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# SHARED FUTURES

Mention the acronym SAARC and eyes glaze over, people stop reading editorials like these and they turn the page – as some of you probably already have. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation has been a regional talk shop ever since it was set up more than 40 years ago, unable to fulfill many of the promises it made about co-prosperity, cooperation, poverty alleviation, energy self-sufficiency, and environmental protection.

Unlike ASEAN or the EU, SAARC is hobbled by its asymmetry. One member state has 1,000 times more people than the two smallest countries in the grouping. That gravitational pull, and India’s aversion to multilateralism in dealing with neighbours (combined with a chronic lack of political will among those neighbours to make SAARC work) has hobbled the organisation. There is cynicism about SAARC, even officials from member states publicly poke fun at it. But, like the United Nations, SAARC can only be as effective as its members want it to be.

Sub-regional groupings like BIMSTEC (Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Thailand,

Myanmar Economic Cooperation) and the Bay of Bengal Initiative are somewhat more tangible. There are also Track 2 think-tanks and private sector initiatives to get the SAARC juggernaut to roll.

The 6th SAARC Business Conclave this week in Kathmandu was one such exercise where, besides the usual lament about unfulfilled aspirations, there was networking and useful sharing of ideas. As in all such SAARC-related events, the elephant in the room was India, and the need to balance its size with its status as an equal member state.

However, the dragon in the room was China. How can these economic behemoths be hitched to pull in the same direction, and take South Asia along? So far, Beijing’s foray into trade, investment and connectivity in South Asia have been bilateral, but its Belt Road Initiative hopes to go regional with the possible extension of the Qinghai-Tibet railway through the Himalayan Range, and across Nepal to India.

SAARC has been held hostage by politics, specifically the strained relations between its two biggest members, for far too long. Trade, investment in energy, river sharing and better connectivity within South Asia could help bind the countries more closely, and build on existing bilateral agreements, as US Ambassador Alaina B. Teplitz argues in this week’s Guest Editorial (*below*).

It is incongruous that intra-SAARC trade constitutes only 5% of the international trade of countries in the region. Of all international investment in the region only 7% is between SAARC members. It is absurd that in this day and age the world’s most deprived region should not be working together to raise the living standard of its people.



GUEST EDITORIAL  
ALAINA B. TEPLITZ

## Em-powering South Asia

Energy is a critical ingredient for prosperity, and can be a catalyst for deeper regional integration. Energy security is a critical issue for South Asia, which is home to nearly one-fourth of the world’s population and where economies are growing by an average of nearly 7% each year.

But South Asia’s GDP per capita is less than one-third of the global average, and per capita energy consumption is far below the rest of the world, hinting at unmet need in spite of increasing economic growth, industrialisation, an increasing population, and accelerating urbanisation. All of these changes increase the demand for electricity.

There have been several positive developments in energy cooperation: the 2014 SAARC Framework Agreement on Energy Cooperation and the Power Trade Agreement between India and Nepal. Bilateral frameworks between India and Bangladesh, as well as India and Bhutan, have also been strengthened. Currently, around 2,300MW of power are traded in this BBIN sub-region.

These demonstrate win-win benefits for all South Asian countries. For example, Bhutan’s surplus hydropower exports to India account for 25% of its GDP. Bangladesh began importing 500MW of power from India in 2013, helping it reduce load-shedding by 70% and generate annual savings of around \$500 million. India also gains by earning revenue from electricity exports.

A 2015 World Bank study found that regional electricity cooperation in South Asia could lead to savings of \$19 billion per year over the next 25 years. A 2017 study by the USAID-funded South Asia Regional Initiative for Energy Integration (SARI/EI) showed that accelerated power trade between India and Nepal could increase Nepal’s GDP by over \$120 billion in the next 30 years.

Energy cooperation is therefore not just about increasing integration but also an essential building block for regional prosperity. The US government actively supports regional energy integration in South Asia. We

are committed to fostering connections from Central Asia to Southeast Asia, and everywhere in between – through increased physical infrastructure, coordinated regulatory and trade institutions, and human and digital connectivity.

Regional integration is not just good for South Asia, it is good for the world, including the United States. A more stable, prosperous, and integrated South Asia is more likely when countries of the region are linked through trade agreements and have greater physical infrastructure connections. Our activities include technical training on power contracts, procurement, regulation, and electricity system modeling as well as physical infrastructure – such as the planned 300 km of electricity transmission lines in MCC’s Nepal Compact.

International experience has shown that most cross-border power trade begins with bilateral interactions which provide a foundation for multilateral arrangements and transactions. South Asia is moving along this path, and the next step is to coordinate regional energy regulations and policies by:

- Building strong and effective regulatory regimes
- Designing competitive market pricing mechanisms
- Developing solid contracts and agreements
- Setting up dispute resolution mechanisms, and
- Supporting a technical regional coordination agency to facilitate regional planning and development.

The United States looks forward to working with both the public and private sector, as well as multilateral organisations, to em-power South Asia. Pun intended.



**Alaina B. Teplitz** is the United States Ambassador to Nepal. This Guest Editorial is adapted from her speech to the 6th SAARC Business Leaders Conclave in Kathmandu on 17 March.

### ONLINE PACKAGES



MEDICOPTER

Magsaysay Prize Winner Mahabir Pun’s National Innovation Centre is testing drones to deliver medicines and treat patients in remote areas of Nepal. Watch a group of young Nepali engineers build the medicopter, test fly it and learn from the visionary himself about how the project can help rural communities and prevent the brain drain of Nepali youth.



PLANNING FAMILIES

The use of contraceptives have stagnated in the last decade in Nepal, yet the fertility rate is in decline. Watch this short video where we take you to health posts in Kavre to find out why and learn about the kinds of family planning services available in remote parts of Nepal.

#### WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED

Thank you for trying to put together this graphic about what probably happened to flight BS211 (‘20 by 02’, Kanak Mani Dixit, #901). The dead will never come back to us, but we can learn lessons from this accident which will set us free to grieve in peace. This article is finally allowing my anger to transform into sorrow. We must be vigilant of all the dark, incompetent and utterly corrupt forces in positions of power and authority who are trying their best to deprive the public of facts by questioning the authenticity of the live ATC audio, the Gagalphedi video, eye-witness accounts and survivor interviews.

Shabbir A Bashar

■ This article should have come out the very next day after the crash. We were left imagining all sorts of possibilities, but not the near impact at Gagalphedi before the actual crash at the airport. This accident is not about 02 or 20 any longer.

Ananta Armugam

■ Nepal needs an alternative international airport (‘Tragedy at TIA’, Kanak Mani Dixit, #901). K P Oli government should focus its attention on expediting the work being under taken at Nijgadh Airport as soon as possible.

Prakash Joshi

■ The proposed international airport in Nijgadh with wide roads connecting to Kathmandu must now be a priority.

Ramesh Shrestha

■ What is really needed first off is an emergency/rescue service on standby 24 hours at the airport, with fire trucks that can actually put down fires. Not the helpless army and police with no equipments. So many lives could probably have been saved otherwise.

Mo Lama

#### WOMEN LEADERSHIP

Excellent portrayal of the upcoming young women leadership, who will change Nepal (‘Win-win for women’, Namrata Sharma, #901).

Karuna Onta

### WHAT'S TRENDING



#### 20 by 02

by Kanak Mani Dixit

‘Tribhuvan’ is the Puranic term referring to the three realms: heaven, hell and earth. From being close to hell on earth, Kathmandu’s Tribhuvan airport must graduate to something somewhat better. Our comprehensive analysis of the tragic crash of US-Bangla Flight BS211 on 12 March was read by hundreds of thousands online. Visit nepalitimes.com to read the investigative coverage, feedback from readers worldwide, and join the debate about ways to improve aviation safety in Nepal.

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### QUOTE TWEETS

**Nepali Times @nepalitimes**  
An increasing number of Nepalis are falling victim to a nationwide epidemic of #vitaminD deficiency as they adopt an urban life-style, stay indoors a lot and do not work or stay outdoors under the sun.

**Rajan Neupane @razzanneupane**  
The urban planning of our cities is abysmal which gives no ground for vacant spaces and not enough exposure to sunlight.

**Nepali Times @nepalitimes**  
Family, friends and relatives of those who perished on 12 March, 2018 US-Bangla plane crash in Kathmandu gathered for candlelight vigil at Maitighar on Wednesday.

**Saurav Gautam @sauravias**  
This is so heartbreaking. May all the departed souls rest in peace.

**Kunda Dixit @kundadixit Mar 17**  
Last moments of BS211 at Kathmandu airport raise more questions than answers: Why didn’t it land on RWY02 as instructed? Why was it so low on VFR go-around? Was 02-20 confusion only reason for tragedy? Read full coverage in @nepalitimes

**Harjyal @Harjyal**  
Finally something that most likely shows the path before it crashed.

**Nepali Times @nepalitimes**  
#Federalism was supposed to shake up this status quo, but it did so only on paper. In reality, the #bureaucracy is too obsessed with preserving its power, and is fighting hard to not let go of it, writes @DinkarNepal http://bit.ly/2tRkUcR

**Sambeg Sharma @sambeg2020**  
Is it bureaucracy alone obsessed with preserving status quo?

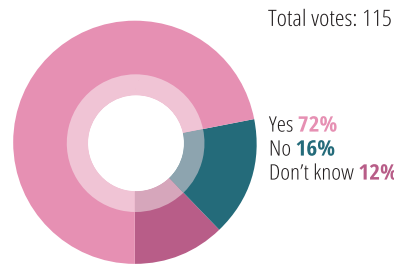
**Nepali Times @nepalitimes**  
“How did the tender to rebuild Rani Pokhari go to the same contractor twice? Who signed the cheque without proper approval from the DoA?” asks Sumana Shrestha in her column To the Point http://bit.ly/2Gd7DxT #RaniPokhari #Heritage

**Sujeev Shakya @sujeevshakya**  
Some pertinent questions on #RaniPokhari raised by @SumanaShrestha in @nepalitimes



Weekly Internet Poll #902

Q. Has the Chief Justice controversy dented your faith in the judiciary?



Weekly Internet Poll #903  
To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Should Prime Minister Oli expand the Cabinet further to accommodate the RJP-N and FSP-N?



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# Minting money by minting money at home

Why are all our passports, currency notes, licenses and car plates printed abroad?

In a country where citizens are fond of flag-waving and public displays of nationalistic fervour, no one seems to be unduly concerned that we are dependent on the outside world for our passports, bank notes, stamps, driving licenses and now even embossed car plates.



1/2 FULL  
Anil Chitrakar

Can we not demand that the government buy, establish and operate a national mint and security press so that we can create jobs, protect our national interest and make all Nepalis proud of the 'Printed and Minted in Nepal' brand?

Our grandmothers took great pride in wearing necklaces made of minted gold coins called *asarfi* which had their birth year and all other important events in their lives marked on them. In those days, they could go to the national mint called *taksar* near where Dharara used to be and get the coins made. Gold and silver coins are minted on special occasions like coronations and Buddha's birthdays, and people buy them as investments.

The mints in gold and silver and special stamps have attracted people because some regard these as long term savings. Many of us have mint from past coronations



GOPEN RAI

and the birth anniversary of the Buddha in our collections. Postal stamps are now steadily becoming extinct, but they still have value because of collectors worldwide. Nepali stamps on postcards could still be a great tourism promotion idea. Nepal prints or uses foreign software for its passports, currency notes, postage stamps and now even our driving licenses, new citizenship cards, our embossed vehicles number plates, PAN cards,

bank debit and credit cards, gold and silver coins. There is no reason why these cannot be done in Nepal. Given the inefficiency, mismanagement and rife corruption at the Janak Education Material Centre in Thimi, we may soon see children's text books also printed outside Nepal. Already, many private school text books are not just printed in India but also written there. So what will it take for Nepal to have its own secure press

and mint (*taksar*) again? Why would anyone oppose such an initiative? Will the media be mobilised by vested interest groups to create a perception that security printing cannot be done in Nepal? Instead of looking for a donor or a middleman of some foreign company, we should be encouraging Nepali businesses to take up these jobs. The old *taksar* at Sundhara could be modernised, and even operate like a museum where

students can watch the minting process from open galleries to understand how currency and passports are printed. The facility could have a gift shop where people could buy new bank notes and coins. The press and mint can be solely managed by differently abled Nepalis who could get gainful employment and send a strong message of inclusion to the rest of Nepal and the world. The only challenge is will the culture of opacity and secrecy also mean that the head of such a security printing facility will be a political appointee? Can someone be found who can rise above party politics and serve the nation with dedication and honesty? The new bank notes could partly be made of hemp and lokta fibre to make them durable. Other countries may even want to use these traditional Nepali paper fibres and there could be a profitable export market. When the prime minister is given the first file to sign ceremonially when he takes office, why do we not demand that they make a decision that will be a legacy for the history books? The word 'revolutionary' has become a cliché in Nepal, but a well managed security press and mint could be a truly revolutionary advance for Nepal.

**Anil Chitrakar** is President of *Siddharthinc*.

## Men's fashion in Nepal



Kathmandu has a lot of well-dressed male professionals who wear branded apparels, but surprisingly, there weren't any high-end clothing outlets for men in Nepal. Most of them had to shop abroad in India, Singapore and Thailand for apparel. This is when Rupesh Pandey realised the market potential for international men's clothing business in Nepal, and in 2012 opened an outlet for the worldwide brand, Da Milano Italia, in Katmandu. Pandey extended his venture with a brands like Celio, Rosso



Brunello, Indian Terrain, and Louise Phillip. The franchise stores in Kathmandu have both formal and casual apparel, along with accessories like wallets, belts, carry bags, laptop bags, watch-cases and, most importantly, shoes -- covering most aspects of men's fashion. Pandey owns 21 international brand franchises in Kathmandu, with Tommy Hilfiger soon to be a new addition within three months. "Our customers are mainly office and business men. Therefore, out of 50 sales in a day, 30 of them are always formal clothing," says Rupesh Pandey, adding, "that is also because Nepali men's choice of casual dressing is quite close to formal." With a team of four, two males and two females, Pandey continually researches the market on customer demand, behaviour and item popularity. And according to what he finds, he selects new additions from an array of freshly showcased products. Pandey says that currently, the most significant demand from menfolk is for a Multi Brand Outlet: a mall with franchise stores of multiple apparel and accessories brands not just for men, but for women, kids and elderly people as well. Opening such an outlet is Pandey's dream project for which he is searching for a 743-929 square meter space in a happening area of Kathmandu.

**Sikuma Rai**

**prabhu BANK**

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### Funding federalism

The World Bank on Wednesday approved a \$200 million credit to support Nepal's framework for fiscal federalism and improved public financial management. The Bank also approved a \$66 million credit to modernise Phase 2 of the Rani Jamara Kulariya Irrigation Scheme.

### Turkish expansion

Turkish Airlines has decided to expand its fleet with orders for 60 new planes from Boeing and Airbus. Six of them will be delivered in 2019, 14 in 2020, 10 in 2021, 12 in 2022, 11 in 2023 and 7 in

### Sporty Qatar

Qatar Airways announced a new five-year partnership with leading German football team FC Bayern München AG, labelling the team as its platinum partner until June 2023. In another press conference at Internationale Tourismus-Börse Berlin,

Qatar Airways announced the airline's expansion plans and 16 new destinations for 2018 – 2019.

### Leading A-Series

Oppe the Selfie Expert and Leader is launching the A71 (2018) to its A Series portfolio. With an upgraded A.I. Beauty Technology and a powerful Qualcomm Snapdragon 450 processor, the A71 (2018) will inherit Oppo's core selfie technology on the front camera and a slim metallic uni-body.

### Remit easily

Muthoot Finance Ltd, the only non-banking financial company to extend money transfer services from India to Nepal has tied up with IME Ltd to expand its money remittance services in the Indo-Nepal Corridor. With just Rs200, a Nepali migrant in India can now transfer money instantly to families back home without opening a bank account through its 7,000 outlets in Nepal.

**prabhu BANK**



# Baburam's U-turn

Om Astha Rai

The EU election mission's report this week that Nepal's Khas-Arya community should not have quotas for proportional representation has set off a social media storm.

The reaction was expected from the likes of the former Deputy Prime Minister Kamal Thapa, or even politicians from the Nepali Congress and UML (page 13).

But it was ex-Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai weighing in with a harshly-worded tweet against the EU that surprised many. He asked the EU to shut up, dubbing its statement a 'condemnable diktat'. He also re-tweeted Foreign Affairs Minister Pradeep Gyawali's post containing Nepal's statement against the EU's.



Baburam Bhattarai @baburam1954 · 7h  
एउटा विदेशी मिशनले नेपालको बारेमा नेपाली जनताको प्रतिस्पर्धी 'आधार' जस्तो आरोप लगाएको छ। यो आरोप नेपाली जनताको प्रतिस्पर्धी 'आधार' जस्तो आरोप लगाएको छ। यो आरोप नेपाली जनताको प्रतिस्पर्धी 'आधार' जस्तो आरोप लगाएको छ।

Heard that a foreign mission issued a condemnable diktat against 'reservation' for a certain caste groups in Nepal! The Constitution written by the Nepali people does not include the word 'reservation', it just states 'proportional inclusive reservation', which is what it should be. If you cannot tell sugar from bullshit, you better shut up.

Baburam Bhattarai, Ex-Prime Minister

As Maoist ideologue, Bhattarai was foremost among those who planted the seeds of identity politics in Nepal. After the 2006 ceasefire, he actively backed ethnicity-based autonomous federal provinces. The trick worked, and more Janajatis and Madhesis stood up against the State.

As President of a committee responsible for sorting out thorny issues during the Constitution drafting process, he had advocated

for quotas for Madhesi and Janajati clusters, and not for the Brahmin/Chhetri. Bhattarai quit the party he founded to set up the Naya Shakti in 2015. Bhattarai has now made a dramatic U-turn, and


political analysts say the former prime minister's course correction is a result of his party's electoral debacle. While Bhattarai won last year's election from Gorkha-2 constituency, his new party did not win any parliamentary seat elsewhere.

"The Khas-Arya did not trust Bhattarai because he was once

against them," explains Madhesi rights activists Tula Narayan Sah. "But the Madhesi-Janajati did not trust him either because he signed a constitution that discriminated against them."

Sah says Bhattarai has made a calculated move, knowing which direction the wind is blowing: "Why would he otherwise criticise

a statement that simply says Khas-Arya are already well-represented?"

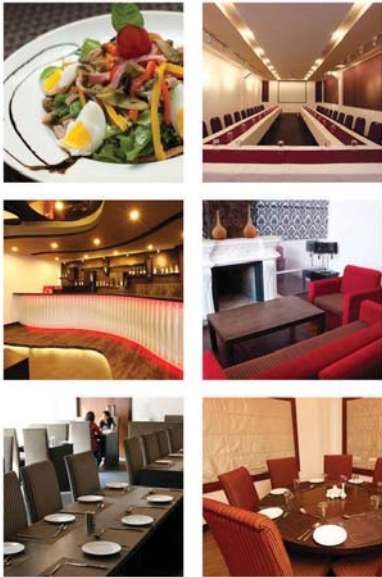
The Khas-Arya have won about half the seats in Parliament through direct elections, and 30% more through proportional representation. This makes their presence in the House more than double the percentage of their actual population. 

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# Five 'funny' things about Nepal

People often ask me how the United States compares with Nepal. Here are five things that are uniquely funny about my country. If you don't take these with a sense of humour, it may be hard to rationalise the way things are here.



**TO THE POINT**  
Sumana Shrestha

**1** Not-for-profit organisations pay more than the for-profit sector. And the pay is lower in the US, compared to Nepal. As long as not-for-profit crowds out the employment sector by paying more, for-profit can never compete or really develop. After all, who can compete with what looks like a never-ending supply of free money? Besides, if the majority of people are focusing on 'development' which most of the time is supposed to centre on the bottom of the pyramid, who is going to focus on the middle class? (A strong middle class would probably have a much more positive effect on the BoP and quality of living.)

**2** Like in Silicon Valley, everybody wants to be an entrepreneur in Kathmandu Valley. Everybody wants to make it big. The only unfortunate part is, most of the kids in urban areas don't really get a job until they are well out of their college or university years (excluding some amazing kids who are working

and paying their own bills while studying). If most people want to be entrepreneurs without ever having worked for someone and are mostly still dependent on their parents' allowances, who will they hire to work on their idea? It must be quite an expensive on the job learning method. I've worked with few tech companies – some quite large, some small: the turnover rate is quite astounding. I still have very

little clue as to what is driving the turnover rate to be so high. And large tech companies pay more than the not-for-profit sectors even at the entry level.

**3** Certificates: All students seem to be driven by the need to get a certificate. Most people who have worked in my social initiatives have probably found to their dismay that I don't give out

certificates. I just tell them that the work they will do is worth their time and if I have funding, they get some allowance. Are the certificates so important when one applies for a job or higher education? What is driving this funny need for certificates?

**4** Internships need a new name or do they? I am not sure if it is because this term has been over abused in Nepal as an excuse for free labour, or if students have been properly introduced to the concept of apprenticeship. A senior mechanical engineer friend with ten years of work experience at Mitsubishi, went to hire interns from a notable Kathmandu college for his project. It turns out the students wanted Rs 2 lakh per month salary to intern with him. I am glad he eventually shared his first internship experience with the students. But in Europe when he went to intern with another car company, he had to pay for the program because he would be gaining more than he would be giving.

Apprenticeships / internships mean you value what the person has to teach and you really ask for that person's time.

I used to run lunch orders for my desk in my first job. That is basically going to each person and saying can I order lunch for you? Pick it up and deliver it to you, and collect cash from you and pay the restaurant, while you work.

And in exchange, maybe after about a month of doing that for you, you will stay for 10 more minutes and show me that cool excel function that would save me four hours. Running lunch orders was the easiest thing I could do to get people to give me their 10 minutes. And this was the way all the first years got by to learn the ropes of the job.

This was a productive way of learning, because in those 10 minutes, I would be most attentive as I had already put in 30 minutes each day for a month or more to earn those 10 minutes.

**5** The number of conferences on entrepreneurship, women empowerment and development, WOW! What is even more amazing is finding the same set of speakers, CEOs and social leaders, or same set of aspiring entrepreneurs attending most of the events. How do these people work on their startups which they are so passionate about and still manage to attend the endless events? Is it for networking, for business sales, another opportune moment to catch a potential subscriber or a buyer?

Whatever the reason may be, hats off to the amazing time management skills folks have here. 🇳🇵

*Sumana Shrestha is an aspiring Kathmandu-based entrepreneur and used to be with Boston Consulting Group and a financial trader at Citigroup. She writes this column, To The Point in Nepal Times every fortnight.*



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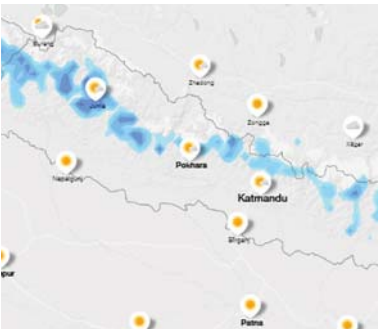
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# Drones to the rescue

Mahabir Pun’s National Innovation Centre tests medicopters to treat patients in remote areas

In an unassuming office in Kupondol, electrical engineer Suraj Karki turns on the DC power supply, and the room goes quiet as his team waits for the octocopter on a table to show signs of life.

Sure enough, its coloured lights blink, and the rotors start spinning with a whine. Relief and excitement floods the office. Later, after a successful outdoor test flight, Karki’s team names the medicopter *Puspak*, after the legendary flying machine from the Ramayana.

“We want people to regard our drones as messengers from God, delivering life-saving support,” says Karki, who hopes to have medicopters fully operational in two years.

The flight test of the locally-made prototype to deliver medicines to remote health centres in Nepal is one of the first projects of Mahabir Pun’s National Innovation Center (NIC) which the Magsaysay Prize winner set up to allow Nepali engineers to apply their knowledge in their own country.

“I want to stop the brain drain of talented people by supporting them in the development of

innovative technologies that bring economic growth to Nepal, not to build strong economies elsewhere,” says Pun, who himself returned from the United States to launch rural Internet networks, telemedicine and agricultural services to over 200 remote villages in Nepal.

The social entrepreneur first piloted a telemedicine program in 2006 to enable rural patients to consult doctors in Kathmandu-based hospitals. Currently, ten rural health centres conduct virtual classes with consultants in Pun’s home district of Myagdi, while the government has introduced telemedicine in 25 districts.

Karki and his colleague Ramraj Khanal say they were inspired to work on drones when Pun visited Pulchok Engineering Campus two years ago. With three other members of the college’s Robotics Club, the team built the medicopter prototype.

“In the past we built drones for fun, now it’s for real,” says Karki with a grin, as he recalls how difficult it was to get parts to assemble the craft. The team searched junkyards in Kathmandu, and the steel pipe for the test drone,



for example, was scavenged from a Japanese photocopy machine.

Pun is delighted with the passion for innovation of young Nepalis like Karki and Khanal, and tells us: “We are glad we can provide talented people with the space, tools and investment to develop their ideas.”

The NIC was set up with \$600,000 in donations from Nepalis here and abroad, but Pun’s long term goal is to make it sustainable by building a hydropower plant, and then run the Centre with income generated by selling electricity to the grid.

Besides medical drones, NIC is also helping Nepali scientists grow cordyceps for medical use, produce a new brand of health drink, and

set up solar and biogas plants.

Pun got assurances from two prime ministers to help NIC with funds which never materialised, so he is selling his own land and all the medals he has been awarded to raise more money.

Tribhuvan University has offered a plot of land to build an office, and Pun’s vision is for NIC to be an incubator and start a ‘micro Silicon Valley’ for startups.

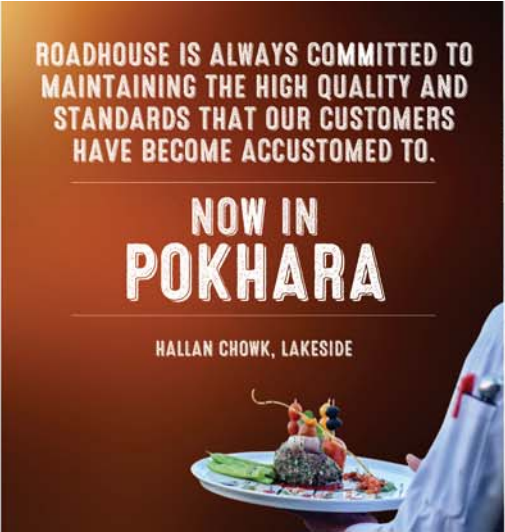
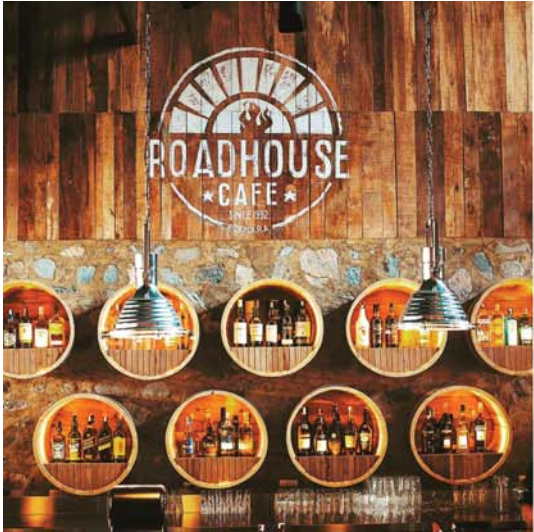
Says the 63-year-old: “I tried to raise incomes in remote villages with pilot projects, but now realise change has to come from the national level. NIC is not social work, but nation building. I am tired of seeing my country being poor.”

Lucia de Vries



Watch a short video on how young Nepali engineers are working to create locally manufactured drones to provide medical supplies in remote areas of Nepal.

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





Climate change has unleashed floods, but also allowed apple and vegetable farming in what used to be a desert



# Mixed blessings in

Mukesh Pokhrel  
in Mustang

It hardly rains in Upper Mustang, the district of Nepal located beyond the Himalaya which juts out into the Tibetan Plateau.

Rain is rare here, and floods even rarer. So when the stream next to her village of Tiri burst its banks five years ago, it was the first time 80-year-old Karma Gurung had ever seen a flood.

The heavy rains and flood had killed a migrant worker from Lamjung, and few livestock.

“It came suddenly, without warning and I lost 15 cows, ten goats and two horses,” recalls Norbu Gurung, pointing to how high the muddy water and boulders had reached.

Konju Gurung lost a chunk of his nearby apple farm, which used to earn him Rs100,000 a year. Today, there are only huge boulders and sand where there used to be fruit trees.

Flash floods, which used to be rare in this part of the Himalayan rain shadow, are becoming more frequent as weather patterns become more erratic. In the past decade, the people of Mustang suffered winter droughts, unseasonal snowfalls and cloudbursts.

The geology of the area is made up of pre-historic deposits of sand and boulders, and with no trees to

hold the topsoil together, these are easily dislodged by heavy rains.

It was 1 Jun 2015 when it started raining heavily in Marpha village along the Kali Gandaki. The monsoon rains were not due for another three weeks, but the freak storm dumped a huge amount of rain in the surrounding mountains, sending a wall of liquefied mud down a tributary of the Kali Gandaki.

“It had been raining heavily, and all of a sudden there was this thunderous noise as rocks the size of houses were washed down in a sea of mud,” recalls Bhakti Hirachan, 77. The flood damaged 25 houses in Marpha and the scar of the flood can still be seen from the village.

A few months later in August, floods came again and destroyed houses and fields in Jong village. Indeed, floods have become commonplace in what used to be arid Mustang.

Villagers here say the weather has ‘gone mad’ in the past 20 years, and blame the wrath of the gods. Few here have heard of global warming and how scientists now believe it has made extreme rainfall and extended periods of droughts more common.

Climate expert Ngamindra Dahal explains: “There is increasing evidence that global warming has lead to more cloud build-up along the Himalaya, and this is leading to intense storms and creating erratic



ALL PHOTOS: MUKESH POKHREL

monsoons and winter rains in Mustang.”

Besides flash floods, the uncertain weather is also affecting local crops like buckwheat, barley and corn. Farmer Chiring Pemba Gurung of Jong village says his

harvests have gone down by half in the last two years.

“Winter snow is good for the spring crop, but for the past two years we hardly had any winter snow, and when it does snow it comes in the spring planting

season,” says Chiring Pemba.

Ironically, while the weather is creating havoc, long-term change in the climate has allowed vegetables and fruits to grow where they previously could not. There are now apple farms in Upper



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3



4



5

# Mustang



- 1 80-year-old Karma Gurung of Tiri village had never seen a flood before
- 2 In Jong village, Chiring Pemba Gurung says his harvests have dropped by half
- 3 Konju Gurung points at her stable after it was washed away by the flood
- 4 Norbu Gurung lost many of his cattle in the flood five years ago
- 5 Mehenda Gurung points at the apple orchard affected by the flash flood
- 6 Apple orchards near Jomsom, where it used to be too cold for the fruit
- 7 River Chengur near Jong which now floods regularly

## Plants move up the mountains to escape the heat

Global warming is melting the Himalaya twice as fast as the rest of the planet, and the most vivid proof of this are rapidly shrinking glaciers and the receding snowline. However, there is another less evident trend, and that is the movement of native plant species up the mountains to escape the heat.

Recent research in the Indian and Nepal Himalaya examined plants growing from 60m above sea level up to 6,000m, which showed an upward migration of plants as global warming increased average temperatures across the mountains.

Sub-tropical weeds and ferns growing in the low valleys of Sikkim and Kashmir are now found in higher elevations. The journal *Nature* recently reported that the flowering and fruiting cycles of pear and apple trees have changed over the last 50 years as have their size, colour and taste. Pine species in India's Himachal Pradesh have moved 1,000m up the slopes in the last three decades, the magazine said. Even moss and lichen are said to be found higher up the mountains as snow cover recedes.

Many of the species which cannot adapt by moving higher could eventually become extinct. There is also an upper limit to how far plants can move since there is no topsoil at extreme altitudes to support plant life.

Mustang, and farmers are switching to cabbage and cauliflowers, which used to be unheard of.

"There never used to be apple up there, now you can have orchards in Jharkot, Khinga, Dhe and other areas of Upper Mustang,"

says Balkrishna Adhikari who is helping farmers here through the Apple Farm Centre.

Meanwhile in the famous apple growing areas of Marpha and Tatopani to the south, new diseases like red spider mite, woolly aphids,

and white grub have destroyed many orchards. "It is getting too hot for apple trees in Marpha, and the regions of upper Mustang are becoming more suitable because of climate change," Adhikari explains. Chiring Pemba Gurung planted

180 apple trees in his new orchard in Jong village, where apples never used to grow. He is confident that the new investment will increase his farm earnings in five years time.

Climate change is a mixed blessing here in Mustang. While it has unleashed floods and disasters, the warming trend has also allowed orchards and farms to move up to what used to be barren mountains.

Says Kusum Shakali, 77, in Jomsom: "The snow doesn't fall when it is supposed to, it rains too much at other times, bringing floods, but now we can also practice farming where we never used to be able to."

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EVENTS



KJC spring camp

Spring camp for kids aged 5-12 where they learn about the basics of music and of the various musical instruments. It will also include zumba, self defense, acting and drama classes, personality development, wall climbing, field trip, arts and crafts.  
2-6 April, 10am-4pm, Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, Jhamsikhel, (01) 5543554, 9813556945

Clothes exchange

Get rid of your old clothes at Annamaya and celebrate spring with music, food and beverages at the café.  
23 March, Gyan Madala rooftop, Jhamsikhel, (01) 5548419

Bird Watching

Enjoy bird watching at Godavari Botanical Garden.  
24 March, 7:30am-12:30pm, Godavari Bus park, 9841330576/ 9801024777

Japanese Solo Theatre

Master Shoko and Margarita, a solo theatre of Shoko Ito, choreographed by Kei Takei, presented in Nepal by the Embassy of Japan.  
24 March, 5pm onwards, Kunja Theatre, Thapagaun, Baneshwor, (01) 4483111/ (01) 4426680



Drum workshop

Drum workshop taught by the internationally acclaimed New York based drummer and composer, Franklin Kiermyer from the band, Scatter The Atoms That Remain.  
28-30 March, 10am-1pm, Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, Jhamsikhel, Rs1,000/1,200 (with certificate), (01) 5543554, 9813556945

Tharu Literature

A talk by writer and journalist Krishna Sarbahari on Tharu language and literature, its influence on the Tharu identity movement and its current status within Nepal's new federal structure.  
23 March, 4-6pm, Quixote's Cove, Jawalakhel, (01) 5536974



Women's trade expo

Women entrepreneurs from Nepal and other countries will showcase their products and services, ranging from handicrafts and fashion to organic agricultural products.  
23-26 March, 10am-6pm, Heritage Garden, Sanepa, (01) 4486775

Spring art camp

10 days of fun and creativity for kids aged 7-12.  
27 March-6 April, 10am-3:30pm, Gyan Mandala, Jhamsikhel, 9841954000, 9849147893



Storyellers-comedy special

Laugh out loud at the Storyellers special stand-up comedy.  
28 March, 6pm onwards, Calm Courtyard, Tangal, Rs350/300 (pre-booked), For Tickets: <http://bit.ly/2FY0Vhj>

Night market

Visit the night market at Le Sherpa when the restaurant's garden comes alive with street food, market stalls, entertainment, arts and craft and organic products.  
28 March, 4-8pm, Le Sherpa, Maharajgunj, (01) 4428604

ABOUT TOWN

MUSIC



Farhan Akhtar

The versatile Bollywood artist, Farhan Akhtar, who made his singing debut in the movie Rock On, will be playing hit songs for Kathmandu crowd.  
7 April, 3-9pm, Hyatt Regency, Boudha, Rs2,000 (gold), Rs4,000 (platinum), For Tickets: 9851104277

Connection live

Reggae, blues, funk and rock— Connection performing live in the house of music.  
23 March, House of Music, Amrit Marg, Thamel, 9851075172



Pandora's Jukebox

Tumbleweed Inc., Kramasha Nepal, Deplore, The Mellow Malady and ASM sharing the stage to perform their original music scores.  
30 March, 6pm onwards, Club 25 Hours, Tangalwood, Tangal, 9801057602

Phatcowlee & The Author

Solo indie artist Rajan Shrestha, also known as Phatcowlee and electronic music producer Rohit Shakya, also known as The Author, will be performing during the weekend.  
23 March, 8pm onwards, Base Camp: Outdoor Lifestyle, Arun Thapa Chok, Rs500, 9841226397

Adrian Pradhan

Adrian Pradhan and his Band performing their hit numbers live.  
23 March, 8-10pm, Senate Club, Thamel, Rs800/1000/1500, 9823009550, 9803085008

OUR PICK



Opens in Kathmandu on 23 March

After a decade-long hiatus, Maha Sanchar is back in the film game with yet another comedy film, Shatru Gate. The Maha duo, Madan Krishna Shrestha and Hari Bansha Acharya shares the screen with popular actors—Deepak Raj Giri, Deepa Shree Niraula and Priyanka Karki. The film is a love story of Suraj (Paul) and Sandhya (Aanchal) who want to get married but the enmity between their parents, who are also neighbours, create obstacles in their union. The movie, directed by Pradeep Bhattarai, revolves around an announced marriage date which can either turn out to be shatru gate (date of enmity) or mitra gate (date of friendship).

DINING

Embassy

Enjoy a hearty meal in this centrally located restaurant known for its lively ambience and assorted menu. Try the Duck Breast, served on a bed of mashed potatoes and roasted vegetables in a rich peppery steak sauce.  
Opposite to Japanese Embassy, Lazimpat, 9802024040



The Café

Experience authentic Asian culinary at Hyatt.  
23-30 March, 6:30-10:00pm, The Café, Hyatt Regency, Boudha, Rs2,200, (01) 5171234

Daawat Indian Cuisine

Sea food BBQ with buffet dinner. A group of more than five gets a special discount as well.  
23 March, 6-9pm, Yatri Suites & Spa, Amrit Marg, Thamel, Rs1,500(per person), Rs2,500 (couple), (01) 4416081, 4423847

Embers

A spacious yet cosy place serving a blend of continental and Nepali favourites. Try their traditional marinated boneless chicken kebab served with vegetable, rice and chutney.  
Krishna Galli, Pulchok, (01) 5555306



Olive Garden

Decorated with green linens and bright pops of colour, the Olive Garden provides guests a fine dining experience with its Italian menu featuring soups, salads, pastas, pizzas, main course and more.  
6:30-10:30pm, Radisson Hotel Kathmandu, Lazimpat, Reservations: (01) 4411818

Kakori

North Indian restaurant, offering various exquisite cuisines ranging from Punjabi, Kashmiri, Awadhi and Rajasthani along with popular Nepali delicacies.  
7-10:45pm for dinner, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, Tahachal, for reservation: (01) 4273999

GETAWAY



The Last Resort

Bungy jump, Tandem swing, or white water rafting—take an adventurous trip to Bhote Koshi River near the Tibetan border.  
Bhotekoshi, Sindhupalchok, (01) 4700525

Club Himalaya

For amazing mountain views and a refreshing weekend escape, special packages available for Nepalis and expatriates.  
Nagarkot, (01) 4410432



Rupakot Resort

Get pampered in the lap of luxury amid stunning views of the Annapurnas.  
Maidan-6, Rupakot, Kaski, (61) 622660 / (01) 4004687 / 9856038043

Grand Norling Hotel

Enjoy a calm and relaxing stay at the hotel which provides a spacious bedroom with adjoining bathroom, a large balcony with sights of the golf course, monkeys and deer herds, and not to forget, the garden.  
Gokarna, (01) 4910193



Tangalwood

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Tangal, Kathmandu, (01) 4428655

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201 – 300 Very Unhealthy							
151 – 200 Unhealthy							
101 – 150 Unhealthy for sensitive groups							
50 – 100 Moderate							
0 – 50 Good							
	FRIDAY Mar 16	SATURDAY Mar 17	SUNDAY Mar 18	MONDAY Mar 19	TUESDAY Mar 20	WEDNESDAY Mar 21	THURSDAY Mar 22

If it is any consolation, the the area of Nepal with the most unhealthy air is not Kathmandu but Lumbini. This past week, the valley's own dust and emissions have been augmented by crossborder pollution and the result can be seen in this week's daily average of Air Quality Index at the US Embassy monitoring station at Phora Darbar. From Sunday to Thursday, air quality was consistently high in the 'Unhealthy' band. Got to [www.nepalitimes.com](https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/) for real time hourly AQI.  
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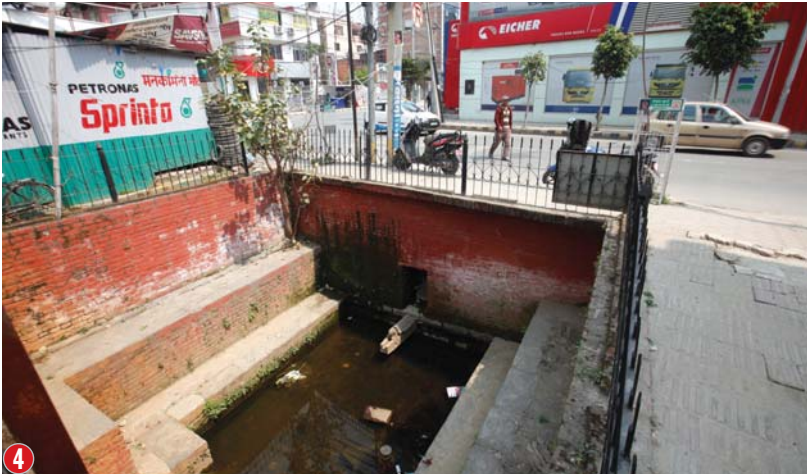




# Water of the ages

The irreplaceable loss of Kathmandu Valley’s historic *hiti*

Alok Siddhi Tuladhar



ALL PHOTOS: BIKRAM RAI



- 1 Tindhara Hiti
- 2 Maru Hiti
- 3 Jhanga Hiti
- 4 Gairi Dhara

The ancient trade route between India and Tibet cut diagonally through Kathmandu’s city core. At its northern edge was the historical gateway to the city through which Newar merchants passed on their way to and from Lhasa.

Today a yellow concrete-and-glass commercial block stands on the spot just northwest of Rani Pokhari. The structure was built right on top of Jhanga Hiti, the centuries-old sunken spout that stood there till 35 years ago.

“This was the spot where families bid tearful farewell to the merchants when they left on perilous journeys across the Himalaya to Lhasa. There is no trace of this historic landmark today,” explains tourism expert Gyanendra Ratna Tuladhar. The Tibet trade thrived for centuries until the Chinese annexation in the 1950s.

Considered one of the greatest technological achievements of the Kathmandu Valley civilisation, *hiti* were traditional stone water spouts built inside conduit basins below ground level, where drinking water flowed non-stop. The water was piped through underground channels made of *Gathu Cha*, a type of water-tight clay.

The sources used to be in a complex network of aquifers, ponds, rivers or natural springs on the outskirts of the valley. This intricate web of water channels helped the valley’s kingdoms thrive and to support dense urban populations.

Today, many of these *hiti* have dried out due to aquifers being covered up, and underground waterways blocked by buildings and other infrastructure.

When Jhanga Hiti went dry, locals forgot its historical importance, and it was covered over to be converted into prime real estate.

A local football club then laid claim to the land, and eventually obtained permission to build its club house on top of Jhanga Hiti in 1981, permanently burying its

glorious history. The lower floors of the building are now rented out to shops, while the football club has offices and a meeting hall on the upper floors.

Some 80m to the south is where Bhotahiti was discovered 4m below the surface in 1984 during the construction of an underpass. Water was still flowing from the spout when it was unearthed. The spout dates back to 621 CE and was originally called Vanta Hiti (Eastern Spout).

Bhotahiti was among seven water spouts in the area, and was first buried during the construction of Tundikhel in the 1880s. The underpass construction went ahead, and Bhotahiti was filled over a second time.

The lower portions of the basin of Tindhara Hiti at the southern end of Darbar Marg is still moist with ground water today. Local apathy and official neglect have turned the historic waterspout into a wasteland.

Engineering student Rohit Nepali studied Kathmandu’s 7th century Gairidhara, 2 km east of Darbar Marg, and says it dried up only a few years ago when large buildings went up in the vicinity.

“We must study and fully understand the physical structures that were built with very little technical resources compared to today, during the Licchavi and the Malla periods, before they all disappear,” Nepali says.

Despite many *hiti* in Kathmandu going dry or filled over, there are still a handful of these historic spouts that provide water to this day to communities in Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur. Maru Hiti is one of them, and it lies at the opposite southern end of the ancient trade route that once bisected Old Kathmandu. Crystal clear drinkable water still flows out of its ornate stone spout day and night.

**Alok Siddhi Tuladhar** is a culture and heritage documentarian. [alokstuladhar@gmail.com](mailto:alokstuladhar@gmail.com)







# Red Sparrow

Jennifer Lawrence has become a mega-star, and while at 27 she is still too inexperienced to be the next Meryl Streep (could anyone really be as good as Streep?) she is



**MUST SEE**  
Sophia Pande

ever versatile, constantly changing the kinds of roles she picks, pushing her boundaries in a way that is impressive, and the trait of a truly great artist. Occasionally she misses, like in 2017's truly awful *Mother!* – a shamefully indulgent piece of exploitative cinema by the usually sensitive Darren Aronofsky. But her willingness to work for an unconventional film-maker like him shows the grit that she first exhibited in her break-through role in Deborah Granik's intense thriller *Winter's Bone* (2010), a film to find

and watch if you have not seen it yet.

Seven years later, Lawrence is capable of commanding films that are vehicles for her talent, underscoring her riveting presence onscreen. With Francis Lawrence's ambitious *Red Sparrow* this actress shows that she can play a number of different aspects of a character without the showiness that can be annoying in the likes of the Johnny Depps and the Leonardo DiCaprios who insist on calling attention to their apparently multitudinous talent.


*Red Sparrow* itself is a paced, classic thriller with a streak of violence. Using the current cold war with Russia as a premise, the film tells the story of a prima ballerina, Dominika Egerova (Lawrence), who loses her dream of dancing after a terrible injury onstage. Used by the state who wields her ailing mother (the great Joely Richardson) over

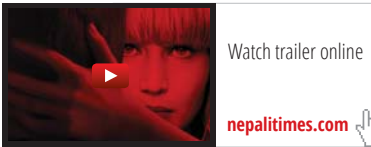
her head, Dominika ends up joining the 'Sparrow' program, a noxious, wholly unethical exercise designed to turn men and women into proverbial 'honey pots', but much worse, teaching them skills of manipulation that are both humiliating and deeply damaging to both executor and recipient.

Dominika excels, she is tough and smart, and her survival skills take her through a series of ordeals and missions that bring her in close contact with other devious Sparrows, a handsome CIA agent, Nick Nash (Joel Edgerton), and a corrupt US bureaucrat.

The film takes its time, so those who expect the adrenaline pumping of an *Atomic Blonde* (2017) kind of film will perhaps be disappointed. But this story, based on the 2013 novel by Jason Matthews, is actually a first rate thriller, albeit, to those who are attuned to the inherent sexism in Hollywood, pretty skewed in terms of its exploitative tendencies under the pseudo-guise of empowerment.

Luckily, aside from a few misguided moments, this does not last, and Dominika compels the viewer and the characters within the narrative like the star that she is.

Laced with a strong cast including the legendary Jeremy Irons and the immensely talented Matthias Schoenaerts, *Red Sparrow* stayed in my mind long after it ended, creating a nostalgia for its world, and the characters in it. I wanted to know more about what happens to them next, I ended up caring deeply about their lives. I would say that is the trait of a good film. 



Watch trailer online

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

## HAPPENINGS



BIKRAM RAI

**NO COUNTRY FOR WOMEN:** Prime Minister KP Oli meets with Chief Ministers of all seven provinces at his office in Singha Darbar on Wednesday.



RSS

**BUSINESS RELATIONS:** Prime Minister KP Oli and President of SAARC Chamber of Commerce Suraj Vaidya during the inauguration of the 6th SAARC Business Leaders' Conclave in Kathmandu last week (See Editorial).



GOPEN RAI

**THE YEAR OF ELECTIONS:** The head of the European Union Election Observation Mission to Nepal, Željana Zovko, presents the final report on the provincial and parliamentary elections in Kathmandu on Tuesday (See page 13).



GERMAN EMBASSY KATHMANDU

**DEAL SEALED:** (Left to right) ICIMOD's Eklabya Sharma and David Molden, Florens Vogt of the German Embassy and Kai Windhorst from GIZ after signing an agreement on Himalayan transboundary cooperation in Kathmandu on Wednesday.



GOPEN RAI

**NATION'S PRIDE:** The captain of Nepal's cricket team Paras Khadka returns to a hero's welcome at Kathmandu Airport on Monday after his team qualified for international one-day cricket.

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# Quotable quota

A European Union (EU) mission has asked Nepal to not allocate Proportional Representation seats for the Khas-Arya community, arguing that it is already well-represented and does not need reservation.

Unveiling its final report on the three tiers of polls that Nepal held last year, the European Union Election Mission presented its final report on Tuesday in Kathmandu saying a quota for a well-represented community is against international principles of equality. The mission said that affirmative action should be taken only in reserving quotas for under-represented communities.

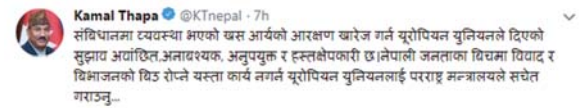
Nepal's new Constitution has guaranteed the higher caste Khas-Arya people's representation in proportion to their population. Election laws therefore require political parties to ensure representation of at least 31.2% Khas-Arya in Parliament.

There was angry reaction in social media to the EU statement from politicians and intellectuals belonging to the Khas-Arya cluster, while others agreed that the group did not need affirmative action. Unofficial translations of some Twitter posts in Nepali:



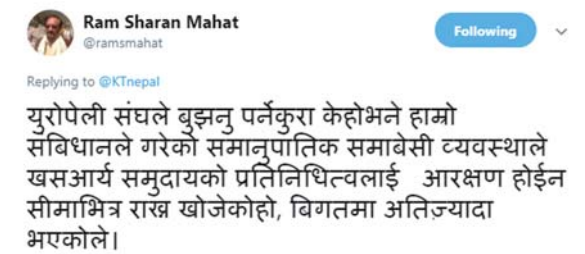
Heard that a foreign mission issued a condemnable diktat against 'reservation' for a certain caste groups in Nepal! The Constitution written by the Nepali people does not include the word 'reservation', it just states 'proportional inclusive reservation', which is what it should be. If you cannot tell sugar from bullshit, you better shut up.

**Baburam Bhattarai, Ex-Prime Minister**



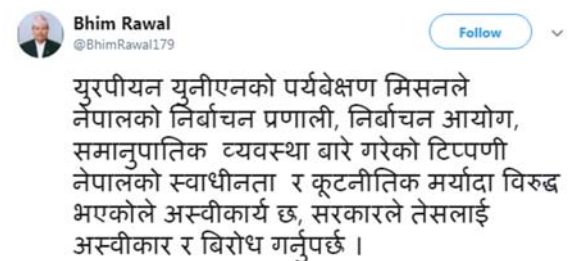
The EU statement against the constitutional rights of the Khas-Arya to reservation is unwarranted, unnecessary, unsuitable and interventionist. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs must caution the EU against planting the seeds of dispute and dividing up the Nepali people.

**Kamal Thapa, Ex-Foreign Affairs Minister**



What the EU must understand is our constitutional provision for Khas-Arya does not reserve seats for them but actually aims to limit their participation because they were dominant in the past.

**Ram Saran Mahat, Ex-Finance Minister**



The comment of the EU Election Observation Mission on Nepal's election system, Election Commission and inclusive structure is an attempt to intervene in Nepal's internal affairs and against diplomatic norms. It should be refuted and opposed by the government.

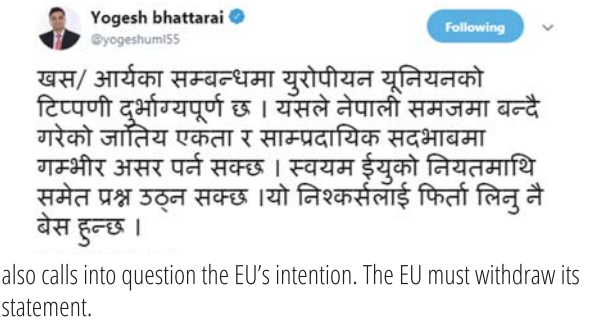
**Bhim Rawal, UML leader**



Foreigners were anxious that Nepal might apply to graduate from the bloc of Least Developed Countries. Nepal did not, so they are now happy that they can lecture us for another six years.

**Rameshore Khanal, Ex-Secretary**

The EU's statement on the Khas-Arya is unfortunate. It might severely harm communal harmony and ethnic unity in Nepal. It



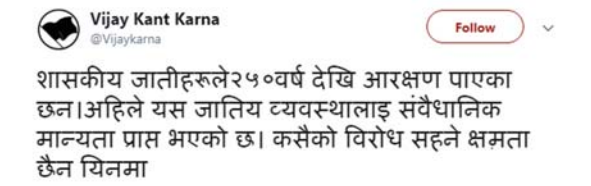
also calls into question the EU's intention. The EU must withdraw its statement.

**Yogesh Bhattarai, Member of Parliament**



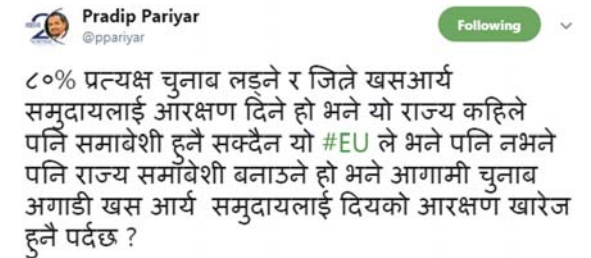
For your information, UN Resident Coordinator Valerie Julliard has instructed her administration to not hire anyone belonging to Khas-Arya caste groups. She is obsessed with inquiring about her employees' castes. Ethnicity politics thrives when the State becomes weak.

**Kiran Chapagain, Chevening scholar**



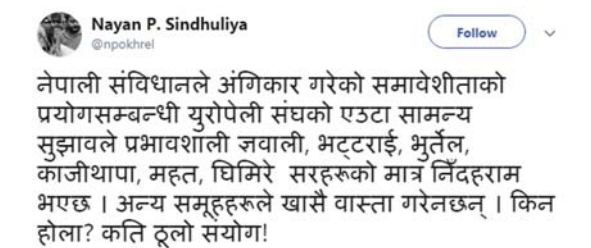
The ruling castes have enjoyed reservation for 250 years. And this caste system has now been legitimised by the new Constitution. They will not tolerate any criticism.

**Vijay Kant Karna**



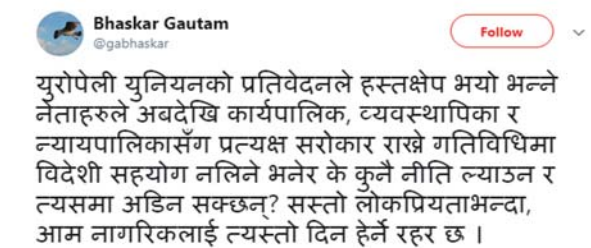
Nepal can never be an inclusive state if quotas are reserved for Khas-Arya people, who anyway grab 80% seats through direct elections. Regardless of what the EU says, if Nepal is to be made inclusive, the Khas-Arya should not be given quotas in the next elections.

**Pradip Pariyar, Nepal Policy Centre**



A simple advice by the EU about Nepal's constitutional provisions for inclusion gives sleepless nights to influential Gyawalis, Bhattarais, Bhurtels, Kaji Thapas, Mahats and Ghimires. Other people do not care much. Why?

**Narayan Sindhuliya, researcher**



Can those who have dubbed the EU report an act of intervention introduce and implement a policy to not accept projects directly related to the Executive, the Legislative and the Judiciary? Common people will be waiting for that day, instead of populist words?

**Bhaskar Gautam, researcher**



Laws were drafted in the name of proportional inclusion to reserve quotas for Khas-Arya. As a result, their share in Parliament is double their actual population. This constitutional provision will now be used to reserve quotas for Khas-Arya in government services.

**Badri Narayan Jha, Engineer**

## Sick airport

Dipak Gyawali in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, March 18-24

हिमाल  
खबरपत्रिका

When the US-Bangla aircraft crashed at Kathmandu Airport last week, Nepal's only international air gateway was closed for nearly three hours. Several aircrafts remained on hold in the sky, ultimately diverting to Lucknow and Dhaka.

If Gautam Buddha International Airport had been completed in Bhairawa by December 2017 as previously scheduled, those planes could have landed there. However, even as just four months remain of the extended deadline, only 35% work has been completed so far.



Frustrated at the sluggish pace of airport construction, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has threatened to pull out of the project. On Wednesday, an ADB team led by Nepal Country Director Mukhtar

Khamudkhanov observed the progress. Based on his recommendation, the ADB will confirm whether to pull out.

Sources say the ADB officials have almost given up hope, and are most likely to call it quits. The ADB has sanctioned Rs540 million in grant and Rs4.2 billion in loan for the Rs6.22 billion project. The airport expansion can actually be shelved if the ADB decides to pull out.

But the CAAN is hopeful that the ADB will not take the drastic step. "We will do our best to convince the ADB that this is still a profitable project," CAAN spokesperson Birendra Shrestha says. "But we will not let this project die even if the ADB pulls out."

The Chinese company which won the global contract to build the airport that will serve Lumbini has blamed earthquakes, the Blockade and frequent strikes for the delay in the project. But the dispute between the Chinese company and its local contractor is the real reason why only 35% work has been completed so far.

## Diplomatic indecency

BBC  
नेपाली

BBC Nepali, 20 March

Some newly-appointed ministers have met the Indian ambassador without officially informing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), which has taken a dim view of these meetings. Indian ambassador to Nepal, Manjeev Singh Puri, walked into one after another ministry on Monday this week, and each minister sat down with him for unofficial conversations. Nepal issued a diplomatic code of conduct in 2010, discouraging ministers and bureaucrats from meeting with foreign ambassadors without the knowledge of the Foreign Ministry. If ministers and bureaucrats cannot inform the MoFA in advance, they have to later submit notes of their conversations for institutional memory.

The code was issued amidst complaints of ministers and bureaucrats hobnobbing with representatives of foreign countries for personal gain. But ministers have been frequently flouting the code, and this week's controversial meetings were just the latest example. Tourism and Civil Aviation Minister Rabindra Adhikari has defended his conduct, saying he agreed to meet the envoy after the latter dropped in to his office to congratulate him. "That's it, nothing more," he said.

Ex-ambassador Jaya Raj Acharya says: "Our political leaders seem to be unaware or do not care about proper diplomatic conduct and its sensitivity."

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# Migrating males and



Nepal's fertility rate is going down even though contraceptive use has not increased.

**Om Astha Rai**  
in Kavre

Sita Yonjan, 21, has a two-year-old daughter, and recently stopped using contraceptives even though she is not planning to have another child. She says she doesn't need her birth control implant anymore because her husband went away to work in Qatar two months ago.

Yonjan visited a health post in Rayale village of Kavre to remove the birth control implant that she had inserted last year. The tiny device prevents births for five

years, and does not need to be removed even when users abstain from intercourse. But many Nepali men want their wives to stop using contraceptives when they leave for overseas work.

"My husband thinks I could sleep with anyone if I use contraceptives in his absence," Yonjan frankly admits.

An estimated four million Nepali men of reproductive age work abroad, and their wives back home generally see no need for contraceptive implants, preferring to use short-term methods like condoms, pills and injectables when their husbands come home on leave. Like Yonjan, those using

IUDs and implants remove them as soon as their husbands go away again.

Demographers say this explains the riddle about why Nepal's fertility rate has been going down despite contraceptive prevalence rate remaining low.

When Nepal conducted its first-ever nationwide health survey in 1996, only 26% women were using modern contraceptives. Within ten years, it had nearly doubled to 44%, but has leveled off since. The contraceptive prevalence rate actually declined to 43% in 2016, when the last National Demographic Health Survey (NDHS) was conducted. Even so,

the fertility rate that measures the average number of children per couple has been going down -- from 4.6 in 1996 to 3.1 in 2006 and 2.3 in 2016 (*see graphs, overleaf*).

Demographers were initially puzzled by the drop in the fertility rate despite contraceptive use rate flatlining. But an analysis in 2013 suggested a correlation between male outmigration and contraceptive use. Another analysis is now underway, which will probably confirm the impact outmigration of men may be having on contraceptive use and fertility rate.

"If we consider only women who are married and living with husbands, we find a high

contraceptive prevalence rate," explains Sharad Pathak, a demographer at the government's Family Health Division. "This rate is low only because lots of women generally do not need contraceptives when their husbands are away."

However, experts warn that Nepal's declining fertility rate may not mean that population growth will reach replacement level -- one in every four married women still have an unmet need for family planning. A third of young married women aged 15-19 do not use contraceptives, making them more vulnerable to unintended pregnancies and unsafe abortion.



# population decline



**THE RIGHT SHOT:** Health worker Januka Dhakal injects Depo-Provera on a woman at Rayale Health Post of Kavre district on Tuesday. With their husbands away, fewer women now want to use contraceptives.

SONIA AWALE

Kristine Blokhuis at the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) says Nepali women are aware of the benefits of having fewer babies, but face barriers in accessing contraceptives: "Health facilities often run out of contraceptive stocks, and there are not enough trained health workers to provide long-term contraceptives like implants and IUD."

A 2016 UNFPA assessment showed most health posts provide only condoms, pills and injectables because of the lack of trained staff. Only one third of the facilities provide all five types of modern contraceptives including implants and IUDS. In most villages, women

have to choose between oral pills or Depo-Provera, which they cannot use if there are side effects. Male or female sterilisation is available occasionally, and most women complain their husbands do not want to use condoms.

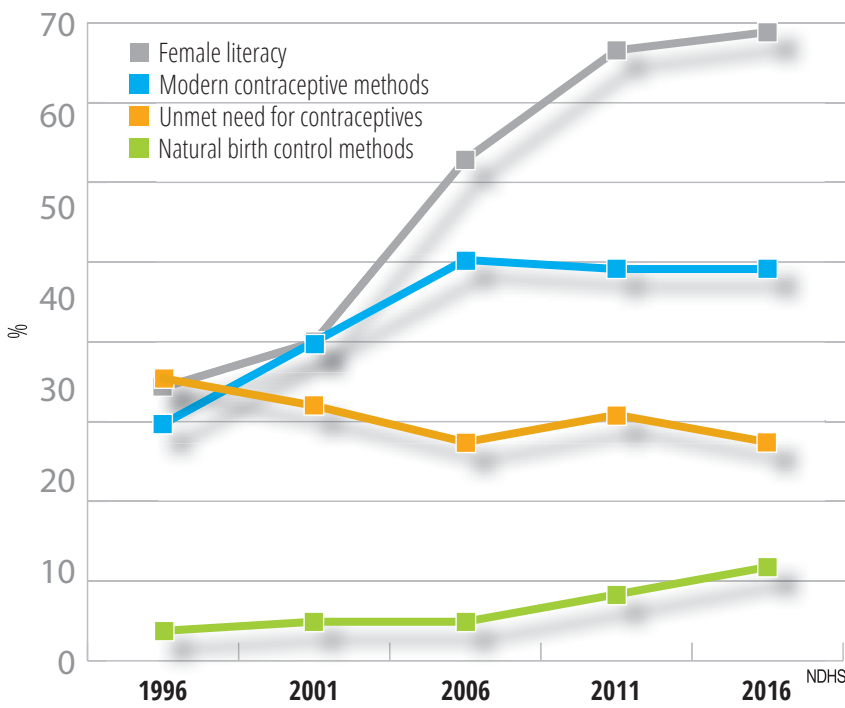
With rising female literacy, the number of women opting for traditional family planning like withdrawal and the rhythm method instead of modern contraceptives is also going up. In 1996, only 3% of married women used such natural methods, now it is 10%. However, the NDHS 2016 showed that 62% women using the rhythm method to avoid pregnancy did not have an accurate knowledge about the

ovulation cycle.

Nepal's target is to increase its contraceptive prevalence rate to 52% by 2020, but it may not meet that goal because of male migration, the preference for natural methods, and family planning programs being scaled back due to a drop in U.S. funding after the gag rule under President Trump. The United States has traditionally been the main supporter of family planning projects in Nepal, through organisations like Marie Stopes International that provide abortion services.

Beth Schlachter, Director of Family Planning 2020, who

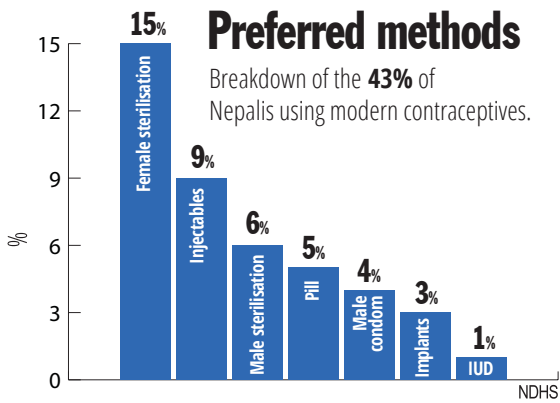
## Contraceptive prevalence



## The mix matters

When Nepal launched its first population control campaign in the late 1960s, its population was only 13 million, it was growing at 3% per year because the fertility rate was nearly 6 children per couple. The only contraceptive choice women had then was to get their partners to use condoms. Most men did not like using them, and women did not have any control over reproductive health. The pill could have given women freedom to limit or space births, but they were scared of its side effects.

Later, injectables like Depo-Provera and IUDs were introduced and today the government provides five types of contraceptives for free, and conducts health camps offering permanent family planning methods like male as well female sterilisation. But many other contraceptives like emergency pills and female condoms are available only in private clinics, and most rural women cannot use them even if they want to.



Beth Schlachter, Director of Family Planning 2020, says Nepal needs to provide a much wider mix of contraceptives in order to protect women from unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions and maternal deaths: "What a 15-year-old girl needs might be different from what a 24-year-old mother of two children needs," she says. "If we try to address all of them

with just one or two methods, we will not be very successful."

Marie Stopes International is preparing a pilot program to test the acceptability of a new type of Depo-Provera called Sayana Press which can be injected at home and would suit women who do not like to visit health posts every three months for their Depo-Provera.

recently visited Kathmandu to take stock of Nepal's progress, says: "The US gag rule might affect Nepal's family planning programs if organisations delivering safe abortion services here do not find other resources to supply contraceptives."

Since Nepal is poised to become an 'aging' society by 2030 and an 'aged one' by 2050, there is an even greater need to scale up family planning. For the country to reduce its dependency ratio and reap the demographic dividend, many more women must have easier access to a much wider range of contraceptives. 🇳🇵

**PLANNING FAMILIES**

Watch this short video of clinics in Kavre and find out why women are having fewer children even though more than half the married women are not using modern contraceptives.

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



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# Broken news

**Robot to Replace PM**  
KATHMANDU -- Nepal this week became the first country to have a robotic head of government, with Prime Minister Oli relinquishing his day-to-day duties to a silicon humanoid with artificial intelligence. The Right Honourable Robot will at first be entrusted with simple virtual reality tasks such as cutting ribbons, lighting lamps, delivering keynote addresses, and meeting chief ministers of federal provinces. After that, the H.E. the Automaton will be given more challenging tasks like nation-building. Since the prime minister's first foreign visit is such a sensitive issue, Nepal will now have two identical prime ministerial robots. Which means that while one of them is on a state visit to New Delhi, the other one can be in Beijing. This way, no geopolitical feathers will be ruffled, and Nepal can keep both neighbours happy, sources said.

**Tankers On Strike**  
HETAUDA -- Tankers ferrying petroleum products from Raxaul to Kathmandu have gone on an indefinite strike demanding restoration of their right to siphon off as much fuel as they like along the way. The new government had decided that tankers can only steal up to 15% of the fuel, but the drivers said there was much more evaporation and the move contravened several international treaties that Nepal was signatory to, including the Convention on the Survival of the Fittest, The Right Is Might Treaty, as well as Articles 2, 6, 7, 9, 11 and 13 of the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights of Petroleum Tankers with Elastic Morals.

**Nepalis Migrating To the Moon**  
KATHMANDU -- Ramesh Kumar Joshi has become the first Nepali to buy a plot of land on the moon, according to reliable sources at Facebook. He got his deed certificate after sending \$150 to a Nigerian middleman who had earlier offered prominent Nepalis a share of Emperor Bokassa's hidden wealth. Since land is becoming so scarce in Kathmandu, Joshi said he ventured boldly forth where no Nepali had gone before to build a housing colony on the moon for which he plans to recruit Nepali contract workers, and blast them off into space. Joshi told this paper, "Conditions on the lunar surface are fairly similar to Gwarko: there is no water, it is full of craters and there is a lot of dust. So Nepalis will feel right at home."



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Mr. Madan Raj Bharati

The features of EcoSport are packed to meet my needs. The infotainment has a great look and attractive finesse while the voice command is very useful in context to Nepal's traffic conditions. The power of this compact SUV is really good and in terms of performance, I have no complaints. Ford EcoSport, for me, is the total package.

Dr. Neeraj Singh

I am greatly satisfied with EcoSport. The SUV is fit for narrow roads and ideal for KTM city. The controls are easy and features such as voice command and touch screen operates smoothly. Boot space is good and so is the performance. Overall, the SUV does promise a smooth drive.

Mr. Sukadev Joshi

EcoSport is an attractive SUV. The interior including the music system is pretty amazing. For a family of 5 people, this compact SUV is extremely spacious. Performance wise, it is great too.

Mr. Raju Dhakal

You can tell that the SUV has given a lot of attention to details. From its robust style and high power to quality build, superb handling, and impressive technology, Ford EcoSport is truly an SUV I feel proud to own.

Mr. Omesh Pradhan

EcoSport meets more than my expectations. The power and performance is extremely good and the interior along with the internal features are quite wonderful as well. Even though it is a compact SUV, there is ample leg room and is very spacious. The SUV suits perfectly for Nepal as it has great clearance, smooth voice control, good Bluetooth connectivity, and dual airbags too.

Mr. Anish Tamrakar

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