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## The unshakeable

145 days, and counting: that is the cumulative time Govinda KC has survived without food and water during his 11 hunger strikes against six different governments in the past five years.

The main demand that KC raised in his first hunger strike in 2012 remains the same: enact a strong law and make sweeping reforms in medical education. Every government has given in to the 60-year-old crusader,

but only to trick him into signing deals that are never implemented.

After KC's fifth hunger strike, the Kedar Bhakta Mathema Commission was formed to shape the Nepal Medication Education Bill. The surgeon had to go on another fast-unto-death to force the government to table it.

The bill was finally registered in Parliament last year, but businessmen-cum-MPs have tried

to water it down by registering as many as 276 amendments. If the bill is altered, it will perpetuate the commercialisation of medical education that impacts the affordability and accessibility of health care in Nepal.

All MPs who have invested in

for-profit medical colleges have the blessings of the top political leaders in all major parties. This is the reason KC has had to risk his life over and again.

KC's representatives and a government negotiation team had made no headway as of Thursday press time. He has survived up to 24 days in the past, but this time his health is deteriorating faster. Dibya Singha, a doctor monitoring KC, told *Nepali Times* on Thursday: "He may not last as long this time."

**ALTERNATIVE  
CURRENT  
EDITORIAL  
PAGE 2**



GOPEN RAI

## TOO YOUNG TO MARRY

Nearly half of all marriages in Nepal are between couples under 18 years of age. Despite laws and a doubling of the female literacy rate, the average age of marriage is not rising. But child brides and grooms are now themselves spreading awareness against the practice.

BY SONIA AWALE

PAGE 8-9



WORLD VISION



BFBS GURKHA

## World-wide waves

After 65 years of broadcasting, Gurkha Radio still links Nepal's soldiers with families back home

BY SHREEJANA SHRESTHA

PAGE 7

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# ALTERNATIVE CURRENT

When established political parties discredit themselves through chronic mal-governance and incompetence, there is either a mass movement for regime change or we see a rise of an alternative political force.

In Nepal we have seen outlier politicians and protest candidates even in Panchayat-era elections. However, in the post-conflict decade the three-party cartel used *bhagbanda* to perpetuate its power, and reformists could not break the stranglehold.

Although they did not win any significant seats in local elections so far, the Bibeksheel Nepali and Sajha parties did not do badly, especially in Kathmandu Valley where they separately tried to capitalise on the frustration of the capital’s residents with unaccountable municipalities that had allowed the city to become unlivable.

In his fortnightly column (*Influencing the influencers*, #868) in this paper two weeks ago, Dinkar Nepal laid out the reasons why Bibeksheel and Sajha should combine forces. That op-ed was prescient: within a week the two parties did indeed unite. Ujwal Thapa of Bibeksheel and Rabindra Mishra of Sajha saw the writing on the wall, but what convinced them was the calculation that if the separate votes of their parties were added up, there was a strong possibility that alternative forces would have grabbed a couple of mayoral seats.

After splitting from the Maoists,

Baburam Bhattarai named his party the New Force and positioned it as an alternative political actor.

New Force did not win any municipality or village council, even in Bhattarai’s own Gorkha constituency. All three parties had nearly identical political manifestos, and if the former Maoist ideologue had given up his rigidity and renounced support of violence, the three parties could have merged.

Daily headlines in Nepali newspapers (*picture, below*) present exposes of massive and widespread corruption in government, the civil service and para-statal, all linked to an entrenched rent-seeking system: Billions owed by businesses in tax forgiven in return for kickbacks, a caretaker Prime Minister distributes Rs170 million to party faithful in his last weeks in office, Nepal Oil Corporation and its political masters pocket millions in kickbacks in land deals.

The challenge for the Bibeksheel Sajha Party now is to channel public anger into swing votes in forthcoming national elections and emerge as a credible fifth force. With a proper strategy, it could even be a third force. Public opinion polls have shown voters are more interested in the day-to-day struggle for survival, jobs, education and health than in populist nationalism. They are wise enough to see through speeches and grandstanding by blame-throwers and buck-passers in the main parties.



## GUEST EDITORIAL

IAIN PAYNE AND BINAYAK BASNYAT

# Federalism in jeopardy

Two years after Nepal’s 2015 Constitution established federalism, the country is now challenged with how to operationalise the federal structure. The latest fault line is the way in which revenue will be shared among local, provincial and central governments.

In Nepal’s federal structure, power is assigned to three governments — local, provincial and central — each of which has autonomy to raise and spend revenue. However, the legislative framework for the assignment of revenue was not put in place prior to local government elections, which has resulted in a confusing mixture of claims and counterclaims emanating from old and emergent power centres. Consequently, continued progress in successful implementation of the federal provisions of the 2015 Constitution is in jeopardy.

The Natural Resources and Fiscal Commission Bill and the Inter-Governmental Fiscal Transfer Bill were tabled in parliament on 7 July. These are crucial for the management of public finance in the federal structure, overseeing revenue distribution among the three governments. However, the bills give the central government an increased share of the proceeds of national revenue collection, at the expense of local governments.

After strong public criticism, lawmakers are now trying to amend the Inter-Governmental Fiscal Transfer Bill, which will regulate the distribution of resources between local, provincial and central governments. Reducing local government’s share of the revenue generated from hydropower and natural resources may seem insignificant in the context of the nation’s total income but in 2016-2017 royalties from mining, hydropower and forestry accounted for less than 0.5% of central revenue collections. In the grand scheme of

things, these royalties may not prove to be significant for local budgets, which can be subsidised by central grants. What is significant is the way in which these latest developments demonstrate yet another barrier put up by centrist forces to maintain the status quo and derail attempts to share power beyond Kathmandu.

With successful local elections after two decades in six of the country’s seven provinces, hopes are high that local governments will deliver on their mandates. However to do this, local governments must not only be politically empowered but also be sufficiently resourced. Autonomy only comes when local governments are able to raise their own revenue and set their own budgets.

Under the Constitution, the central government retains all major revenue sources such as income taxes and VAT. Provincial and local governments are assigned comparatively low-yielding revenue sources such as property and vehicle taxes. Where subnational governance systems are required to be built from the ground up, and revenue-raising potential vary greatly from province to province, this design is appropriate. Local governments should not be expected to raise most of their own revenue. Gaps will need to be filled by intergovernmental fiscal transfers. This in itself is not a cause for alarm, but what should concern us is that political forces in Kathmandu once again are manipulating legislation to prevent the sharing of power.

**Iain Payne** is a Colombo Plan Nepal Fellow and **Binayak Basnyat** is a program associate at The Asia Foundation in Kathmandu.

A longer version of this piece is in the *In Asia* blog: [www.asiafoundation.org](http://www.asiafoundation.org)

Times.com

## ONLINE PACKAGES



### MARRIED YOUNG

Nearly half of marriages in Nepal are of girls below 18. This is not just a social but also an economic burden on the country. The good news is that former child brides and grooms are now spreading awareness against the practice. Watch a video of one such couple married when young, and a complicated early pregnancy.



### FINANCIAL FREEDOM

Nepali women being trafficked abroad gets big headlines, but an increasing number are being trafficked domestically for sex work. Anti-trafficking groups have found a tool to both prevent trafficking and to help impart life skills for rescued women. Go online to watch this uplifting video of how at-risk women have found jobs and financial security.

**TERRIFIC PIECE**

Such a nice spread, Alton Byers, and a terrific and important piece (*‘High water’*, Alton C Byers, #869). Thank you for sharing this, and to *Nepali Times* for running it.

**JACKBOOT OF AN OLIGARCHY**

‘... Relatively large international footprint’ (*‘Himalayan rumblings’*, Nishchal N Pandey, #869)? Seriously? Perhaps for being a provider of slave labour for the rest of the world? The international community have been carefully watching the shameful neglect of earthquake victims who have been abandoned, a constitution not honoured and the shooting of citizens who protest for justice. This is the relatively large jackboot of an Oligarchy.

■ Nepal lacks the leadership to bring India and China together. There is no Nepali diplomat alive that could mediate and shuttle between Beijing and Delhi. This rift can get worse and last longer.

■ The Cabinet should veto Deuba’s desire to go to Delhi (*‘Equidistance or asymmetry’*, Editorial, #869). Save the tax payer’s money.

**DOGMANDU**

Not to sound judgmental at all about the great work Shreejana Thakuri and other animal rights activists are doing (*‘Woman’s best friend’*, Sonia Awale, #869). But priorities are a bit misplaced when there is so much unmet human need and discrimination to address in Nepal? Canine care is necessary but more urgent is to fight for social justice and human equality.

**FAIR & HANDSOME**

As an ass-piring ass, let me congratulate The Ass for his imagination in naming different kinds of brand names for Fair and Lovely (*‘Whitewash™’*, Backside, #869). I like Pale Face the best.

## WHAT’S TRENDING



### GoPro Commute

A GoPro video of the daily home-to-work commute of a *Nepali Times* reporter along the Jorpati-Chabahil road got phenomenal online response on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, unleashing lively engagement among readers who found the government at fault for making Kathmandu so unliveable. Visit [nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com) to see for yourself what a ride along Kathmandu’s streets these days feels like.

**Most reached and shared on Facebook**  
(160,629 people reached, 56k views, 206 shares)

### High water

The digital package of the Barun glacial lake outburst flood in April was one of the most popular recent stories on the *Nepali Times* site. If you missed it last week, go online to watch dramatic videos by eye-witnesses to the flashflood triggered by a mountain falling into a lake near Mt Makalu.

**Most popular on Twitter**  
(77 retweets, 112 likes)

**Most visited online page**  
(2,500 views)

### Woman’s best friend

Meet Shreejana Thakuri, who despite personal tragedies, still shelters and cares for dozens of street dogs at her home in Baneshwor. Find out how her expansion plans have been thwarted by a politician.

**Most commented**

## QUOTE TWEETS

**Nepali Times @nepalitimes**  
Report @Himal\_Khabar 10 years after the end of the #war, as many as 72 Maoist leaders have become ministers. <http://bit.ly/2hdxpZW> #Nepal

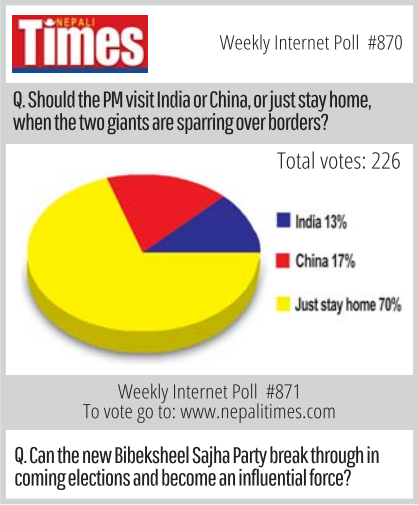
**Kamal Thapa @kamalKThapa**  
For me it doesn’t matter. But my question is where is that revolution, development you promised to us? Is it all forgotten @cmprachanda?

**Nepali Times @nepalitimes**  
#POLL Should the PM visit India or China, or just stay home, when the two giants are sparring over borders?

**Adarsha Tuladhar @Am49T**  
If India is willing to welcome despite the problems he should go ahead. But he should avoid being used for political one upmanship by India.

**Nepali Times @nepalitimes**  
EDITORIAL PM shouldn’t do anything to erode & undermine #Nepal’s independent foreign policy during his #India visit <http://bit.ly/2w5NkvV>

**Dev Rana @SwissNepali**  
.@nepalitimes Agree with the sentiment but has #Nepal’s foreign policy ever really been independent?







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# Unlearning politics

Handover of power to newly-elected local governments has been put on hold for too long, and that is not a good start

Right after they were elected, Nepal's local governments have got sucked into a legal vacuum, exposing the ad hocism of the ruling system. The Self-governance Act hasn't been enacted, heads of local bodies are mostly clueless about their roles.



CONNECTING DOTS  
Dinkar Nepal

The result of all this is that interpretations of the constitution are haphazard. To correct that, interim circulars are issued by ministries without homework. Even orientation sessions by ministries are misleading and self-contradictory.

This lack of accountability and is creating real problems for local governments on the ground. There is now a very real danger that the apathy, fueled by the reluctance to devolve central power, might just kill the little hope for development after two decades of conflict and instability.

The elections were a source of optimism and excitement for the people after a long period of uncertainty. Early signs after voting proved that the optimism was justified. In contrast to the

confusion at the centre, and past apathy at the local level, elected local governments finally promised stability, responsibility and proactive grassroots democracy.

Shisir Khanal of the non-profit Teach For Nepal explained to me this week how much things have changed: "Dealing with government agencies has always been troublesome for organisations like ours. Responsiveness to groups like us is not good in Kathmandu. In contrast, local governments of late are reaching out to us to help them reform public schools."

Apart from inserting trained graduates as fellows into the public school system, which Teach for Nepal has been doing in some districts for the last four years, the new heads of municipalities are also reaching out to the group about improving the quality of education.

When the local bodies took shape, many experts were sceptical. One of the major concerns was the threat of local elite capture of the resources in the new system. This, understandably, is a major concern for any drastic decentralisation effort. The shifting political setting and local autonomy are usually fertile ground for a new eco-system

that reinforces the traditional community imperfections. Replacing centralised corruption with decentralised corruption could in fact sabotage the whole democratic project.

Another grave concern of some of the sceptics was the lack of capacity at the local level to address the needs bestowed on local bodies by the Constitution.

"The hope, enthusiasm and political will is evident, but the capacity at the local level to make policies, to plan and implement projects, isn't adequate to support that zeal," Khanal says.

These are genuine concerns for any nation transitioning into a new system of governance. Our institutions are still weak and, often, we have experienced them crumbling under the might of strong individuals and corrupt interest groups. Similarly, institution building at the local level remains a big challenge.

Rather than streamlining the process of transition to enhance institution building, the ad hocism of rulers is making all these systemic challenges difficult to overcome for local governments. Too many things have been put on hold for too long, and that is not a good start.

Enhancing community-led projects, directly handled by local governments, and accountability

mechanisms that develop into strong local institutions over time are the only ways to ensure that rapid capacity enhancement takes place in the towns and villages so that local strongmen do not abuse new powers.

It is probably time for the national leadership in Kathmandu to unlearn politics.

They must abandon the culture of rewarding inefficiency and pick up some of the commitment to nation building seen in many newly elected local leaders. To channel this passion, motivation and political will at the grassroots into effective local governance and enhance prosperity, we have to move much faster. 🇳🇵

**prabhu BANK**

**BIZ BRIEFS**

### More crops

Food productivity increased by up to 100%, and farmers and businesses earned \$169.4 million under the Knowledge-based Integrated Sustainable Agriculture and Nutrition (KISAN) project, a five-year US Government-supported program that promoted modern farming technologies and private sector investment, the US Embassy says.



### Turkish boosts flights

Turkish Airlines is increasing its Istanbul-Kathmandu-Istanbul service from 4 to 5 flights per week starting 18 September.



The airlines has also launched direct flights to from Istanbul to Phuket in Thailand.

### Qatar to Canberra

Despite the ongoing blockade imposed by its neighbours, Doha-based Qatar Airways has launched flights to Canberra, its fifth destination in Australia. Canberra is one of 18 new destinations announced by the airline for 2017-18.



### Paragon in Nepal

Popular Indian footwear brand Paragon has entered the Nepali market with Prinsa Impex as the authorised dealer. The company will open four showrooms in Kathmandu and offer a wide range of school, party and formal shoes.



**prabhu BANK**

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**ANIMAL LOVE:** Andrew Laurie pursued a passion for rhinos in Chitwan, and for Sancheri.

# Gaida Sahib

Andrew Laurie, Chitwan's Rhino Man, did pioneering research into the endangered animals

We thread our way between the thinning trees along an earthen trail back to Andrew Laurie's research camp near Sauraha on the edge of Royal Chitwan National Park. Not more than a couple of tents and a wood hut, it's Andrew's base for three years whilst studying the behaviour of the greater one-horned rhinoceroses for his Cambridge PhD.



**SO FAR SO GOOD**

Lisa Choegyal

Supported by renowned biologist George Schaller and the loan of a royal elephant, Andrew's study will be hailed as ground-breaking research and the basis for decades of successful rhino management. Known throughout Chitwan as 'Gaida Sahib', his bare feet, solid ankles and pale hairy legs lead me with assured

familiarity down the jungle track – I like following his musty smell and distinctive short-stride gait.

Birds call in the late afternoon and there are comforting scents of hot grass and animal urine, but my mind wanders as we trudge the distance. Andrew has confided that his Tharu friend, Sancheri, is recently pledged in an arranged village marriage by her family. That morning I had seen them together at his camp, a tall striking girl, but perhaps too lanky and defiant for local tastes. Together they speak Tharu, and Andrew has even learned her native coded dialects. Custom dictates that intimates never use each other's given names, and I never heard Andrew utter hers.

"Quick," he whispers, "get up that tree. A rhino is approaching." I hear and smell nothing, but Gaida Sahib is assimilated into jungle rhythms

and not one to be questioned. He helps me climb a strong sapling beside the path and sure enough, a large old male rhinoceros ambles around the corner. His body is marked with scars of ancient feuds, but to my relief he is interested only in his evening river drink – every year people are injured and even killed by rhinos. With a throaty laugh and shy smile, Andrew jumps down and leads me back to camp.

Accompanied by the rattle of the elephant's chain and the clatter of night insects, we rest on his makeshift Sauraha veranda. Chitwan's rhinos are labouriously recorded by name and distinguishing marks on index cards in those pre-computer days. Every blemished ear, damaged tail or nick in the crumpled grey skin is noted. He shows me details of the venerable individual that we have just encountered, and adds another sighting to the hand-written card.

Andrew reckons there are

about 300 rhinos living in Chitwan in 1974, and he has discovered they feed on over 180 plant varieties but mainly on grass of which there are no less than 50 species. To combat threats of poaching and habitat loss, Andrew proposed the translocation of rhinos to other protected areas to spread their risk, a strategy that has successfully safeguarded Nepal's population. With a team of Nepali colleagues, his work has underpinned today's heralded rhino conservation status of almost-zero poaching.

We share a Khukri Rum and Coke and he explains how his Tharu love is doomed. "How can it ever work, Lisa? I have to be realistic. I must do what is best for her." He sighs. "I don't need to tell you how strongly I feel." When Sancheri is married and has a baby, she is convinced that Andrew is part of the boy because of the large flecks of blue in his brown eyes. Andrew arranges

help from visiting American doctors to treat the infant's malformed hands, attributed by the villagers to a total eclipse of the moon.

One winter morning a year or so later we drink tea outside Tiger Tops lodge, gazing across the verdant mosaic of lawn, grasslands, hills and mountains. Andrew is packed, dressed and on his way home to write his thesis. "How did it go?" I turn to him. Reluctantly he admits his farewell was impossibly sad, their mutual longing unabated. "But I'm doing the right thing, aren't I?"

Gaida Sahib divulged his difficulty adapting to Cambridge life after the Tarai jungle. For months he preferred sleeping on the floor, and had to remember to wear shoes and not pee by the roadside. Andrew Laurie was destined for a fine doctorate and a distinguished wildlife career that still takes him all over the world. But he has never come back to Nepal. 🇳🇵



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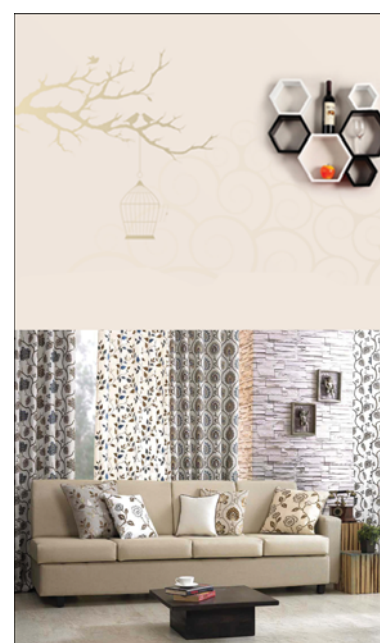
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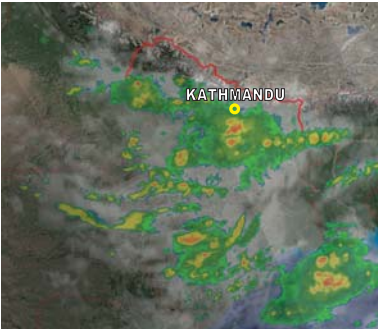


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This satellite radar image of cloud cover and precipitation gives you an idea of the intense monsoonal front lashing northern India and Nepal. The system represents the confluence of the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal arms of the South Asian monsoon, and brings heavy rains as water vapours from the two oceans meet. Expect heavy rain into the weekend. Although the mornings will usually start bright, by afternoon there will be heavy buildup and steady nocturnal showers.

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# World-wide waves

After 65 years of broadcasting, Gurkha Radio still links Nepal's soldiers with families back home

SHREEJANA SHRESTHA

Sixty-five years after it first started broadcasting, Gurkha Radio, which connects Nepali soldiers in the British Army with families back home, is the most listened to of the 18 stations in the British Forces Broadcasting Services (BFBS). Although many families of retired soldiers are now with them in Britain, serving soldiers and others still have relatives back home and the radio links them with news, current affairs and entertainment. Despite social media, its radio programs are required listening for ex-Gurkhas and families all over the world. Gurkha Radio keeps soldiers updated on events in Nepal with a staff of 18 reporters country-wide contributing to news bulletins aired from its Kathmandu station from 5:45am to 11:45pm on weekdays. It also broadcasts from Brunei and the United Kingdom and its programs are re-broadcast through 10 UK radio stations. The British Army sets up a receiving unit when Gurkha soldiers are deployed in Afghanistan or other war zones so that the servicemen can keep in touch with what is happening in Nepal, including their families, and around the world. The unit is dismantled once the mission ends.



PHOTOS: BFBS GURKHA

Gurkha Radio's first broadcast was in 1952, when the service was set up within Dharan Camp, one of the Gurkha recruiting centres in eastern Nepal. The first live broadcast from Kathmandu was in 1986. The British Army also brought out the magazine *Parbate*, written in Roman Nepali script, which is now published in English from Sandhurst. "Gurkha Radio is a low-profile radio with a very specific target audience," says Kathmandu news editor Suman Kharel. "We focus on the activities of the British Gurkha Camps in Lalitpur and Pokhara. The credibility of the service is high among Gurkhas families. Its integrity has not been questioned in the last 65 years." Kharel joined Gurkha Radio after 22 years with BBC Nepali in London, and says his work hasn't really changed: it is still mostly broadcasting news and current affairs. Although his target audience is much smaller, he says the work is equally exciting because it is a cohesive and niche listenership. The only two challenges he faces are fulfilling listeners' requests, because the station broadcasts from three different time zones, and enticing the younger generation to tune in. Gurkha Radio averages 2.5 million connections from 165,000 unique devices in a month. Most listeners are in the UK, US, India, Nepal, Saudi Arabia, Hong Kong and Malaysia. The station's most popular Nepali show is *Pardeshi Ko Sandesh*, where serving Gurkhas send messages to their family members and vice-versa. It's followed by *Kathmandu Ko Saugat* and *Swarnim Sangam*. Because families now prefer to keep in touch through Skype or Facebook, one would think that Gurkha Radio may soon become obsolete, but Kharel doesn't agree: "The future of radio journalism is as bright as it was in the past. Radio will still remain the most popular medium in Nepal for years to come because of our topography, low literacy level and lack of access to the Net and its relatively high cost." 🇳🇵

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**THREE GENERATIONS:** Pampha (*right*) with her grandson, Rhythm. She had married at the age 12, and had eight children. One of them is Kamal (*below, at left*) who himself got married when he was 16 to Rita. After suffering a miscarriage first time, Rita gave birth to their son, Rhythm.

SONIA AWALE

Kamal BK fell in love with 18-year-old Rita and eloped. Little over a year later, the teenager suffered a miscarriage after being rushed to hospital in Dharan. Today, the couple have become activists to convince others like them not to marry young.

Last week, a video went viral on Facebook showing a girl in Rautahat being mercilessly beaten by male family members and for having an affair with a lower-caste boy. The teenage girl did have a relationship with the boy, but only because her parents had promised her in marriage to another family soon as she was born, a practice still prevalent in the Tarai, known as *gaura*.

Salma was 14 when she got married with a boy from her village in Sunsari. Two years later, her husband left her for another girl. Salma doesn't know how to get help and spends her days with her young daughter in her parent's home.

These cases offer examples of why Nepal has the third highest rate of child marriage in Asia: 48.5% of girls here get married before the age of 18, and, according to a Human Rights Watch report, 11% of boys. Despite a doubling of female literacy in the past 20 years, traditional mores and cultural practices persist in Nepal's patriarchal society.

"Child marriage perpetuates poverty, increases school dropout and leads to early pregnancy that could risk both mother and child," says Ramesh Gautam of World Vision Nepal, which takes a multi-dimensional focus to enhancing the capabilities of girls and the community.

Ending child marriage can also help increase family income. A United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) report noted that individuals earn 10% more for every additional year they stay in school. When couples marry

young they are unable to continue studying, which leads to limited livelihood options and affects their productivity.

"Education is the best way to reduce child marriage: it is important to find ways to keep girls in school. Nepal has high school enrolment, but also a high dropout rate among girls, who are 10 times more likely to get married and miss out on education and a career," explains Kristine Blokhuis of UNFPA.

Health impact is the other reason to end the practice. Young girls are more likely to suffer from uterine prolapse and obstetric fistula because of their under-developed reproductive organs. Girls who marry early also face increased domestic violence and psychological trauma.

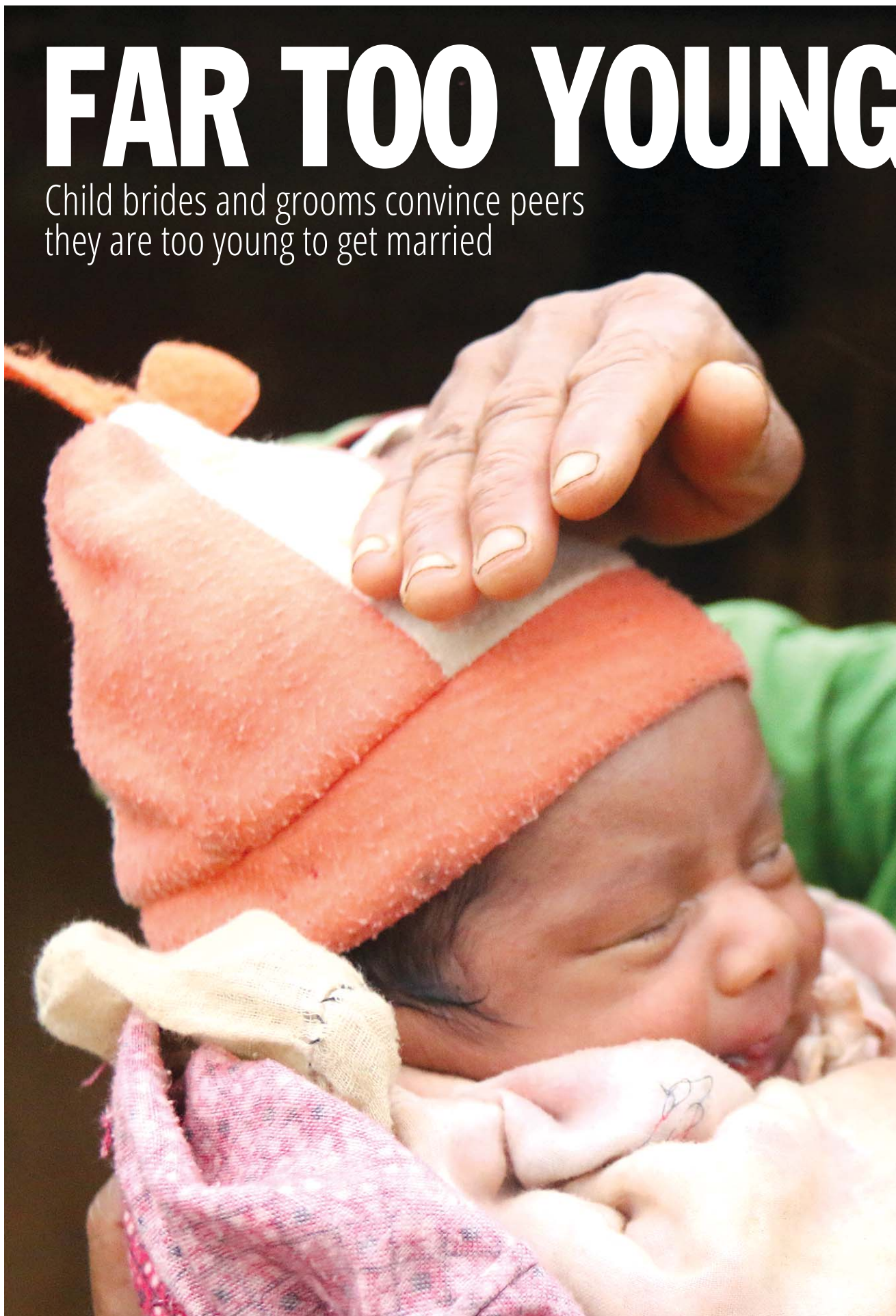
"The primary causes for both the conditions are early marriage and early child bearing, both common in Nepal. Most girls do not know how to get help and are ostracised, forcing them to suffer throughout their life," says Latika Maskey Pradhan at UNFPA.

Nepal outlawed child marriage in 1963 prohibiting it before the age of 20 for both girls and boys. But additional legislation is still needed to make the ban workable, including penalties for marrying too young. The government has set a target of ending underage marriage by 2030, and has drafted guiding principles to enforce the minimum age of marriage. However, activists say they need to lobby for a separate, stronger law if the changes do not address every aspect of child marriage.

"Although the National Code criminalises child marriage, there is no strong provision of punishment so that such practices will be discouraged from a legal point of view," says Gautam. "It is not well defined and is very feeble in terms of severity of the crime. The law is not effective and the government needs to strongly address it."

Besides stronger laws, Blokhuis says greater gender equality and equal opportunities for girls will help curb child marriage.

"It will take time to change traditions and attitudes but we



need to show girls and their parents and communities that they can be something important and valuable in society, and provide them with role model and choices in life," she added.

World Vision Nepal will be launching a five-year campaign against child marriage this month in collaboration with the government. Figures show that child marriage is not just a rural problem: 34% of marriages in cities are of couples below 18. Teenagers begin relationships on Facebook and if their parents disapprove, they elope. There is also a sharp rise in child marriage in earthquake-affected areas.

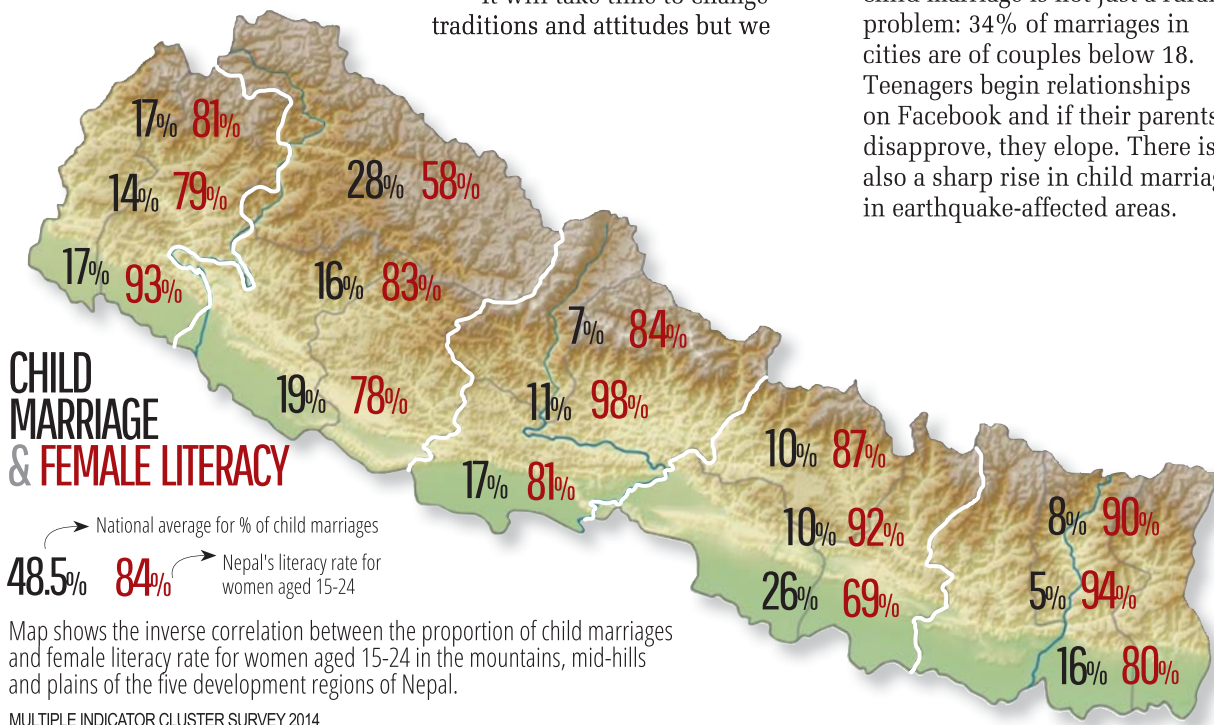
The trend has made sex education and adolescent-friendly services essential, which is why the Ministry of Education is working with UNFPA to integrate information on sexuality into school textbooks.

"It is important to consider both forced and voluntary child marriage when combating it, and employ a multi-sectoral approach where adolescents, the community, private organisations and the government are all involved," says Larina Sthapit of Oxfam. "Laws against child marriage are in place, but periodic review and implementation are needed." 🇳🇵



Watch Kamal BK and his parents talk about his child marriage and its consequences, while his wife Rita shares the pain and doubts she had after losing her first child due to an early pregnancy.

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







PHOTOS: NISSI THAPA



## Child groom fights child marriage

It has been six years since Kamal BK decided to get married when he was just 16. He had fallen in love with Rita who was 18. His parents, who had also married when they were children, did not object much. Rita soon got pregnant and due to complications had to be rushed to Dharan, 200km away from their village in Udaypur, where she suffered a miscarriage.

"I had no idea about child marriage then, but now I know it gives a lot of problems: my wife was constantly sick and I had a hard time managing the household. I learnt the hard way," Kamal told us. Today, the young farmer has become a social mobiliser against child marriage, volunteering to spread awareness in his community.

He says: "I didn't know about the consequences of child marriage. If I had, I wouldn't have married early. Now I have a chance to warn others against under-age marriage. I hope they will listen."

There are few cases of forced child marriage in his village today, but if he fails to convince young couples not to get married he reports the case to the authorities.

Rita didn't face complications in her second pregnancy, and the couple is now learning to take care of their one-year-old son together.

## Not just a social problem, but an economic one

ELIZABETH HANNA SATOW

Child marriage is defined as marriage or union before the age of 18. The negative impact of child marriage on girls in particular is well documented. Compared to those who marry later, girls who marry before the age of 18 tend to become pregnant earlier, they suffer a higher number of complications during their pregnancy and they have a higher maternal mortality rate than those who marry later. Child brides also have a high tendency to drop out of school upon getting married and a higher chance of experiencing domestic violence.

But the impact of child marriage goes far beyond individuals and their families. According to the report *Economic Impacts of Child Marriage*, published by the World Bank and the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) in June 2017, child marriage will cost developing countries trillions of dollars by 2030. Conversely, ending child marriage would have a large positive effect on the educational attainment of girls and their children, contribute to women having fewer children and having those children later in life, and increase women's expected earnings and household welfare.

The analysis suggests that by 2030, gains in annual welfare from lower population growth could reach more than \$500 billion annually. In Uganda, the benefit from reduced fertility would be equivalent to \$2.4 billion, while in Nepal this would be almost \$1 billion. Child marriage is an economic issue as well as a social one.

Though the prevalence of child marriage has decreased around the world, it remains high in many countries. Nepal is among the 10 countries in the world with the highest rate of child marriage and third highest in Asia, after Bangladesh and



**TWO SISTERS:** At 17, Parvati (*right*) was about to be married off when the Village Child Protection Committee stopped the wedding. Her older sister Kamala (*left*) wasn't as lucky, and was married at 15. Both now campaign against child marriage.

India. Over one-third of girls in Nepal (37%) marry before the age of 18 and 10% before the age of 15, according to UNICEF. A 2012 report by World Vision International Nepal, Save the Children and Plan International shows that the prevalence of child marriage varies significantly among Nepal's many ethnic, religious and caste groups. The rate of child marriage is highest among marginalised and lower-caste communities.

The government has taken some good steps to reducing child marriage in Nepal, making it illegal in 1963. However, implementation and enforcement of protective policies need to be strengthened. Ending child marriage is a target under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5.3 and 16.2 and the Nepal government has endorsed a National Strategy to End Child Marriage in Nepal by 2030. This is a positive step, but much work needs yet to be done. An action plan to implement the strategy is due, and investment is required to bring about the necessary changes to end the practice in Nepal.

Ending child marriage cannot be done through legislation alone: it needs to be tackled at many different levels.

On 10 August, World Vision, in partnership with the Association of Community Radio Broadcasters Nepal (ACORAB), will launch a five-year campaign to empower children — working closely with government, civil society, the private sector and communities — to bring an end to child marriage in Nepal.

As we embark on this campaign, I invite you to join us in strengthening systems that protect children, raise awareness and challenge harmful practices so that the children of Nepal can look forward to a future where they can fulfil their potential and the potential of this country. 🇳🇵



**Elizabeth Hanna Satow** is the National Director for World Vision International Nepal.



## EVENTS



### Before the flood,

Support bird conservation by participating in a charity dinner and screening of the documentary 'Before the flood'.

11 August, 5pm, Cine De Chef, CTC Mall, Sundhara, Rs3,000  
(01) 4417805, (01) 4420213

### Layering The City,

Save the date to be a part of an exhibition of lithographs and woodcut prints by Bhavika Dugar.

30 July-10 August, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited, (01) 5260607

### Vocal workshop,

Register to learn singing techniques from renowned jazz vocalist Diandra Danieli, hosted by Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory.

5 July-10 August, (01) 5013554  
<http://www.katjazz.com.np/vocal-teacher-diandra-danieli/>

### Obstacle race,

Be adventurous and test your strength at Nepal's first obstacle race.

9 September, 6am, Godavari Football Ground, Rs 1,000, free for ultra run.



### Talks of philosophy,

Discussion on the paper 'Against Time Biases' by philosophers Preston Greene and Meghan Sullivan, published by The University of Chicago Press.

6 August, 5:30-7pm, Yala Mandala, Lalitpur, (01) 5536690

### Art market,

A great platform for artists, designers and producers with unique, contemporary arts, designs and products. The market features a print-making workshop for children above six years.

5 August, 2-6pm, The Yellow House, Sanepa, Bookings: [ange@image-ark.com](mailto:ange@image-ark.com), [nayantara@photocircle.com.np](mailto:nayantara@photocircle.com.np), (01) 5006665



### Comic con in Nepal,

Fans of Marvel, DC, Anime, games and the comic genre are in for a treat. Participate in this event that will host international cosplay artists from Japan, Philippines and India.

9 September, 10am-8pm, Heritage Garden, Sanepa, (01) 5013096



### Artmandu,

Book your seats to participate in a musical event of bands MA and Cycle, from Kathmandu University, and get a taste of folk, traditional ensemble and a rare combination of sound.

14 August, 2-4pm, Sarwanam Theatre, Kalikasthan, Kathmandu, Rs1,000 (pre sale), Rs1,500 (door sale), (01) 4011027

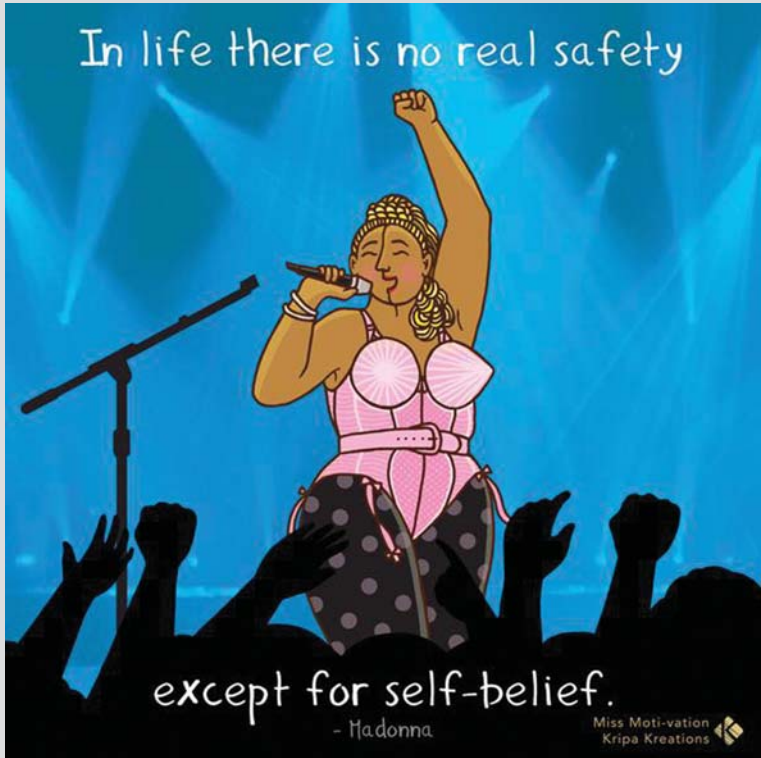
### Hall of memories,

Don't miss an opportunity to see the contemporary paintings of late artist Prashanta Shrestha. Three young artists will be awarded with the Prashanta Scholarship Award 2017.

4-6 August, 11am-6pm, Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal, Kathmandu, 9841211297

## MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



## MUSIC



### Live with Jovan,

Spend the weekend with close friends swaying to the rhythms of Jovan Bhuju.

4 August, 6:30pm onwards, Bricks Café, Kupondole, (01) 5521756

### Gypsy Jazz,

Groove to the tunes of gypsy jazz with Nepali guitar maestro Hari Maharjan.

11 August, 7:30pm onwards, Base Camp: Outdoor Lifestyle, Jhamsikhel, 9841226397

### Classical Kanta,

Warm up your weekend listening to a classical music performance by Nepali fusion trio Kanta dAb dAb.

4 August, 7-10pm, Places Restaurant & Bar, Saath Ghunti Marga, Thamel, (01) 4700413

### Phatcowlee,

Catch bass guitarist Rajan Shrestha perform electronic numbers from the EP launched recently under his new project Phatcowlee.

4 August, 8pm, Base Camp: Outdoor Lifestyle, Jhamsikhel, Rs300, 9841226397



### The Axe,

Your favorite band The Axe is going live in Bhaktapur.

5 August, 4-7pm, Madhyapur Thimi, Free entry

### Weekend mania,

Spend the weekend with Squad 3.

5 August, 7pm onwards, Ai La Lounge Restaurant, Kumaripati, Lalitpur, 9801018681

## OUR PICK



Opens in Kathmandu on 11 August

As soon as it premiered in Los Angeles last week, this action movie was heralded as having sequel potential. Based on the graphic novel 'The Coldest City', the movie is a look back at 1980s Cold War Berlin. As the title character, Oscar winner Charlize Theron plays undercover MI6 agent Lorraine Broughton, who travels to Berlin to investigate the murder of a fellow agent.

## DINING



### Ventures Café,

Stop by for the best fusion menu and all local favourites and enjoy the breezy outdoor seating. A great venue for beer connoisseurs.

Baluwatar, 9851228014

### Monsoon Sundays,

Food connoisseurs can relish a succulent barbeque with a choice of African, Arabic or Mediterranean specialties, along with access to the swimming pool.

23 July onwards, 12:30-3:30 pm, Rs1,999 per person, Hyatt Regency [www.kathmandu.regency.hyatt.com](http://www.kathmandu.regency.hyatt.com)



### Taste of the east,

Tantalise your taste buds with scrumptious dim sums prepared under the guidance of Chinese master chef Dhan Limbu.

12:30-2:30pm and 7-10:45pm, Bao Xuan, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, (01) 4273999, [www.crowneplaza.com/Kathmandu](http://www.crowneplaza.com/Kathmandu).

### 1905,

Heritage boutique suites with garden dining, 1905 Suites and Restaurants is now open for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Bookings open for four boutique suites with promotional rates and offers.

Nagpokhari, Naxal, Information: 9860374450

### Dan Ran,

The best Japanese food this side of the Bagmati. Try one of the bento boxes with a fresh lemonade.

Jhamsikhel, (01)5521027

### Trisara,

With dishes like flambéed prawns, crispy chicken and khao soi, it would be a folly to ignore its aromas.

Lazimpat, (01)4410200

### Café Déjà Vu,

Spend an evening at this budget restaurant offering more than six types of momos. Try chicken kurkure. Good music guaranteed.

Naxal, (01) 4428829



### The Village Cafe,

Authentic Newari food that comes straight from the heart.

Pulchok Road, (01)5540712

## GETAWAY



### Rupakot Resort,

Get pampered in the lap of luxury amid stunning views of the Annapurnas.

Maidan-6, Rupakot, Kaski, (61) 622660 / (01) 4004687 / 9856038043, [www.rupakotresort.com](http://www.rupakotresort.com)

### Mango Tree Lodge,

Culture walks, rafting in the Karnali, wildlife exploration, and jungle safari at Bardia National Park.

Bhetani, Bardia, [info@mangotreelodge.com](mailto:info@mangotreelodge.com)

### Monsoon madness,

A two-day, three-night package exclusively for Nepalis and expatriates. Rs 6,299 net per person on a twin sharing basis.

Shangri La Village Resort, Pokhara, (01) 4420252, 9861388277 / 9804116774 [shangrilavillage@hotelshangrila.com](mailto:shangrilavillage@hotelshangrila.com)

### Gokarna Forest Resort,

A numinous paradise that relaxes you and encourages meditation, just a 20-minute drive away from Kathmandu.

Gokarna, (01)4451212, [info@gokarna.net](mailto:info@gokarna.net)



### Hotel Landmark Pokhara,

For the best views of Phewa Lake. Enrich your stay with cultural performances every evening.

Lakeside Pokhara, (61) 462908, 9851059096

### Club Himalaya,

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

Nagarkot, (01) 4410432



### Shivapuri Heights Cottage,

Book 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.

Budanilkantha, 9841371927 / 9802012245, [info@shivapuricottage.com](mailto:info@shivapuricottage.com)

### Barahi Jungle Lodge,

The first eco-jungle lodge of Chitwan directly overlooks Chitwan National Park. Spa, boutique guest room, individual and two-in-one private villas, including a suite with a private swimming pool.

Megauli, Chitwan, (01) 4429820



***Pheri bhetaunla*, Stewart**

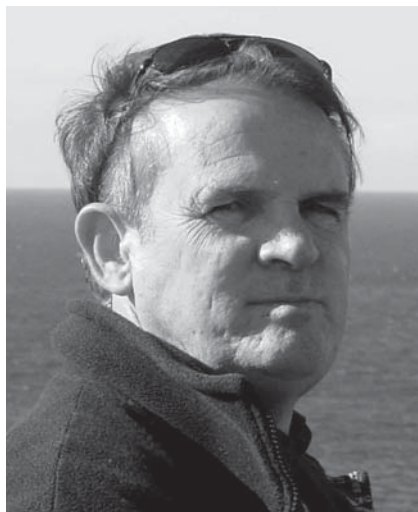
**RUPA JOSHI**

The one memory that sticks in my mind of Stewart McNab is of him climbing uphill to meet a group of women in Bharatpokhari village in Kaski, stopping to chat with every child and woman he met on the way with genuine interest, concern and empathy.

The former Nepal representative of UNICEF died at age 70 in Scotland last week, and it is in the outpouring of love and loss from those who knew, admired and were inspired by him that I rediscovered Stewart. They remember a former colleague, mentor, friend, his wit, good humour and a can-do approach to almost everything.

Stewart approached issues with clarity and a human touch, they remember. He was a fair, honourable, generous, caring, courageous, helpful, approachable, incredibly generous and fun-loving man who was great, not through grand gestures, soaring rhetoric or a lofty position in the organisation, but through his warm humanity, hard work and unswerving commitment to getting things done for children.

He got the best out of people, tapping into every individual's knowledge, experience, creativity and sensitivity, and getting everyone to work together. Stewart was the



**ROYAL COMPANY:** Stewart McNab, who served as UNICEF Nepal Representative in the 1990s, with King Birendra and Queen Aishwarya at a function in Kathmandu in 2000.

ultimate leader, who worked for the upliftment of children and women in all countries he served in, but most so in Nepal.

Stewart first came to Nepal in 1975, three years after UNICEF had set up a proper office in Kathmandu, as a Nutrition Officer. He then went on to head the Health and Nutrition section, and after leading the Bhutan office in the early 90s, was appointed Representative in Nepal in 1998. He spent a total of 14 years in Nepal, turning him into a Nepalophile. This was where he started his family with his wife Di, where he had one of his two daughters, and where he also found a Nepali son. Even after leaving UNICEF, he continued to work through The Nepal Trust as adviser.

Stewart was instrumental in jumpstarting many innovative programs that focussed on empowering women, and giving a voice to children, and ears to adults. He helped plant the seed of decentralisation and local governance through community-based programs, believing that working with local governments would bring positive changes for Nepali children. Decentralised Planning for Children (DPCP) became the bedrock of what has now evolved into Child Friendly Local Governance (CFLG) adopted as a national strategy by the Government in July 2011. The investment in human capital at the local level is paying off as village facilitators, community mobilisers, child club members,

and members of women's groups have been empowered, and have now become deputy mayors, parliamentarians, child rights activists and champions.

Stewart was a team builder, coach and motivator, and got people fired up, excited to do their very best for children. He never had to impose his ideas on the people, office or country – they came to fruition as he rallied his team and cut through the hierarchy.

In the UN's Country Team he helped agency heads to function as a team, taking them all to Achham in 2000 to understand the local situation and improve coordination. The trip resulted in a single MoU signed by the various UN agencies with the Achham DDC.

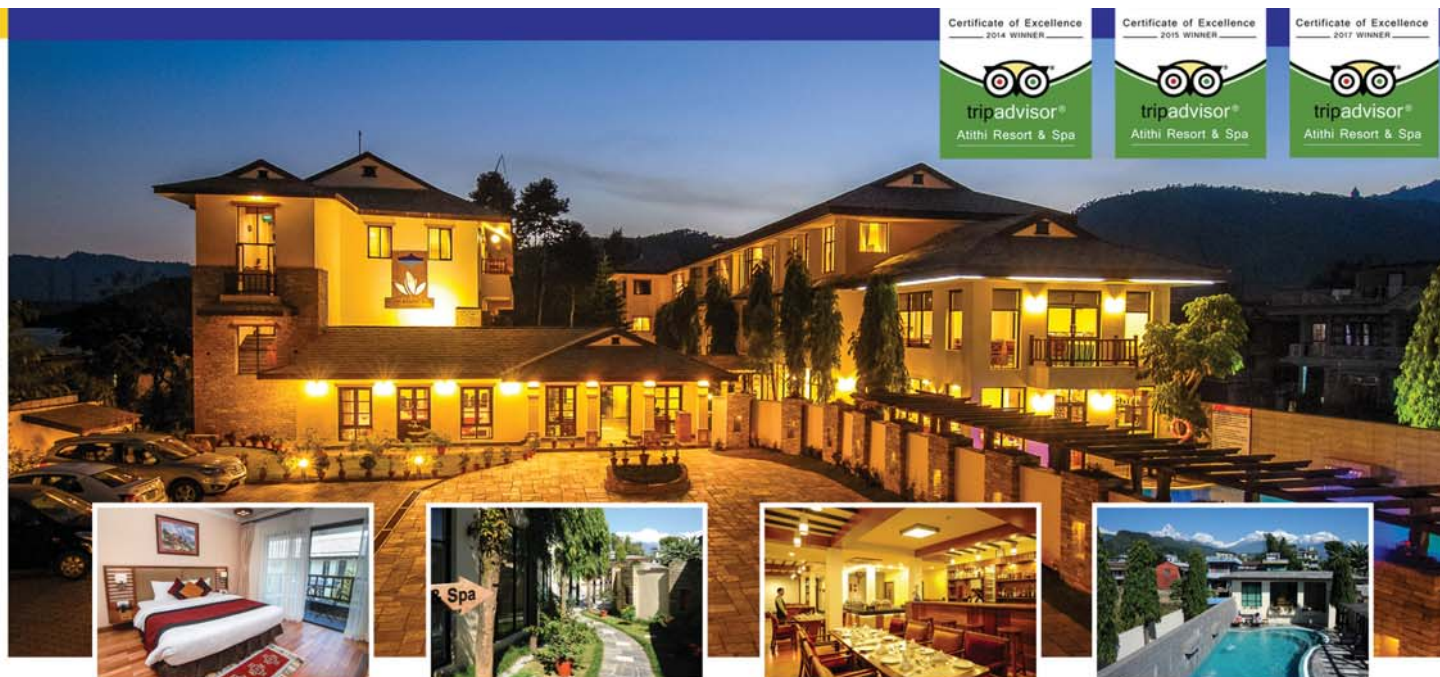
It was not an easy time to be Representative as Nepal was in the throes of an armed conflict. For Stewart there was only one side to take — that of the disadvantaged children and their families. Talking to *Nepali Times* in April 2002, he said: "Children and women suffer the most in conflicts ... when a water supply system is blown up, it is again women who have to fetch the water from somewhere up the hill."

At the height of the conflict, when Mangalsen was under siege, Stewart arranged to send a helicopter to rescue a UNICEF staff and other development workers stationed there. Staff security, safety and dignity were Stewart's top priorities. A highlander, Stewart loved travelling to the field, which always helped him to re-focus on the children that he cared so much about.

Stewart's legacy lives on in Nepal not just in the programs and memories of his friends and colleagues, but also in the smiles of hundreds of children with cleft palates and club feet fixed through the Human Touch Fund. Initiated by Stewart, the Fund was made up by contributions of time and money from UNICEF Nepal staff.

*Pheri bhetaunla*, Stewart.

**Rupa Joshi** is Chief of Communication at UNICEF Nepal, and collated this from tributes paid to Stewart McNab from friends across the world.



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## Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets

**D**on't listen to what anyone says about Luc Besson's latest and greatest sci-fi epic, just go watch it and decide for yourself. *Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets* is a joy for everyone who loves



**MUST SEE**  
Sophia Pande

science fiction, and an essential addition to Besson's oeuvre, which includes classics like *The Big Blue* (1988), *Nikita* (1990), *Léon: The Professional* (1994), *Lucy* (2014) and now this big-hearted, glorious, stunningly beautiful adventure that leaves the films based on Marvel and DC comics looking like they were made by unimaginative, heartless amateurs.

A wondrous imagination has always been at the core of Besson's best films, and *Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets* represents

perhaps the apogee of that extraordinary quality that has allowed Besson to stand apart from his contemporaries. The original source material for *Valerian* comes from a beloved French sci-fi comic series titled *Valerian and Laureline* but Besson resisted making a film based on these comics for years, realising the visual demands could not be met — until James Cameron unveiled his magnum opus *Avatar* in 2009 and Besson saw a way to bring these richly detailed comics set in a never before seen futuristic world to life on the big screen.

*Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets* must be seen in the cinema, and in 3D. From beginning to end the film will leave you open mouthed in astonishment and wondering why other mainstream films just don't produce the same amount of joy. It is a visual treat, but also an example of just how big budget films can be mind-bogglingly gorgeous to look at, if

the director actually knows what he is doing and can reign in the visual effects people when there is millions to play with. Take *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* (reviewed previously in this column) from earlier this year as a perfect example: the film is fun and imaginative, but the ending is an overblown, nauseating plethora of visual effects gone wrong, with nothing of the delicate detail and attention that makes *Valerian* so riveting.

The main story of *Valerian* is pretty great too, the cast is filled with stars — Rihanna makes a jaw-dropping cameo — and the leads Valerian (Dane DeHaan), and Laureline (Cara Delevingne) are adorable and feisty enough to combat the heavy competition offered by the visuals.

The mission is, additionally, commendable, the villain believable, and the characters the duo meet are so vividly realised that you will fall in love with all (well, most) of them. The whole experience will leave you humming at the end: you will have been treated to a film like no other, and it will make you happy, content and yet yearning for more, your senses piqued after years of explosions that have left you numbed. You can then turn to all of Besson's films while you wait for a sequel that may or may not come. *Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets* has not done well at the box office. I leave it up to you to figure out why.



Watch trailer online

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

### HAPPENINGS



RSS

**VOTES ON FIRE:** Police on Tuesday burn ballot papers cast in Ward 19 of Bharatpur Metropolitan City after the Supreme Court stayed the Election Commission (EC)'s decision to hold re-polling there. Re-elections will take place on Friday.



GOPEN RAI

**FAST FRIENDS:** Ujjwal Thapa and Rabindra Mishra of the recently unified Bibeksheel Sajha Party participate in a rally in Kathmandu on Saturday to support Dr Govinda KC's demand for reforms in medical education.



BIKRAM RAI

**HEADSTART:** Minister for Youth and Sports Rajendra Kumar KC on Tuesday inspects Dashrath Stadium in Kathmandu, the venue for the South Asian Games to be held in Nepal in 2019.



GOPEN RAI

**ON RECORD:** *Kantipur* Journalist Krishna Gyawali (middle) accepts the 2016 Barbara Adams Investigative Journalism Award from Suresh Raj Sharma (right) on Thursday.



TURKISH AIRLINES

**MAKING WAVES:** On return to Kathmandu on Monday from Budapest, Tisha Shakya who set a new national record in the women's 100m breaststroke at the Swimming World Championships is greeted by Turkish Airlines Nepal Manager Abdullah Tuncer Kecici.

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# Manufacturing ministers

Rameshwar Bohara in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 30 July-5 August

हिमाल

After sending nine cabinet ministers and four state ministers to join the Sher Bahadur Deuba government, the CPN (Maoist-Centre) is now selecting five more state ministers.

For a distant third party in Parliament, having 18 ministerial berths is an impressive achievement. But this pales in comparison to what the erstwhile revolutionary party has achieved after joining parliamentary politics – a bourgeois democracy they fought a bloody war to overthrow. In the 10 years after joining the peace process in November 2006, as many as 72 Maoist leaders have become ministers, 44 in cabinet and 28 as state ministers.

Some Maoist leaders have become ministers multiple times: Krishna Bahadur Mahara is a six-time minister. After being

deputy prime minister and finance minister, even in the Deuba government he has a top post, as foreign minister. Giriraj Mani Pokharel is now a four-time minister, having been named health minister when Deuba expanded his cabinet last week.

Janardan Sharma, Top Bahadur Rayamajhi and Prabhu Shah have become ministers three times each. Nine other Maoist leaders have become ministers twice and 30 leaders once.

There have been 10 governments in the last 10 years, and the Maoists have been left out only three times. Except when Madhav Kumar Nepal, Khila Raj Regmi and Sushil Koirala were

Prime Ministers, the Maoists have always been in government – they led three governments and were part of four other ruling coalitions.

Political analyst Shyam Shrestha says: “Maoists have now become part of the very bourgeois system that they condemned. Their attitude and aspirations are not different from those of the old parliamentary parties.”

Comrades from the UML, whom the Maoists during the war denounced as lackeys, would often

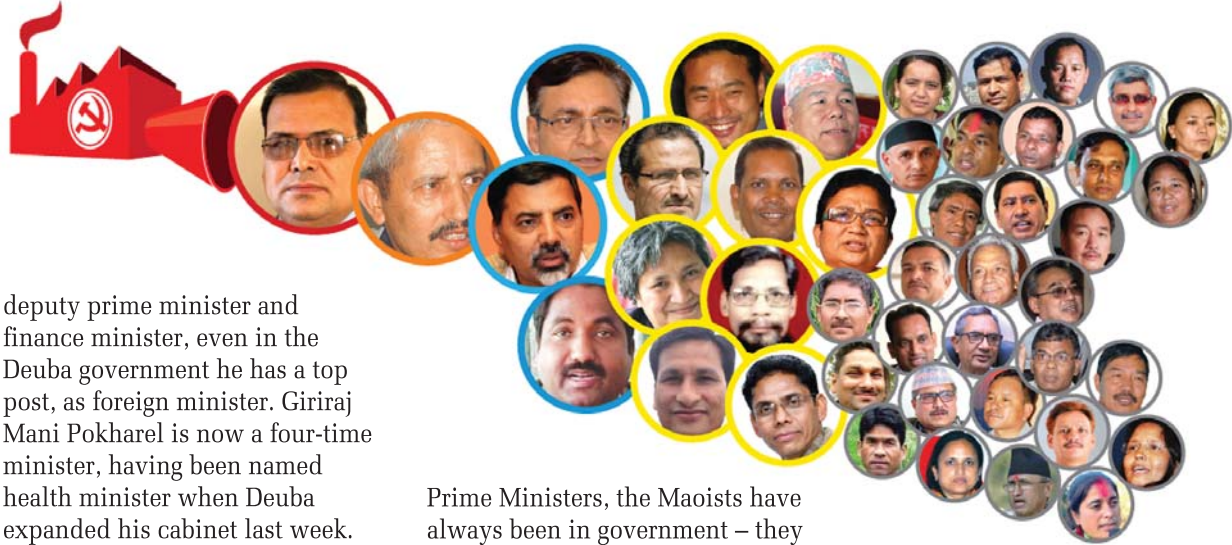
proclaim that they are not into politics to be ascetics, implying that their real aim is to grab power and earn money. Now that has become a favourite one-liner among Maoist leaders. Politics is a lucrative business. Shrestha, who is also a Maoist MP, says: “Maoist leaders are vying with each other for greed.”

Analyst Mumaram Khanal,

who quit the Maoists and is now a Central Committee member of the newly-unified Bibeksheel Sajha Party, says Maoist leaders no longer debate political agendas, and are just concerned about grabbing plum ministerial posts. The Maoists have split not because of ideology but because the party command could not fulfill every leader’s aspirations, he adds. “For example, Mohan Baidya would not have split at all if his lieutenant, Dev Gurung, was made finance minister.”

Narendra Jung Pitar, an analyst still affiliated with the CPN (Maoist-Centre), says: “In our party, there is an ongoing marathon to enter Singha Darbar. But except for one or two, no Maoist minister has done anything to be proud of.”

A Maoist leader sarcastically says: “In the Hetauda convention, our party decided to form a manufacturing brigade. And sure enough, our party is now manufacturing ministers.”



## “Have faith in me”

Kulman Ghising in *www.setopati.com*, 2 August

सेतोपाटी

My aggressive campaign to avoid load-shedding for a second consecutive winter is facing obstacles at every step.

In a meeting with the Public Accounts Committee of Parliament this week, MPs ordered the termination of a contract awarded to a Chinese company for installing a 25MW solar plant in Trisuli. The MPs also demanded an investigation against me, accusing the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) of not choosing the lowest bidder.

Awarding a contract is not just about choosing the lowest bidder: the history and capacity of the bidding



company also needs to be taken into account. And this is what the NEA did when it chose Risen Energy.

The contract process for this solar project began in April 2015, after the World Bank agreed to provide a loan of Rs5 billion. The Bank itself disqualified three lowest bidders on technical grounds, and recommended the fourth lowest bidder.

I had not been appointed Managing Director of the NEA at that time. The then MD wanted to choose the second lowest

bidder, arguing that its technical problems were ‘minor deviations’. But the WB did not agree.

When I became MD, the NEA sought my views. I suggested stopping the entire process, and beginning afresh. But the World Bank said there was no valid reason to terminate the process, and threatened to withhold the loan. So we went ahead with the fourth lowest bidder.

MPs need to understand that it is the Wold Bank that is investing in this project,

and we cannot do anything without its approval. So why investigate me when I had virtually no role in choosing the contractor?

Crooks see crooks everywhere. But that is not right: you must have faith in those who are working hard, and delivering results. If you want sweeping reforms, you have to take risks. This is what we are doing. There might be some flaws in the process, but my intention is good. Supplying 24-hour electricity is not going to be easy this winter but I am confident we can do it. I have taken on the ambitious goal of ending load-shedding once and for all. If you don’t want me to import electricity from India, buy LEDs and install solar panels, how do you expect me to end load-shedding? If there is load-shedding this winter, everyone will blame Kulman – so why are they not supporting Kulman now?

I sometimes feel that everyone has put the entire responsibility for ending load-shedding on me, but it is all of our responsibility.

## What Govinda KC wants

*www.setopati.com*, 31 July

सेतोपाटी

Govinda KC is on a hunger strike again – his 11th in the past five years. This time, his bottom line is Parliament passing a bill on medical education. Negotiations between KC’s representatives and government authorities have made no headway, even as his hunger strike reaches Day 10.

The drafting and tabling in Parliament of the Nepal Medical Education Bill was the outcome of multiple hunger strikes by KC, an orthopaedic surgeon determined to reform Nepal’s medical education sector. Some MPs who are directly or indirectly involved in lucrative medical colleges are trying to block the bill, or water down its content by registering amendments.

But the iron-willed crusader is not ready to give up just yet. He has floated 24 amendments to make the bill stronger.

KC is opposed to the bill’s definition of public education institutes. The bill recognises institutions run by the government, trusts or non-profit organisations as ‘public education institutes’. KC says all medical institutes should be categorised as either ‘government-run’ or ‘private’. UML MPs Rajendra Pandey, Naresh Kharel and Man Kumar Gautam have demanded removal of the word ‘non-profit’.

The bill envisages a Medical Education Commission chaired by the Prime Minister and co-chaired by the education minister. KC says this commission should be independent, and not include a minister at all.

The bill also aims to bar colleges in Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur from starting new diploma courses in medicine, dentistry and nursing. As per the bill, the prerequisite for a medical program is a 300-bed hospital,

for dental and nursing a 100-bed hospital is required. KC wants the bill to allow new medical, dental or nursing colleges only after running 300-bed and 100-bed hospitals for three consecutive years.

Most importantly, KC wants the government to not issue new letters of interest or renew old ones prior to the passing of the bill. Past governments had agreed to this demand, and KC wants the present government to honour those past pledges.

Govinda KC wants the bill to ensure one government medical college for every private medical college. He has also demanded at least one government-run medical, dental and nursing college in every province, and prohibition of any private college before a government-run one is opened. He is also pushing for more scholarships from government as well as private medical colleges.



Car: Prime Minister’s instructions

नागरिक

Robin Sayami in, *Nagarik* 1 August

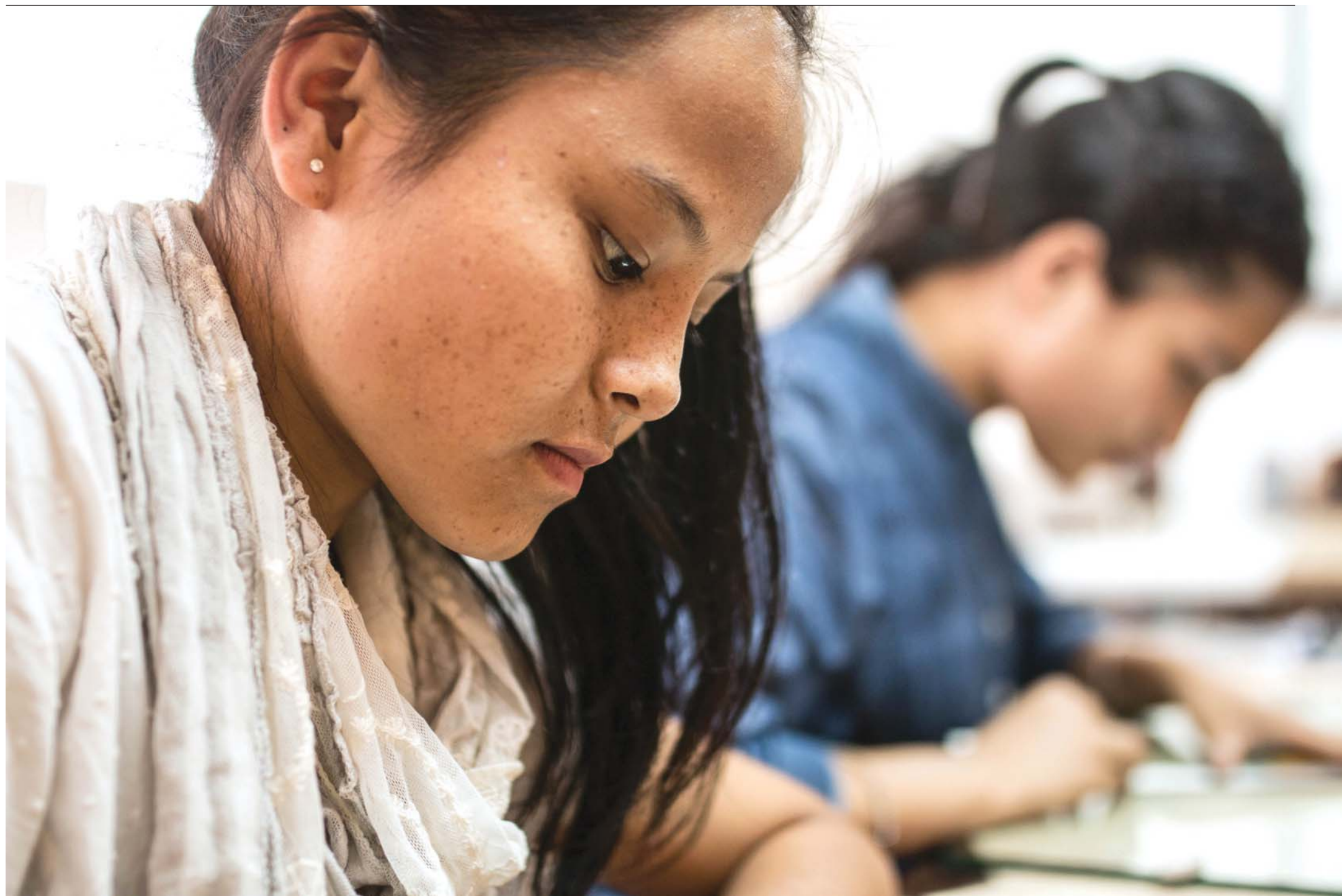
### QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“The country is being run by the mafia, and political leaders are just their proxy.”

Nepali Congress MP Dhan Raj Gurung in Parliament on Wednesday, referring to recent exposés of corruption





# Internal needs

KATE RYAN

While cross-border trafficking of Nepali women gets attention, domestic trafficking does not

When Pramesh Pradhan began volunteering for Change Nepal in 2003, trafficking to Kathmandu was on the rise. In the midst of the Maoist insurgency, he estimates one in three homes in Thamel housed a woman working in the entertainment industry.

“We found them ignorant. We found them vulnerable. We found them exploited multiple times a day,” remembers Pradhan. As a managing director he is now fully consumed by his work at Change Nepal. But no matter how hard he works, the problem of internal trafficking persists.

“A lot of focus has been to address the issues of migrant Nepalis going abroad, their lives

being very unsafe,” says Pradhan. “But at the same time, tens of thousands of children and women are working in adult entertainment centres in our own areas. It is rampant.”

Change Nepal is one of dozens of non-profits working with women and children who are financially bound to employers, work in unsanitary conditions, are cut off from their families, physically abused and psychologically trapped. These organisations work independently and in coordination to empower victims, to offer alternative work, education, housing and financial aid. The results are impressive, but not long-lasting.

“We integrate 20 girls in a

month, and they’ll bring 30 more the next month,” says Pradhan. “We feel we are banging our heads against the wall.”

Helen Sherpa, from World Education, says trafficking is like a sausage balloon: “If you put the pressure one place to stop traffickers, they pop up somewhere else. They are very quick to shift, whereas NGOs and government are very slow in comparison.”

Pradhan says that the government is too reliant on NGOs eager to address the problem and that it should be taking the lead. When a case of 10 children working in a brothel is uncovered, the government looks to groups like Change Nepal to be on the front lines.

## Skills they can count on



Hira Dahal (*right*) recently met a young woman who was earning Rs90,000 a month as a sex worker. But the woman’s clothes were ragged and her shoes worn.

“Though she made that much money she had nothing,” Dahal, executive director of the non-profit Chhori, recalls. The woman had to hand over all her earnings to her boyfriend, who forced her to have sex with customers.

Until she found Chhori, it did not occur to the woman that she could save money and plan for the future – this lack of financial ownership and foresight common among women trapped in Nepal’s entertainment sector.

Financial literacy can be a path to freedom for trafficked women, and the key to prevention for those at risk of being sold as sex workers. Math skills are essential to learning most trades, and personal finance leads to economic independence and self-confidence.

Former trafficked women do well in Kathmandu once they gain basic business skills,

says Helen Sherpa of World Education. “They’re quite entrepreneurial, they are survivors.”

For girls who have not been trafficked but are at risk, math skills are tools for alternative work. And when women are working they are less likely to be lured by traffickers and tend to self-advocate for their finances, health and when they marry.

Sumitra (*pictured, above*) was helped by Maiti Nepal when her mother was rescued from a brothel. Now 18, she passed her SEE exam and works for Kobold Watch Company, making high-end leather goods and saving for the future. She plans to return to school to study rural development and one day create jobs for young women.

For now, she is able to provide for herself because of her math skills.

**Kate Ryan**





**NEW LIFE:** After her mother was rescued from a brothel, Sumitra was put in school by Maiti Nepal. Now she makes high-end leather goods (left). Pramesh Pradhan of Change Nepal (above) says the numbers of internally trafficked girls is in the thousands.

“We wish the government said, ‘OK, there are 10 children, we have a plan. We have seen the reports. Let’s work’,” says Pradhan. “They have not owned this issue.”

Hira Dahal of Chhori (pictured below), is a member of the Campaign for Rights, a coalition of non-profits that lobbies for improved laws and services for vulnerable women and children. The Supreme Court’s 2008 directive to protect the rights of women in the entertainment sector and the 2012 Minimum Standards for the Care of Trafficking Survivors are steps forward. Whether or not those directives are carried out is her concern.

Dahal says the slow and inconsistent implementation of laws is due to the patriarchal mind-set of those in power. Because women are not kidnapped in the night and locked in a room, the prevailing theory is that they are in the industry of their free will. The psychological and financial chains that bind trafficked women are harder to see and understand.

“They are not treated as human beings,” Dahal says of the women she meets. “They were blamed for being trafficked, for trusting the people and leaving the house, for being infected with HIV, and for being prostitutes.”

Helen Sherpa says the punishment for those who are prosecuted needs to match the

lure to join the industry. She says each trafficked girl is worth around \$24,000 for traffickers, brothel owners and landlords over two or three years.

Some officials have been supportive. The US Department of State named Superintendent Kiran Bajracharya a Trafficking in Persons Hero in 2016 for her investigation into organised crime involving women and children. At a panel hosted by the Fulbright Commission last week, Bajracharya noted the social stigma that keeps young women from seeking police help, and called for stronger relations between the public and private sectors and between public prosecutors and police.

Advocates say the government needs to ensure all police are trained to spot traffickers, to hold landlords of establishments pimping children responsible, and to ensure prevention and punishment are not just written into law but practised and legitimised. Until then, victims are not likely to seek justice.

Last year, Dahal surveyed 180 women to see why they were not willing to file cases against traffickers and employers. Women answered that they did not know where to file, who to file against and added that police and the law were not on their side.

Pramesh Pradhan sits back and sighs. He says there are so many NGOs working on this, they begin to compete with each other.

“We want to network and work together, but because of the government not playing the pivotal role, is it networking or not working?” he asks. “Without the ownership of the government, we’ll fail,” he says. “Certainly fail.”



Watch this uplifting video of how at-risk women like Sushmita (above) and Sumitra have found jobs and financial security because of math education.

nepalitimes.com



ALL PHOTOS: KATE RYAN

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# Smart City

A mayoral candidate in the last elections asked voters not to be worried about the condition of what are euphemistically referred to as “roads” in the capital because Kathmandu was soon going to have a monorail, an elevated highway from Tundikhel to Lagankhel, an underground rapid transit, and he was going to turn Kathmandu Metropolis into a “smart city”. Not to be outdone, a rival candidate promised that Kathmandu would not just be smart, it would be a total genius with an IQ of not less than 150.

We must thank the four-time PM for making the clever move to instruct the PMO to instruct the Secretary at the Ministry of Metaphysical Planning and Highway Robbery to instruct the Department of Roads to instruct its contractor to instruct the sub-contractors to order the construction workers to patch the holes on the streets in 15 days. That chain of command was what the city needed to be street smart.

The military precision has meant that five meteorite impact craters in the newly-paved roads in Pulchok were filled after the Primary Minister's order was handed down in Chinese whispers to the repair crew. It is a dramatic illustration of the adage that two birds killed with one stone in the bush are worth more than a live one in the hand, that the five potholes were all filled with garbage and turned into speed breakers overnight. Three of them have since reverted back to being potholes again with the onset of the monsoon rains. But, hey, look

at the bright side: five minus three is two. That still leaves us with fewer potholes in Patan than previously. The naysayers will of course point out that there are 2.3 million other ash-holes inside the Ring Road, but you can never please these negative nabobs.

While we are all waiting for the mayors to be more astute, there are a few things us citizens can do on our own to to give us a head start when, and if, Kathmandu ever becomes a highly intelligent organism. The Valley's mayors have already fulfilled their election pledge to turn the capital into a smart city by having:

- Smart Phones:** Mobiles so wise they relay your geo-location to intelligent agencies.
- Smart Toilets:** The Municipality has designated some pot holes as outdoor loos where citizens can attend to calls from nature and openly defecate to help fill the cavities with compost.
- Smart Cattle:** Kathmandu Metropolitan City has deployed clever cows to serve as bovine traffic islands as well as to eat plastic and keep Kathmandu clean and green.
- Smarty Pants:** This Assan tailor is contributing in his own way to make Kathmandu a smart city.
- Smart Traffic Lights:** These haven't worked since the Japanese installed them at major intersections 10 years ago, saving the gubberment billions in electricity bills.
- Smart Airport:** An NRN cleaned up the toilets, but forgot the cesspool in the immigration desk that harasses single women travellers.
- Smart Parliament:** Kleptocrats in the Public Accounts Committee have found ingenious new ways to punish Cool Man to ensure resumption of load-shedding in winter.
- Smart Ass:** That's me.



The Ass

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