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## Election in instalments

The good news is that the much-delayed second phase of local elections will be held on 28 June itself. The bad news is that voting will take place in Province 2 only after the monsoon.

On Thursday, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, under pressure from the Madhes-based RJP, once more asked Chief Election Commissioner Ayodhi Prasad Yadav if the polls could be put off again. Yadav replied: "It will be a political and electoral disaster."

Yadav added that the EC is prepared for 28 June, the Home Ministry is ready to provide security, and delaying local polls will make it difficult to hold provincial and parliamentary elections before January 2018.

Deuba just listened, and did not push Yadav to agree. After

he left the EC office, an election commissioner told *Nepali Times*: "Looking at the PM's body language, I could tell that he had already made up his mind to delay polls, at least in Province 2."

Two hours later, PM Deuba persuaded the Madhes-based RJP to not obstruct polls in Province 1, 5 and 7 in return for rescheduling elections in Province 2 for a fourth time. But it is uncertain if the RJP will participate in polls even on the new date. "Postponing elections is not a solution, amending the Constitution is," says Tula Narayan Sah, a Madhesi rights activist.

The RJP is pushing for amending the Constitution on issues like provincial boundaries, language and citizenship. The ruling coalition has already tabled an amendment bill that largely addresses Madhesi demands, but it has been rejected by the main opposition UML.

The UML slammed the government's decision to delay polls in Province 2, arguing that it will create a psychological divide between people from the hills and the Tarai. Due to the UML's stance on the amendment, some of its Madhesi supporters have defected to Tarai-centric parties. But the UML knows its plains base is made up of hill settlers and mixed communities along the East-West Highway.

"We are taking a stand against the amendment because it is not a Madhesi agenda," says Raj Kumar Gupta, a UML MP from Parsa. "The RJP is using the amendment as an excuse to delay polls because they know they are weak and will be defeated."

The RJP has bought more time to deal with intra-party rift, organise itself and probably emerge as a big party in Province 2. But it has missed an opportunity to contest elections

in other provinces and rise as a truly national party.

In the RJP's absence, Upendra Yadav's FSFN and Bijaya Gachhadar's Nepal Democratic Forum have better electoral prospects in other provinces, and will probably defeat the RJP in Province 2 as well.

**Om Astha Rai**



### PATAN RISES AGAIN

Like a 3D jigsaw puzzle, Patan Darbar Square is being pieced together after the earthquake.

BY SAHINA SHRESTHA

PAGE 11



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# BLOCKADING QATAR

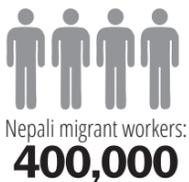
Out of every 20 people you meet on the street in Qatar, three are from Nepal. The country's native population numbers only 313,000, and there are another 2.3 million expats – of whom 400,000 are Nepalis. In the last fiscal year alone, 130,000 Nepalis went to Qatar, and the numbers were increasing – till last week.

On 5 June, 495 Nepalis were issued permits to Qatar by the Foreign Employment Department. Two days later, after Qatar was blockaded, on 7 June only 25 permits were issued. Although the government has not officially banned Nepalis from going to Qatar, many workers who were getting ready to fly to Doha have either put off their plans, or decided not to go. Those who had already booked tickets on flights from Kathmandu via stopovers in the UAE to Doha were stuck.

The exodus of Nepali workers abroad had increased after the 2015 earthquake as many affected families needed to earn to rebuild their homes. But the impact of the Indian Blockade was far more devastating – as investments dwindled, jobs became even scarcer and economic growth plummeted to zero. Nepal's economy is only now limping back to normal.

Ironically Nepalis, who essentially fled an Indian Blockade of their country, are now having to face a Saudi-led embargo of Qatar. In many ways, the siege of Qatar by Saudi Arabia, UAE and their allies is much more serious: it is a land, sea and airspace blockade. Food and other essentials, which used to be trucked into Qatar from Saudi and UAE ports by Nepali drivers, have been stopped at the border.

With Malaysia, Qatar is the most popular destination for Nepali workers overseas. Official annual remittances from countries other than India totalled Rs5.7 billion last year and of this, 17% was from Qatar. It is a popular destination not just because it is the richest country in the world per capita, but because of the relative ease with which visas and work permits can be organised. Also, despite negative media coverage, workers there have relatively better protection now. There is also a preference among Qatari employers for unskilled Nepali workers, who are regarded as being more docile. Indians make up the largest numbers of expat workers in Qatar, and Bangladesh is the fastest growing source country for labour.



Nepalis leaving for Qatar/day:  
**353**



Total Nepali workers who went to Qatar last year:  
**129,039**



Total remittance from Qatar last year:  
Rs **169** billion



Qatar's portion of total remittance:  
**17%**

If the crisis drags on, Nepal is going to be hit in more ways than just declining numbers of workers going to Qatar. A regional flareup would mean that the estimated 700,000 other Nepalis in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and UAE would also be affected. Oil prices are already showing volatility and this would affect Nepal's petroleum imports from the Indian Oil Corporation, which sources its gas and crude from Qatar and other Gulf countries.

Nepal's economic diplomacy in the Gulf, especially Qatar, needs to get into high gear. Nepali embassies in the region should be on alert -- proactively providing information and other assistance to workers in trouble. In the longer term, Nepal's strategy must be to become less dependent on a remittance-based economy, and for that there is no alternative but to invest in large infrastructure projects to create jobs at home.

## GUEST EDITORIAL BISHNU RIJAL

### Warning bells from the Gulf

Perhaps few other peoples in the world feel the pain of being poor and jobless as much as Nepalis. If there is conflict anywhere in the world, Nepalis are impacted right away. Whether it is extremists massacring foreigners in Iraq, Libya erupting into conflict, another attack in Afghanistan, or the battle on Kargil, it is the bodies of Nepalis that are sent to bereaved families back home. It would be surprising, therefore, if the current crisis in Qatar did not affect us.

Qatar is being blockaded by its Arab neighbours over various allegations: that its Emir's dream project of Al Jazeera supports terrorism, it helps the Islamic State and the Islamic Brotherhood, and that Qatar allowed the Taliban to open an office in Doha. At the heart of the dispute is the Shia-Sunni divide between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and a power struggle for control of West Asia.

Whatever the case, it is up to the Arab states in the region to resolve their problems peacefully. The more relevant question for us is what is Nepal doing to reduce the impact on our own economy from tension in an area of the world where so many Nepalis work. Are we prepared? Have we made contingency plans? Do we have alternatives? Qatar is a warning sign for us to work on getting our own house in order in case the Gulf is engulfed in a political volcano.

Nepalis prefer to work in India not just because

they don't require passports and visas, but also because there is no language barrier. The prospect of higher earnings have, however, attracted them to the Gulf and the remittance they send home props up our economy. It is clear that we need a long-term strategy to reduce our dependence on migration, create stable governments and build a robust state structure. We have none of these three attributes. We have no real plans in place to create jobs within Nepal.

Our economy is not poor, we cannot even spend the money we have. We pay out more on administrative costs than on development. How can we create jobs at home if we spend only 20-25% of the annual development budget outlay?

We are embroiled in politics, and haven't been able to turn political change into economic transformation. If we can mobilise our resources and manpower for large infrastructure projects, Nepalis would no longer have to migrate overseas for work. We need to start working on that from today itself.



**Bishnu Rijal** is an editor and commentator

### ONLINE VIDEOS



REMOTE POSSIBILITIES

Kalikot doesn't lack schools, but it lags in the quality of education. A focus on rote learning, little outdoor activity and sports discourage students and increase the dropout rate. But there is a bright spot. Watch video of a non-profit school in Lulu village which is setting an example on how early childhood education should be conducted in government schools in Nepal's remote mountains.



HOME WORK

On International Domestic Workers' Day on 16 June, a *Nepali Times* video tells the story of Sharmila Tharu, who was forced to become a domestic worker at age five, and 15 years later is still a household helper. The practice of Kamalari was abolished in 2006, but this form of modern day bonded slavery persists in Nepali society.

#### SAVING THE BAGMATI

First we need to clean the Bagmati River. But that doesn't mean just going to the river bank every Saturday and picking up waste. The crux of the problem is the sewage. Unless we take ownership and the responsibility of the river, it cannot be made better. What is the point of constructing a river park if dumping waste is going to continue?

**Samjhana Gurung**

#### WE CAN DO

David Seddon's response to Swarnim Wagle's Guest Editorial is a bleak analysis. ('Muddy road to middle-income', David Seddon, #862) Swarnim clearly outlined the facts, statistics and reasons behind the current 7% economic growth projection in to the future with the completion of big hydropower projects which in turn will increase consumption and industrial production. Last year we were fortunate to have a good monsoon, but we are also on the verge of completing major irrigation projects in Tarai, which will be like having a good monsoon every year. Many other infrastructure projects are taking momentum that will increase connectivity.

**Mahesh Gautam**

#### ALTERNATIVES TO MELAMCHI

Good habits are difficult to adopt for Nepalis ('Don't wait for Melamchi', Tyler McMahon, #862). We'll only realise the importance of saving water and looking for alternate sources to ground water once ground water depletes completely.

**Bidya Sharma**

#### SAVING ENERGY

It looks good in paper but there are other ways to making an electricity user less dependent on NEA ('How to avoid power cuts this winter', Shreejana Shrestha, #862). We have to find ways to make daytime solar energy run more daytime gadgets. Unlike with light bulbs, fridges keep running silently drawing a heavy load to get it first primed. There should be other cheaper and practical solutions to save power.

**Anupam**

### WHAT'S TRENDING



#### Resurrecting the river

by Oskar Frelin

The multimedia package on Bagmati River Park was one of the most-visited *Nepali Times* online page last week. The proposed green belt will create a new identity for the capital city and chart a bold path towards a more environment and heritage-conscious urban core. Visit nepalitimes.com to follow a vigorous debate about the issue, and watch Charu Raman's film *Unholy River*.

**Most reached and shared on Facebook**  
(16,099 people reached)

**Most popular on Twitter**  
(66 retweets, 115 likes)

**Most commented**

**Most visited online page**

### QUOTE TWEETS

**Nepali Times @nepalitimes**  
#Kathmandu has many organisations working with stray #dogs but only one solely devoted to #cats http://bit.ly/2RkArbi

**Richa Bhattarai @15n3quarters**  
Thank you so much for this. Loved reading, I need a cat to complete my life, too. Sigh.

**Nepali Times @nepalitimes**  
Nikita Chandak has proven through her win that Miss Nepal has become more inclusive http://bit.ly/2r9Lxnn #NepalMissNepal

**Adarsha Tuladhar @Am49T**  
No doubt... moreover, she is so elegant and clear in her language: more deserving than those in the past... good luck for Ms World pageant

**Kunda Dixit @kundadixit**  
Grab Friday's print edition of @nepalitimes Exclusive: Bagmati River Park, #Kathmandu's proposed green membrane

**Prashanta Khanal @theprashanta**  
Too many concrete structure in the name of park - not good. Need greenways (not motor road) along river corridors

**Nepali Times @nepalitimes**  
STUCK AGAIN RJPN renews threat to disrupt polls in Tarai as back-to-back negotiations fail in Kathmandu http://bit.ly/2sQHPJO

**bharat b. subedi @art4heartssake**  
Enough is enough. Govt doesn't need to cave in to their moods any more. Either they come for election or they don't. Let them try & disrupt!

**Times** Weekly Internet Poll #863

Q. Can Nepal maintain its 7% economic growth in coming years?

Total votes: 184

- Optimistic 15%
- Pessimistic 63%
- So so 22%

Weekly Internet Poll #864  
To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Do you agree with the government's decision to postpone local elections in Province 2?





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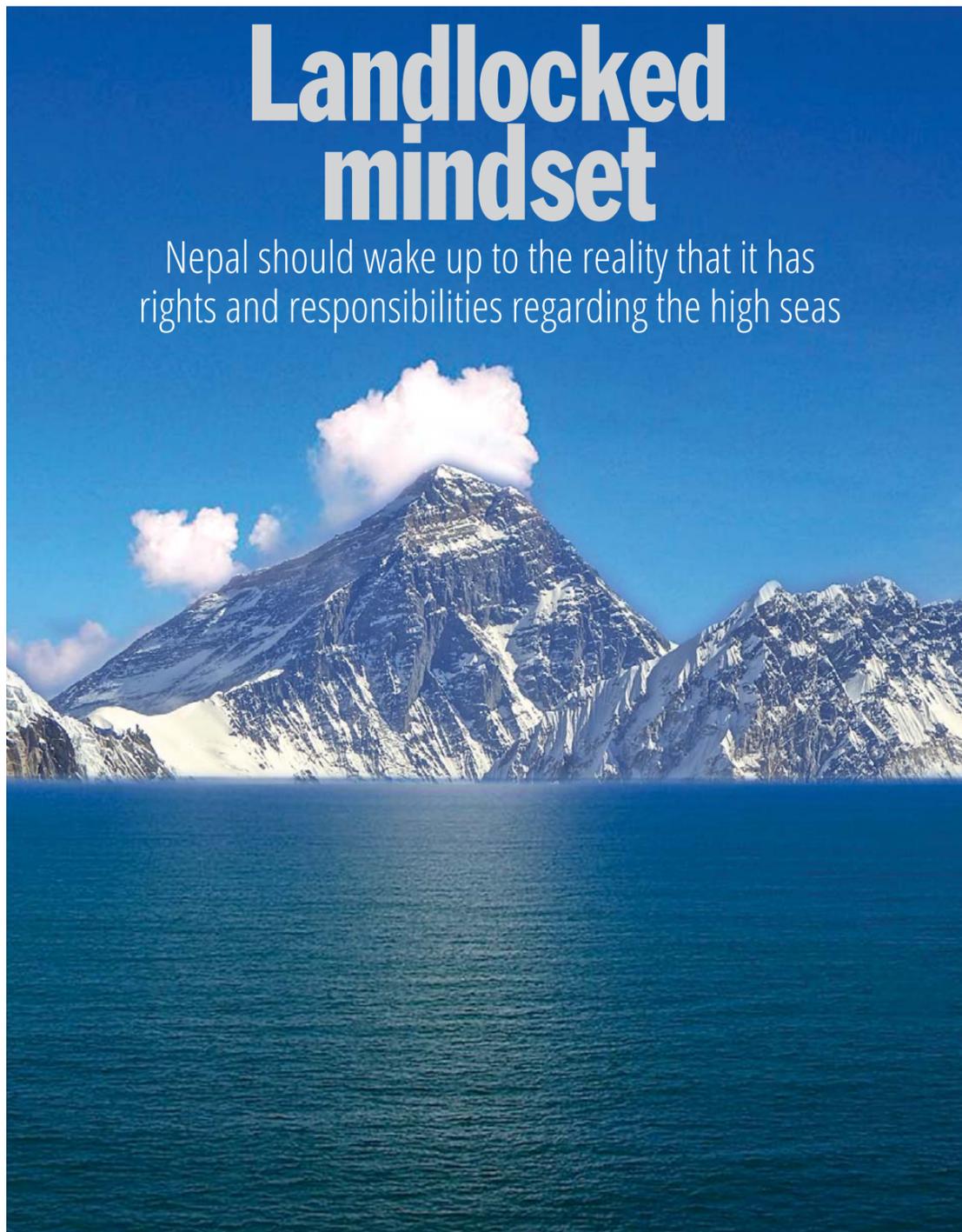
The Law of the Sea is vital for Nepal as a country landlocked, because it enshrines the right of transit, as well as confirms rights over the resources and possibilities of the high seas. And yet, the Law of the Sea does not receive due attention in Kathmandu, even though Nepal suffered the Great Blockade of 2015 and earlier in 1989-90, and even though a Nepali diplomat-politician played a key role in getting the Law of the Sea off the ground in the mid-to-late 1970s at the United Nations.



**ON THE WAY UP**  
Kanak Mani Dixit

He was Shailendra Kumar Upadhyay, and while Nepal's Permanent Representative to the United Nations at a time when the country had a far higher international profile than it has now, he was involved as key negotiator in the talks that evolved into the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Besides Nepal, the flamboyant Upadhyay represented the landlocked and least developed countries at the negotiations, which led to the Convention being ultimately signed in 1982, coming into force in 1994.

Nepal's right to transit gained sudden prominence when the KP Oli government inked agreements in Beijing for third country access via China in March 2016, and



# Landlocked mindset

Nepal should wake up to the reality that it has rights and responsibilities regarding the high seas

or landlocked'.

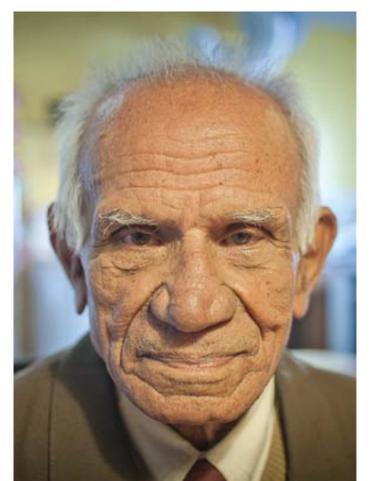
Thus, the opportunities as well as the obligations that apply to the open sea apply to Nepal. These include the possibility of being a 'flag nation' plying ships in the oceans, with Chittagong or Calcutta as home ports (though it could be anywhere else). Incidentally, the Panchayat era did see Nepal launch the Royal Nepal Shipping Corporation and one ship (named after the queen of King Prithvi Narayan) was purchased, but the project sank.

The oceans as world heritage, covering two-thirds of the globe's surface area, are suddenly being weakened and depleted, before landlocked countries like Nepal have even woken up to the promise of UNCLOS. The extreme dangers include over-fishing in all the oceans, as well as the catastrophic spread of plastic and other wastes. Nepal acts as if none of this is of its concern.

There is today an active push to exploit the deep ocean floor for minerals, a sensitive matter on which Kathmandu must take keen interest and have a point of view. It should be active in the various bodies born of UNCLOS, including the International Seabed Authority, even as the exploitation of the Atlantic, Pacific, Indian ocean floor gathers steam, not to forget the Arctic and the Atlantic regions.

Nepal should not remain content speaking on behalf of high mountains alone. It must become vocal on all aspects of use of the high seas, including transport, pollution, seafood/fisheries, seabed mining, security. There is no reason not to do it, and Shailendra Kumar Upadhyay would have approved. 🇳🇵

**Postscript:** Shailendra Kumar Upadhyay (*below*) was an unconventional politician, who started out as a Communist but turn-coated to join the Panchayat regime of King Mahendra. Over the years, he was rewarded with a string of important assignments, including foreign minister. Upadhyay followed the footsteps of Rishikesh Shaha in providing dynamic presence in New York as Nepal's Permanent Representative to the United Nations between 1972-1978. Ever the maverick, in deep retirement at age 82 he trained to climb Mount Everest, and he died in the attempt on 9 May 2011. One day in about October 1988, while walking out of the UN General Assembly building where I worked as press officer of the UN Secretariat, Foreign Minister Upadhyay was coming the other way. We chatted, standing there on the kerb, and I informed him of my plan resign the job and move back to Nepal. His answer is etched in my memory: "Kanak, don't leave the sun for the shade."



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there may come a time when this route becomes viable. However, for now, and given the proximity to the Bay of Bengal, the transit right is important for the passage it allows to Calcutta, Haldia, Vishakapatnam, or traversing India to the Bangladesh ports of Mongla and Chittagong.

However, Nepal's interest in the Law of the Sea should go far beyond transit rights. Yes, access to ports allows Nepal to import and export goods, but the Law of the Sea means so much more than that. By now, there should have been vibrant Nepali scholarship on how Nepal as a country can take advantage of the high seas and deep oceans as the common heritage of humankind.

But we remain locked in 'landlocked mindset', acting as if discussion and decisions on the high seas, including those relating to 'our' Indian Ocean, are reserved for the littoral states. At the very least, Nepal should be facilitating discussion among the landlocked countries of South Asia, convening meetings with Afghanistan and Bhutan to develop a joint position.

UNCLOS, which represents a largely successful effort to codify as well as evolve customary law regarding the oceans, provides a graded level of rights and obligations to the littoral states, through territorial waters of 12 nautical miles off the coast, to the Contiguous Zone of 24 nm, and the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of 200 nm, including the Continental Shelf. However, says the Convention, in terms of passage, resources and environment, 'the high seas are open to all states, whether coastal

# Nepal-watching from Delhi

Is there really a shift in India's approach to election and amendment in Nepal?



after his predecessor endorsed and signed China's Belt and Road Initiative in his last few days in office. It will be a tricky balancing act for Deuba in the post-blockade period when China has stepped in to increase investment and influence in Nepal.

Sources in New Delhi downplayed reports in a section of the Indian media that there has been a shift in New Delhi's position vis-a-vis Madhesi politics in Nepal. The Indian Embassy in Kathmandu was said to have urged Madhesi leaders to drop the demand for amendments to the Constitution and participate in the second phase of local polls. They said this was a "misrepresentation" and that India

still insists on constitutional amendments. It could well be that the Indian establishment is urging the RJPN to go for elections in the face of a threat of its political marginalisation, while tacitly supporting its agitation.

India did not sincerely or seriously support Madhesi politics initially, and only realised its importance after Nepal became a federal democratic republic. New Delhi wanted a compromise amendment with the KP Oli government, and later with Dahal, to lift its Blockade, and only supported the deal hesitantly as it perceived the Madhesi leadership as weak and divided.

In that sense, there could indeed be a soft shift in the way India perceives local elections in Nepal. However, sources here say there has been no change in India's belief that the Tarai is important to gain influence in Nepal, a country it sees slipping out of its sphere of influence.

The latest statements by the Indian leadership stress that India supports all initiatives by Nepal to make the new Constitution inclusive by taking in to account the aspirations of dissatisfied communities, adding that it encourages 'dialogue and consultation among the political stakeholders' in Nepal to ensure a broad-based political consensus and stability. 

**Akanshya Shah** is a Nepali journalist based in New Delhi. This is the first of her new *Nepali Times* column, DEL-KTM.

There is heightened expectation in New Delhi that the government of Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba will heed its concerns about consensus-building on the Constitution and addressing the grievances of the marginalised, especially the Madhesi.



**DEL-KTM**

Akanshya Shah

India backed the power-sharing pact and used subtle diplomacy to persuade Deuba's predecessor, Pushpa Kamal Dahal, to stick to his agreement to step down in nine months and not break with the NC to seek UML support.

This is being interpreted here as the "right move" on the part of the Maoist chief, who until recently did not enjoy the best of relations with New Delhi. He visited India twice during his tenure and assured the Indian leadership of his commitment to push for a constitutional amendment, an issue which had disrupted bilateral ties and led to the Blockade of 2015-16. The Indian establishment will seek from Deuba a similar assurance on the amendment.

Deuba's immediate challenge, as perceived here, is to keep the coalition intact and subsequently conduct local, provincial and national level elections by January 2018. But there is concern that the

rifft within the NC rank and file could derail the transition process.

"Deuba is in a unique position to address the issues confronting the Madhes and hold elections by bringing everyone together even if that means postponing the second phase. Otherwise, there will be deepening conflict in the Tarai, even the rise of secessionism," one academic here said.

Deuba underlined three priorities after taking office last week: implement the Constitution, accommodate Madhesi groups and push development. Since then, his government has had four bilateral dialogues with the Indian side: Indian Prime Minister Modi called to congratulate him immediately after he took over, External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj spoke with her counterpart, and the Indian Ambassador in Kathmandu, Manjeev Singh Puri met Deuba and his Maoist Foreign Minister Krishna Bahadur Mahara this week (*pictured*).

Sources here say that they were given "credible assurances" the Madhes-based parties can be persuaded to take part in elections since the Maoists and NC together can muster support in Parliament to push for amendments. India will also urge Deuba to implement the three-point agreement between the SLMM and other parties signed in August 2016, just before Dahal took office.

New Delhi is said to be wary of how Deuba will handle Nepal's relations with China. He is expected to engage with Beijing

prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

**BO<sub>2</sub>**

The International Finance Cooperation (IFC) is investing another \$7.3 million into Business Oxygen (BO<sub>2</sub>), Nepal's first private equity fund, to help small businesses and farmers cope with the impact of climate change.

In 2015, IFC provided \$7 million of its own funds to BO<sub>2</sub>. In this second round, funding will come from DFID and Climate Investment Fund, which are contributing \$3.7 and \$3.6 million, respectively.

**Nepal ranks #3**

Nepal is projected to achieve top ten growth rates in 2017, the World Economic Forum says. Nepal ranked third with a forecasted 7.5% growth, behind Ethiopia's 8.3% and Uzbekistan's 7.6%, ahead of India (7.2%).

**Sherpa discount**

Sherpa Adventure Gear's flagship outlet in Kathmandu is offering most of its spring/summer 2017 collection

at discounts of 25-50%. Sherpa manufactures most of its outdoor and sports apparel in Nepal and exports it around the world.

**Qatar flights normal**

Noting that transit passengers via Doha have been affected by the present crisis, Qatar Airways has pledged greater flexibility for refunds and rebooking for passengers. The airline has also announced that travellers from Nepal can now fly to Dublin daily via Doha on



its Boeing 787 Dreamliners. The airline is also adding flights to Canberra, Chiang Mai, Chittagong and Accra.

**30th 777 for Turkish**

Turkish Airlines has added its 30th Boeing 777-300ER to its fleet of more than 100 Boeing airliners. The latest



addition is also the first aircraft to feature seats by Turkish Seats Industries (TSI), the first local aircraft seat producer and designer in Turkey.

**Ncell bundle**

Ncell has introduced the weekly combo pack 'One Plan', which allows customers to enjoy a bundle of voice, data and SMS service, and free access to unlimited Yonder Music streaming. One Plan offers three packages for various data options. Customers can activate a plan by dialling \*17123# and pressing 4. This offer is valid for 30 days and each 'One Plan' is valid for a week.



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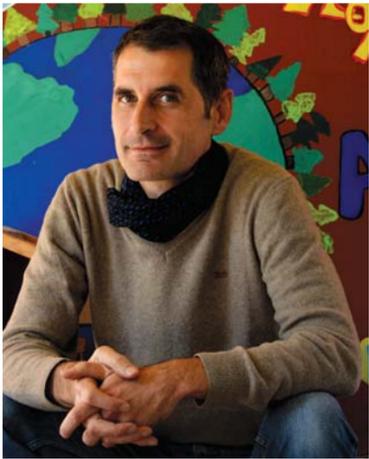
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# École Française Internationale de Katmandou turns 30



PICS: EFIG

École Française Internationale de Katmandou was set up in Lazimpat in 1987 to cater to the needs of a growing French community in Kathmandu. However, the quality of education it offered attracted other nationalities not just from Francophone countries, but also other expatriates and Nepalis. Today it has 70 students from 18 nationalities. As the French School marks its 30th anniversary, *Nepali Times* caught up with its director Joël Keller to ask him about the school and its future plans.



**Nepali Times: Why a French School in Kathmandu?**  
**Joël Keller:** Some parents and teachers in Kathmandu felt that it was important for the French community in Nepal to offer French education to their children and to promote French language and culture with French style education here in

Nepal. As most of the French families live in Nepal for a few years and then return to their home country, it was important to make sure that children could be integrated into the French education system wherever they went next, including those who returned to France.

**Given your growth, it seems the need is even greater today.**

Indeed, the need is even greater today and this trend continues. The French-speaking community in Nepal continues to grow as do families who value a multilingual education in an internationally accredited program. Families from Britain, US, India, China, Canada, Japan have also joined our school. We now teach children from age 2-15, with 70 students of more than 18 nationalities. 30% are French, 3% Nepali and the rest are from various nationalities. Only 30% of our students are French and 10% are French-speaking students from Canada, Belgium, or Switzerland. Our objective is not to attract only French-speaking students but various nationalities in a French-style education. Our core values remain the same: education with a family spirit. We now

offer a CNED (Centre National d'Enseignement à Distance) program, which is a semi-structured distance education program.

**Where do your alumni end up?**

As the International French School of Kathmandu is part of the Agency for the French Education Abroad (AEFE), an official French network of about 500 French schools all over the world, students can join other schools when they finish their education. We offer language certification (both in French and English) to make sure that our students can be admitted in different systems without any difficulties. Our alumni are in France but also in India, USA, UK and elsewhere.

**What has been your experience with students of Nepali parents?**

The school has attracted increasing numbers of Nepali students in recent years. We have had Nepali parents who

speak fluent French and those who don't speak much. Children are amazing and quickly learn the French language. We are delighted that Nepali families are interested in a multilingual education.

**What are the advantages of studying in French for Nepalis?**

Studying in a French school is not only about learning the French language, it is also about participating in a French-style education: respect for age-appropriate development, quality of teaching, individualised support and openness to the world are major priorities of our school. The teaching team and all employees of the school focus on the children's progress in all areas. Therefore, for Nepali families willing to give the best education to their children and the possibility of following higher studies abroad, International French School of Kathmandu is a fantastic option. Fees in French universities are about 10 times cheaper than in UK or USA. The French language is also an asset to work in an international context. More than 300 million people all over the world speak French, which is the second international language after English.

**What are some of the extra-curricular activities you offer?**

During school hours, we offer swimming, rock climbing and other sports. After classes, we teach pottery, sewing, judo, badminton, football, thangka painting, cooking, origami, music, theatre, photography, etc. We also take students on field trips within the Kathmandu Valley or outside to Chitwan or Bandipur to discover Nepali culture and enjoy outdoor activities.

**Do you plan to help other schools with French?**

French is offered in some schools, but it would be fantastic if more schools also did so. We have not supported French language classes outside, but plan to establish partnerships with Nepali schools and share more about France and French culture.



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The wait is over. After a brief but violent tug-o-war, the southwest monsoon has beaten away the westerly jetstream and is steaming towards Kathmandu after entering Nepal's airspace on Tuesday. The moisture-laden clouds brought in by a tropical storm that created havoc in Chittagong this week are now massing over eastern Nepal and are expected to arrive in Kathmandu by early next week. But before that we will get a preview of things to come with sudden squalls over the weekend accompanied by some thunder.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
27° 17°	28° 17°	27° 18°

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# Charismatic Nikita

During the conflict years, Miss Nepal pageants were constantly threatened by underground Maoist guerrillas, and there used to be arson attacks outside the venue. Maoist leaders issued statements saying that they were against the 'commercialisation and commodification of the feminine body' by international multinationals sponsoring the events.

Eleven years after the war ended, this year's Miss Nepal pageant was held while the Supreme Commander of those guerrillas was prime minister, and the venue of the former Miss Nepal contests is now the Parliament building.

Criticism of the Miss Nepal event is now muted, and restricted to a few outraged op-eds by gender activists. One such piece in *Setopati* last week by Sabitri Gautam dissected the premise of 'beauty' contests, of stereotyping and patriarchy.

"The glamour industry is marketing the female body, parading women in swimsuits on a stage and calling it empowerment," Gautam wrote. 'Beauty pageants are the starkest examples of the commodification of a woman's body. It shows how little families, society and the contestants themselves know about personality development, and their mistaken belief that such pageants empower them.'

However, the selection of Nikita Chandak as Miss Nepal last week was unexpected because of what many deemed to be her unconventional looks, the fact that she was not 'fair', and that this was the first time a person from the Marwari community and a Tarai resident was selected. The trolling on social networking sites proved that it is perhaps society's notions about stereotyping and beauty that need to change rather than beauty pageants themselves.

Chandak, for her part, seemed unfazed by the uproar, refused to be drawn into the debate, and kept an upbeat, positive outlook on her win. She told us: "I believe positivity leads to happiness and when people

are happy and have self-esteem they are naturally beautiful. I believe in tolerance, respecting everyone, being compassionate towards all."

Chandak became a contender for the Miss Nepal contest by chance. The 20-year-old from Morang, who is pursuing a BBA degree in New Delhi, had come to Nepal to take part in a fashion show in January. She was approached by the organisers, who were impressed with her self-assured personality, to enter the Miss Nepal contest.

Chandak started developing an interest in modelling while she was still in high school, but because she came from a conservative Marwari family in which no one had ventured into the profession before, it wasn't easy for her to talk to her parents about it. But when she did, she found them to be very supportive, and she has since appeared on many cat walks in Pune and Kerala Fashion Week in India.

"My win was mostly possible due to the support of my family," says Chandak, who impressed the judges and audiences with her poise and confidence. The warm response she got during the Marwari celebration of Mahesh Nawami the day after being crowned was confirmation for her that attitudes within her community towards the entertainment industry are changing. "There is a minimum participation of our community in showbiz. In that sense, my win is in itself a big deal," she says.

The Miss Nepal crown has also given Chandak an opportunity to represent youth here and abroad and she wants to use social media to reach Nepalis all over the world. As part of her preparation for the forthcoming Miss World pageant, she plans to learn from the experiences of previous Nepali participants.

For the future, Chandak has her eyes set firmly on a film career once she finishes her studies. And for the Nepali public, notwithstanding criticism, Chandak has proven through her win that Miss Nepal itself has become more inclusive.

**Sabita Shrestha**

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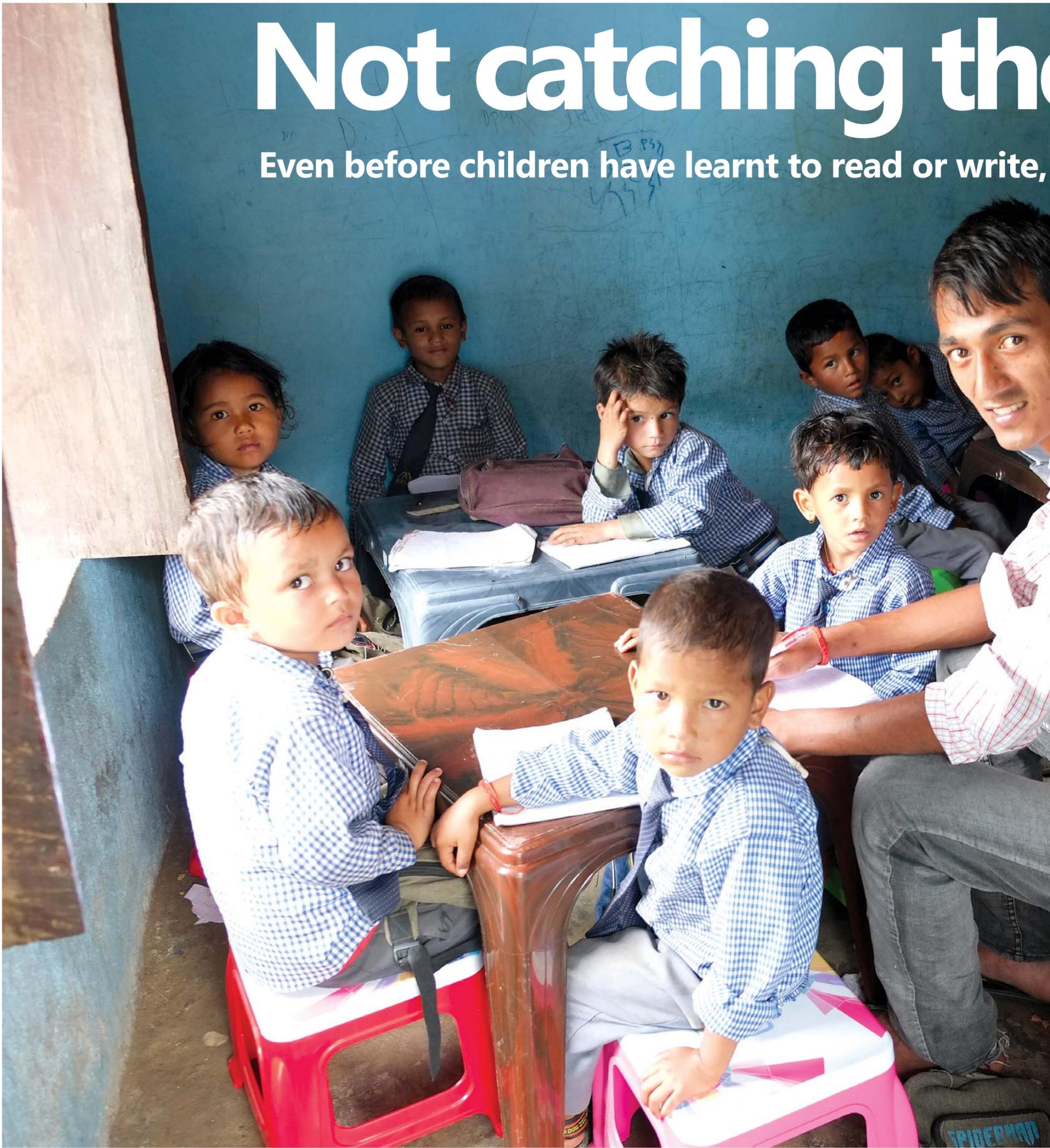
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# Not catching the

Even before children have learnt to read or write,



ALL PICS: PRAJEET BAJPAI

**CLASSROOM WITH A VIEW:** Children at the Modern Model School in Lalu village of Kalikot (*above*) where trained teachers are trying to shift the mode of instruction away from traditional rote learning.

The school playground (*right*) from where five other government schools are visible in Kalikot. On the far ridge is the Kotbada airfield, which was finally completed after being under construction for 32 years. But there are no flights yet, and the remote district is now connected by a highway to Surkhet.



**PRAJEET BAJPAI**  
in KALIKOT

If you pick the right spot in Lalu village and look east, you can see five schools dotted across these rugged and scenic mountains of mid-western Nepal.

Clearly, Kalikot does not lag behind in education because of the lack of schools. It is poor teaching at pre-primary and primary levels that sets back a new generation of school-goers from the start, affecting their

# em young

## they have learnt to hate school



current and future performance.

There is much research to prove that early grade reading competency is crucial to success in future grades. A 2014 nationwide survey showed that more than one-third of Grade 2 and 19% of Grade 3 children cannot read even a word of Nepali. The figures for Kalikot are much worse.

Even in Nursery, classes are handled in lecture fashion. Instead of prioritising activities, games or student engagement, the focus is already on rote learning. Five year olds chant the alphabet and the numbers table in class, and at home memorise books and prepare for exams.

There is no change in teaching style or method between primary school and upper grades: it is

assumed the same style works for everyone. If this fails, as it does for most, it is assumed to be the child's fault for 'not studying hard enough'. Opportunities to play outdoors are actively discouraged, and even before the children have learnt to read or write, they have learnt to hate school.

The government curriculum advises that the main focus for language teaching should be on listening and speaking. However, exams are entirely written, even in kindergarten. Many children are therefore held back at the pre-primary level, and Nursery classrooms still have eight- and nine-year-olds. There are even teenagers in primary school, contributing to the high dropout rate. This large age disparity

within a class also makes the teacher's job harder. Since children are not being tested for correct skills, they cannot be evaluated to the full extent of their capabilities.

Without an emphasis on developing language abilities and support for reading, those who manage to pass early exams go through primary school with fundamental reading deficits that get worse as they grow older. At one school here, Grade 3 students, including some teenagers, were unable to summarise the contents of simple picture books.

The Nepal Government curriculum for primary education focuses on basic learning objectives: activity-based teaching, and continuous and age-appropriate evaluation. It states



## Removing the class barrier

There is one school in Kalikot that is trying to change the way teaching is done. Modern Model Residential School is a non-profit private institution in Lalu village, across the valley from the Karnali. It never used to have enough money for good teachers, but with new support it has become a catalyst for change in other schools in the area. The idea is to depart from traditional rote learning to allow children to be creative and knowledgeable about their surroundings through play and outdoor activities.

A partnership with Leo Clubs in Nepal has brought qualified and motivated teachers to the school under a 'Rural Teaching Fellowship'. The school also runs a hostel for orphaned and needy students, and manages a goat farm and vegetable greenhouse (*below*) to generate revenue for the school's sustainable upkeep. <http://www.modernmodel.edu.np>



### KEY INDICATORS

	Nepal	Kalikot
Per capital income \$PPP	1,160	578
Average life expectancy	69	63
Mean years of schooling	3.9	2.4

that exams are not to be used when upgrading students. It shifts from marks-based evaluation to grades, and abolishes any 'fail' grade at this level. But here in Kalikot, teachers either do not know about this or ignore it since it takes too much effort to adopt a new style of teaching.

Kalikot is ranked 73rd among Nepal's 75 districts on the Human Development Index, unchanged in 10 years largely because of the lack of progress in early childhood education. It is remote even compared to other remote districts in western Nepal. It has a new airfield but no flights, the road to Surkhet is crumbling just two years after it was blacktopped.

There are some private, non-profit schools using 'English-medium' as a draw for parents even though studies have shown that children who learn to read in a language they know well develop better reading skills overall — including in

any additional languages they learn. Instead of learning better English, therefore, students at these 'boarding' schools often learn it worse, taught by teachers who are themselves often poor speakers. Students also lose what little Nepali reading and writing skills they would have gained in a government system. 🇳🇵

**Prajeet Bajpai** is a Dartmouth College alum from India working in Kalikot to upgrade education.



Watch video of a school in Kalikot that is trying to change the way early childhood education is conducted in government schools in Nepal's remote mountains.

# EVENTS



## Israeli film fest,

Don't miss the opportunity to watch selected Israeli films at the 11th edition of the Israeli Film Festival. Moviegoers can choose from two films that will be screened for three days in Kathmandu, Pokhara and Biratnagar.  
21 to 23 June, 2:30 pm and 5:30 pm,  
Nepal Tourism Board, Kathmandu  
(01) 4256909

## Mud fest,

Celebrate this rice-planting festival by getting soaked in the rain, playing in the mud and mingling with locals. Includes a Newari fest at the end of the day.  
24 June, 7 am-3 pm, Khokana, Rs1950 for adults, Rs 999 for children, free for children below 4  
<http://www.socialtours.com>

## TIME is LOVE,



## Becoming a home electrician,

Register today for a six-session workshop on home electrical maintenance for women. Be equipped next time you change bulbs or replace wires at home.  
19 June, Karkhana, Naxal, (01) 4412624

Be a part of an international video art program that will inspire viewers to question the normative understanding of relationships in our modern society. The screening will be accompanied by public discussions and performances.  
16 June, 4 pm, Gallery MCUBE, Lalitpur  
[www.gallerycube.com](http://www.gallerycube.com)

## Vatvatey Reunion,

Join other biker enthusiasts to find out about latest trends, models and accessories in biking. Don't miss out on live music and scrumptious food afterwards.  
17 June, Park Village Resort, Budhanilkanta, (01) 4375280

## Vocal workshop,

Register to learn singing techniques from renowned jazz vocalist Diandra Danieli, hosted by Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory.  
5 July-30 August, (01) 5013554  
<http://www.katjazz.com.np/vocal-teacher-diandra-danieli/>



## Ride for refugees,

Mark this year's World Refugee Day by participating in a cycle rally from Patan Darbar Square to Khokana to show solidarity for refugees.  
17 June, 7:30-11 am, Patan Darbar Square, 9841729965  
[www.cyclecity.org.np/ride4refugees2](http://www.cyclecity.org.np/ride4refugees2)

## Artist in residence,

Attend the seventh season of artist in residence with works of artists CC Chang and Chen Siao Chi of Taiwan, Kapil Mani Dixit of Nepal and Jupiter Pradhan of Nepal on display.  
23 to 30 June, Gallery MCUBE, Lalitpur  
[www.gallerycube.com](http://www.gallerycube.com)

## Off the Block,

Take the afternoon off to view unique woodcut print works by local student artists.  
16 June, Park Gallery, Pulchok, (01) 5522307

## MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



# MUSIC



## Jay Sean live,

Book tickets now to listen to British singer and songwriter Jay Sean perform live in Kathmandu.  
28 June, 7 am onwards, Black Religion, Kathmandu,

## Saturday Night Live,

Sway to the rhythms of alternative rock band Innov8 and spend your weekend with friends and family.  
30 June, 6:30-9:30 pm, Ai-La Lounge, Restaurant, Kumarijati, 9801018683



## Friday jazz,

Tap to the beats of jazz this weekend. The renowned Jackowacko trio will be performing.  
16 June, 7 pm onwards, Places Restaurant and Bar, Free entry, (01) 4700413



## Musical tribute,

Kamero will be playing rap metal, rap rock and alternative metal songs as a tribute to Rage Against the Machine & Tool.  
8 July, 2-5 pm, Purple Haze Rock Bar, Thamel, 9841539392



## Fête de la Musique,

Celebrate this year's International music day by participating in the annual Fête de la Musique where various artists will be performing.  
23 June, 3-10 pm, Alliance Française Kathmandu, Free entry

# DINING



## Asian time,

Experience the flavours and diversity of Asian cuisine at the ongoing Asian Food Promotion. Nasi Goreng, gado gado salad, tum tim grob and mango sticky rice are the major attractions.  
12-20 June, 6:30-10 pm, The Café, Hyatt Regency, Rs 2,000 per person  
9802050429, [www.hyatt.com](http://www.hyatt.com)

## Pauline's Garden,

A perfect place to enjoy the sunset and sip on a happy hour cocktail. Buy one cocktail and get one free on Thursdays.  
Baluwatar, Aaneek Marg, (01) 441537

## Café Déjà Vu,

Spend an evening at this budget restaurant that offers more than six types of momos. Try chicken kurkure.  
Naxal, (01) 4428829

## Lakpas' chulo,

Offering a modest selection of recipes from around the world. Quiet and warm ambience.  
Jhamisikhel, (01) 5542986



## Around the Corner,

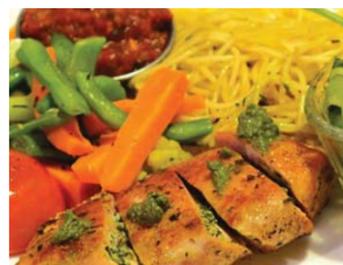
Spend an evening for a dine-in-the-nature experience. The homely environment at this full service restaurant adds flavours to your food.  
Bansbari (Inside The Standard Nursery), 9861631197

## Koto,

Japanese cuisine of the highest quality, served with meticulous attention; food fanatics will find themselves in a haven for sashimi and tempura.  
Lakeside or (01) 5542936, Pulchowk or (01) 4220346, Darbar Marg (01) 4220346

## Le Trio,

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



## La Bella Cafe,

Let Italian cuisine tease your palette this weekend. A place to go for good portions of food.  
Chaksibari Marg, Thamel, (01) 4700078

## 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

# GETAWAY



## Chhaimale Resort,

Enjoy the beauty of nature and a peaceful weekend. Perfect for BBQs, picnics and family hangouts. *Dakshinkali*, (01) 4628121, 9851181409

## Monsoon madness,

Head down to Pokhara and enjoy an exclusive two nights, three days package with Shangri-La Village Resort.  
Pokhara, Rs 6,299 per person  
(01) 4420252 / 9861388277

## Gokarna Forest Resort,

A resort to relax your breathing and encourage meditation, just a 20-minute drive from Kathmandu *Gokarna*, (01)4451212, [info@gokarna.net](mailto:info@gokarna.net)



## Club Himalaya,

For amazing mountain views and refreshing weekend escapades, special packages available for Nepalis and expatriates.  
Nagarkot, 4410432

## 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

## Pataleban Vineyard Resort,

Japanese-influenced eco-resort with great views, jungle walks, and picnics.  
Chisapani, Kathmandu, 9841679364



## Shivapuri Heights Cottage,

Book for a walk and lunch around Budanilkantha to escape the hustle of the city. Enjoy some quiet family time or a massage or opt to stay overnight at this cottage. Advanced booking recommended.

## The Last Resort,

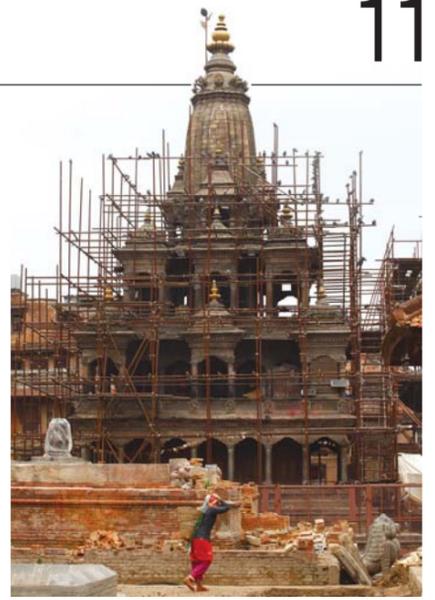
Test your limits with canyoning, hiking, rock climbing, rafting, mountain biking, bungee jumping.  
Bhotekosi, Sindhupalchok, (01)4700525/1247

## Mango Tree Lodge,

Culture walks, rafting in the Karnali, wildlife exploration, and jungle safari at Bardia National Park.  
Bhetani, Bardia, (084)402008, [info@mangotree lodge.com](mailto:info@mangotree lodge.com).



BIKRAM RAI



GOPEN RAI

# Piece by piece

Like a 3D jigsaw puzzle, Patan Darbar Square is coming together again

SAHINA SHRESTHA

It started within hours after the earthquake struck two years ago. As if in fire-drill mode, the Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT), along with Patan's local community, immediately went into action to salvage precious religious objects from the ruins of fallen temples.

Volunteers collected carved wooden columns, stone and metal figures of deities, even the bronze statue of Yog Narendra Malla that had toppled, and put them in the Patan Museum courtyard for safekeeping.

Two years after the earthquake, the monuments of Patan Darbar Square are encased in steel scaffolding, awaiting careful restoration and rebuilding.

"If the funds come in on time and there are no bureaucratic hurdles and controversies, the monuments here can be rebuilt in three years," says KVPT's Rohit

Ranjitkar, hinting that it can be a big 'if'.

While the debate between the purists and modernists delays reconstruction of other monuments in the Valley, restoration in Patan is in full swing. Architects are clear about preserving the integrity of the historical configuration while ensuring seismic strengthening, introducing modern materials only where and when necessary.

"The idea is to reconstruct in a way that ensures human safety. If introducing a small metal nail ensures that the monument will last longer, why not do it?" asks Ranjitkar. "Conservation is always controversial but we need to move forward instead of wasting time splitting hairs."

With the help of donors and the local community, KVPT has repaired the statue of Yog Narendra Malla and installed it back on its stone pedestal. It has repaired the east wing of Sundari Chok, which had collapsed in the earthquake, and work is underway to complete the interior layout of the exhibits of the museum by September.

The upper part of the North Taleju Tower, which was destabilised by the quake, will be repaired in two months. While the structural consolidation for the interior is completed, the team is working on completing the bronze *shikhara* finial.

"Many sections needed to be replaced as they were missing or not historically accurate because they had not been properly restored in previous renovations," Ranjitkar explains.

For monuments that were completely destroyed, like the South and North Mani Mandap at the entrance to the Mangahiti, the Hari Shankar Temple and the oldest temple in the square, the Char Narayan, KVPT first studied the foundations to check if they would be safe to build on. In the South Mani Mandap, the team rebuilt the foundation using lime *surki* mortar, and in the North strengthened the foundation with a brick masonry padding. The foundation of the Char Narayan temple was found intact and its foundation replaced by brick work.

The Krishna Temple and Vishveshvara Temple did not go down, but the earthquake inflicted serious structural damage. The corner stones on all four sides of the second level of the Krishna



Series coordinated by Alok Siddhi Tuladhar

Temples have to be replaced and the exquisitely carved stonework repaired.

The Vishveshvara temple tilted to the South after the earthquake and although it cannot be straightened, it is being retrofitted. Woodwork on the northwest is now complete, the walls are being reinforced, and the decayed carved wooden columns replaced.

"All the damage was not caused by the earthquake, but the lack of upkeep, but we are using the opportunity to repair them as well," Ranjitkar says.

KVPT has launched a five-year campaign to raise funds for the reconstruction so that lack of money will never be the reason to stop work.

"We will finish our job and move on, but the local community will once more have to take the responsibility of conserving Patan's heritage just like they did in the hours after the earthquake," says Ranjitkar. 🇳🇵



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

Go online for a complete slide overview of ongoing restoration at the Patan Darbar Square.



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# Wonder Woman

It took a long time for this version of DC Comics' iconic *Wonder Woman* to get to the screen, but now that it has, it is a resounding, wonderfully warm hearted, sincere but not naive, funny but not hammy, exciting, fast-paced origin story



**MUST SEE**  
Sophia Pande

that balances really good storytelling, satisfying character development, and action sequences that are breathtakingly good, making you want to stop and rewind to see them again and again.

Directed by Patty Jenkins who made *Monster* (2003), a film that won Charlize Theron an Oscar for Best Actress, *Wonder Woman* is proof that super-hero(ine) films can be helmed just as well by women, a fact that was seriously doubted by the male decision-makers that run Hollywood. Now,

with the inarguable success of this fun, memorable film, one can but hope that more will follow, directed by women, and starring women. The reasoning is simple: if women go to films about men, and made by men, why wouldn't men also go to films about women, and directed by them? Are we supposed to be void of even that little empathy?

To get back to *Wonder Woman* though, all I can say is, the film is utterly elevated by the astonishing performance of Gal Gadot, who seems to have been born to play this beloved character. Gadot has, in the past, been very noticeable, mainly due to her incredible, feisty loveliness in some of the *The Fast and the Furious* films, and in her first turn as Wonder Woman in the execrable *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* (2016); one of the only things good in that film was the appearance of Gadot as Diana Prince aka Wonder Woman.

We learn of how Wonder

Woman came to be the defender of humankind in the first half of the film, which is also the most riveting. Wonder Woman, or Diana, Princess of the Amazons, lives on the island Themyscira, hidden from the world, placed there by Zeus to save us from the bellicose Ares, his evil son.

The Amazons are fierce warriors, but also filled with compassion, veiled from the world, but training faithfully for the day they are called upon. When Steve Trevor (Chris Pine) crashes near the island during World War II, Diana rescues him, and so begins her journey to enter the often-cruel world that we live in today.

Diana's life on Themyscira is exceptionally well defined, populated by scenes of breathtaking beauty of the Amazons in combat training, and setting up Diana's relationships with her mother, Queen Hippolyta (Connie Nielsen), and her aunt General Antiope (Robin Wright) who teaches her to be the phenomenal, true-hearted warrior that she is. The rest of the film is great, but this introductory chapter is golden.

This is a film that is as good as action movies get, slightly long but worth your time. At the end of it, you, and everyone around you will be captivated by Gadot; she is a star that shines so bright, you can't take your eyes off of her.



Watch trailer online

nepalimes.com

**HAPPENINGS**



BIKRAM RAI

**SAY CHEESE:** Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and leaders of three major parties with leaders of the Madhes-based RPN at Singha Durbar on Wednesday. On Wednesday, Deuba offered to postpone local elections in Province 2 (see page 1).



GOPEN RAI

**SEE YOU SOON:** President Bidya Bhandari leaves for Switzerland to attend the Global Employment Summit on Tuesday. Vice-president Nanda Kishore Pun on left.



EMBASSY OF INDIA

**LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR:** Indian ambassador Manjeev Singh Puri calls on Deputy Prime Minister and Education Minister Gopal Man Shrestha to discuss further expansion and strengthening of bilateral relations in Kathmandu on Wednesday.



RAAMESH KOIRALA

**HE HAS A HEART:** 'Serial killer' Charles Sobhraj poses for a photo on Monday after a successful heart surgery at Gangalal Hospital in Kathmandu performed by surgeon Raamesh Koirala (left) who tweeted this picture after the operation.



**JACK-KNIFE:** Nawayug Shrestha of Nepal's football team during the AFC Asian Cup qualifying match against Yemen at Halchok Stadium on Tuesday. Nepal was held to a goalless draw.

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Tulsipur : 082-562575

# Not free, nor fair

Centre for Investigative Journalism, 12 June

Phase One of the local elections has been hailed 'ground-breaking' for the large number of women and Dalits elected, but some Dalit communities in Bajhang can only dream of being able to vote freely, let alone run for office.

During the 1997 local elections, some 35 Dalit families of Kailash VDC of Bajhang, voted for the RPP's contender for Chairman. The Dalit vote played a vital role in the RPP's victory, and infuriated non-Dalit supporters of the Nepali Congress and CPN-UML.

In retaliation, the Dalits were not only socially excluded, some 120 families were deprived of the customary practice of getting the traditional *khala* grain received in return for services rendered to their landlords, thus putting their survival at stake. Shivu Kami, who led the Dalit community in favour of the RPP during the election, says, "We regretted casting our vote as per our landlord's will. Non-Dalits manhandled us, misbehaved with us. We could not even walk freely in the village any more."

Kami said Dalits were forced to touch the feet of the higher castes, honouring them for being their guardians. "The higher castes were gracious enough to forgive us by accepting our



**Almost all Dalits are financially poor and are glued to the traditional belief that non-Dalits are their rulers. Therefore, they do not want to disappoint their landlords while casting votes.**

Afilala Okheda  
Lawmaker

assurances we wouldn't repeat the mistake," he said sarcastically.

Interestingly, 16 years later during the Constituent Assembly (CA) elections, the majority of Dalits in Kailash VDC, still could not vote freely because of fear of punishment. Indeed, 18 Dalit families of nearby villages were thrashed for defying political pressure and not voting for NC and UML candidates. Among them was Giri Damai, now 62, who recalls: "They threatened to

chase us out and demolish our houses."

The issue was partially resolved by some non-Dalits of a neighbouring village. This time, Dalits are still fearing similar harassment. "Let's see what happens during this election because we know one or the other party is sure to intimidate us," says Padam Damai.

The underlying reasons why Dalit voters are not free is because they represent such an important vote bank, but half the 22,194 Dalit people in the district are illiterate, 1,683 Dalit families are landless and 1,063 families are homeless.

Of the landless Dalits, 2,848 are classified as Haliyas (bonded labourers) by the District Land Revenue Office. Many families have been in servitude for generations and are vulnerable because the land on which they built their houses belong to non-Dalits.

Lawmaker Afilal Okheda says, "Almost all Dalits are financially poor and are glued to the traditional belief that non-Dalits are their rulers. Therefore, they do not want to disappoint their landlords while casting votes."

For 65-year-old Chakhudi Damai, elections have always brought trouble. "Whoever wins is not a matter of concern for us. After all, we are always victimised, elections have no

meaning for us," she says.

In the 2013 CA elections, NC and UML cadres clashed at the voting centre in Chainpur as each side tried to snatch ballot papers from the Badi community, which had been wined and dined by both parties in exchange for votes. This time, too, alcohol is flowing freely as parties try to win Dalit votes.

Former Dalit representative of Bajhang, Dharmaraj Bi Ka, asks: "How can we expect Dalits to cast their votes in a free and fair manner when they don't own the land on which their houses are built?"

Even non-Dalits who are

poor are similarly intimidated by landlords to whom many are indebted. More than 14,000 out of 34,000 families in Bajhang live below the poverty line in Bajhang.

Says Birendra Bahadur Singh of the District Coordination Committee: "A feudal culture still prevails. I have seen several instances of well-off families coercing the poor to vote according to the will of the rich."

CDO Keshav Bahadur Thapa says only self-reliance will guarantee free elections: "People cannot exercise their voting rights freely until and unless they stop relying on others for food."

**Abhisek Shahi** in Bajhang



Rabindra Manandhar in *Nepal*, 10 June

**QUOTE OF THE WEEK**



**"The government has turned the Election Commission into its puppet."**

RPP Chair Kamal Thapa after the government decided to postpone local elections in Province 2 for a fourth time.



## Ecole Française Internationale de Katmandou

The International French School of Kathmandu (EFIK) celebrates

# 30

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# Modern-day

The practice of Kamalari was outlawed 10 years ago, but the traditional system of bonded labour still exists in other forms



**HOME WORK:** Sharmila Tharu, 21, has been working as a domestic helper since she was five, but she is now determined to make a better life for herself by studying hard and striking off on her own to open a beauty parlour.



PICS: SHREEJANA SHRESTHA

## Domestic dignity

Mina Shrestha (*left*) never feels ashamed to tell people she is a domestic worker. With 10 years of experience as a household help, she is proud of being the breadwinner of her family of three.

"I am happy to be known as a domestic worker despite its negative connotation, there is dignity in work," says Shrestha, 38, who helps out part-time in two houses in Kathmandu, earning over Rs 13,000 a month.

Shrestha launched her career after separating from her husband, and moving to Kathmandu from Chitwan. She now lives in a rented flat with her son while her

21-year-old daughter recently completed secondary school and works in Jordan.

"My daughter is already independent and my son is studying. Isn't that great?" she adds with a smile. Shrestha considers herself lucky to have found good employers who have now realised the value of domestic workers, and started treating them better.

It wasn't always that way, she notes, advising others wanting to get into this line of work to be assertive. She also suggests that training centres be created for domestic workers so that they have the skills needed to be able to bargain for good salaries, in Nepal or abroad.



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# domestic slaves

SHREEJANA SHRESTHA

Sharmila Tharu was five years old when she left her village hometown in Bardiya district, with her family's blessings. They believed she was going to a better life, one where she would attend a decent school, receive good food and get a monthly salary for 'helping' a family in Nepalganj with household chores.

But when she got there, the little girl had to literally work like a slave. She had to rush home from school during tiffin breaks to finish household chores.

"I used to cook, wash dishes and clothes, clean the house and everything else," recalls Sharmila, now 21 (pictured, left).

Under the traditional Kamalari system, legally abolished in 2006, girls from the Tharu community in western Nepal were kept in bonded servitude. Yet, many girls are still kept as virtual slaves by well-off families in the name of educating them. Although the children are sent to school, they are treated as domestic workers once they return home.

Sharmila followed the same daily grind for 13 years but never

got her promised salary, except for occasional bus fare to see her family in Bardiya. She says she didn't have the option to fight for her rights as her own family was too poor, and she desperately wanted to study.

Good food and nice clothes were less important than education for Sharmila, but there were times when she went to bed hungry and didn't have proper clothes. She had chronic ear infection for many years, but was never treated and her hearing is partially impaired.

Sharmila left the employer's house two years ago after secondary school, and came to Kathmandu to find a job as a domestic worker. She wanted to continue her studies too, but life was even worse in the capital.

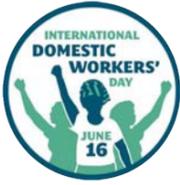
"I became an untouchable after I came to Kathmandu," she says. "I had separate dishes and my own place to eat." Her monthly salary was Rs 2,000 for working more than nine hours a day.

"It is illegal to keep children under the age of 14 as domestic workers," says Tarak Dhital of the Central Child Welfare Board. "Child labour is illegal but it is socially accepted that children, mainly girls, are being exploited as domestic workers. This is a modern form of the Kamalari

system."

Although Nepal has ratified the International Labour Organisation Convention 182, pledging to prohibit and eliminate all forms of child labour, the practice is still rampant in Nepal. It is estimated that more than 200,000 people toil as domestic workers in the country, more than 40% of them children. Many are often exploited physically, but their stories remain unheard.

Sharmila Tharu's tale has a happy ending. After becoming a member of the GEFONT union, she found a job that pays Rs 8,000 monthly with free food and a place to stay. She is even taking beautician training in her spare time, and plans to continue her studies and open her own beauty parlour in future. 



On International Domestic Workers' Day, 16 June, a *Nepali Times* video tells the story of Sharmila Tharu, who was forced to become a domestic worker at age five, and 15 years later is still a household helper. The practice of Kamalari was abolished in 2006, but this form of modern-day bonded slavery persists in Nepali society.

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

## Regulatory hole

The demand for domestic workers in Nepal, mainly in urban areas, is growing faster than ever because of the increasing mobility of women and rapid urbanisation. Because of the increase in double-salary households, there is a high demand for caregivers, babysitters and household help, resulting in child labour, forced labour, exploitation and even slavery.

"The domestic labour deficit often results in child labour. To curb this, we need a regulatory body," says Prashant Dangol of Active Domestic Workers Consultancy, which was the first service provider of its kind in Nepal when it started six years ago. It used to receive 50 requests a month for domestics, now it has more than doubled and the company cannot keep up with demand.

Workers placed through the agency get a monthly salary of Rs 8,000 for working eight hours a day and Rs 3,500 for part-time (two hours daily). However, more than half the demand goes unmet. "The deficit will remain until there is standardisation of salary through a national regulatory body. Children will continue to fall prey to child labour," says Dangol.

A proposed amendment to Nepal's Labour Code includes regulation of domestic workers. It is the first time a Nepali law has addressed domestic workers, but rights activists say it may take years to finalise. In the absence of regulations, arrangements between domestic workers and employers are mostly informal which means domestic workers remain hidden.

"Domestic workers continue to be an invisible force and their contribution to the economy is not counted, unlike remittances," says Milan Dharel from the NGO, Swatantrata Abhiyan, which works for the rights of domestic workers. Registration of domestic workers, a minimum wage, weekend leave, social security, contracts and health insurance are some of the major needs.

Dharel adds: "Cases of abuse of Nepali domestic migrants in destination countries make headlines almost every day, but the conditions of domestic workers in Nepal do not make news."

## Project Noah

### The Betterment of Humanity

Roughly one in ten people worldwide lack access to safe drinking water. Climate change threatens to exacerbate this problem by fuelling drought in vulnerable regions. At present, the planet's population is set to grow substantially and global temperatures to rise steadily. This adds further uncertainty to the supply of fresh water. This is where Project Noah's mission to supply clean drinking water to the underprivileged communities comes into action.

Project Noah started in 2013 with seed capital



from the Rockefeller Foundation, Cisco Systems Foundation and three individual

philanthropists continuing the founders' vision. Their goal is to embark on a social mission to drive change on a global scale



by applying new, innovative thinking to formulate a solution for the underprivileged, excluded and impoverished people of the world.

Project Noah has been involved in various community projects in Nepal, Thailand and in Cambodia. In Nepal they are investing USD \$500 000 in building Children's Home for the orphanages, supplying clean water filter systems to the underprivileged community all over Nepal. On 6th May 2017 Project Noah opened the water filter system in Gorkaneshwar,



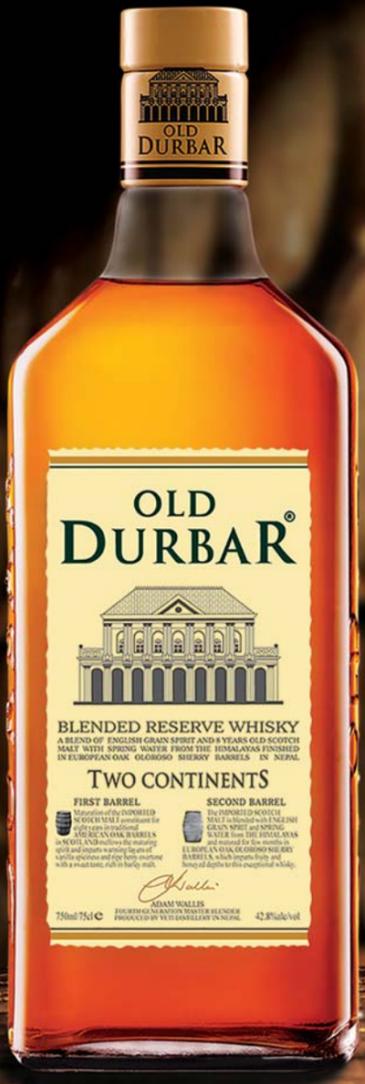
Jorpati, Nepal for about 200 families, another clean water project on 7th May in Padmai Ga shall Choiling School in Gorkanath Nepal. Our aim is to build 100 water filter systems in Nepal.

Project Noah's goal is to use the latest technology to extract water from the atmosphere to provide clean drinking water in remote villages where water is a scarce resource. Turbine or wind powered water extraction from atmosphere can supply about 11 gallons of water per day while solar powered system can supply about 10 gallons per day, depending on the humidity.

More than 600 million people lack regular access to clean drinking water on a daily basis and by 2030, half of humanity will live in areas where the demand for water outstrips the available supply. Project Noah is continually innovating and formulating a solution for the underprivileged, excluded and impoverished people of the world.



# ELEVATE YOUR EXPECTATIONS



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## All in our stars

Unlike some other parts of this paper, we don't make anything up on the last page. No siree, our news is fake so calling it 'fake news' would be an oxymoron (Latin: 'oxy' = bull; 'moron' = shit-ass). So, ipso facto, inter alia and in flagrante delicto: If fake news is already fake, then it would be logical to assume that the double negative means this column is actually totally factual.



Jokes aside, the oldest rule in the world's second-oldest profession is that we journalists shouldn't make anything up unless it is an emergency, in which case we qualify those sentences with the all-purpose adverb (or is it a gerund?) 'allegedly'. Eg: 'Newspapers allegedly tell the truth and nothing but the truth, so help us God, in case you exist, but just as a precaution, even if you don't.'

Unfortunately, the sad fact is that us presstitutes have been such compulsive liars throughout human history that even when we finally get around to telling it like it is and let the tortillas fall where they may, no one will believe us. Which is why The Ass found the page 1 news item in Thursday's paper that Sub-Prime Minister Dubya IV is delaying moving to his official residence in Balu Water because he is still waiting for the Royal Astrologer to give him an exact auspicious date and time, hard to believe.

Like a lot of you loyal customers, I thought that item was fake news. But apparently it is deadly serious, Comrade Brave Lion has been advised by scientists at NASA (Nepal Academy of Science and Astrology) to wait until the Moon is in the seventh house and Jupiter is aligned with Mars in the Age of Aquarius.

"Since all the nine planets are in alignment with the Prime Minister's constellation, it will be smooth sailing for him after these initial difficulties," Astrologer General Angiras Neupane told a packed press conference. The fatal flaw in the National Soothsayer's reading of the prime minister's zodiac, however, is that astronomers have discovered that there is actually a tenth planet so the prediction may be somewhat off. In addition, Nepali students have just assembled Nepal's first mini satellite to be put into orbit on an Indian rocket — which

means there is yet another heavenly body besides Miss Nepal that astrologers will have to take into account in their calculations.

The news item also mentioned that the Astrologer General is working with interior decorators at Singha Durbar to make sure that the Prime Minister's spatial geometry is in harmony with the universe. But since Dubya is walking a tightrope balancing the geo-strategic interests of India and China, he is torn between using Vastu or Feng Shui, fearing one or the other neighbour will be ticked off.

The Ass' advice: Sit facing North when receiving visitors from China and hide under the table when receiving dignitaries from India.



The Ass

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