, USA, and stories from Nepal's LGBTI community.
19 to 28 May, Nepal Tourism Board, Rs 200 to 750, Reservations: 980 1192690

Local governance talks,

Be a part of discussion on local election and governance organised on the occasion of 70th anniversary of Nepal-US relations.
23 May, 4 to 6 pm, Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka, Entry: free



Watch Ma,

This exhibition by Ryan Elisabeth Reid features photography, video and textile installations, including a post-modern dance workshop based on the experience of multigenerational women from Nepal.
19 to 24 May, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babarmahal Revisited, 9849519933, Information: lalathereid@icloud.com, giriirina40@gmail.com

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



Poetry with Alok,

Join for a night of poetry, comedy and performance with a 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

Girls Futsal,

Register your teams for the first girl power futsal tournament organised by The Girls Power.
20 May, 8 am to 6 pm, Dhanyentari Futsal, Kalopul, Entry fee Rs 5,000, (01) 4009635



Feminist Friday,

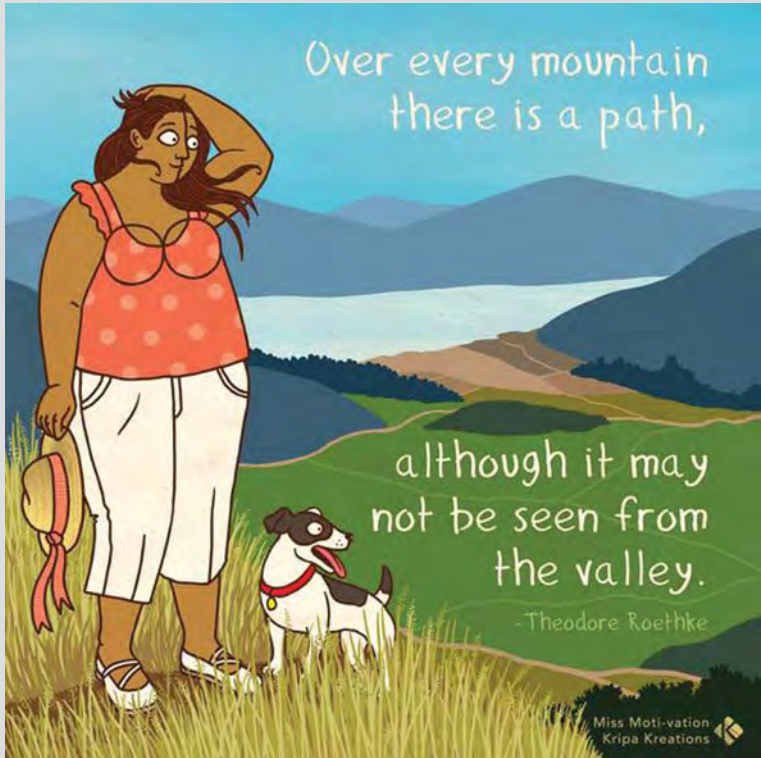
Be part of the discussion at the first episode of Feminist Friday. Women from all walks of life will be sharing their views on gender issues.
19 May, 2:45 to 5 pm, Hamro Chahana Nepal, Baluwatar, 984-0312499, nepalhamrochahana@gmail.com

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, Durbar marg. Admission: Free for members, non members will be ticketed, risingjunkiri@gmail.com



MISS MOTI-VATION KRIPA JOSHI



MUSIC



Tribute night,

Exhibit 69' will be playing 15 heavy-metal songs as a tribute to Iron Maiden.
3 June, 2 to 6 am, Purple Haze Rock Bar, Thamel, Tickets: rs 400 (200 limited tickets), Rs 500 (door)



Live Friday,

Away from the hustle and bustle, spend a soulful Friday evening with good food, and live music by NS 1134.
19 May, 6 to 10 pm, De Arena Restaurant, Bhaktapur, 9851160188

Musical arts,

Enjoy live music by Mama Disquo and Lazy monk with the displayed artwork of urban artists from Nepal.
19 May, 6 to 10 pm, Friends Restaurant, Thamel, (01) 4700063



Paleti with Bidhan,

Book your tickets to enjoy folk and pop music with singer Bidhan Shrestha.
26 May, 5:30 pm onwards, Nepa-Laya, Tickets: Rs 1,000, (01) 4412469
paleti@nepalaya.com.np



Acoustic Friday,

Tap to the beats of acoustic and rock by Kramasha Nepal.
19 May, 7 to 10 pm, Wicked Spoon Fork & Rock, Jhamsikhel, 9841461765

DINING



Kashmiri feast,

Step in for scrumptious Kashmiri starters (8 veg and 7 non-veg items). In a serious of promotions of authentic Kashmiri delicacies, patrons and connoisseurs can enjoy tabak maaz, mutton rogan josh, gushtaba and many more.
18 to 28 May, 7 pm onwards, Soaltee Crown Plaza, (01) 4273999



Vootoo,

The new home of Newari cuisine also has a safe continental menu for those not yet ready to experiment with new dishes.
Lajimpat, (01)4005222

Taza,

An excellent new Middle-Eastern restaurant with a Syrian chef. Offers free deliveries within Patan. Don't forget their shawarmas!
Pulchok, (01)5541592, 9860960177



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

Roadhouse Cafe,

For the best wood-fired pizzas in town.
Thamel, (01)4260187



Le Trio,

The best momochas (soup momos) in town.
Narayanhiti Path and Jhamiskhel, (01) 4435440 / 5521647

GETAWAY



Landmark Forest Park,

Eco-friendly resort that offers safari packages. Bed and breakfast at Rs 4,000 plus taxes per person.
Chitwan, (056) 580311, 9851059096

Shivapuri Cottage,

Escape the hustle and bustle of Kathmandu and enjoy peace, tranquility, good food, and fresh air.
Budhanilkantha, 9841371927



Chhaimale Resort,

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Milla Guesthouse,

If you prefer the quiet, and admire a mix of old and new, this is the perfect place to stay. Not too far away from the city, yet miles apart.
Bhaktapur, 9851024137

Club Himalaya,

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



The Last Resort,

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



Fine dining on Phewa's shore

Dunga met all our needs after a week on the trekking trail

SHREEJANA SHRESTHA

Culiniarily speaking, Pokhara always mesmerises, especially after a long trek with dal bhat as staple. Because of this clientele, Pokhara has earned a well-deserved reputation as a centre for fine dining. Dunga is the newest addition to the busy Phew strip.

Uniquely designed on the theme of a boat (*dunga*), the restaurant offers a spectacular view of the lake, or guests can dine facing the busy street and people-watch.

We cleverly decided to sit in

amalgamation of home-made noodles, fresh lettuce, oven-baked trout flakes, gherkins, charred onions, pickled ginger and cucumber, mixed with miso sauce. Somehow ABC seemed very far away.

Extremely happy with the first two dishes, we sought to satisfy our thirst with cocktails, ordering a watermelon martini (Rs 450) and passion refresher (Rs 550) for a dining-in-a-cruise experience. Both drinks with their vodka base had a wallop. We were tasting the passion refresher for the first time, and the mix of passion fruit syrup, lime juice, egg white and pineapple juice gave us all a tingle. The bartender rocks.



the middle section of the first floor, facing the bar, where we could breathe fresh air as well as listen to the live music. Settled into our comfortable chairs, we quickly decided to satisfy the carnivorous cravings developed during our week-long trek to Annapurna Base Camp with pork chops and Dunga Special Trout Salad.

Both were winners. We had been seeking out tasty pork chops for a long time and the well barbecued ones here were succulent. (The smell of raw meat had can turn one off at other restaurants). Served with boiled seasonal vegetables and French fries, the portion was ample for the price (Rs 620).

Recommended by our host, Dunga's trout salad (Rs 430) delighted our palettes. It was simple yet satisfying: an

We ordered chicken parmigiana (Rs 580) to go with our cocktails thinking that it would do justice as a pub-food classic, but but the dish turned out to be just pieces of crumbed chicken breast topped with mozzarella cheese.

Aside from that, Dunga was full of tasty treats with a service to match. While service in some well-known restaurants in Pokhara tend to be lackadaisical, at Dunga the bar seems to have been set high for service -- starting with the smart uniforms of white shirt, black pants and waist coats.

We received our food within minutes of placing orders, possibly because the restaurant has two kitchens: the one on the ground floor cooking continental and the upper floor serving Nepali and Indian food. Thanks to the open kitchen concept, customers can inspect the construction process.

Dunga ticks all the right boxes. No wonder it has become one of the most popular new on Lakeside after just three months of opening.

World-class ambiance, great food and service make this place deserving of a visit. 🇳🇵



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The highly anticipated “Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2” is here in theatres, and it is pretty good: not as eternally memorable as the first film from 2014 that spawned hope in all of our hearts about mainstream cinema’s potential but still, by today’s standards, not bad at all.

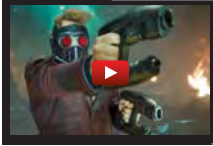


MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

The main problem of this sequel, which is also written and directed by the talented James Gunn, is its lack of restraint. At 2 hours and 15 minutes, this sequel gets unwieldy towards the end, proving, at least in my mind, that a \$200 million budget is most certainly indulgent. The film starts off well, with the signature soundtrack-oriented set pieces that made the first film so surprising, original, refreshing and delightful, a feeling that I

experience so rarely when watching movies these days. The beloved characters are back in good form, with Chris Pratt as the unlikely hero Peter Quill aka Star Lord, Bradley Cooper as Rocket, the adorable, prickly, furry, furious, sarcastic, genetically modified creature that everyone loves to pick on, Zoe Saldana is great as the brooding, soft-hearted Gamora, fighter and love interest of Peter Quill, David Bautista continues to create hilarity as Drax, the Destroyer, who says exactly what he thinks, and finally, Vin Diesel, who excels as Baby Groot – the inarguable star of the show. There are many wonderful moments in this film as the Guardians get up to their usual antics: Rocket stealing stuff that gets them into trouble and the incessant bickering that is so endearing, and is also their strength and their downfall. Many old, familiar characters return to fill out this outlandish universe, including a cameo appearance from a very famous

actor that will bring smiles to everyone’s faces. There is also the much-anticipated appearance of Peter’s father Ego (Kurt Russell), a seemingly heart-warming reunion that quickly goes astray. As the film progresses into its final denouement, all the things that are good about it are overtaken by the over the top, quite frankly hideous special effects (I will not elaborate further, you will see for yourself), and by an overly long, drawn-out final battle scene that could really do with the lightness that made the opening scene of this film, and the final scene of the first, so very memorable. After all, when characters like these are brought to life on the screen, what we really want is to get to know them better, not to see them hurtle across space yelling indecipherable things to each other as our eyes blur at purplish green space clouds. The emphasis on action here is at the expense of the development of Peter Quill’s gregarious personality, the heart-warming, cross-species friendship between the Guardians, and the funny, endlessly quotable jokes that stay with and incorporate themselves into our vocabulary. When Peter calls Rocket a “Trash Panda”, it becomes one of those moments. If only there were more than just the few. 



Watch trailer online

[nepalitimes.com](#)

HAPPENINGS



BIKRAM RAI

EVERY VOTE COUNTS: Health Minister Gagan Thapa of the NC casts his vote from Maitidevi in Kathmandu during the first phase of local elections on Sunday.



RSS

CEYLON TEA PARTY: President Bidya Devi Bhandari attends a tea reception hosted by Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena at his official residence in Colombo on Monday.



BIKRAM RAI

ADDING IT ALL UP: Officials start tallying votes of Kathmandu Metropolis at City Hall on Monday, amidst mounting criticism about the pace of the count.



NEPAL ARMY

HAIL TO THE CHIEF: Chief of Army Staff Rajendra Chhetri inspects a Nepal Army Guard of Honour at Tribhuvan International Airport on Wednesday before flying to the US.



UNAIDS

BEING HUMAN: “My brother is now my sister, and I love her very much,” said Kaski Kapali at a ceremony at UN House to mark International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia and International Family Equality Day, on Wednesday.

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Dalit candidates in running

Disenfranchised women in Saptari encourage other women to run in elections

MINA SHARMA
in SAPTARI

As per the new Constitution, 6,680 Dalit women will be elected in the current local polls — a significant achievement for this group, who have been discriminated against for decades. CPN-UML deputy mayor candidate of Surunga Municipality, Silam Kumari Paswan, 24, describes this as an historic opportunity: “Dalit women are ignorant about their rights: we should inform them, and I will encourage them to fight for justice.”

She adds: “Very few in the Dalit community are literate. I am currently doing my Bachelors. Many people in my community do not understand Nepali. The fact that lower-caste people need to tolerate discrimination or untouchability has been wedged in their minds.”

Likewise, 60-year-old Ramrati Sada, a Dalit ward candidate representing the Nepali Congress says: “Dalits have neither land nor citizenship. They are oblivious to acquiring birth, marriage or death certificates. Dalit students struggle in the Nepali language despite being in school for 5 years.”

Sada’s election promises



include creating a conducive environment to ensure enrolment of Dalit children in schools. She has already served as a ward member and says she doesn’t suffer discrimination but members of her community do. “It breaks my heart to see how badly they are treated.”

Nepali Congress ward member candidate of Surunga-7, Shanti Devi Mandal, says: “The time has come for us to provide justice, not beg for it.”

According to the 2011 census, 19 out of the 26 Dalit castes live in the Tarai and they are often victims of caste-based discrimination and ostracism. Dalit women now see local elections as a way to

emerge from discrimination and untouchability.

Rather than promising monorails and highways, Dalit women candidates are raising social issues, including sharing meals together with so-called upper classes, permission to enter temples and enrolling Dalit children in schools.

Shiva Shanker Das was killed for having an inter-caste affair six years ago. Shovit Ram of Deuri village was mistreated for sitting with upper-caste people during a feast. Many believe things like this will happen less after local elections result in greater representation of Dalits.

Mamata Devi, 21, of Harper is campaigning day and night for the

Dalit candidate even though she is not a voter and doesn’t even have a citizenship certificate, like 20 other Khatwe women of her neighbourhood. She applied for citizenship but was denied it by the district administration office (DAO), which cited lapses in the recommendation from the VDC.

Despite being married for four years, Mamata’s in-laws aren’t bothered about providing her the necessary papers. She is compelled to get help from other people to receive the money sent by her husband, who is working overseas.

Mamata is campaigning because she thinks she can get citizenship once a Dalit candidate is elected. “People of higher caste do not support us. Therefore, there has to be someone from our community to understand our problems,” she says.

Married for the last five years, Manisha Devi Mandal, 23, also doesn’t have citizenship because her marriage was never registered. She blames her husband and in-laws for not paying attention to registration. Without citizenship, she can’t vote.

“It will be easy for me to get all these things done if Shanti Devi Mandal gets elected since she understands my problem,” she says.

Mamata Khatwe, 20, has

neither a marriage certificate nor a citizenship certificate. “I talked to my in-laws but in vain,” she said. Similarly, 23-year-old Lalita Mandal of Surunga has made up her mind to get her citizenship once her husband returns from Malaysia. She wants it not only so she can vote in the next election, but to be a candidate.

Dalit activist Bhola Paswan says the role of Dalit women to date was limited to clapping during campaign speeches. “Now they are taking to leadership so their voices are heard,” he said.

Compared to untouchability, the citizenship issue is trickier for Dalit women because they don’t know how to work the system in the DAO and do not get much help from in-laws. Lack of literacy and language issues add to the problem.

“Only a woman can understand a woman’s problem,” says candidate Shanti Devi Mandal. “That is why I am standing for election.”

Surendra Sah of the Federal Socialist Forum Nepal is not surprised that Dalits are being discriminated against: “When literate Madhesis are discriminated against by the state, what can an illiterate Madhesi Dalit expect?”

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Nepali Radio, Nepali Awaz

Two decades on, South Asia's pioneer community radio keeps defending its founding values of a public service broadcaster

OM ASTHA RAI

When South Asia's first community radio went on air in Kathmandu in May 1997, Nepalis were electing representatives to VDCs, DDCs and municipalities in the midst of a war that had just started. Democracy, development and the free press were under threat. It had taken four years of relentless lobbying to get Radio Sagarmatha broadcasting on 102.4FM, the first ever challenger to the state monopoly of the airwaves. This month, as the station marks its 20th anniversary, Nepalis are once again electing representatives to self-governing local structures under the new Constitution. Radio Sagarmatha soon gained popularity for its fresh new sound and trustworthy bulletins, as the war spread quickly across the country. The royal government used the conflict as an excuse to cancel scheduled local elections in 2002, and three years later staged a military coup when it gagged Sagarmatha and other new FM stations that had sprung up. Throughout it all, Radio Sagarmatha kept broadcasting, circumventing government restrictions on news by camouflaging current affairs bulletins between songs. Successive governments have since realised that the Nepali

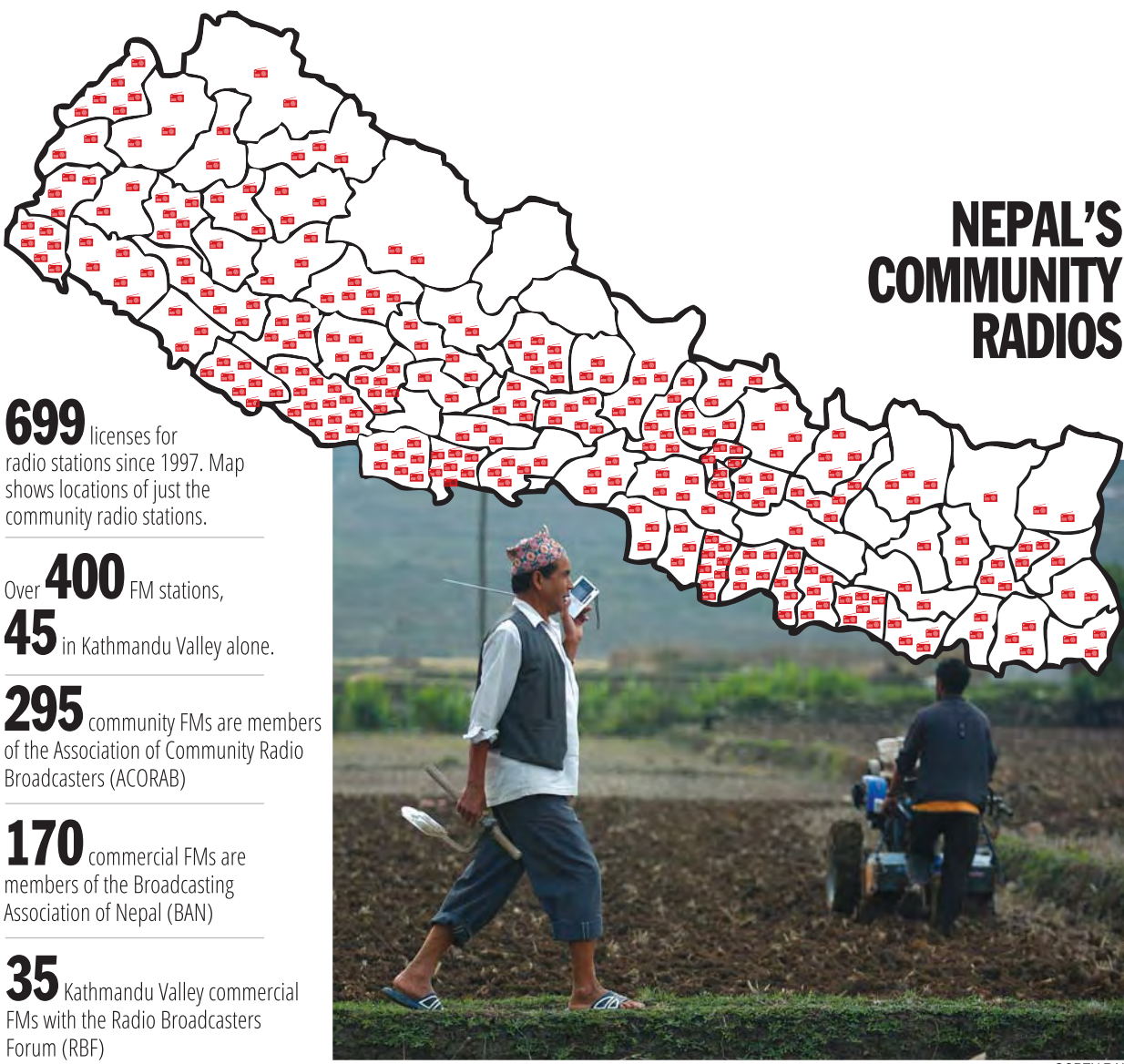
people believe strongly in an open society, and are willing to defend democracy by protecting their right to information. In the absence of locally-elected representatives in the past two decades, it was community radio that helped keep democracy alive, which would have been difficult had the floodgates for radio not been opened by Sagarmatha. "Radio Sagarmatha sparked Nepal's radio revolution, it was a landmark not just for Nepal but the whole region," recalls Bharat Dutta Koirala, who was presented with the 2002 Magsaysay Award for his tireless lobbying to get the radio its license. Koirala, now 75, is still active in promoting public broadcasting. After the National Communications Policy 1992 paved the way for public broadcasting, Koirala led a team of freedom of information activists to register South Asia's first community radio. A year later, Parliament passed a bill to allow community ownership of radio, but the information bureaucracy was reluctant to let go of the state monopoly on broadcasting. Despite more intense lobbying, the license had to wait for Jhulanath Khanal of the UML to become Information Minister in 1997. Sagarmatha's parent organisation, the Nepal Forum of Environmental Journalists (NEFEJ), got the permit, but with a proviso that it could not broadcast news.



Frequently modulated

The establishment of Radio Sagarmatha in 1997 ended the monopoly of state-owned Radio Nepal, and there was hope the country's airwaves would be independent and dedicated to public service. The community radio revolution launched by Radio Sagarmatha in Kathmandu and Radio Madanpokhara in Palpa initially lived up to this ideal. But soon, just as with every sphere of national life like health and education, radio also got hijacked by commercial or political interests, sometimes both. "We have deviated from the original philosophy of community radio as a public service. Most stations are not local anymore, they are commercial or overtly political," says Bhairab Risal,

90, who till recently used to run a daily program on Radio Sagarmtha. The most glaring recent example of politicians abusing community radio was during the five-month Tarai strike, when FM radios broadcast inflammatory hate speech. Some community FM stations in Birganj exhorted people to join protests by spreading rumours that police spat and urinated on the corpses of those killed in demonstrations. Radio had become communal, instead of being community-owned. The Nepal Press Council warned FM stations to adhere to the code of conduct, but the watchdog is also run by political appointees, and it lacked the will to take action. Ajaya Yadav of Birganj-based





KUNDA DIXIT



USHA TITIKCHU



KUNDA DIXIT

VOICES: The studio of Radio Sagarmatha is housed in a pre-fab shed after the studio was damaged in the 2015 earthquake (*far, left*).

A soldier guards Radio Sagarmatha in 2005 after the royal-military coup silenced FM radio stations (*left*).

Station Manager Laxman Upreti (*above*) says Radio Sagarmatha will continue upholding the values of public service broadcasting.

The station still calls its current affairs bulletins *Hal Chal* instead of *Samachar* to sidestep that rule. Rajendra Dahal, an editor and member of the taskforce that drafted the 1992 communication policy, remembers: “We had to be very creative, and it is true that Radio Sagarmatha untied the knot that unleashed the community radio phenomenon.” Two decades later, there are nearly 400 FM stations all over Nepal, 290 of them community-owned, and 40 commercial stations crowding the frequency spectrum inside the Kathmandu Valley alone. Throughout it all, Radio Sagarmatha carved out a niche, and still has a loyal following for its fiercely independent, non-commercial content adhering to its original motto: ‘Nepali Radio, Nepali Awaz’. It has a strong emphasis

on social reform and the environment. “What makes us stand out from the crowd is our credible content and the emphasis on simple colloquial Nepali,” says Station Manager Laxman Upreti. Sagarmatha does not play Hindi songs, and has been instrumental in popularising Nepali folk duets. It has a strict limit on the ratio and content of commercials. “It was not easy: folk songs were difficult to find those days. We had to painstakingly build our own archive, and bought old folk songs. But our hard work paid off and we made Nepali folk our staple,” recalls journalist Durga Karki, who has been with Radio Sagarmatha since its early days and was even detained with four other colleagues in 2005, after King Gyanendra’s military coup. The five were accused of re-

broadcasting an interview from BBC Nepali with ‘terrorist’ leader Prachanda. That ‘terrorist’ is now Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, and the BBC interviewer, Rabindra Mishra, has launched his own Sajha Party, whose candidate for mayor of Kathmandu currently leads the Maoist candidate, as election results trickle in. After the 2005 coup, the military, under direction from the palace, tried to gag the media. It sent soldiers into newsrooms to censor content, ordered FM stations to only broadcast music, and jailed and tortured radio journalists in the districts. Radio Sagarmatha was relatively protected because of its reputation as an impartial community broadcaster, but the Prachanda interview was the excuse the military needed to shut it down. Closing Sagarmatha cost the

regime dearly: radio broadcasters staged demonstrations, the international community and press freedom groups issued strong protests, and the Supreme Court finally ordered the regime to allow the station back on air. Radio Sagarmatha has borne witness to all tumultuous events of recent Nepali history: the brutal conflict, the royal massacre, political upheavals, the earthquake. Since its studio was damaged in the earthquake, it is broadcasting out of a pre-fab shed in Lalitpur. Some of its original programs, like *Aajko Kura*, are going strong, Bhairab Risal’s popular *Uhile Bajeko Palama* is done by a younger radio host, and its afternoon program, *Khula Manch*, has immediacy and appeal. More than 100 radio journalists trained at Radio Sagarmatha are now established names in broadcasting, working at BBC Nepali, Kantipur FM and other stations. On 18 May a station alumnus, Jitendra Raut, was named head of BBC Nepali. The community radio pioneer is looking ahead to the next 20 years to defend democracy and press freedom and to be a voice of the Nepali people.

On a rain-soaked morning this week, watching studio hosts prepare for programs in Nepali, Newari and Tamang languages, Upreti said: “This is not just an FM station, it is part of our urban community and a school for broadcast journalism.” 🇳🇵



Radio Sagarmatha is celebrating its 20th anniversary next week. Watch a video and listen to the founders like Bharat Koirala (*pictured*) and radio journalists speak about their initial struggle to register the station in 1997.

Follow us as we take you on a tour of Radio Sagarmatha where studio hosts this week were busy preparing programs in Nepali, Newari and Tamang languages.

nepalitimes.com 🖱️



HISTORIC MOMENT: Information Minister Jhalanath Khanal of the UML (*left*) and right-to-information activists at a ceremony in 1992 in which Radio Sagarmatha was finally granted its broadcasting license.

Tarai FM says some stations controlled by political leaders did their best to fuel the agitation while others were forced to do so. Tarai FM even had a bomb planted in its premises as a warning. Rajendra Dahal, a member of

a taskforce that drafted a liberal communication policy in 1992 that paved the way for private FM, says community radio today is not reaching deeper into society because it is no longer independent, impartial and the source of quality content. “Most community stations are now either propaganda machines of political parties or a tool of businessmen to fulfil their interests,” he says. “Nepal’s community radio revolution is in the process of being derailed.” **Om Astha Rai**

Working at 102.4

SANGITA MARHATTA

Everyone has a pet memory from their early careers, and for me that is the time I started work as a reporter at Radio Sagarmatha. I was just 18. It was an exhilarating time, and we all knew we were making history just by being associated with South Asia’s first community radio station. There was an immense sense of self-fulfillment that came with having a job that fit perfectly with my idealism. I was fresh into journalism and new to radio. But we had mentors who did not just teach us the craft of radio journalism, but also inspired us with their commitment and passion to this pioneering project. I used to be shy and hesitant at first to approach people on the busy streets of Kathmandu with those big old-fashioned recorders and microphones for my vox pop interviews. I was assigned to the brick factory in Bhaktapur, the marble quarry in Godavari, every corner of the Valley searching for hidden stories and sound bites. I have interviewed hundreds of eminent Nepalis for our profile segment in the flagship *Hamro Khaldo* program, which became immensely popular. We used to work 18 hours a day, but never got tired, even when we survived on dried noodles. Sometimes we would not be paid, but that did not matter because I was learning more at Sagarmatha than at any university. It was when people I didn’t know started



recognising me by my voice that I was sure about my journalism having an impact, and that encouraged me even more. It was difficult in the beginning, but our audience soon realised that we were different from other commercial FMs because we spoke about local community issues. My most enjoyable program was hosting comedian and philosopher Chatyang Master in the morning show. Once, he didn’t realise my microphone was live and started blurting out that he had nothing to talk about. I had to control myself from bursting out laughing. Somehow we survived. Those were the days when my station and I were both young, and bit crazy. I now live in London and try to visit Radio Sagarmatha every time I am back home. I was interviewed in my last visit by my own beloved radio station. Happy 20th Birthday, 102.4!

Sangita Marhatta worked as a program producer at Radio Sagarmatha (1997-2000).





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Nepal elects Hitler

Herr Hitler Shakya is Unsere Führer of Lalitpur Ward #6 because most people put the swastika on him. It appears that people with first names Stalin, Lenin, Mao, Mussolini, Pol Pot and Darth Vader all voted for him.

A new Nepali movie named (what else?) *Hitler*, with Sohit Manandhar, Menuka Pradhan et al is being released on 17 May. It is not a historical biopic of the fall of the Third Reich, but shot on location with fight scenes at Rara Lake.

Meanwhile, the Ejection Commission has expedited vote



counting so there is a good chance Ranju Darshana could be Mayor of Kathmandu in her lifetime. In Bharatpur, First Dotter Renu Dahal has insisted all ballot papers for the NC Mayoral candidate should be counted as hers since

Daddy Dear has made a pact with Dubya Uncle. The new party is called Nepal Commgress Party (Centrifuge).

Meanwhile, the Once-Royal Nepal Embassy in Washington DC has brought out its much-awaited press release on the landmark presidential elections in the United States last year. Here is the full text of the statement:

Nepal Statement on the U.S. Presidential Elections

WASHINGTON DC — Nepal recognises the effort by all steak holders in the Beef Belt, including the military-industrial complex, climate deniers and creationists in conducting what appears to be at first glance a largely polarising and broadly acrimonious presidential election.

The Government of Nepal (GONE) now urges all aforementioned steak holders to once and for all decide whether they want theirs well done, or rare. We urge Americans to accept the result of the election even though a #Doofus is a #Potus. That's the way the cookie crumbles in a democracy, folks. Live with it.

The Nepal Embassy also lodged a strong *note verbale* (Latin: A message delivered verbally and not in writing since it contains expletives) with the Federal Erection Commission to permit Nepali Election Observers unrestricted access to inspect the electronic records of the last election in order to enable the international community, including accredited Nepali diplomats in DC, to have a say in the final outcome of that highly disputed election.

Before going, GONE would insists that with less than four years to go for the next U.S. president to be elected or the present one to be impeached (whichever comes first) all efforts should be undertaken by the Federal Government as well as the American people to be engaged in creating a more inclusive society, boost turnout, improve the credibility of the electoral process, and make Russia Great Again.

Not to be outdone, 12A Kensington Garden has also issued a statement about the forthcoming U.K. elections:

Nepal Statement on U.K. Elections

We do not want to comment on the process at this stage of preparations for the upcoming U.K. elections since it is Nepal's policy never to comment on the internal affairs of another country, but we will do it just the same and let the fish and chips fall where they may. *Luja*. We absolutely insist that necessary conditions are created to ensure that people who want to separate from Britain, and those who want Britain to separate from Europe all get to vote. We don't want to go to war with you again, but we take umbrage at not being allowed to officially observe the elections on June 8. Bye.



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