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Deuba, Delhi and Doklam

In diplomacy, some things are better left unspoken, and that is exactly what India's PM Narendra Modi did at a joint press meet with visiting Nepal PM Sher Bahadur Deuba in New Delhi on Thursday. Last year, when Pushpa Kamal Dahal visited, Modi advised him to 'take all sections of the society on board for effective implementation of the Constitution.' Earlier that year, during KP Oli's visit, the two countries failed to issue a joint statement owing to differences over Nepal's new Constitution, which India had rejected.

But this time, Nepal's prime minister was warmly congratulated for successfully holding two phases of local elections, and in his teleprompted statement, Modi did not utter a word about the Constitution under

which those polls were held.

Parliament voted down an amendment bill registered by the ruling NC-Maoist coalition the day before Deuba left for New Delhi, but in Delhi he promised to continue trying to get Madhesi parties to own the Constitution.

Some analysts here say India realised it may have pushed Nepal too far with the blockade, right into the arms of China, and is therefore trying a different tack.

"India's strategic priorities have clearly changed after Doklam, it can no longer keep pushing for an amendment," says Federal Socialist Forum Nepal (FSFN) MP Abhishek Pratap Shah, who is on Deuba's entourage in New Delhi. "India now needs Nepal's support and goodwill more than ever," he adds.

This could be why Modi

invited Deuba for an unscheduled tête-à-tête Wednesday evening, even greeting Deuba at the doorstep of his residence, ahead of Thursday's official meetings.

When Deuba gulped while reading out his speech at the press conference, India's External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj rose from her chair to offer him a glass of water.

Modi and Swaraj went out of their way to be gracious to Deuba with friendly gestures. Could this new bonhomie be due to the India-China row over the disputed territory of Doklam in Bhutan?

B C Upreti, an Indian member of the Nepal-India Eminent Persons Group, downplayed Doklam, but admitted there had been a shift in India's policy towards Nepal. 

Om Astha Rai in New Delhi

CHRONIC DYSFUNCTION EDITORIAL

EARLY WARNING
GUEST EDITORIAL
BY MAN B THAPA

PAGE 2

The golden age of the gospel



A secular Nepal sees a surge in conversions to Christianity by evangelical groups

BY OM ASTHA RAI

PAGE 14-15

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GOING PLACES TOGETHER

CHRONIC DYSFUNCTION

‘It is the chronic dysfunction and selfish ambition across the political spectrum that most prevent the changes that we deserve.’ That was Miguel Syjuco writing about his country, The Philippines, in a *New York Times* op-ed last week. But he may as well have been saying that about Nepal.

There are other passages that are hauntingly analogous to Nepal’s current 3-party dictatorship: ‘...it seems that loyalty is first always to the self, and a far second to the country. Our rulers, however, would have us believe that they are our heroes.’

Or: ‘... as with (Game of Thrones) we can only watch and wait for the next episodes of deceit, betrayal, impunity and corruption. Meanwhile, our rulers readily wield accusations of contempt against any who refuse to cooperate. They miss the obvious irony. The contempt is ours, for them. For respect is earned, never demanded. They forget who, in a democracy, has every right to demand leaders worthy of our respect.’

There is a message here for prime ministers who don garlands while parachuting in for 15 minutes on a flood-ravaged land, for presidents who close down half the capital when their motorcade moves anywhere, for Parliament that behaves like a Chamber of Commerce to pass bills favouring the medical-industrial complex, for self-important officials whose sense of entitlement extends to extorting those they

are supposed to serve. ‘Respect is earned, never demanded.’

Last week’s flood disaster is not over. (*See map below*). The bungling of relief and delays in reaching marooned villages is a disaster within a disaster. The floods affected 20% of the country’s population, and exceeded the impact of the 2015 earthquake. A column of cloudbursts over the Chure Range was the trigger event, but there was sufficient early-warning, and the subsequent inundation was the result of decades of neglect and corruption by successive kleptocrats. Poorly planned infrastructure, encroachment, deforestation, sand mining of river beds and raised road embankments right along the border that acted like dams: all played a part. The rivers took revenge, and nature punished us for our folly.

As our reports this week from Chitwan and Rautahat show, relief has been better organised and more fairly distributed in areas with newly-elected local governments. (*See page 11*) Even if Kathmandu bungled relief, mayors and village council heads realised the disasters provide an opportunity to perform. There isn’t much accountability in evidence among public servants in Province 2, the worst affected by the floods and the only region which hasn’t had elections yet.

It may be a generalisation, but the moral of this story is that if there had been responsible local governments answerable to the people, the inundation would not be as extensive, and relief would be quicker and better coordinated.

To paraphrase Syjuco: In a democracy the people have every right to demand leaders worthy of our respect.



Early warning

The Category 4 Bhola Cyclone that hit Bangladesh in 1970 killed 500,000 people. The more powerful (Category 5) Sidr Cyclone that smashed the same area in 2007 resulted in only 3,500 deaths. The reason: disaster preparedness.

If Bangladesh can be prepared, why cannot Nepal? We can also minimise death and destruction from earthquakes and floods. We need to create an end-to-end, early warning system, multi-hazard and GIS-based risk assessments, develop shelters and evacuation plans, and raise awareness at the community level.

The monsoon season happens every year, and Nepal receives 80% of its annual rainfall between mid-June and mid-September. Unfortunately, the soil is sometimes unable to absorb heavy rain, which leads to floods, flash floods and landslides.

Advances in forecasting, remote sensing and communications have made it possible to very accurately predict information about rainfall (location, time and even amounts), and then transmit warnings to the public. Nepal has made progress in predicting and warning about floods, but there are still problems with alerting vulnerable communities in time, as we saw with the recent floods in the Tarai. (*See report on page 11*)

There has been some work on river-based early warning systems, and there are emergency operation centres at national and regional levels and in some disaster-prone districts. However, district-based centres

are not functional and staff is poorly trained.

An accurate and effective early-warning system that informs vulnerable populations about the possible risk of floods, post-flood responses and relief mechanisms must be put in place.

The number of people killed in floods and landslides is high, and many are a result of faulty development initiatives: roads that do not respect the natural flow of water, encroaching on rivers and streambeds, and neglecting proper drainage systems. Uncontrolled extraction of building materials from riverbeds in the Chure has caused rivers to change course frequently with unpredictable, destructive and deadly consequences.

The existing 1982 Natural Calamity Relief Act only deals with relief and rescue activities, not risk reduction and preparedness. A high-level authority is needed to coordinate with all ministries and development partners. Disaster risk management must be part of regular development planning and evaluation. Early warnings should encompass multi-hazard risk assessments of the entire country to identify disaster prone areas, types of disasters and proper mitigation measures.



Man B Thapa, is program manager at the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre.

ONLINE PACKAGES



TRYST WITH CHRIST

When Nepal was still a Hindu monarchy, devotees of Christianity were harassed by police and even jailed for spreading the gospel. Today there are around 15,000 churches in the country and the number is increasing. Join us on a video visit to some of Nepal’s new churches and learn more about the lives and faith of Christians.



CALLIGRAPHY LESSONS

Nepal was one of the epicentres of ancient eastern calligraphy, but after contemporary art became common, it lost its appeal and remained confined to the texts of pundits, gurus and lamas. Bal G Kapali has been a calligraphy instructor for 30 years. Watch a video of his class and see how younger students are taught penmanship.

ON BOARD, UNDERCOVER
Nepali Times' collaboration with the Metropolitan Police Office to record a sting operation to apprehend gropers on a bus route generated vibrant debate on our website. A sample of the feedback:

The question here is: Are these undercover agents male or female? If they are female, the agents should look like young female students. Maximum numbers of complaints are from students and college-going girls. If the undercover police are male...they will rarely catch a molester because a lot of girls feel ashamed to make a scene. This is a generic question and not an opinion.

Abhaya Subba Weise

■ It’s good that Government is doing this. Nepal is not as unsafe like India, but this kind of operation will discourage anyone who even thinks about it.

Aswin Pradhan

■ Such an operation in a near-empty bus, needless to say, is a futile exercise. Apparently, the undercovers need to apply the yardstick of common sense. Also, this could mean another thing: the gropers have gone on a Sabbath for the 3-month period the operation is on! Nepal Police, does it mean no operation once this honeymoon period is over?

Anil Shrestha

■ Why not fix the number of passengers in every public transport and not overcrowd them? Please come up with a permanent solution instead of doing sting operations every now and then.

Sandhya Evn

CORRECTION
In our print version, the byline of columnist Dinkar Nepal was missing on the article ‘The shining subaltern’ (page 5, #872). The error is regretted.

WHAT'S TRENDING



Going undercover
by Shreejana Shrestha

Kathmandu police have launched an undercover operation to flush out molesters from commuter buses. Code-named Safety Pin Campaign, the sting operation involves undercover police officers riding with passengers. Watch video made by a *Nepali Times* team that joined the police with a GroPro camera which has been viewed by a phenomenal 200,000 online users.

Most reached and shared on Facebook
(458,498 people reached, 676 shares)

Most commented



Migration in a microcosm
by Sebastian Wolligandt

Why are young people in Tangting of Kaski district, despite access to a well-equipped school, plenty of clean drinking water and a micro-hydro station, trading clean air for the dust and pollution of cities? Find out in the most read story of the week. Visit nepalitimes.com and watch a video tour of this scenic village tucked away below the Annapurnas.

Most popular on Twitter
(55 retweets, 83 likes)

Most visited online page
(1,638 views)

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times@nepalitimes
Nepali Times joins undercover police in 'Safety Pin Campaign' sting operation to catch harassers in the act. Story: <http://bit.ly/2xf6Er6>

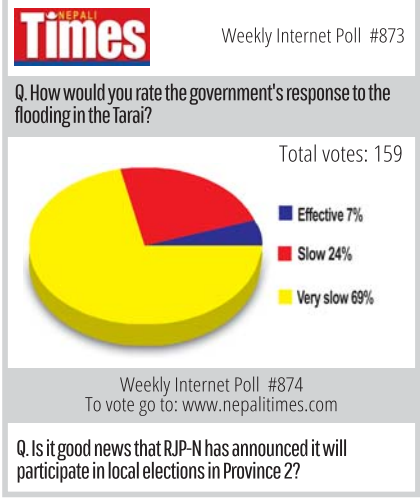
Prashanta Khanal@theprashanta
Thanks @valleytraffic. But also make sure that public transport is not overcrowded!

Nepali Times@nepalitimes
@dixit_ajaya explains why future floods will be more destructive than past ones. Read: <http://bit.ly/2wZKA1h> #NepalFlood2017#Nepal

chirayu regmi@chirayuR
mainly because we never learn. We don't have any disaster preparedness at all. Earthquake as big as that didn't shake us up enough!

Nepali Times@nepalitimes
CloudFactory worked with a company in France that applied data to help French President #Macron win the election. <http://bit.ly/2icJr6a>

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A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER 20 YEARS

Kasthamandap and Mary

Slusser was deeply apprehensive about the impact of the 2015 earthquake on the Valley's heritage

Within two months, we have experienced the departure of art historians Eduard Sekler, Sukrasagar Shrestha, Dina Bangdel — and now Mary Slusser, author of the monumental two-volume *Nepal Mandala*, a gentle authority of Nepal's art and iconography.



ON THE WAY UP
Kanak Mani Dixit

Mary Shepherd Slusser was born in 1918, and arrived in Kathmandu as the spouse of an American diplomat in the 1960s with a doctorate in South American archaeology. Following in the footsteps of the pioneering Sylvain Levi and Brian Houghton Hodgson of the previous century, Slusser quickly understood the treasures hidden within the Valley's toles and bahas.

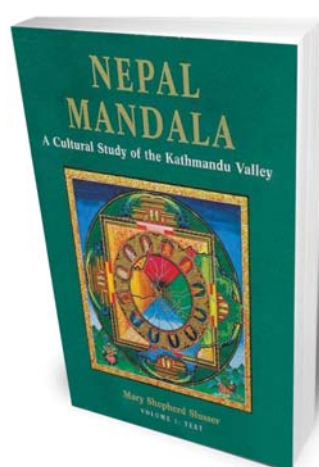
The incredibly profuse bibliography of Slusser's work can be found in the blog of California-based history enthusiast Dipesh Risal, who writes that it 'serves as a final testament to (Slusser's) longstanding and steadfast love of Nepal and Newa culture.'

In Washington DC, Slusser

lived in close proximity to the Sakler Gallery on the National Mall, where she worked. Age 97 at the time, Slusser felt the tragedy of the 2015 Earthquake much more grievously than many of us walking these ruins. Observing the devastation from afar, her worries came to focus on Kasthamandap, the spiritual fulcrum of Kathmandu Valley, as Mount Meru is to the Universe. In the words of distinguished conservationist Neils Gutschow, the sattal is 'the pivot of the (Valley's) entire urban landscape'.

Slusser was an authority on the Valley's cultural microcosm taken as a whole, but repeatedly she returned in her research to Kasthamandap, and in 1974 produced a book on the sattal with University of Madison-Wisconsin based scholar Gautam Vajra Vajracharya.

'Slusser played an important role in ensuring that the works of Nepali academics were disseminated and recognised worldwide,' writes Risal. And it was to these friends that she turned as the ground shook in her Nepal Mandal. We have communication between Slusser and her Nepali colleagues which show how all of her heartfelt fears for the Valley as a whole were poured into her worries for the



fate of Maru Sattal (Kasthamandap) — not merely the wood and brick, but the intangible culture that the structure represented and hosted.

Kasthamandap was built about 1,300 years ago to serve, according to Slusser, as a 'public hostel' or rest house, situated at a crossroad of the ancient north-south trading route before the Kathmandu city-state grew around it. Used by 'pilgrims, merchants, mendicants and other wayfarers' from the Valley and the surrounding hills, the sattal's location would have been ideal because of the Maru Hiti water source nearby.

While it was the 'the largest brick and wooden building ever built in Nepal before the eighteenth century', writing in the Asian Art web portal, Slusser

conceded that 'despite the stellar position Kasthamandap held in the cultural and architectural history of Nepal, it was not a very attractive building. Austere and ponderous, it was but little ornamented'.

Slusser did note the one ornamentation for which the sattal stood out: a finely carved wooden frieze that ran beneath the railings on one side — about 6m long and about 20cm in "deep relief carving with great attention to detail". The iconography is both Buddhistic and Saivite: 'The frieze is a pictorial confirmation of the syncretic nature of Nepalese religious practice... the lingam neighbours the stupa and the Buddhist Nativity is juxtaposed to (Uma-Maheshwar).'

What mortified Slusser, clear in her writings to Risal and the scholars Kashinath Tamot and the late Sukrasagar Shrestha, was the fear that the frieze was lost in the mayhem after the earthquake, the disorganisation of recovery efforts, and the use of bulldozers to pick up what was considered scrap wood but which in fact contained the artistic outpouring of the ancestors.

Slusser wrote to Risal: 'I have been very, very worried about Kasthamandap because all the powers interested in restoration

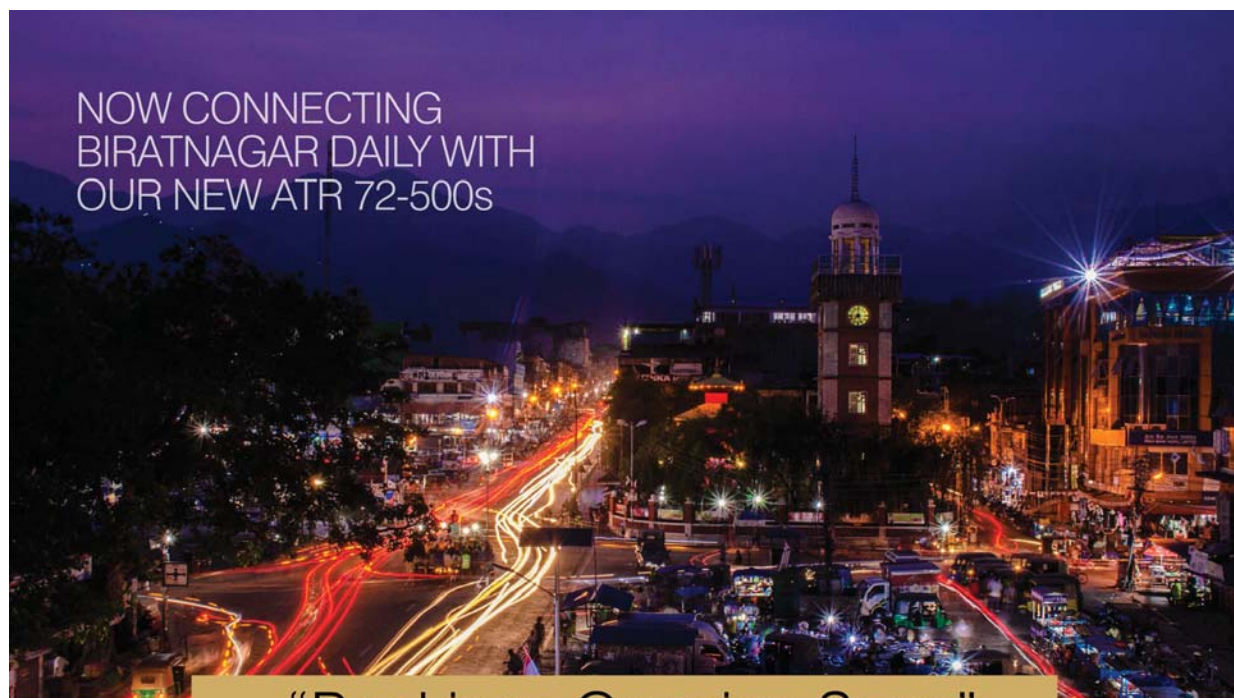
of the monuments are fixated only on the royal squares whereas historically Kasthamandap is far more important... I am truly sick at heart about what nature has wrought...'

After the earthquake, Slusser feared that the frieze was gone. Imagine her delight, then, when she learnt on 7 September 2016 from Shrestha and Tamot that most of it had survived intact and that the various pieces had been located in storage inside the Hanuman Dhoka complex.

A day later, Slusser wrote to Tamot: 'This is like Christmas in September to have the wonderful gift of the resurrected frieze that I had feared was lost forever.'

Hopefully, Slusser was not told of the row that has now erupted between the newly elected representatives of Kathmandu Municipality and the citizen activists who had organised to restore the sattal. It is an unseemly fight that has delayed the restoration, and it weakens the cultural aura that Kasthamandap sheds as the centre of Nepal Mandal and Nepal, the nation-state. The controversy needs to be resolved and restoration work begun, for all the reasons that Mary Shepherd Slusser valued in the sattal Kasthamandap. 🇳🇵

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European Image and Sound Association (EISA). HUAWEI P10 has been named

EISA Smartphone Camera 2017-2018 and HUAWEI WATCH 2 was named EISA Wearable Device 2017-2018.

Students' support

Students of British College collected Rs60,000 in one day during a donation campaign in the Kathmandu Valley to help Tarai flood victims. The money will be used to buy relief materials,



including non-perishable food, medical equipment, water purifiers and bedding. The college also announced it will contribute Rs100,000 for flood victims.

Qatar spreads wings

Qatar Airways has inaugurated a non-stop flight from Doha to Prague, marking the airline's first-ever passenger service to the Czech Republic. The Doha-based airways also announced new flights to Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. Starting September, Colombo service will increase from four to five flights per day and Dhaka service from two to three per day.



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An antelope story

In 2014, an undergraduate student majoring in paper preservation visited the library at the Zoological Society of London for her research. Puneeta Sharma knew the building housed a collection of old wildlife paintings, but it was a carelessly folded sketch that captured her attention. It depicted a *chiru*, a Tibetan antelope that is

today among the most endangered species because of its valuable fur used to make expensive shawls. After learning that Brian Houghton Hodgson, British Resident to Nepal from 1820-1843, commissioned the work from Nepali artist Rajman Singh, Sharma immersed herself in restoring the 83.5 x 63.5cm painting.

“I really wanted to work on this, I could feel it in my heart,” says Sharma, who is from India. During restoration, her thoughts often went to two lines in Devnagari written on the painting by Hodgson himself. When her parents, who moved to the UK in 1970, couldn’t translate it, she emailed the picture to her grandmother in



ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF LONDON LIBRARY

India, but to no avail. Later, her uncle, Major General Vijakumar Dutt, who served in the First Gurkha Rifles and had spent a considerable amount of time in Nepal, deciphered the meaning: ‘The deer is roaming in the King’s Jungle.’

Sharma’s restoration of the painting paid off, as it was framed and put on a wall of the library at the Zoological Society. She says: “I hope this painting will be a medium for people to understand Nepal like I did, not just the chiru and Hodgson.”


Hodgson had handwritten on the back of the painting: ‘My Birds & Mammals done my painter send to me by Jang Bahudur’. This suggests that Jang sent several paintings, including ‘Chiru’, to the British Resident. Although Hodgson left Nepal before Jang came into power, the two enjoyed good relations, as revealed by the letters they exchanged, which are preserved at the British Museum.

After his tenure in Kathmandu, Hodgson stayed on in Darjeeling until 1858 studying Himalayan flora and fauna and Nepali language, caste and religion. He sent a total of 9,512 samples of wildlife from Nepal and Darjeeling to Britain: 672 of

them were birds, of which 124 were ‘new to the world.’

The chiru was the first mammal Hodgson discovered, and in 1825, he sent the mammal’s fur and horn to his friend Clark Abel in Calcutta, who named the undiscovered mammal *Antelope houghsonii*. Hodgson himself carried out additional research and gave it another scientific name: *Pantholopes houghsonii*.

Based on Hodgson and Abel’s research, Nepal’s National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act, 2029, lists the Tibetan antelope as a protected species. The animal was supposed to be extinct in Nepal, but some are said to exist in the high mountains.

In his book, *The Prisoner of Kathmandu*: Brian Hodgson in Nepal 1820-43, Charles Allen explains how a chiru raised at the monastery of the Tashi Lama (the seventh in a line of reincarnate Lamas, better known today as the Panchen Lama), was presented to the king of Nepal. Bhimsen Thapa then gifted the antelope to the British Resident, but within a month, the animal died of heatstroke. Hodgson later sent the animal’s fur to his friend Abel in Calcutta. 

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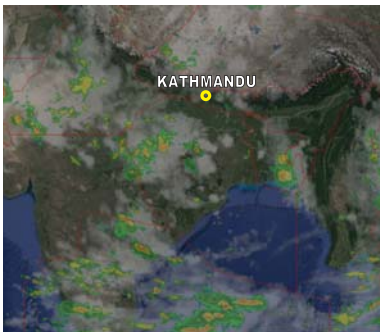
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The monsoon should be winding down now, but we have seen in the past 10 years a trend towards the rains lingering late, till the end of September. We may actually see in Nepal the aftereffects of Typhoon Hato, which lashed Macau this week and is rushing deep into the Chinese mainland, proceeding west by taking advantage of the absence of the jet-stream. This will inject fresh moisture, augmenting the monsoon into the weekend. More rain.

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THE WRITE STUFF
Teaching calligraphy as a way to boost students' confidence

ANAGRAMS: Bal Kapali with the letters from Dan Brown's Angels and Demons, which look the same from above or below, and with pupils learning to improve their handwriting.

PHOTOS: SHALEEN SHAH

Muna Poudel, mother of three, takes her children to calligraphy class in Thamel every morning in hopes of improving their handwriting. The children, despite knowing French, have limited knowledge of Nepali as they spent their childhoods with their parents in Tanzania.

In class, the three children carefully scribble letters under the guidance of their instructor, Bal G Kapali, whose classes for children from Grades 3-10 run for 20 days. When students reach the next level, they are given a special pen.

"Look, I have improved so much," exclaims sixth grader Pratham Poudel, proudly showing his improved Nepali handwriting. It used to take him an hour just to write a paragraph, now he can do it in minutes. Pratham says that having better handwriting increases his confidence at school, plus he benefits from the evergreen trend of Nepali teachers associating good handwriting with solid performance.



Although the word calligraphy brings to mind fine, imprinted letters written with a thick, nibbed pen, Kapali and his calligraphy institute are more focused on helping children like Pratham improve their handwriting, and have been at it for about 30 years.

"We teach each child

differently, keeping in mind their unique handwriting and style," says Kapali, who has tutored students from Pokhara, Bhairahawa, Butwal and Dharan, as well as Kathmandu.

Kapali takes inspiration from a number of sources. Pointing adoringly to his old, original iMac, he recalls that Steve Jobs

learned calligraphy in college, and later used the fonts in Apple's devices. UML Politician Pradip Nepal, legend has it, met his wife Jhuma Nepal only after she fell in love with his handwriting in the letters he sent her. Renowned doctor Jagdish Prasad Agrawal was promoted from Grade 1 to 3 in primary school because of his good handwriting. The great poet Laxmi Prasad Devkota once became jealous of Balkrishna Sama's handwriting, and so asked Shyam Das to rewrite his works more neatly.

Unbeknownst to many, Nepal was one of the epicentres of ancient eastern calligraphy based on Brahmi, Lichchhavi, Ranjana, Bhugimol, Pachumol and Devnagari Lipi — developed long before western calligraphy came into popular use. During the late 1950s, artists like Hemraj Shakyra practised the ancient art form, but after contemporary art became common calligraphy lost

its appeal and remained confined to the texts of pundits, gurus and lamas. Today, renowned artists like Madan Chitrakar are keeping it alive, along with the younger generation.

Kapali's son, Abhisekh, works as a calligraphy instructor at several schools and colleges in Kathmandu. Says his father: "The craft has been a family tradition, and we plan to keep it well and alive."

Shaleen Shah



Watch video of a calligraphy class in Kathmandu and see how younger students are taught penmanship.

nepalitimes.com

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ALL PHOTOS: SONIA AWALE

Not enough for everyone

Melamchi water distribution will reflect the city's existing inequities

SONIA AWALE

Kathmandu roads are being dug up to lay new mains to distribute water from Melamchi when it arrives, but access to it will reflect existing socio-economic inequities. The centre, as usual, will have priority over the periphery. The first phase of the Melamchi Project will transfer 170 million litres per day (mld) through a 27-km tunnel to Sundarimal, then via a new distribution network and the existing pipeline to various parts of the Kathmandu Valley. But, daily demand in the valley is 360 mld, so there will not be enough water for everyone, and even

those connected will only get four hours of water a day. "If there was plenty of water for everyone, the distribution could have been uniform because the project has an improved network and delivery system," says water expert Madhukar Upadhyaya. "But since the water will not be enough, I don't doubt for a second that the usual water politics will come out in full force." Indeed, Melamchi may just repeat the findings of two recent PhD dissertations, one by Aditi Raina at the National University of Singapore, the other by Olivia C Molden of the University of

Oregon: distribution will continue to favour richer households and those near main roads who already have greater access to government piped water. "Without adequately addressing water access issues for low-income families and renters, Melamchi will likely perpetuate existing social inequities in the city," says Molden, a Fulbright scholar. The distribution plan for the first phase of Melamchi water (*see map*) shows that areas inside the Ring Road, higher-income localities and those closer to the mains will get water first. The second phase will bring

340mld more water, but that may take another decade: by then Kathmandu Valley's population will have exceeded 4 million. At the Kathmandu Valley Water Supply Management Board, engineers say they are aware of the need for more equitable distribution, and plan to feed water to neglected neighbourhoods through reservoirs strategically located outside the Ring Road. "Uneven distribution was due to faulty engineering and haphazard planning in the past," (which meant, for example, that people who could afford it started using pumps to access more water), says Sanjeev Bikram Rana, an engineer at the Board. "The Melamchi pipeline has been designed to provide a minimum of 10m residual height, which means people won't need water pumps. We will also have a scheme for poor households who use limited water." The water supply utility, KUKL, will introduce a computerised system to monitor and control distribution. This will end the existing practice of manually opening and closing water valves, which favoured well-off neighbourhoods that could afford the service. 670km of pipes have been laid so far, making the city look like a disaster zone this monsoon, but with 80% of the network completed, 40,000 houses are



Paying bills

Many inner city residents of Patan have found that they cannot register to have a connection to new water mains unless they have cleared past water bills and fines. But some households are being billed for water they never got in past decades. Bhaikaji Maharjan and his neighbours in Lukhusi haven't paid their water bills for years, and he doesn't want to pay for something he never got. But Maharjan says some may be compelled to clear dues because of the promise of Melamchi water. D P Chapagain of KUKL says customers should have notified them if they wanted to disconnect their supply: "They should have known they had to keep paying the minimum rate. All the dues must be cleared for Melamchi water."

PIPE DREAM



Reservoir



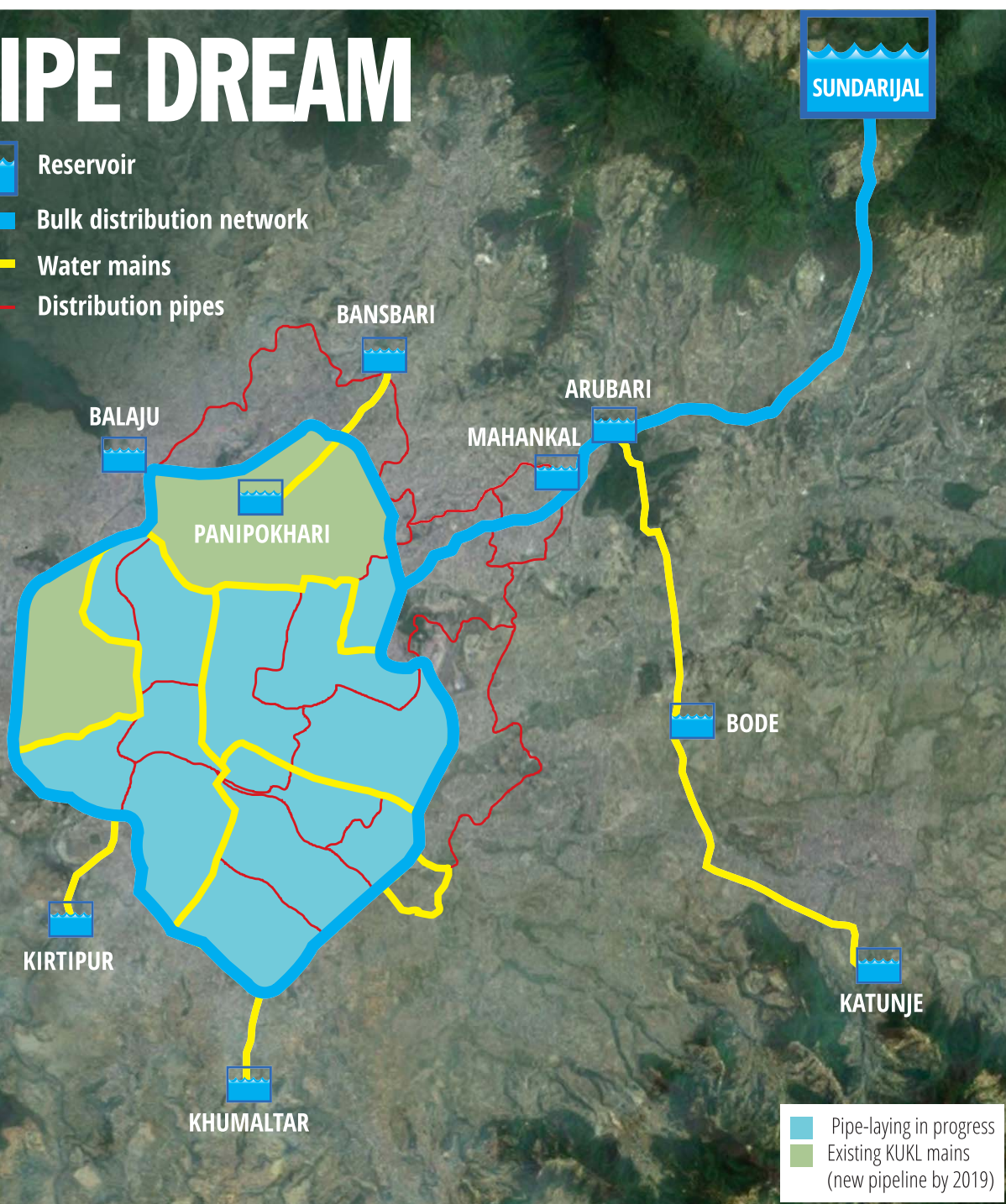
Bulk distribution network



Water mains



Distribution pipes



ryone

connected. Construction of five of the six new reservoirs, with a total capacity of 65,000 cubic metres, has been completed.

PID and the Department of Roads are temporarily repairing roads dug up during pipe laying. Once the system has been successfully tested, roads under the jurisdiction of the municipality will be permanently fixed.

"If water arrives in Sundarijal, we are ready to supply in October," says Tires Khatri, Chief of the Project Implementation Directorate (PID).

Yet, the project is unlikely to meet its October deadline because the final 2km of the tunnel has been delayed due to soft rock. Once the water finally arrives in Sundarijal, it will take six more months to test the flow and finish the treatment system. KUKL says it may be May 2018 by the time the first Kathmandu households get Melamchi water, which is snowmelt from the Langtang National Park.

Kathmandu Metropolitan City architect Chandrashova Shakya says that Melamchi must be seen primarily as a solution for drinking water, and communities should continue with recharging Kathmandu's ground water, harvesting rainwater and reviving traditional channels and water spouts for more sustainable use.

Adds Molden: "Alongside the modern pipe network, revitalising



Sunita Tamang, 28, (pictured above) rents a room in Chyasal with her young family and spends Rs 3,000 per month for water. She will have to continue to buy it because the new pipes have not reached the area. It is clear that even with Melamchi, many Kathmandu residents will continue to rely on other sources.

While the long wait for Melamchi water will soon be over for some people, neighbourhoods in Patan have developed their own ingenious ways to deal with the shortage.

Chanmaya Awale, 42, of Chyasal gets only a trickle of water from the KUKL utility every 12 days, so she still relies on the 400-year-old neighbourhood waterspout, and well water. She is looking forward to having plentiful water by next year, from the plastic hose that has been connected to the Melamchi pipe under the road outside her house.

Suman Bajracharya of Nyakhachok, on the other hand, doesn't trust the utility, is opting out of Melamchi and plans to stick with his community's well-water distribution system by reviving ground water recharging.

"I'm not taking Melamchi, I'm not even sure if it'll ever come," said 48-year-old Bajracharya. "We have never relied on the government, the community has been managing its own water for decades now. We will continue with that."

Says Rajani Maharjan of the research group Institute for Social and Environmental Transition-Nepal (ISET-N): "Neighbourhoods have been using well water, but we are extracting more than we are recharging: the water table has gone down and wells are going dry."

old water systems can provide additional public water sources that people can access for a variety of reasons."

The cost of Melamchi water could be anywhere up to Rs 400 per month for an average household. Experts hope putting a price-tag on the water will force people to be more prudent with

water use so that treated drinking water is not wasted to flush toilets.

Madhukar Upadhyay concludes: "This is a hugely expensive project, and the water will have a cost, so we have to manage it locally, regard it as a precious commodity and not waste or misuse the water." 🇳🇵

ALL FOR WATER



MACHINDRA BAHAL

Maiya Shakhya's (above) life revolves around water. She used to wake up to wait in line for hours every morning at the neighbourhood well in Machindra Bahal. But the community well dried up, so seven years ago she started to rise at the crack of dawn to walk 20 minutes to the sunken spout at Mangal Bazar to be first in line.

During her second pregnancy, she asked her husband to dig a well in their backyard. "We suffered a lot due to the shortage of water, so it was important to have it nearby," recalls the 40-year-old. One of her neighbours even has a well under her bed and pumps water to sell to her community.

Shakya and families renting rooms in her house are all using water from the well in the backyard these days, and are not hooked to the city supply. At one point she had even started selling water to the neighbourhood, and remembers: "People from all over Patan used to come to me to buy water."

But Shakya knows shortages could return any time, and is happy about Melamchi supply: "It will wash away all our problems."

NYAKHACHOK

KUKL did not supply water to Nyakhachok regularly, and even when there was water it was contaminated with sewage. So, 18 years ago people there decided to dig a community well, and disconnected the city supply. Community leaders also planted trees, revived a park to recharge groundwater, and even collected harvested rainwater. Nyakhachok has set an example in Patan and still provides up to 200l of water daily to 250 households at only Rs100 per month.

"We stopped paying our KUKL water bills: we haven't gotten any water from them in almost two decades. And now we don't need them either," said Suman Bajracharya. A neighbouring area has hooked up to Melamchi pipes, and some like Ashakaji Shakya would also like a tap in his house but says: "We haven't seen any pipe-laying work around here, I don't know why."



LUKHUSI

This Newar town was once so rich in water everyone envied its residents. But its ancient stone pouts started drying up and wells went yellow with iron contamination. A biosand filter made the water fit for washing and cleaning purposes, but not for human consumption. The community started buying tanker water and now Bhaikaji Maharjan (above) of the local well management committee is providing tanker and filtered water to the community every day.

Local people have been using both KUKL and tanker water, but a recent test found that both sources of water were below WHO standards for purity. Maharjan has been drinking jar water since then.

The Melamchi project pipe-laying in Lukhusi is almost complete and people have high expectations. But after learning about their hefty fine for not paying past bills, however, there are misgivings. (See box, Paying bills).

Says Maharjan: "The government should offer to minimise the penalty for the poor."

Sonia Awale

EVENTS



Biointensive gardening,

Everything Organic Nursery (EVON) will be offering its basic 3-day course in Nepali biointensive gardening.
5-7 September, 10am-5pm, For reservations: 9849325002, www.everythingorganic.org

Become a photographer,

Register for a 10-day photography workshop.
August, 7-9am, Artudio, Chhauni Hospital Road, Fee Rs5,500, 9803779777, 9851180088, artudio@hotmail.com

Nepal reads,

A platform to promote good reading habits and critical thinking. This month's edition, under a year-long project of the US Embassy's Book Bus, focuses on poems. A maximum of 14 participants will be selected.
26 August, 2-4pm, Kataksha, Maharajganj, 9802012564, kataksha.edu@gmail.com

Comic con in Nepal,

Fans of Marvel, DC, Anime, games and the comic genre are in for a treat. The event will also host international cosplay artists from Japan, the Philippines and India.
9 September, 10am-8pm, Heritage Garden, Sanepa, (01) 5013096



Music 101,

Register for group lessons to learn guitar, bass, vocals and piano from the best music teachers.
August-December, Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, Jhamsikhel, (01) 5013554, 9813556945

Obstacle race,

Be adventurous and test your strength in Nepal's first obstacle race.
9 September, 6am, Godavari Football Ground, Rs1,000, free for ultra run.

Stories of storytellers,

Book your seat if you crave inspiration from Kathmandu's amazing story makers. Tickets available at Ekta Books outlets and Attic Restaurant.
30 August, 5pm onwards, Russian Culture Centre, Kamal Pokhari, Rs300, 9841647128



The connection,

Participate in this charity event to support handicapped dogs. Money collected will fund a home for incapacitated and elderly dogs.
1 September, 7pm onwards, The Heritage Garden, Sanepa, Rs3,000, 9860130928

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.katzjazz.com.np/vocal-teacher-diandra-danieli/>

MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



MUSIC



Reggae acoustic,

Don't miss an opportunity to tap to the reggae acoustic beats this weekend by Zimba and Sanjay from Joint Family Internationale.
25 August, 8-11pm, House of Music, Thamel, Free entry, 9851075172

Basuri duo,

Indulge in an Asian classical musical evening by Hiroshi Nakagawa from Japan and Nagendra Bikram Rai from Nepal.
8 September, 5-7pm, Alliance Francaise Kathmandu, Rs500, Rs300(for students), (01) 5009221



Deep Shrestha,

The legendary singer and musician Deep Shrestha will be gracing the evening with his special performance.
28 August, 6pm onward, GG Machaan, Pulchowk, Rs1,000, (01) 5554291

Aadarsha live,

Unwind this weekend with a soothing musical performance by Aadarsha band.
25 August, 7-10pm, Ai-La Lounge, Kumaripati, (01) 5008681

Music for a cause,

Your favourite band B-8EIGHT and singer Sweta Singh Hamal will perform live to support the students of Palanchok Bhagwati Secondary School.
26 August, 6pm onwards, Titos Pub and Lounge, Jhamsikhel, 9841647747

OUR PICK



QAIDI BAND

Opens in Kathmandu on 25 August

In this fast-moving, musical tale, seven prisoners in an Indian jail come together to form a band for a social event. As their music gains massive popularity on social media, they begin to use their songs as a platform to protest the country's judicial system — and face questions about their own freedom. The film features newcomers Aadar Jain and Anya Singh in lead roles.

DINING



Yala Mandala,

Spend the evening at a café in this urban artisan village. Take a tour of the gallery and handicraft workshop until your food arrives.
Kwalkhu Road, Lalitpur, (01) 5536690

The Bent Fork,

A charming European style restaurant that offers the best salads and varieties of continental dishes.
Bishal Nagar, 9802049888

Utopia,

For a relaxed ambience and mouth-watering food. Delivery available.
Ekantakuna, (01) 5000584

Dechenling,

The place to head to for Bhutanese and Tibetan cuisine, the pleasant and spacious garden is ideal for big gatherings.
Thamel, (01) 4412158



Newari bhoj,

Experience the taste of ancient Newari culture.
18-27 August, Kava, Thamel, Rs1,750, (01) 4217999, 9801227613

Café Swotha,

An intimate setting in the heart of Patan, with an atmosphere of sophisticated, romantic warmth.
Patan, (01) 5551184, info@traditionalhomes.com.np

Falcha,

Give in to the twin pleasures of lemon jeera chicken and mutton handi kabab.
Jhamsikhel, Lalitpur, 9851013475, bipinpiya@gmail.com

Capital Grill,

This American style diner offers a large assortment of appetisers and entrees to suit everyone's tastes.
Bhatbhateni, (01) 4428426, grillcapital@gmail.com



Fuji Bakery,

Tucked in Chakupat, this bakery offers homemade goodies like apple pie, pain du chocolate and banana cake.
Chakupat, Lalitpur, (01) 5543678

GETAWAY



Raniban Retreat,

Situated at the other end of Phewa Lake and nestled inside Raniban forest and the World Peace Stupa, this retreat has one of the best views of the Annapurna range.
Phewa Lake, Pokhara, (01) 4411855

Jhule Mountain Resort,

Resting 2,050m above sea level, the eco-resort boasts a farmhouse that stretches across a hill covered in fresh pine. Enjoy an organic homestay experience.
Shivapuri-Nagarjun National Park, Lapsipedi-3, Jhule, (01) 6212399



Famous Farm,

Wake up to the sounds of chirping birds and a fresh morning breeze wafting in through the *aankhijhyal*.
Nuwakot, (01) 4700426, info@rural-heritage.com

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

Haatiban Resort,

Climb up to Champadevi in the morning for a royal view of Kathmandu Valley and jog down to the hotel for a relaxed evening.
Pharping, Kathmandu, (01) 4371537 / 56

Shivapuri Cottage,

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Budhanilkantha, 9841371927

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Leading from beneath

The one-door policy for flood relief was widely criticised, but it can work if newly-elected local governments take charge

SAHINA SHRESTHA
in CHITWAN

Three months after Tara Kaji Mahato was elected deputy mayor of Madi Municipality, Chitwan saw one of the worst floods in recent decades. Although no lives were lost, nearly 200 houses were damaged, and settlements had to be relocated.

Local women surrounded her on Tuesday morning, each wanting to share their woes. This was Mahato's third visit to Dhukurbari after the floods: the first time she made a list of basic needs, during the follow-up visit she brought relief materials.

"Why aren't you in school?" she asks a young girl outside a house. "The flood swept away my books," the girl answers.

"I'll bring you books and stationery soon, then you must go to school regularly," says Mahato, who had brought Dignity Kits for pregnant women she met on her second visit.

In Ratnanagar, Anita Rai, 13 (*pictured*) brings out books and notebooks she managed to salvage after the flood, placing them to dry on a clothesline. She remembers the water reaching her knees and her parents tying down their belongings, but the first thing Rai did was store her books in a higher place. Even that was not high enough and the sixth grader lost more than half her books.

"My friends are in school because they have concrete houses and their uniforms and books were saved," she says.



SAHINA SHRESTHA

On Monday, three organisations handed over needed relief materials to the flood victims in the village, in coordination with the mayor and deputy mayor of the municipality. UNICEF had brought water buckets, mugs and blankets for the children, Sapana Village Foundation came with notebooks, stationery, bags and uniforms and Ratnanagar Chamber of Commerce and Industry donated mosquito coils and phenyl to maintain hygiene.

That outcome was possible because local representatives collected data and coordinated with relief agencies that wanted to help. Chitwan district

quickly formed a disaster management fast-response team chaired by CDO Narayan Prasad Bhatta. The CDO implemented a strict one-door policy, where local representatives lead relief distribution.

"This is to ensure that there is no manipulation or duplication in relief distribution," says Bhatta. "We need to identify and reach the right people for effective distribution of aid. With local representatives in place, it is easier to do it. They are more responsible and accountable as they know the people and the area."

Local leaders say the policy has been effective. "The best part about this is people get what they need and

nothing goes to waste," says Bharat Gurung, chairman of Ward 6, Madi Municipality. "What is the use of giving people quilts when they need rice?"



"The one-door policy has really been very effective in Chitwan," says Anita Dahal, Chief of the UNICEF Office in Bharatpur. "Since the local elected leaders are in place, there is better identification of those who need supplies, and therefore more effective targeted distribution of the relief materials being brought in through various organisations and individuals."

This is in sharp contrast to Rautahat, one of the worst-hit districts, where the lack of elected representatives at the local level is slowing down relief distribution, which is being led mainly by private organisations.

"Sending employees to the field for emergency work is not ideal," says Umesh Basnet, local development officer for Rautahat. "If we had local council members to count on, reaching those truly affected would be much easier and effective."

While there are still places they haven't been able to reach because roads were damaged, local leaders in Chitwan continue trying to deliver aid. They say this is an opportunity to work for the people and help regain communities' trust.

"Even if she can't bring anything for us, I am glad she at least visited us," says Tirtha Kumari Lamichhane of Dhukurbari, after deputy mayor Mahato had left.

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SPLIT

For those who followed M Night Shyamalan's film career with glee, and then growing despair, there is now a flicker of hope. With *Split*, which came out early this year and is now on DVD, Shyamalan



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

is back with a film that is so unpredictable and so deeply bizarre that you really have no idea what is going to happen, a trick that made the filmmaker so popular with *The Sixth Sense* (1999) and continued with a few subsequent films, but without as much success.

Originality is a rare quality in the film industry these days. The big films financed by American studios, and now increasingly big Chinese corporations, are formulaic and often the source

material is comics or novels: few risks are taken. Independent films coming out of North America are not particularly groundbreaking, leaving independent world cinema, and now television, to really push the boundaries.


Some of Shyamalan's films have been quite bad, and while *Split* is nowhere as good as *The Sixth Sense*, there are parts of it that are absolutely riveting. James McAvoy is the main reason for this. Playing a man with 23 different identities, McAvoy's portrayal of Kevin Wendell Crumb is a work of true art, a feat that can only be pulled off by a thespian of the finest calibre. McAvoy has always been impressive, but with this particular role he runs the gamut from loveable to pathetic, tender to bizarre, and finally to the horrifying — and it is awesome to watch.

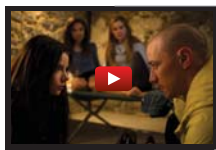
The story itself is a real

cipher and as with many of Shyamalan's films, it really is quite ludicrous once one snaps out of the haze of the film. However, as byzantine as it may be, the plot does compel, and the central mystery holds enough gravity to keep you focused.

There is also another phenom onscreen, the young Anya Taylor-Joy, who plays Casey, a girl who is kidnapped by one of Crumb's personalities. Plot-wise that's as far as I can go without ruining things for you, and I hope that these little clues will interest you enough to watch this strange film, which is full of flaws and yet one of the most curious productions I've seen in a while.

Shyamalan wrote *Split* as a sequel of sorts to *Unbreakable* (2000). While it really isn't a conventional sequel, there is enough in it to give way to a third, planned film, which is now in the works after the box-office success of *Split*. While his work is uneven, as is the case with the Shyamalans of this world, you just never quite know what you're gonna get- and that to me is so much more interesting than the umpteenth, interminable fight sequence at the end of another *Transformers* movie.

You may not like *Split* but it will leave you wondering for hours to come. It may not be everyone's cup of tea, but those with a soft spot for this kooky filmmaker will breathe a sigh of recognition. 



Watch trailer online

nepaltimes.com

HAPPENINGS



RSS

STRIKE A POSE: Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and his wife Arzu Rana Deuba with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Rastrapati Bhawan in New Delhi on Wednesday.



JICA

JAPANESE AID: Ambassador of Japan to Nepal Masashi Ogawa handed over emergency relief goods worth Rs23.4 million to Home Minister Janardan Sharma at a ceremony at the Humanitarian Staging Area, Tribhuvan International Airport, on Wednesday.



GOPEN RAI

FERVENT PRAYERS: A woman performs a ritual to celebrate Tij at Krishna Mandir in Lalitpur on Thursday.



NEPAL ARMY

"SAY AHHEH": Nepal army and US army conduct a health camp in Gorkha, which was the epicenter for the 2015 earthquake.



GOPEN RAI

GOAL!: Nepal's Birjesh Chaudhary celebrates after scoring a goal against the Maldives at the SAFF U-15 Championship 2017, held at the ANFA complex, Lalitpur, on Monday.

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Periods of banishment

Nagarik, 24 August

नागरिक

Health assistant Sarita Sejuwal works at a local health post in Tila Rural Municipality-9 of Jumla district. But she is forced to vacate her house during her menstruation. "Locals don't come to the health post for treatment if I am there during my periods. I am not allowed to touch patients and can't stay at home," Sejuwal says. Women, including many health assistants, in the far flung villages of Jumla are forced to live in Chhaupadi during their periods despite continuous campaigns to raise awareness against it.



"No, go there." "Go down." "Get out!"
अव्णपूर्ण
Basu Kshitiz in Annapurna Post

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“ We believe even India wants to see the Nepal-China relationship proceed peacefully. ”
Hua Chunying, spokesperson at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, Kantipur, 24 August

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The golden age of the

A secular Nepal sees a surge in conversions to Christianity by evangelical groups

OM ASTHA RAI

Adam Parajuli's right hand was paralysed, but all attempts to treat it had failed. He had almost given up hope when his Christian uncle told him that the pastor at the Rofeka Church in Sindhupalchok district could cure him.

The pastor asked the congregation to pray for Parajuli, and made him drink some 'holy' water. "It was a miracle: I was able to move my hand," Parajuli recalls.

Nepal was still a Hindu monarchy at the time and practising Christianity was not easy. Devotees were harassed by police, and even jailed for spreading the gospel. Parajuli began to visit the church in Lamosangu clandestinely, without telling his parents. The villagers soon found out, then abused and ostracised him.

"I was not bothered about what others thought, but I was upset that my father was upset because he was also taunted," he says.



One Saturday, Parajuli saw his father sitting in the last row of the church. His heart pounded as his father approached him. "I was scared that he would slap me in front of everyone," he recalls. "But he hugged me and told me to be happy with the life I had chosen."

Three decades on, Parajuli is now the pastor of a protestant

church in Bhainsepati. His whole family has converted to Christianity. Sindhupalchok, where there was only one church when he was baptised, now has more than 175 — half of them opened after Nepal became a secular republic in 2008.

"The 200 years of monarchy was the dark age for Nepal's Christians, now is the golden age

despite all the recent attacks on us," says pastor Kiran Kumar Das of Anugraha Church in Kusunti, Lalitpur.

But there is a growing backlash against conversions from conservative groups unhappy with the secular Constitution. In 2009, a blast killed two people and injured 10 at the Roman Catholic Assumption Church

in Lalitpur. Police arrested Sita Shrestha, who grew up singing Hindu hymns with her father, a priest at a temple in Kathmandu.

In an interview then, she told a reporter she was proud of what she did, and would do it again. "All the misery inflicted upon us... is because of these Christians, they need to be chased out of Nepal."

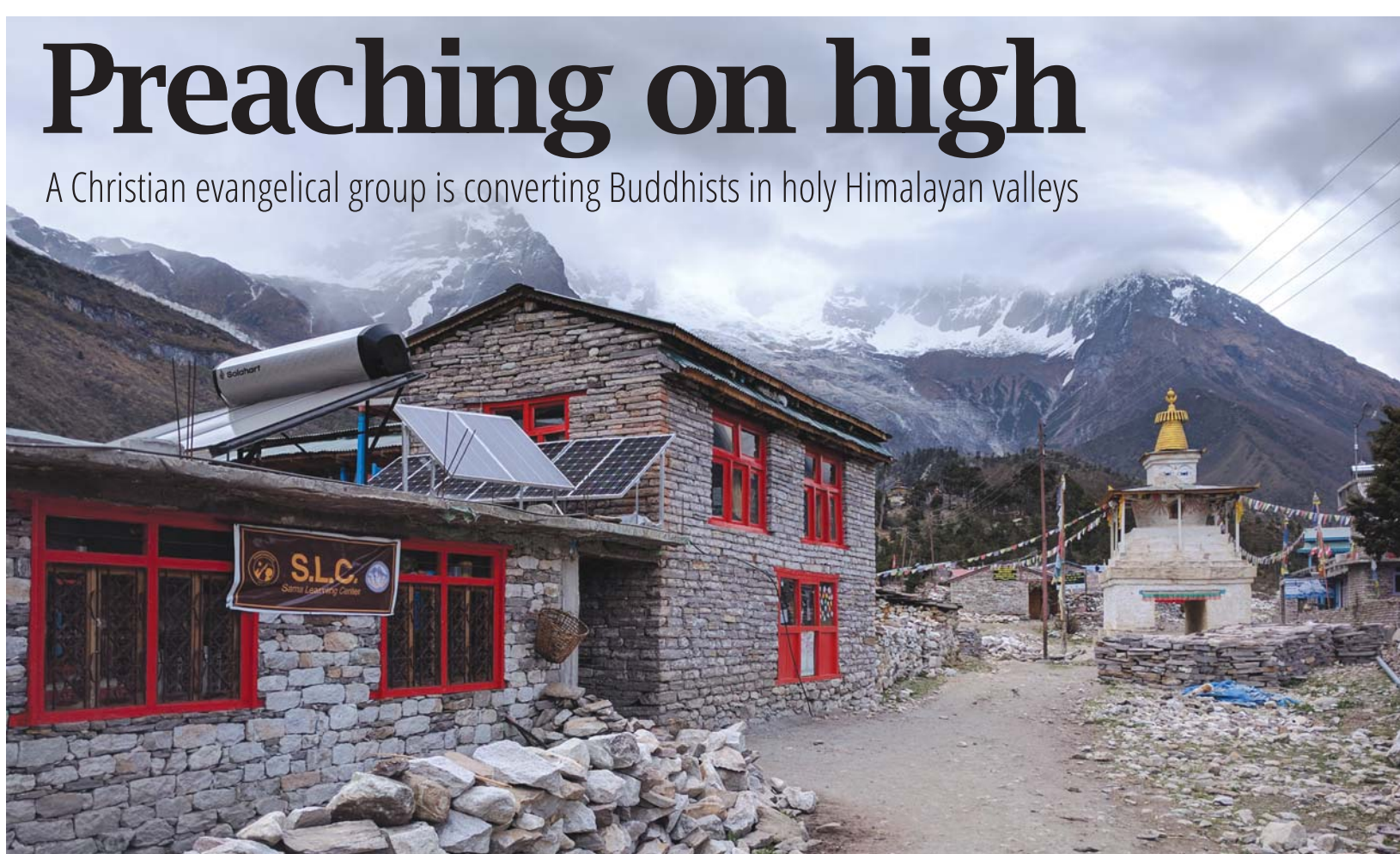
HIGH SCHOOL: A Christian school in Nubri the *be-yul* below Mt Manaslu next to a Buddhist Chorten (*right*).

BROT COBURN
in GORKHA

In 2014, a group called MountainChild signed a 5-year agreement with the Social Welfare Council to open schools in rural Nepal: the Sama Learning Centre in Nubri of North Gorkha is one of them.

There were rumours that MountainChild was a cover for evangelical Christian missionaries engaged in religious conversion and 'church planting' across the high mountain belt of Nepal, even though the Constitution states, 'No person shall... convert another person from one religion to another or any act or conduct that may jeopardise other's religion.'

"Well, we're giving them a choice," the fresh-faced American director of the school said when I pointed to evidence of their hidden agenda of conversion. He was implying that any interest a student expressed in converting to Christianity was voluntary. But can such a choice be truly free will, at Sama Learning Centre's KG and pre-KG levels, when the children are provided with food, clothing and promises of a glorious future blessed by Christ?



The Nubri and neighbouring ethnic groups proudly trace their lineage — their families, the generations of lamas and the teacher-disciple relationships — back hundreds of years. I asked the director how he could introduce Christianity without a scholarly background or

personal knowledge of the millennium-old traditions, cultures and languages of the valley.

He replied: "Well, before Buddhism, they practiced another religion, then converted, so conversion is not new to this valley."

He may have been referring to the 8th-Century saint, Padmasambhava, who transformed the pre-Buddhist deities into defenders of the faith. It seemed arrogant to suggest that some development aid, and a conviction of moral righteousness, could co-opt a cultural system that has

BROT COBURN

Preaching on high

A Christian evangelical group is converting Buddhists in holy Himalayan valleys

gospel



GOPEN RAI

In April this year the same church was set ablaze by an unidentified man. The State continues to deny Christians a designated cemetery, and political leaders often make disparaging remarks against the religion. Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal said recently: “The growing Christian population is a threat to Nepal.”

All of this pales in comparison to what Nepali Christians suffered during the monarchy. There was no recorded case of a church bombing, but there was the Hindu state-sponsored harassment of and discrimination against Nepali Christians. Despite this, Tri Ratna Adam Tuladhar, who converted to Christianity when he was a

TAKE ME TO YOUR HEART: Christian devotees pray at Koinonia Patan Church, which aims to plant 500 churches in Nepal by 2020.

teenager in the early ’70s and is now pastor at the Cannan Prayer House, says secularism has given Christians a breathing space compared to the harassment and jail they faced during the Panchayat. The number of visitors to his prayer house is increasing, and Pastor Tuladhar is opening another church in Buddha Nagar. The Federation of National Christians Nepal (FNCN) estimates there are 12,000 churches in the country, and the number is increasing. The Koinonia Mission, which began with the construction of Patan Church in 1978, already has 90 churches and is aiming to build 400 more over the next three years under its Vision 2020 program. “We are so far concentrated in and around central Nepal, but we want to reach every corner of the country,” says pastor Mangal Manandhar, who leads the evangelical group. While catholic Christians are not active in conversion and expanding their community, protestant Christians, mostly belonging to evangelical and pentecostal denominations, are in full expansion mode. Although the Census 2011 showed less than 2% of Nepalis as Christians, the FNCN says the number now is closer to 10%. The Hindu, royalist political party RPP and other Hindu groups blame secularism for growing proselytization, and are

Fake secularism

Nepal was declared secular in 2007, but it is not yet secular in the real sense. Secularism requires the state to be either indifferent to all religions, or treat all religions equally. But the Nepali version of secularism, as defined by the Constitution, protects and promotes the Hindu religion and alienates other faiths. The Constitution recognises a primordial Hindu identity (Sanatan Dharma) and symbols like the cow. This was a compromise, but pro-Hindu politicians must be happy because the Constitution gives them more than they wanted. There has been a surge in conversion to Christianity after Nepal was declared secular a decade ago, but secularism is not to blame. The problems lie within the Hindu religion, which is exclusionary in nature and discriminates against Dalits and other social groups that suffer from an entrenched caste-based hierarchy. These groups are looking for ways to escape the shackles of this unjust hierarchy, which is why they are attracted to Christianity. They are also enticed by its false promises of salvation and a prosperous future: it is not surprising that most converts to Christianity are from Dalit and Janajati communities. The best way to stop proselytization is to introduce reforms into Hinduism. Otherwise another religion will attract Hindus excluded by their own religion. But the possibility of reforming Hinduism looks bleak because it is based on self-granted privileges of caste. If pro-Hindu politicians are worried about Christian conversions, they must push for genuine secularism. If Nepal becomes a secular nation in the real sense, it really does not matter which religion you follow. So the charm offensive of Christian missionaries will be less. Dambar Chemjong is an anthropologist.



DAMBAR CHEMJONG

demanding that Nepal revert to being a Hindu nation. Anthropologist Dambar Chemjong argues that secularism is not the only reason why Nepal’s Christian community is growing. “Hinduism is an exclusionary religion,” he says. “It excludes Dalits and others by creating a caste-based hierarchy. They want to escape this exclusionary religion, and end up converting to Christianity.” (*See Guest Editorial, page 2*) Chemjong says Nepal is pseudo-secular because it still promotes Hindu identity, culture and symbols. He adds: “If Hindus are worried about Christians, they

must push for real secularism. If Nepal becomes secular in a real sense, the Christian charm offensive will have less impact.” 📺

TRYST WITH CHRIST



Join our reporter on a visit to some of Nepal's new churches and learn more about why many are attracted by the Christian faith.

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Hidden treasure valley

The northern Gorkha area of Nubri is a sacred landscape recognised as a *be-yul*, a ‘hidden treasure valley’ designated by Padmasambhava, a place where the people have peacefully and (mostly) joyously existed for centuries. The illegal proselytizing has sounded a wake-up call for the area’s Buddhist lamas and practitioners, who find themselves needing to step up and compete with the lavish gifts and lofty promises of the Christian missionaries. But Lamas in Sama village are now garnering support from donors to build a lay school that will supplant the Christian-supported school. Nuptul Rinpoche, acting Co-Abbot of the Serang Monastery, says: “Missionary activity has brought disharmony to the village, which we have been called on to help resolve, including when a child from Bihi was converted. Because of that, parents asked us to create a lay school at the monastery.” The school now has 38 students, in addition to the monastery’s roughly 100 monks and nuns.

The Footstool Project (*see main story*) produced a dramatic, sympathy-raising video (featuring founder Jack Reid as a shadowy, godfather-type figure) that outlines its goal of delivering the Nubri people from spiritual ‘darkness’. The clip recently disappeared from YouTube — possibly in response to questions posed by some prominent villagers. Confronting evangelicals can be tricky because exposing their zealous agenda might only drive them further underground. They view non-Christian faiths and practices as the handiwork of Satan, while challenges to their beliefs feed the conviction that they are being ‘persecuted’ as Jesus was. Buddhists in Nubri and throughout Nepal may need to proactively alert evangelicals that they are aware of their intentions and methods. Hindus and followers of other great Asian religions are similarly at risk of infiltration by these interlopers offering gifts of rice, education, hope and eternal salvation — which come at a very high cultural cost.

Brot Coburn

TARGETED PEOPLE

An interactive map of Nepal in The Footstool Project (<https://tfp.asia/unreached>) showing 23 Buddhist Nepali groups in high Himalayan valleys that are being ‘targeted’ by the evangelical group for conversion to Christianity. The groups says it is trying to ‘reach the unreached.’

provided people with guidance, meaning, and connection for centuries in these holy, hidden Himalayan *be-yul* (treasure valleys). MountainChild was founded by an American from Colorado named Jack Reid, and its influence in Nepal grew after the 2015 earthquakes when people were most needy and vulnerable. In an appeal for post-earthquake support, Reid wrote, ‘... We have an unprecedented opportunity to unfold God’s pervasive grace upon areas that have only known martyrdom in the past. The hearts of these unreached are now open and they are crying for help. We are positioned for success through the decades of community-building that now affords us the relational grid to deliver both natural and eternal results.’ MountainChild works with The Footstool Project (from the biblical passage in which God exhorts, ‘make your enemies your footstool’), which is another Jack Reid invention, single-mindedly dedicated to conversion. Its strategy is to send energetic youth to rural posts, while organising short-term mission treks for like-minded Christians from the United States, focusing on the ‘unreached people groups’ — Nepal’s of the high Himalayan valleys, mainly those of Tibetan ethnic origin. “They are raised the Buddhist way — no affection, no emotion, no love, just empty,’ blogged one trekker, referring to the people she met in Nubri. ‘The scenery might be beautiful here, but there is so much darkness! I don’t feel hope or joy here. Everyone is just going through the motions, no direction, just dark despair. So sad....’ In a video of a sermon delivered to

more than 2,000 parishioners in Alabama, Pastor David Platt referred to Nubri as a place ‘where the Devil has had his way for centuries’. Villagers there see only the mere tip of the evangelicals’ institutional and fundraising iceberg. Dozens of US-based churches are providing MountainChild and The Footstool Project with financial support. Their philosophy suggests an ideological link to Assemblies of God, a fundamentalist, Pentecostal denomination with an aggressive agenda to convert the ‘unreached’. The AG claim to have 13,000 churches in the US and 67 million followers worldwide. With that comes money — lots of it. Nepal’s Hindus and Buddhists have historically incorporated elements of other religions into their belief systems. But the evangelicals require that their Christian converts renounce and reject in their actions and hearts all expression of their existing spiritual traditions. This has aroused quiet scepticism among Jesuits and other Christians in Nepal, such as those connected to United Mission Nepal (UMN). These groups are doing unquestionably positive work, without a focus on conversion. A prudent response to MountainChild’s tenacious presence might be: Sure, take their money and gifts, and learn the English they teach. But don’t relinquish your heritage as part of the bargain. An even more prudent response would be to enforce Nepal’s Constitution. 🚫 Brot Coburn lived in Nepal for 20 years, working in conservation and development, and is the author or editor of seven general trade books.



Summit of Scoundrels

Good thing the rhinos that inadvertently swam into India due to last week's floods were rescued and repatriated to Nepal, otherwise it may have sparked a diplomatic row just before R-zoo's state visit to India. If only the talks on water and security matters could be as amicably settled.

Just before the Crime Minister scooted off, though, his party's MPs filed a draft bill in Parliament allowing convicted murderers, rapists, human traffickers, drug pushers, kidnappers, carjackers, and other outlaw criminals sentenced to less than 20 years, to henceforth stand for elections by cutting the mandatory six-year cooling off period by half. A lot of people were outraged by this, little realising that this has been standard operating procedure in Nepal since the dawn of democracy and the advent of party-based parliamentary democracy (hereinafter referred to as 'Goat Market').

You can tell Prime Minister Dubya IV is an equal opportunity employer because he has formed a superduper kingsize x-tra large cabinet platoon of 50 ministers. And since the Chambers of Parliament are beginning to resemble the Chambers of Commerce, we can only hope that Nepal's newly affiliated hospitals can operate (pardon the pun) without let or hindrance. Nepal is more advanced: in other countries the mafia is involved in killing, here the mafia is involved in healing.

However, Dr Govind KC is right:

we have reached saturation point with medical colleges in Kathmandu because competition has got so stiff (another subtle pun, if you all noticed) that hospitals are bribing ambulance drivers and chopper pilots. It is time for a moratorium on medical colleges: let's open training centres for malfeasance, and promote MICE tourism by conducting an international conference of mafia bosses.

Having notched up a few more points in the Transparency International Corruption Index this year, Nepal has won the bid to host the next Global Conference on Graft and Organised Crime, for which scoundrels have to pay a hefty bribe to attend.

Some of the world's most renowned rascals will be here to deliberate for three days on how to swindle more efficiently, as well as to put finishing touches on the Universal Declaration on Plunder and State Capture.

At press time, more than 1,000 internationally-acclaimed thieves and knaves have confirmed participation, including biggies such as Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo of Equatorial Guinea and Mossack Fonseca from Panama, with the opening plenary keynote by the legendary Imelda Marcos. Delegates will split into breakout sessions, and their highlights will be shared in the final Tyrants' Networking Evening.



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