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## Former prez Yadav against quarry mafia

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## Hearing for the deaf, seeing for the blind

PAGE 14-15

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# SPEECHLESS



BIKRAM RAI

Fourteen years after the end of the conflict, a series of controversial actions by leaders of the ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP) have raised doubts about their commitment to transitional justice.

The most glaring was the appointment of Agni Sapkota to succeed Krishna Bahadur Mahara as Parliament Speaker. (*Sapkota is pictured above on Tuesday after having registered his name for the candidacy.*) Nepal's cybersphere poured scorn over a person accused of murder replacing someone charged with rape when all the while a highly qualified female candidate, deputy speaker Shivamaya Tumbahangphe, was available for the post.

Sapkota has been accused

of ordering the murder of Arjun Lama, a UML activist, in Kavre in 2005. Ironically, the UML is now a partner with the former Maoists in the NCP.

In 2010, Agni Sapkota was denied a US visa for 'serious and specific human rights allegations associated with his conduct during the insurgency'. He was earlier also prevented from going to Australia.

"Theoretically, the Speaker should be someone able to rise above the party line, and not someone controversial. That does not seem the case with Sapkota," said political analyst Krishna Khanal. "In fact, that has never been the case in Nepal. The Speaker's post has always been a launching pad

for those interested in higher political status."

The appointment of the Speaker was deadlocked for more than a month by the power struggle between Prime Minister Oli and his would-be successor Pushpa Kamal Dahal. Sapkota was Dahal's choice, and Oli wanted a loyalist from his former UML party: neither supported Tumbahangphe's nomination.

At a farewell press conference this week, the fiery Tumbahangphe lashed out at her own party leadership for not trusting a woman to do the job, saying: "We succeeded in abolishing the monarchy, but we still need to work hard to abolish patriarchy."

Human rights activist Bhojraj Timilsina

**THE TWO-YEAR ITCH**  
EDITORIAL  
PAGE 2

from Sapkota's home district of Kavre said: "A person accused of such grave crimes should be investigated like anyone else." But few expect that to happen. Of Sapkota's nomination, Lama's wife Purnimaya Tamang said: "Now I have lost all hope of justice."

In another move, the opposition Nepali Congress (NC) joined the ruling NCP to appoint apparatchiks to vacant posts in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the Commission for Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons (CIEDP) despite strong opposition from activists.

The two parties did hold a consultation with victims' groups about the nominations, but the consultation was boycotted by many and was condemned as a merely cosmetic gesture. "This is just a ploy by leaders to give legitimacy to their nominations and it is not acceptable to us," says Bhagiram Chaudhari of Conflict Victims' Common Platform. "It also mocks the rule of law, and gives a negative impression of the country in the international arena."

Last week NCP co-chair and former Maoist leader Dahal said he took responsibility "only" for 5,000 of the 17,000 Nepalis killed in the conflict. Dahal's irreverence about war-era crimes was seen as a mockery of the rule of law. Since 2006, the Maoists under Dahal and later the NCP have tried to turn both the TRC and the CIEDP into pawns and prevent prosecution of perpetrators of proven wartime atrocities.

"These are troubling signs," wrote Meenakshi Ganguly, South Asia Director of Human Rights Watch, on Tuesday. "International crimes cannot be brushed away with political trickery. If justice is denied in Nepal, victims may be forced to take their cases to courts abroad."

**Sewa Bhattarai**

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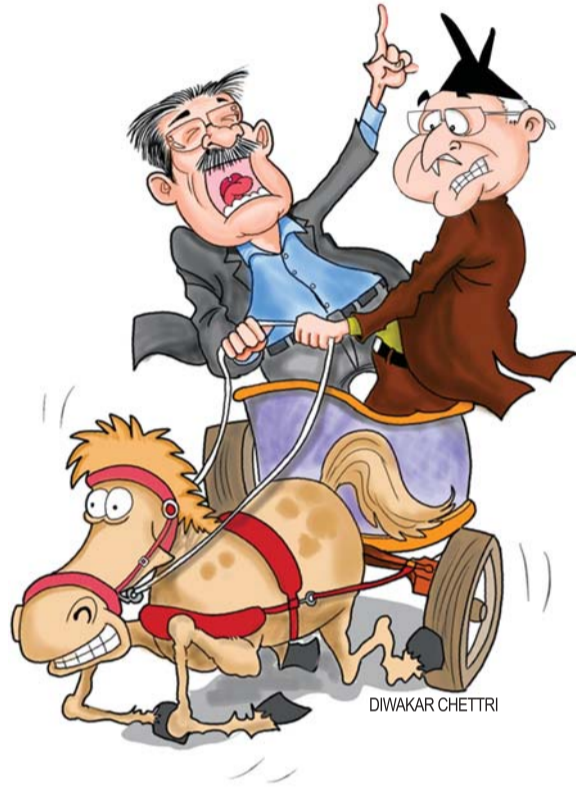
**QATAR AIRWAYS**

GOING PLACES TOGETHER

# THE TWO-YEAR ITCH

The Nepal Communist Party (NCP) government completes two years in power next month. Despite its strong majority, the party's performance has been underwhelming.

It may look like the NCP is just lurching from one embarrassing cockup to another. But there are signs the party may have a Plan. That all along, it has been aiming not for 'stability and prosperity', but for the extension of control, the stifling of dissent, the intimidation of critics, the muzzling of the media and the constriction of civil society. There is even a systematic strategy in place to roll back the development gains of the past decades.



**The government's actions over the past two years may seem ad hoc and haphazard, but taken together there appears to be a method to the madness.**

Given that power is centralised in Baluwatar, the plan is obviously being hatched at the Prime Minister's Office. There may be a power struggle at the top between Prime Minister Oli and his comrade Pushpa Kamal Dahal, but on matters of control and domination the party has one body with two heads.

The Cabinet has zero accountability and no performance evaluation. Instead, ministers regularly threaten critics with crude scare tactics. They take their cues from Prime Minister Oli, who last week accused editors in the Nepali media of being "without hearts". It is true that the criticism of Oli across a broad-spectrum of the national media over his dealings with the Yeti Group has been relentless, but we have received no satisfactory explanation of why the consortium gets preferential treatment in leases of former royal property by the Nepal Trust.

The government's actions over the past two years may seem ad hoc and haphazard, but taken together there appears

to be a method to the madness. Let's take the sidelining the NCP's own Shivamaya Tumbahangphe and the bullheaded approach to replace a rape-accused Speaker with a murder-accused Speaker. If we had to cite just one example of why there is impunity and blatant flouting of the rule of law in this country, the appointment of Agni Sapkota to the post of Parliament Speaker is it.

Ever since the end of the conflict 14 years ago, the Maoists, the UML, NC and the security forces have been partners in crime in sweeping their combined wartime atrocities under the carpet. Families of the victims and survivors of the war demand justice and truth, but every government since 2006 has tried to rig the transitional justice mechanism, and not a single perpetrator has been brought to trial. In fact, perpetrators get to lead Parliament.

Agni Sapkota is accused of murdering Arjun Lama, an activist of the UML, in Kavre in 2005. The irony of it all is that the UML and the former Maoists are now unified in the Nepal Communist Party. After years of struggling for justice for her husband, Purnimaya Tamang finally told this paper this week: "I have lost all hope for justice now."

Pushpa Kamal Dahal may have been technically right in stating last week in Chitwan that he was responsible for the deaths of "only" 5,000 of the 17,000 people killed during the conflict. But who is keeping count? If this vulgar non-repentance rattled many Nepalis, imagine what it did to the families of the disappeared and the survivors of that terror-filled decade.

One of the provisions of the Comprehensive Peace Accord signed in 2006 was the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and a Commission for Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons (CIEDP).

But all governments since have conspired to make these commissions ineffectual by appointing party loyalists to their senior positions so that no one ever has to answer for war crimes. This week, the NCP and NC appointed new handpicked commissioners to the TRC and CIEDP.

Aside from transitional justice, the NCP has been trying to dismantle just about every sector in which Nepal has done well. There are attempts to dilute the laws governing community forestry. Pushpa Kamal Dahal hinted in Madi last week that he intended to change the by-laws governing Chitwan National Park. Under pressure from the fossil fuel lobby, the Finance Ministry is said to be thinking of scrapping the tax rebate on electric vehicles. And this week, the Home Ministry was reported to be drafting a new Social Organisations Act which will allow it to close down non-government organisations it does not like.

Taken together, it is not hard to see what the NCP has been working hard to do in the past years. In an Orwellian sense, when the party said 'stability', it always meant 'control'.

## 10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

The analysis by Ashutosh Tiwari in issue #486 of 22-28 January 2010 shows us how the power centre may have shifted in the last ten years, but the lust for power among our political leaders remains the same. As two Communist alpha males continue to battle it out in the ruling NCP, the latest casualty is the post of Speaker, with the sidelining of Shivamaya Tumbahangphe in favour of a murder-accused candidate:

Even accounting for politicians' lust for power, what's wrong with our particular democratic structure that keeps on returning the same old politicians to power no matter how many Roman numeral andolans we have?

On the outside, our system has the requisite avatar of a democracy (multiple parties, elections, political horse-trading, etc). Dig deeper, and you will find that it's not the voters who call the shots but the party leaders, who have designed their parties' internal structures in such a way as to keep them in power for as long as they live. Voters can express resentment, but come election time, they have to choose among the same menu of candidates.



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## ONLINE PACKAGES



SILENT FILM

There are only 20 sign language interpreters across Nepal and despite a government directive that requires national television channels to broadcast news in sign language at least once a day, that has not happened. Watch this short silent film to better understand the deaf community, their special needs and the Nepali sign language. Story: page 14-15.

### SHIVAMAYA TUMBAHANGPHE

Another opportunity lost for Nepal's politicians, especially those belonging to the ruling party, to convince the masses that they do practice the politics of principles, that they do listen to their consciences, that their commitment towards gender and social inclusion is not mere lip service, that democracy has a bright future in the country, and so on ('Crushers of justice', Editorial, #993).

Anil Shrestha

■ Another proof that inclusiveness is not part of real Communism, but just slogan to defraud the commoner.

Lal Bahadur Nepali

### TONI HAGEN

How extraordinary to see such a clear, clean, bright blue sky over Kathmandu Valley, completely devoid of smog ('Time capsule of Kathmandu', Kunda Dixit, #993). And the beautiful Bagmati, looking like what a real river should.

Judi Forsyth

■ This beautiful land has been destroyed by the land mafia. In recent years, it has turned into a concrete jungle and there is not a place to live peacefully.

Phurpa Tamang

### BLOOM NEPAL SCHOOL

Inspirational work from former students of Budhanilkantha school ('Giving back to Nepal what Nepal gave them', Kunda Dixit, #993). Talent is everywhere and it is the responsibility of older people like us to give younger generation the opportunity to 'bloom'.

Manohar Budhathoki

## WHAT'S TRENDING

### Giving back to Nepal what Nepal gave them

by Kunda Dixit

Three former classmates who went to MIT, Harvard and New York University came together to start a nationwide network of affordable, world-class schools in Nepal. Now they have bagged a \$100,000 award in the UAE for an energy self-sufficiency plan. This most popular story of the week can still be read online.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

### Returning home has its rewards

by Naresh Newar

Karvika Thapa was living the American dream, but after 14 years decided to return to Nepal with her husband and two daughters. Today, she is one of the few women IT entrepreneurs in Nepal. Her success story was widely shared on social media. Watch the video on the Nepali Times YouTube channel.

Most popular on Twitter

### Time capsule of Kathmandu

by Kunda Dixit

A new book of Toni Hagen's photos shows Kathmandu as it was 70 years ago. Neighbourhoods and street scenes have long gone, but there are also images of how the inner city bahals and squares have not changed much. Visit nepalitimes.com for the review and more archival photos of Kathmandu.

Most commented

Most visited online page

## QUOTE TWEETS

**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
In 1950 Swiss geologist Toni Hagen came to Nepal, crisscrossed the mountains and plains on foot, & took thousands of photographs. A new book of his photographs shows us a Kathmandu where the Bagmati reflects the deep-blue sky and mountains shine clear.

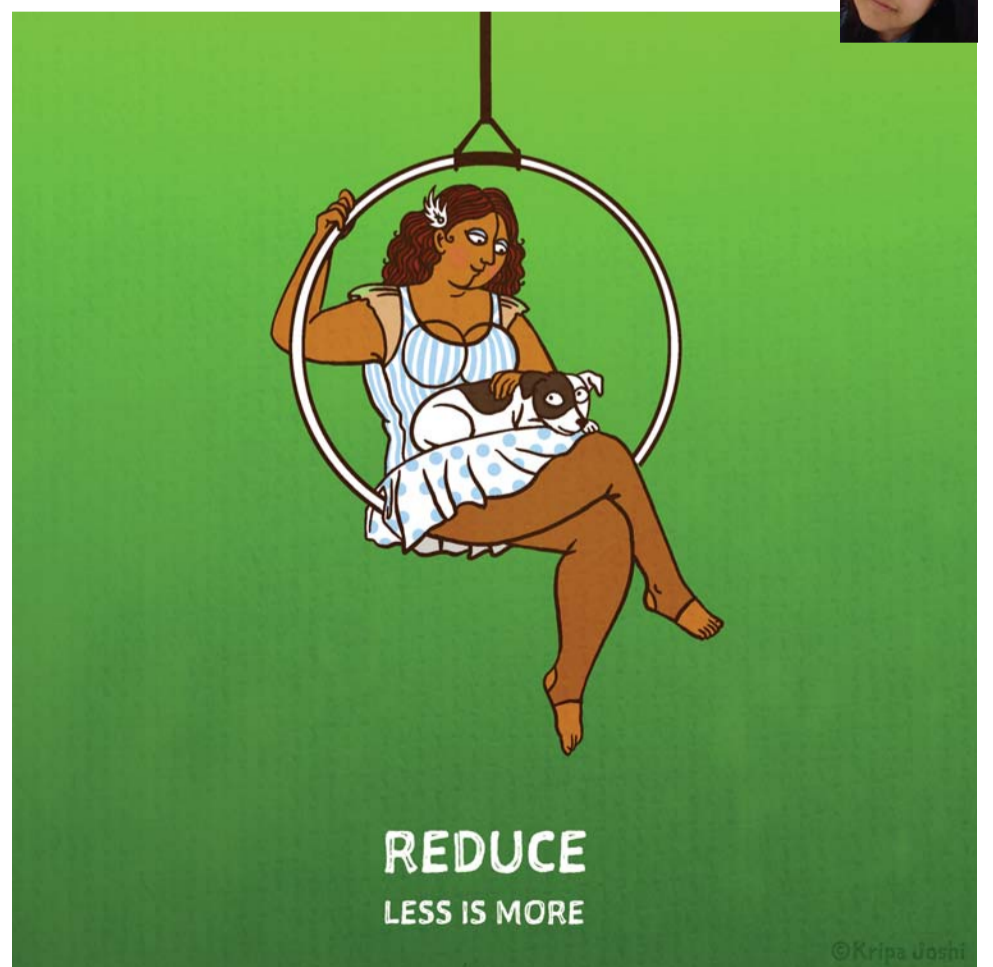
**Barsha Baral @barshaabaral**  
Once upon a time Kathmandu looked like a heaven.

**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
Bloom School wins an award in Abu Dhabi for Energy Self Sufficiency Plan. The school founders, three abroad-educated Nepali, hope to educate rural youngsters so that they can get best education in any country they want and come back to work in Nepal.

**Ramraj Sharma @ramrajshr**  
Really optimistic that our educational system will get better through initiatives like these.

## ECOLOGIC WITH MISS MOTI

KRIPA JOSHI



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# Counting what counts in Nepal

The state of the toilet at Kathmandu airport is a better indicator of progress than the Human Development Index

Anyone who visits Nepal seeking investment opportunities will look at two indicators: the first is the exchange rate of the Nepali rupee against major currencies, and the second is the state of the toilet in the airport arrival hall.



**1/2 FULL**  
Anil Chitrakar

When asked a simple question such as, "How far is Bhaktapur from Thamel?" The answer in kilometers may be easy but it is nearly impossible to answer in units of time. The answer therefore will be, "It depends". What does it depend on? Well that also depends.

In a country where we cannot tell anyone how long it will take to get to the next city, we have the world's most complex and sophisticated statistics to indicate where Nepal stands on anything and everything compared to the rest of the world.

Does this country really need a Human Development Index, a Doing Business Index, a Multi-dimensional Poverty Index and many others? How do you monitor and verify so many indicators?

It is quite obvious that the number of tigers in Chitwan is an indicator for the deer population there, and the grazing area and water available to the deer. The tiger count would serve as a proxy indicator for the state of the environment.



BIKRAM RAI

The system of conducting a national census was first carried out in the United States in 1790. In Nepal, the first census was conducted in 1911 during the reign of Prime Minister Chandra Shamsheer. We are now preparing for the National Census 2021, which will provide many indicators that will then hopefully be used to set priorities and allocate our scarce financial resources.

The reason we cannot say how long it will take to get to Bhaktapur is because of the huge traffic jam at Koteshwor. Is the number of

two- and four-wheel vehicles that converge at this junction and many others in the valley an indicator of the failure of seventy years of rural development?

Why are people not staying in the villages where the government has been pumping annual budgets for as long as we know?

It is very unpopular to tell development experts that rural Nepal does not need another school building because the parents have moved their children to the cities or to India or further afield. Pregnant women move to the nearest urban area with its

good maternity health facilities when they are six months into their pregnancies.

Two and half billion people will need old-age care globally by 2030 and this indicates that nursing is a good choice of profession. The sizes of different hoarding boards at major street junctions indicate which countries top the list of places to which young Nepalis are aspiring to move. Japan and Korea seem to be most popular, and yet these billboards are small compared to the English boarding school signs found all over Nepal.

The ruling parties of Nepal have

a vision and a mission -- prosperous Nepal, happy Nepalis. Can we agree on three indicators for each and hold politicians accountable to them? And then make sure that each cabinet and parliament session always begins by re-visiting these six indicators and reporting to the citizens on where we stand on each?

A problem with statistics is that data can be bent every which way. For example, does the high growth we have seen in the domestic airline business indicate Nepalis are getting rich or that road travel is risky?

Does the growing number of private hospitals indicate wealth or that people are becoming sick? Does the increased forest cover in Nepal indicate that people have internalised conservation or that imported LPG and cement have made it redundant to collect firewood and building materials?

While GDP per capita is the most popular indicator we use, we know few report their true income. Should income be replaced by the prices of the phones we carry or the size of the TV owned or vehicle driven?

Indicators are a good management tool, but we often do not like to be held accountable to them. There are too many variables that affect our work and hence the goal post keeps changing. But if we agree that the toilet at the airport is a critical indicator to inspire potential investors, we need to make it functional and impressive. 🇳🇵

Anil Chitrakar is President of Siddharthinc

## Make yourself a hot rum punch

**STEP 1**

Pour 30ml of honey into a punch glass.

**STEP 2**

Add 60ml of Khukri XXX rum, 15ml of lemon juice, and 150ml hot water

**STEP 3**

Top it off with half a teaspoon of ground cinnamon, a few cloves, one burnt star anise, a few pods of cardamom and a few lemon slices

There you have it, your favorite winter comfort drink is ready.

All the rain and snow this winter calls for a special drink. A standard punch is all well and good when the weather is fine. But it is cold enough right now to chill our bones, and we are in need of stronger stuff.

Hot rum punch is a winter drink that was allegedly created by British sailors in South Asia in the 17th century as a beer alternative. And we'll bet you didn't know that the word 'punch' comes from the Sanskrit *panch*, meaning 'five'. That is because the drink was made from five ingredients: alcohol, sugar, lemon, water, and tea or spices. So if you thought 'punch' in the hot rum drink was so named because it delivered a punch, think again.

In Nepal, the rum in the hot rum punch must come from the legendary Khukri Rum -- one of the most celebrated rums in Nepal, if not the world. During the 1975 coronation of King Birendra, the rum was sold in bottles that had the shape of the khukuri knife. But the drink is also available in standard (and cheaper) bottles.

This version of hot rum punch, spiked with lemon and infused with cardamom and clove, is both spicy and warm: exactly what you want when the temperature drops outside. Khukri hot rum punch can easily be made at home, and the ingredients you need are already there in your kitchen cabinet.

Ingredients: cardamom, clove, star anise, ground cinnamon, honey, lemon, hot water and Khukri XXX Rum.

## prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

### Robots on Turkish



Nepal's first food-delivery automation robots, Ginger and Ferry, have been shipped from Kathmandu to Texas via Turkish Airlines.

The robots were created by Nepal-based AI and robotics company Paaila Technology. The two robots built by Paaila have advanced features such as autonomous navigation, speech synthesis and recognition, auto docking, swarm intelligence and facial recognition.

### Hifz Al Naema

Qatar Aircraft Catering Company (QACC) is collaborating with charity Hifz Al Naema to redistribute surplus food and beverages



to support good causes in Qatar. They will daily redistribute 200-300kg of food and beverages such as whole fruits, cereal, soft drinks, yoghurt and chocolates.

### High Hyundai

Hyundai Electric KONA has made it to the Guinness Book of World Records by being the first fully electric SUV driven to



an altitude of 5,731m (at Sawula Pass in Tibet) and breaking the previous record of 5,715.28m altitude by an electric car.

### Mountain Flight

Vraman Travel Company is offering a mountain flight deal for Visit Nepal 2020.



For Rs11,995, two passengers can take a 50-minute mountain flight and get a grand view of the Himalaya.

### NMB Bank

NMB Bank has relaunched its branch office in Chauraha, Dhangadhi as the provincial office for Sudur Paschim Province. The new provincial office was jointly inaugurated by Rajendra Kafle and Pradip Raj Pandey, members of the bank's board of directors.

prabhu BANK

# Khumbu shuts trekker clinics

Two mountain medicine clinics that have saved hundreds of lives of trekkers and porters in the Khumbu region of Nepal have been forced to close down by the local municipality, allegedly in collusion with a helicopter company that profits from rescues.

The clinics, at above 4,500m in Machermo village on the Gokyo trekking route (pictured right), are run by the International Porter Protection Group (IPPG) and Community Action Nepal (CAN) with support of the Mountain Medicine Society of Nepal (MMSN).

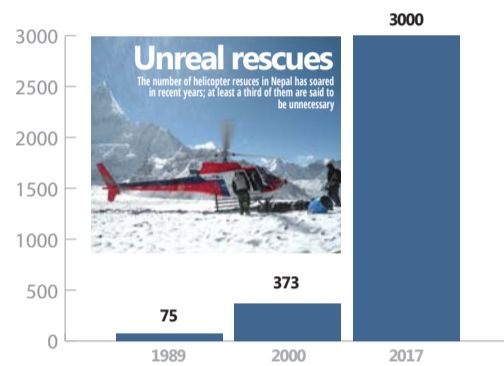
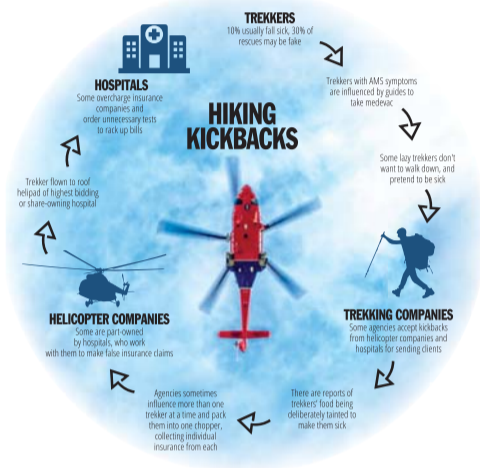
The shelter and rescue centres provided free care for porters and local people, a service paid for by charging trekkers who needed treatment for acute mountain sickness. But a new private clinic that was set up nearby in October 2019 and that started airlifting trekkers by helicopter to a hospital in Kathmandu appears to have pressured the local government to end the agreement with IPPG.

"The business model for the new clinic would appear to be to evacuate as many trekkers as possible to Kathmandu, where it is alleged they are often subjected to excessive or fictitious investigations and treatment," wrote Nick Mason, Chair of IPPG, a UK-based charity.

Volunteer physicians in Gokyo estimate that the new private clinic medevac-ed up to 50% of patients to a hospital in Kathmandu partly owned by the helicopter company. IPPG used helicopter evacuation of only 5% of the most serious cases.

Last year, the Nepal government promised to investigate after a major scandal broke in the media about an insurance scam involving unnecessary evacuation by helicopter of trekkers suffering from altitude sickness. Trekking insurance fraud has been reported in Nepal since 2013.

The incidence of fraudulent rescues



claiming insurance rose since 2015, as reported by this newspaper and others. Trekking companies were also said to have collaborated with helicopter companies and hospitals to entice tourists to opt for medical

evacuation at an inflated fee, after which profits were shared by the three parties.

Nepal's Tourism Ministry said last year that it had investigated the scams. The Ministry issued a report and drafted

new rules governing search, rescue, and treatment of trekkers to check fraud. But the rules were never implemented.

IPPG said its doctors faced 'hostility and abuse' from local lodge-owners with ties to the new private clinic. Then the Khumbu Pasang Lhamu Rural Municipality refused the IPPG permission to operate in Gokyo Valley starting spring 2020. Lack of permission means the clinic would have to shut down.

In past 17 years the IPPG posts in Gokyo have treated thousands of patients and saved the lives of hundreds of porters and trekkers.

"We have always viewed ourselves as guests of the Sherpas of the Gokyo Valley, having been originally invited into the valley by the local community and the Sagarmatha National Park, and it has been a privilege to serve them," Nick Mason wrote. "We looked forward to the day when we would be able to hand over the rescue posts and porter shelters fully to Nepalis."

Most porters accompanying trekkers are from lower valleys, and suffer from altitude sickness because of poor acclimatisation. Sherpas and other high-altitude guides do not suffer as much from acute mountain sickness.

Trouble reportedly started in the 2019 autumn trekking season, when the new private clinic opened and the IPPG health posts started to feel the pressure from locals. Suspicion has fallen on a private hospital in Kathmandu with its own helicopter company that has started opening a string of clinics in the Khumbu, showing that the over-commercialisation of Nepal's medical sector is now affecting the Everest region as well.

Edi Albert, a volunteer physician in Gokyo, wrote: "You can imagine the size of the bills presented to the insurance companies." 🇳🇵

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Enjoy Responsibly

# Nepalis go salmon fishing in Kamchatka

... and discover one of the last untouched stretches of river on the planet

**Arun S Rana**  
in Petropavlosk

Few Nepalis know where Kamchatka is, and the ones who do probably heard about it from the board game 'Risk', where it is described as the remote region between Asia and North America.

Kamchatka Krai, as it is known in Russia, is a land of active volcanoes and hundreds of thousands of pristine rivers that flow down to the Sea of Okhotsk. It teems with brown bears, salmon and trout.

For a group of eight Nepalis brought together by their passion for fishing, this was paradise. In the past, we had explored Himalayan rivers in Nepal and India in pursuit of the iconic golden mahseer. But overfishing, habitat loss and failures of conservation have led to massive depletion of this magnificent fish.

Taking a roundabout route via Muscat and Moscow, the Nepali fishermen landed in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky Airport 43 hours after leaving Kathmandu. Our guides for the trip, Andrey, Victor and Serge, and our cook Tanya, met us at the airport, and took us to a store to buy supplies – including a stock of vodka, an essential in Russia for warding off the cold.

We had all bought waders in the hopes of fly fishing, but these were more useful as wind breakers. Despite the thick thermals we wore under them, we found it too cold to stand in the water of the Bystraya River for more than 15 minutes



PHOTOS: ARUN S RANA

at a time. Meanwhile, the macho Russians bathed in the frigid water and walked around in t-shirts.

There are six species of Pacific salmon, and all of them swim in the waters of Kamchatka. From June to October, different species run up the rivers at different times to spawn. Unlike our golden mahseer which also migrate upriver to spawn but return to the depths of our big rivers every year, a salmon spends its early life in the river and then enters the ocean where it grows into an adult. After two to five years, the salmon swims back up the river to the exact spot where it was born, to spawn and then die.

The indigenous people of this region revere the salmon as a deity. Brown bears gorge on salmon and store the energy thus gained to sustain them through their winter hibernation. Rainbow trout, char and grayling feed on salmon eggs and decaying salmon flesh. What the bears and other fish do not

consume decays and provides nutrition for the vegetation along the rivers.

When we stepped into the Bystraya in mid-September, the last of the sockeye salmon were bright red and exhausted. Big silver spinners shimmering in the water imitated trout, and even as they gasped for life, the dying sockeyes bravely fought off predators to protect their eggs.

The sight of thousands of juvenile salmon leaping joyously into the air was comforting. We slept well knowing that the sockeye had done their duty, and that millions of salmon would be swimming into the Sea of Okhotsk this year as they have for countless years.

Salmon undergo a drastic metamorphosis when they enter freshwater rivers from the ocean. Their bodies contort into humps and they develop beaks and gnarly teeth. Fish that are bright silver in the ocean turn red and green in the

river, and are considered inedible. Only the silver salmon are eaten.

On the first two days we could not hook a rainbow trout, until we discovered that they were taking pink flies. Up to 15 rainbow trout were then hooked before lunch, including a monster 24-incher that weighed 4.5 kg.

As we ventured into the Kamchatka wilderness, autumn had coloured the forest in yellow and red, interspersed with green. Every living thing was stocking up for winter. A dozen brown bears were fat from their salmon diet, and human beings too were storing salmon, cleaning hundreds of fish and packing them in beds of salt to preserve them through the winter. It is impossible not to develop a deep reverence for the salmon, and we all hoped that sustainable angling would win over commercial greed.

Every evening we stopped rafting around five o'clock, and set up camp for the night. Our three guides used

chainsaws to quickly cut logs for the fire, and before long Tanya had two pots on them, one for coffee and the other for borsht. Inside the dining-kitchen tent, she got on with other dishes – some of the tastiest meals we had ever eaten.

Fresh caviar, straight out of the salmon gut, washed and lightly salted; fried salmon steak; baked rainbow trout; grayling sashimi; pumpernickel bread; pancakes and an assortment of chocolates for dessert. Generous shots of vodka, of course, to wash it all down. The organisation of the trip was meticulous and exemplary.

We landed more than a hundred fish in five days, and learned that fish see in colour -- how else do you explain the trout's preference for pink flies? We learned that despite their rough exterior, Russians are mild-mannered, honest, hard-working people who look after their guests well.

It is heartening to know that there are still a few magical, untouched places on this planet where human beings and nature coexist. For us Nepalis, there was a parting wish that we could keep just one river in our own country flowing free and clean, and that we might set it aside to save the mighty golden masheer. 🇳🇵

*Arun S Rana is a fishing enthusiast  
shaiyax@gmail.com*

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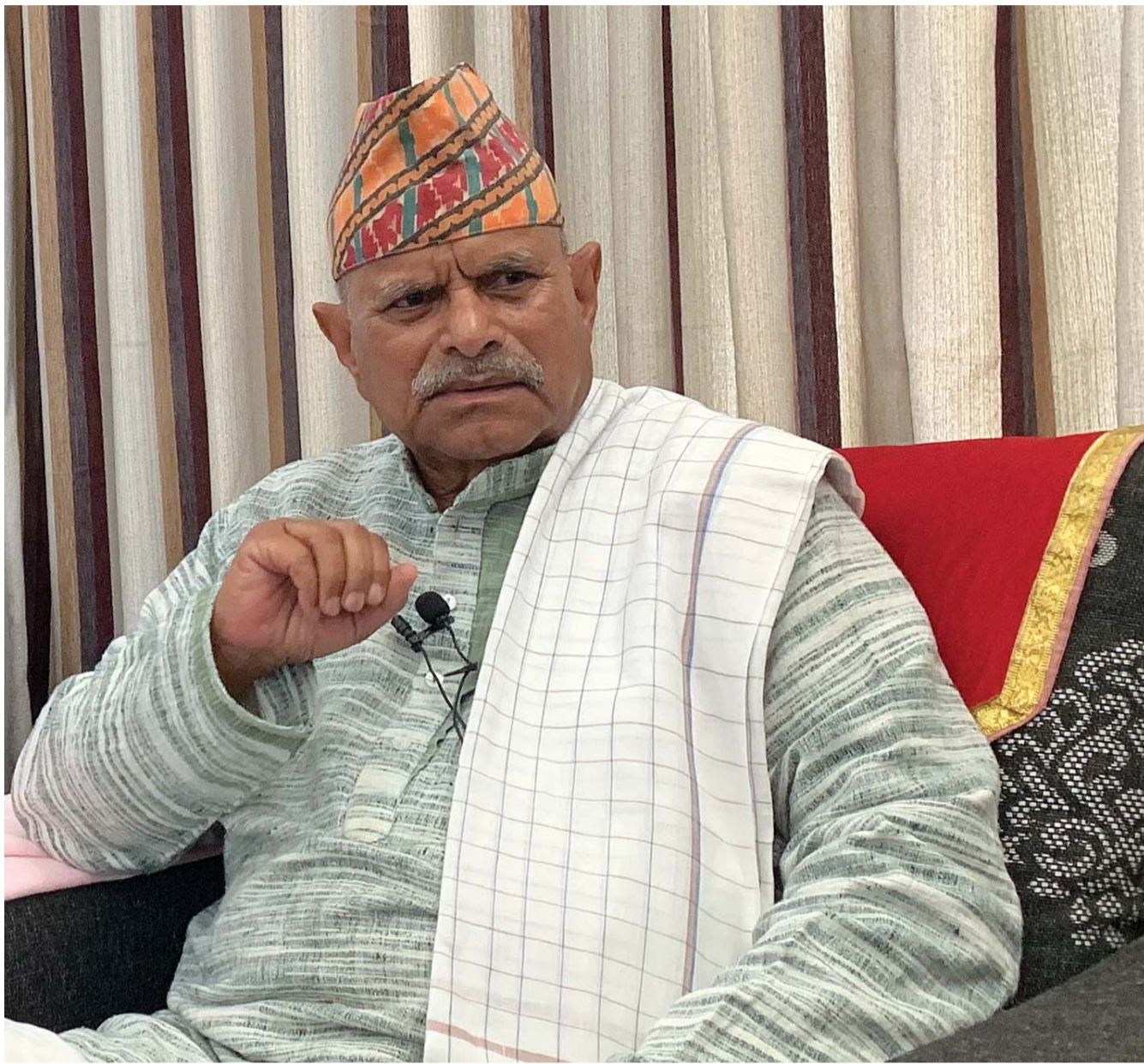
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After the fourth westerly disturbance of the season last week that dumped 60mm of rain on Kathmandu and triggered deadly avalanches in the mountains, a high-pressure system now holds sway over northern India. This is bringing frigid air from the northwest, resulting in chilly, clear air in Kathmandu, but enveloping the Tarai and the low valleys in daytime fog. Kathmandu will be sunny but unseasonably cold over the weekend.

| FRIDAY | SATURDAY | SUNDAY |
|--------|----------|--------|
| 14°    | 13°      | 13°    |
| 3°     | 3°       | 3°     |



MANISH POUDEL

## “Business, bureaucracy and politicians all plundering the Chure”

On 10 January, 24-year-old Dilip Mahato was killed for opposing the ‘Crusher’ industry in Dhanusha that was illegally mining sand from a river. This week, another Dhanusha native, former president Ram Baran Yadav, spoke to *Nepali Times* about the Chure conservation program he initiated.

**Nepali Times: Dilip Mahato was murdered in your home district, and your former constituency. What does his killing tell us?** This is a grave crime. Dilip had been mobilising the villagers and talking about Chure conservation. The people were responding to it positively. Those who were earning millions from illegal mining of the river beds were alarmed. So they murdered him.

**Why does the trade in boulders and sand have to lead to murder?** The price of aggregate and sand for construction is sky-high right now. The materials are even exported to India. Money is at the crux of the matter. Everyone wants to become rich quickly by selling natural resources. Businessmen, mafia dons, police, local administration, and elected representatives are all complicit. One river is contracted out for Rs50-70 million. Malpractice increased after the practice of allocating money for Chure development shifted to the local administration. The crusher industry is also influential in politics: many have parliamentarians on their pay roll, and some owners are even MPs themselves. They do not care what

the exploitation of rivers will do to the environment, or what kind of earth we are leaving behind for future generations. Dilip was fighting to protect our future, and he paid for it with his life.

**What environmental impact does this river extraction have on the Tarai?** More than half of the Chure’s forests have been destroyed in my lifetime. Rivers and wetlands are drying in the Tarai, and the groundwater table has receded. Water scarcity is increasing in the eastern and central Tarai. In summer, people come to the highways carrying drums on bullock carts to fetch water. Fewer migratory birds winter here now. Human-wildlife conflict is increasing. The Tarai used to be our breadbasket, and we used to export grain till 40 years ago. That is no longer the case.

**While you were President, you established the President Chure Conservation Program, and there is also a Chure Conservation Master Plan. But the present government has not heeded the reports.** The 20-year Chure Conservation Master Plan outlines activities to conserve the Chure. The government has included it in its National

Pride Projects, but Parliament has not made any laws pertaining to it. That shows that the government is not serious about it. All the construction projects in the Chure negatively impact its natural resources, for example the East-West Highway that was built right across the jungles. An east-west railway is being constructed at a distance of 20-30 km from the highway. The proposed mid-hill highway runs parallel to it, and the postal highway is under construction too. Another proposed highway, the Madan Bhandari Road, is being built from Jhapa to Dadeldhura. The impact of these 4-lane highways on the environment was not considered. That shows the government is not serious about the environment.

**What do you say about the proposed Nijgad airport?** The government just wants to destroy our last remaining jungles. It wants to chop down the forest to build a new capital in Kailali. Do we need a fourth international airport when international airports are already under construction in Bhairawa and Pokhara? This is just immature. If we don’t listen to conservationists, the Tarai will become a desert in a few decades.

Laws should be made to implement the Chure Master Plan, and an environment-friendly policy drawn up. But this subject is never raised in the federal Parliament. All three levels of the government should be active, and the government should understand that once you tamper with nature, the effects are irreversible.



Following the death of 24-year-old Dilip Mahato for opposing a sand-mining contractor in Dhanusha last week, former president Ram Baran Yadav, who is from the same district, speaks out against the quarry mafia. Watch the former president talk about Chure conservation and Nijgad airport.

nepalitimes.com

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# Nepali ultra-r anti-litter

Mira Rai's initiative to clean up hiki



**TEAMWORK:** South Asian Games gold medalist in karate Anupama Magar and Mira Rai (right) after a day collecting garbage on the Champadevi trail. Legendary trail-runner Bhim Gurung and Mirai Rai (left).

## Bipin Thapa

One of the best hiking trails close to Kathmandu is the Champadevi-Chandragiri trail. The path travels through thick forests teeming with wildlife and offers a splendid view of both the Himalaya and the city sprawled below.

But as the path becomes a popular attraction for urbanites seeking solace in nature, it is increasingly marred by plastic trash.

Now, a community effort led by the Mira Rai Initiative (MRI) has started a clean-up and awareness campaign along the trail, which it hopes will set an example not only for locals and hikers here but for people who take advantage of nature walks elsewhere in Nepal.

Last month, MRI, started by international champion trail runner Mira Rai, mobilised 65 volunteers who hiked the forest path picking up litter and installing 30 doko dust-bins and 20 anti-litter signs.

Altogether, the volunteers collected 80 bags of glass, paper, food wrappers, beverage containers, and straws from along the trail. MRI made arrangements with Dakshinkali Municipality and local garbage recyclers to ensure regular collection and disposal of the trash from the doko bins.

MRI promotes trails and trail running across Nepal while encouraging and empowering female trail runners in particular. Rai has said she wants to give young Nepali women the same opportunity she had to become world-renowned racers.

Nepal has some of the most exquisite natural and geographical features, and holds enormous untapped potential for trail-running.

Because of the Champadevi-Chandragiri trail's natural beauty, accessibility, and proximity to the city, it is gaining popularity among both tourists and locals. There has been a rapid growth in the number of hikers and picnickers, and this has meant that the trail suffers from plastic and other litter. The negative impact of this on the trail's beauty and appeal could in turn reduce its popularity.

Popularity does not necessarily translate to pollution. The problem faced by the Champadevi-Chandragiri trail is a lack of awareness and inadequate instructions against littering and at school and at home. The problem is also a lack of bins and containers for waste collection, in the absence of which people throw their waste on the trail itself. This is why MRI installs waste-collection bins and focuses on awareness and the ongoing preservation and maintenance of the trail. A clean trail would also motivate more runners.

"If we can create a wonderful playground for enthusiasts, we can help create more Mira Rais, who can be torchbearers of our nation on the international stage," says Mira Rai, who has taken part in 20 international ultra-marathons to date, setting a new world record on the Mont Blanc 80km race. The former Maoist also received the National Geographic Adventurer of the Year Award in 2017.

She adds: "Such community efforts aid in the promotion of tourism and the ongoing national campaign for Visit Nepal 2020." 🇳🇵

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

More pictures and video of the clean-up online. 📺

## The Champadevi Trail

Located along the southern rim of Kathmandu Valley, Champadevi (2,300m) is the Valley's third highest ridge. It is named after the forest protector goddess, whose shrine is at the summit. The peak and the shrine hold great religious significance and in recent years Champadevi has also become popular as a destination for day hikes, trail running, cycling and picnicking.

The trail to Champadevi climbs uphill through planted pine forest towards new-growth oak, rhododendron, and uttis community forests. The summit can be approached from Chandragiri, Hattiban, or more directly from Kirtipur via Deurali and Machhegaun. The ridge offers unparalleled views of the Himalaya from Annapurna to Numbur, with Ganesh Himal, Langtang, and Dorje Lakpa being the closest peaks. Far in the distance, even Mt Everest is visible in clear weather.





# Marathoner's er drive

ng trails, starting with Champadevi



## Nepal's fantastic female runner

Mira Rai is already well known in Nepal and in the international athletic community as a trail runner, and a new book spreads her fame beyond that by introducing her to other audiences around the world. *Fantastic Female Adventurers* by Lily Dyu features Rai as one of 13 contemporary women who have had extraordinary adventures.

Mira Rai from Bhojpur did not know that mountain running could be a sport, until she won a race. Born and raised in a farming family, Mira was used to walking up and down steep mountain paths every day carrying grass for cows. She walked two days to the nearest market with her mother whenever they needed groceries. This stamina came into good use when she briefly joined the Maoists during the conflict. After the war, when she learned that what she did every day could be a sport, she competed in some of the world's most challenging trail races, won several awards, and broke three world records.

Rai's story is an extraordinary one, since she achieved so much despite not being able to afford training or proper equipment. But even more extraordinary is the possibility of what could be hiding in Nepal: how many other ordinary young men and women going about their everyday tasks are so toughened by the rough terrain of Nepal that they are already elite athletes?

Like many other Nepali youngsters Rai was planning to go to Malaysia to work, and would have done so if her life had not taken the dramatic turn it did. Today she is busy competing in races, leading environmental initiatives and helping other youngsters in athletics.

Lily Dyu brings Rai's story alive in her book, documenting her phenomenal rise in sports. Mira Rai's chapter is beautifully illustrated by Chellie Caroll, with a village street scene of traditional mud houses, women carrying fodder and hens pecking at the ground.

Author  
Lily Dyu hated sports as a child

but took up running in her adulthood. She realised that one of the reasons she had been averse to adventures was that she had never known examples of women adventurers. Like everyone else, she had grown up seeing and reading about male explorers, and thought that outdoor activities were for men. After cycling all over the world, hiking and swimming in far-flung places, and even coming to Nepal to complete the Manaslu circuit, Dyu decided to write about other women who were out and about in the world.

Dyu's book features Ann Daniels, who skied to the North Pole; Jin Jeong, who cycled around the world; Karen Darke, who hand-biked in the Himalaya; Sarah Outen, who kayaked in a ring of fire; Emma Timmis, who explored Australia on a stand-up bike, and others. Between them, the women cover not just half the sky, but the entire planet.

**Sewa Bhattarai**



*Fantastic Female Adventurers*  
by Lily Dyu  
Shrine Bell, Sheffield, UK  
131 Pages  
£ 12.99

EVENTS



Mantra

Learn about the physical, mental and spiritual effects of mantras and practice mantras with instructor Ramesh for a relaxing and rejuvenating meditation session.  
29 January, 6pm-7:30pm, Rs1,500 per person  
Sooriya Wellness and Yoga Centre, Lazimpat (01) 4001714

Passage of Time

A solo exhibition of artwork by Krishna Lama.  
25 January-1 February, 10:30am-5pm, Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal (01) 4220735

Call for artists

Sattya Media Arts Collective invites artists to apply for Lost & Found: Myths into Mural, a five-mural project in February and March where they will paint scenes from mythology around Kathmandu.  
Till 26 January, 3pm, Apply: bit.ly/lostandfoundktm.

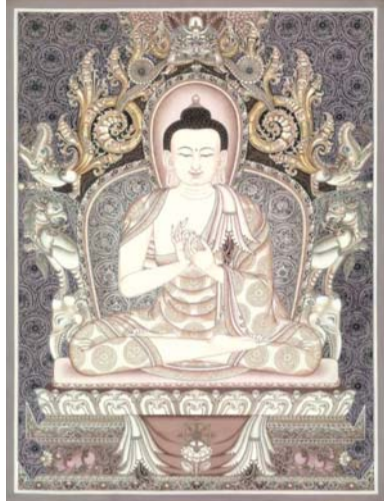


Art Afternoons

Art Afternoons at CAM Nepal invites children of all ages to spend the day painting, sculpting and dipping their hands in sensory bins.  
Every weekend, 12pm-4pm, Children's Art Museum, Hattisar, 9801087072

Sonam Lhosar

Celebrate Sonam Lhosar at the Hyatt with great food, music and festivities.  
25 January, 12:30pm-4pm, Rs2900++ per person, Hyatt Regency, Boudha (01) 5171234



Lok Chitrakar

Lok Chitrakar has been a respected artist for more than 40 decades. This exhibition, curated by Ujen Norbu Gurung, will showcase Chitrakar's collection of intricate Paubha art.  
11-24 January, Le Sherpa, Maharajgunj, 9851177901

Garage Sale

Have any vintage knick knacks or barely-used objects lying about your house? Book a table at the garage sale and let them find a new home.  
26 January, 11am-2pm, Cafe & Restaurant U, Bhakundole (01) 5555750



Swing Dance Classes

Want to try something new this year? Take a swing dance class and learn the Lindy Hop from teachers from the Swing Dance Academy.  
27 January, 6pm onwards, Alliance Française Kathmandu, Jhamsikhel, 9808880227

Handicraft Market

The second edition of Chhaya Centre's Handicraft Market presents a vast collection of handicrafts from some of the best artisans in the country.  
25 January, 11am-6pm, Chhaya Centre, Thamel (01) 5252125

MUSIC



YAKO Live

Hong Kong-born and -based musician YAKO will be performing his electrifying set for the first time in Nepal.  
24 January, 7pm onwards, Tickets: Rs1,500, Privé Nepal, Tahachal Marg, 9801090111

Jhilkey Fire

Jhilkey and Company will be releasing its latest EP, Jhilkey Fire, with band Kta Haru on Acid.  
25 January, 2pm onwards, Tickets: Rs500, Purple Haze Bar, Thamel, 9849015292

Ser O Duo

This Weekend Jamsession features Ser O Duo, composed of Tomas Carrasco and Moa Edmunds. The duo, based in Valparaiso, Chile, incorporates western musical elements with traditional South American sound.  
24 January, 7pm onwards, Electric Pagoda Bar/Cafe, Thamel (01) 4700123



Rohit J Chettri

Rohit J Chettri shot to fame with his song "Bistarai" and is now a household name. See him perform on Friday.  
24 January, 8pm onwards, Tickets: Rs1,000, Playboy Lounge & Club, Chhaya Centre, Thamel, 9808263228

Music & Madness

Nabin K Bhattarai, known for his combination of rock, folk and pop sounds, is a musical marvel that has been producing some of the most popular songs in the last decade.  
25 January, 7pm onwards, VIP Restaurant Lounge Bar, Thamel (01) 5364160

DINING



Thay Bu

If you're searching for a new place to try Newa cuisine, look no further. Thay Bu offers some of the best chatamari, choila, fhokso and khaja sets in town.  
9am-9pm, New Road (01) 4222481

Grace Cafe

Grace Cafe is the best new brunch spot in Kathmandu Valley. It serves everything from burgers and momos to green smoothies and refreshing salads.  
7:30am-7:30pm, Kupondole Height, 9863020497



Grill Durbar

At Grill Durbar, there isn't anything that you can't have grilled. We serve everything from slow-grilled chicken to grilled vegetable shawarmas.  
11am-8pm, Sankhamul, 9813578858

Lah Puka Chhen

This eatery is a dream come true for chicken lovers. They serve everything from fried chicken to Nepali-style chicken and if you can handle the heat, try the Lah Extra Hot Wings.  
11:30am-8pm, Naya Bazaar (01) 4366294



Utpala Cafe

Located within a Buddhist monastery in Boudha, Utpala Cafe offers an all-vegetarian menu. It features locally grown produce and the mushroom dishes are a must-try!  
Boudha, 9801978106

GETAWAY



Hotel Moonlight

At the outskirts of Thamel, this hotel offers respite from the busy city. Relax in the deluxe rooms and grab a hearty meal at the beautiful garden-side restaurant.  
Paknajol (01) 4380452

Fish Tail Lodge

Located on the quieter side of Phewa Lake, this lodge is an oasis surrounded by blue waters. Add to this an innovative architectural design and breathtaking panoramic views of mountains, and this place is a must-visit.  
Phewa Lake, Pokhara (61) 465071



Dhulikhel Mountain Resort

This resort blends culture and comfort seamlessly together with its well-designed bungalows and Newa accents.  
Dhulikhel (01) 4420774

Sapana Village Resort

Experience the rich Tharu and Chepang culture, marvel at the beauty of the lush national park, witness elephants lumbering through the forests and relax at this beautiful getaway in the heart of Chitwan.  
Sauraha, Chitwan (56) 580308



Hattiban Resort

Hattiban Resort is the perfect place to get away for the weekend. Grab breakfast at the hotel's buffet, lounge in the sunny courtyard overlooking the mountains, get a massage at the spa and take a tour of nearby Pharping, Champadevi Temple and Khokana Village.  
Hattiban (01) 6916140

OUR PICK

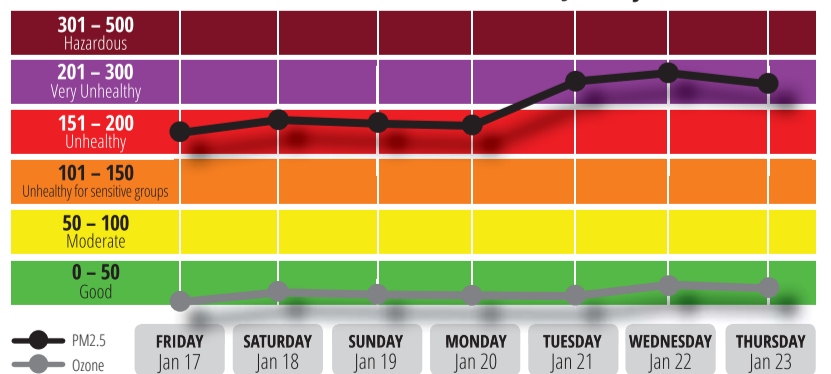


Opens in Kathmandu 24 January

Jaya Nigam (Kangana Ranaut) – a forgotten kabaddi player and a wife and mother in her early 30s – seeks new meaning for her life. She returns to the world of kabaddi, navigating the challenges posed by age and gender stereotypes. An inspiring film directed by Ashwiny Iyer Tiwari.

AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 17 - 23 January



60mm of rain in Kathmandu over the weekend wasn't enough to clear up the air as we continued to breathe harmful pollutants throughout the week. Air quality was particularly bad from Tuesday onwards as the concentration of particles smaller than 2.5 microns at Phora Darbar, the US Embassy, entered the 'Very Unhealthy' purple zone. On Wednesday, the Air Quality Index (AQI) was 293, a few points short of reaching the 'Hazardous' level.  
<https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>

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# Tipping point on menstrual banishment in Nepal

Change happens when local women take the lead

It is easy to be cynical about recent reports of actions taken to end *chhaupadi*, the traditional practice in parts of western Nepal of segregating menstruating women.



Since December, after the Home Ministry ordered district officials to strictly enforce laws that bar the practice, hundreds of the *chhaupadi* sheds where women live during their periods have been demolished. Local officials have warned that they will withhold social security payments to anyone found to be involved in the practice of menstrual banishment.

We have heard such threats from officialdom before, and many of the recently dismantled sheds were likely previously broken down and rebuilt. But something feels different now about the campaign to end this practice that has killed more than a dozen women and girls in the past decade, most of them by exposure to cold or snakebite or by suffocation from fires to warm the windowless sheds in winter. It seems we might be at a tipping point.

Reason for optimism comes in the form of some good news from Nyaya Health Nepal, the NGO that runs the Bayalpata Hospital in Achham. Nyaya has 58 community health workers (CHWs), who form the hospital's link to residents in its catchment area. Of these 58, 29 had not practiced *chhaupadi* since before they began working at Bayalpata and, according to the hospital, 28 of the remaining 29 have given up the practice in the time since.

Efforts of the hospital clearly have something to do with this.



NYAYA HEALTH NEPAL



Aradhana Thapa, healthcare design director at Bayalpata, says that sporadic informal discussions with CHWs were followed by regular discussions in 2017, and by more formal interventions in 2018-19. "We started with baby steps, to

understand the issue and to help provide a safe platform for CHWs to openly discuss and support each other. Last year we added a few more interventions, including social mapping and reaching more pregnant women," added Thapa in

an email interview.

The mapping found that 66% of the 14,000 women of reproductive age in the hospital's catchment area practise *chhaupadi*, compared to 50% of the CHWs before Bayalpata's intervention. CHWs are required to have at least Grade 10-level education, which is far above the district average, and perhaps that higher level of education explains Bayalpata's success in helping these women give up sheds.

"Education and the understanding of menstruation as a biological phenomenon universal to the general population is allowing this change [in attitude towards *chhaupadi*] to take place," says Thapa. "However, there needs to be a trigger for that final decision. For many CHWs, that point was that they wanted to give up the practice themselves

before preaching to other women."

In December, Parbati Raut of Achham became the last reported victim of *chhaupadi*. For the first time, an arrest was made over the death – of Parbati's brother-in-law Chhatra Raut, for banishing her to the shed. Unofficial reports from Achham say that he is out on bail, punished only with having to report to the police twice monthly for three months.

Many activists say that banishment to sheds is only the most extreme form of the menstrual segregation that occurs throughout Nepal among women of all socio-economic groups, both rural and urban. A 2005 Supreme Court decision outlawed *chhaupadi*, and a 2017 national law made forcing a woman to use a shed punishable by up to 3 months in jail or a fine of Rs3,000. Yet these changes, along with various local regulations that punish the practice or reward women who reject it, have failed to end it.

In one ward in Achham, senior citizens' allowances were reduced as punishment for banishing women to sheds. This was effective because elders tend to be the most immersed in the traditional beliefs surrounding *chhaupadi*, such as that not going to the shed once a month will anger gods and result in sickness, or worse, in a village.

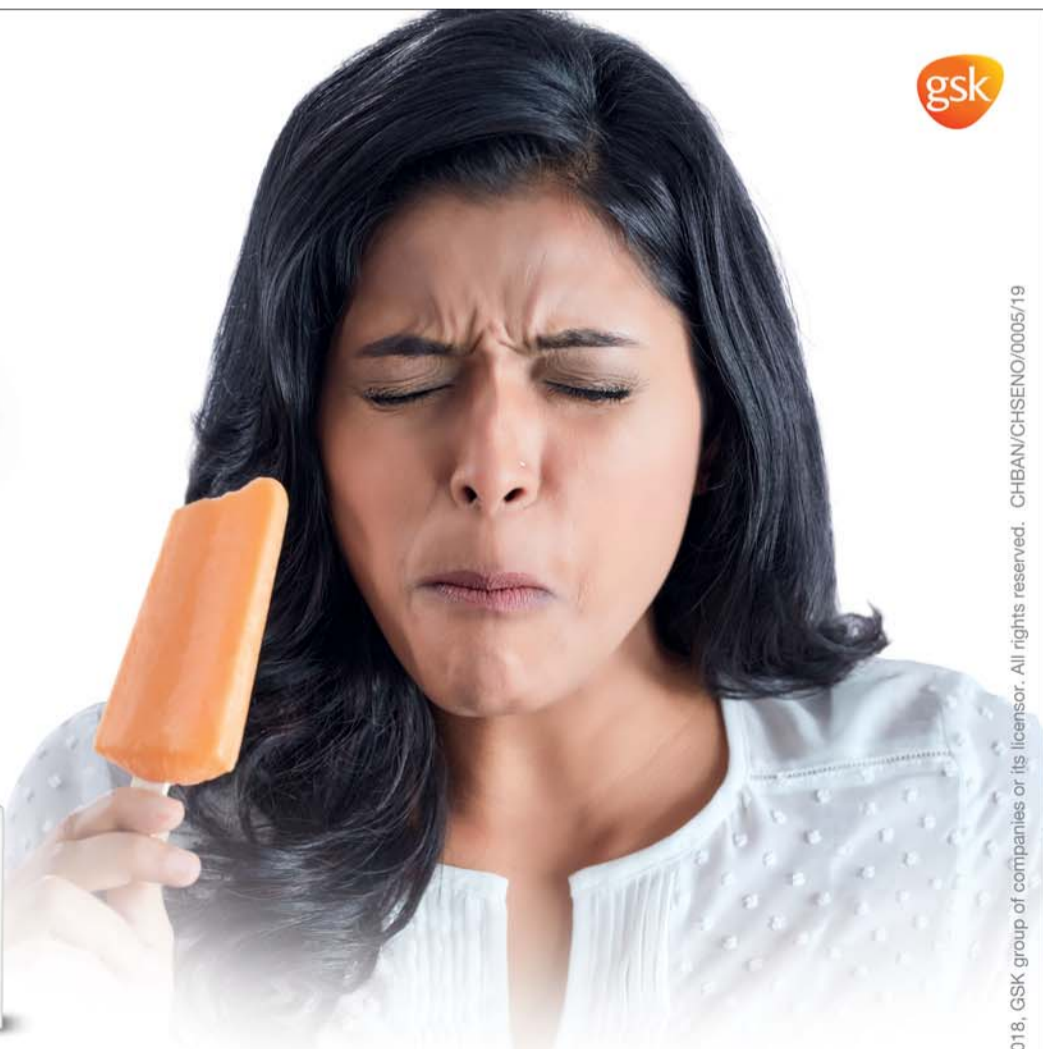
Such local initiatives, and especially women-led campaigns to destroy sheds, have helped CHWs to give up the *chhaupadi* practice. "It is the fact that these campaigns are led by local women that makes them so effective. I think it's peer influence, pressure, that's playing its part," says Thapa.

For other CHWs, the decision to give up the shed was driven by practical considerations -- the absence of caretakers for their children, in cases in which the women do not live with their in-laws and their husbands have to be away for work. Says Thapa: "They ended up staying at home to ensure care for their children."

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BIKAS RAUNIAR

**INDIA CONNECTION:** The exit gate of new Integrated Check Post (ICP) near Biratnagar and the ICP gate in Jogbani, India. The ICP will ease Nepal-India trade and reduce the cost of transportation.



RATNA SHRESTHA/RSS

**GONG XI FA CAI:** Home Minister Ram Bahadur Thapa and Chinese Ambassador to Nepal Hou Yanqi at an event organised in Kathmandu on Tuesday to mark the Chinese New Year.



MOFA

**ROYAL DUTIES:** Princess Astrid of Belgium at meets Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali on Sunday. The Belgian royal was in Nepal for a campaign against tuberculosis and leprosy.



VERONICA CODY/TWITTER

**EYES ON THE BALL:** Women footballers in action during an opening match of Mahila Premier League in Kathmandu on Saturday.



LAXMI BASNET

**HELP CENTRE:** British Ambassador Nicola Pollitt with Far-Western Province officials at the inauguration of the new Humanitarian Staging Area at Dhangadi Airport.

# Nepal's Tarai

**Sonam Lama**  
in Nepalganj

Nepalganj is expanding as a hub for western Nepal, with a new six-lane highway linking it to Kohalpur and upgrading work underway at the airport. But these days the city and its surroundings have also become a hub for abandoned cattle.

They are everywhere, sitting along the road dividers and sidewalks of the East-West Highway and other roads in the thousands. The cattle have been abandoned by owners after they could not be transported across the border for sale in India. Cattle from Uttar Pradesh have also been transported into Nepal after the increase in street lynchings of cattle traders by cow vigilantes since 2014.

That there are no abandoned water buffaloes or mules along the highways is proof that only animals that have no economic value but are 'protected' by religious groups are left by the roadside to fend for themselves.

The cattle problem in the western Tarai hit the headlines last September when 24 cows and bulls were found dead below a highway in Surkhet after they were thrown off a cliff by truckers hired to ferry them to the mountains in Dailekh.

Following the incident, officials responsible for arranging the transport of the cows from a Nepalgunj-based shelter were detained. The shelter, or *kanji*



house, is supposed to keep cows until they are claimed, or until a permanent home has been found for them, but the officials had decided to send these cows away. Although the outrage over the cattle deaths has evaporated and the problem has disappeared from the media headlines, the plight of stray cattle has only grown.

In August 2018, in response to a writ petition by a human rights group stating that the stray cattle were causing highway fatalities, the Supreme Court issued a mandamus against Nepalgunj Sub-Metropolitan City, Kohalpur Municipality and five rural municipalities last February, directing them to put the cattle in *kanji* houses.

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# is over-run by cattle

Shelters are overwhelmed by the growing problem of abandoned livestock from both sides of the border



ALL PHOTOS: SONAM LAMA

Metropolitan City, but the problem is much bigger than a cattle shelter can handle and the shelter has been overwhelmed with cows and bulls being driven into Nepal across the open border with Uttar Pradesh after crackdowns there.

Nepalgunj mayor Dhawal Shumsher Rana admits the scale of the problem makes it difficult to manage. "The *kanji* house is supposed to give refuge to stray cattle until their owners pay a fine and take them back, but these cattle have no owners, and their number just keeps growing. That was why we had decided to ferry the cows to Dailekh." The city blames the transport company for abandoning the cows along the way. In another,

less-publicised incident, Sukla Phanta Municipality in Kailali rounded up cattle last year and put them in shelters in which they then died of starvation and lack of care. The Nepalgunj *kanji* house currently shelters only 137 cows and oxen, whereas there are tens of thousands out on the roads.

At the *kanji* house, Pawan Kumar Kanojiya says few have taken up the offer of adopting cows after providing proof of citizenship and personal details. "We cannot take care of so many cows, so we introduced this provision with a view to help them get better care and treatment. But there are few takers." Kanojiya says.

Animal Health Technician at

the *kanji* house, Laxmi Shah, says many cattle are out in the open and die from cold during the winter fog. Others die by having ingested much plastic from feeding on roadside garbage.

Mayor Rana says the city is planning to build a new Rs70 million *kanji* house in the Karanbaba neighbourhood of Nepalgunj, which will aim at proper management of the cattle, prioritising their health and treatment.

Animal activists say the problem can be solved with cattle being tagged and with better monitoring at the border. Because this is a cross-border problem, the local and national authorities in Nepal and India need to get involved, they added.

### ALL OVER THE PLACE



In Nepalgunj, stray cattle are all over the streets and their condition is deplorable. Even a shelter house for cattle is overcrowded and cannot accommodate them. Watch how the cows, bulls, and horses are faring in the highways of southern Nepal.

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

"The court ordered that the cattle problem be managed within a year, and we have sent letters to the concerned to implement the order, but nothing has been done," says Biswajit Tiwari of the Information and Human Rights Center, (IHRC) which filed the original writ.

A *kanji* shelter was built under the initiative of the Nepalgunj Sub-

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**SIXTH SENSE:** Visually impaired travellers experience Nepal's famous touristic attractions including Kathmandu Darbar Square, paragliding, streetwalking in Thamel, and Phewa Lake in Pokhara with the help of sighted guides.



Sanghamitra Subba

As Alex T James stood before a white lion statue in Kathmandu Darbar Square, his sighted partner took his hand and guided it across the curves of the lion's belly and the divots inside its gaping mouth, all the while describing to Alex what he was touching. Other sighted and visually impaired travelers in the group were doing the same.

Having travelled extensively throughout the years, James says, "For me, travelling is a chance to explore new countries and have a sensory experience. There is nothing more exciting than experiencing the sounds, smells and feelings of a new city. Sighted guides who go out of their way to help those who can't see make it easier."

Visually impaired tourists like James rely heavily on their sense of touch, smell and sound when visiting Nepal. Their guides help them navigate the landscape and describe to them their surroundings. Through partners, sighted guides are also encouraged to experience new places with senses other than sight.



## Sightseeing for the blind

Traveleyes brings visually impaired and sighted tourists to Nepal

This group was the second to visit Nepal through Traveleyes, a British holiday company for blind, visually impaired and sighted travellers. Last November sighted guides described the mountains in Pokhara to their visually impaired partners, led their hands across prayer wheels in Boudha, described the solemn cremation rituals at Pashupati, helped them navigate uneven pavements and

rocky staircases, lent a hand when boarding rafts in Trisuli and led them to dance circles during cultural performances in Chitwan.

Suzy Hesseldon, tour manager for the trip, speaks fondly of the group's adventures in Nepal. She says, "The trip was incredible and the visually impaired guests are absolutely inspiring. They are thrill seekers and live life to the fullest."

Blind tourists are paired with

sighted guides on a rotational basis on the morning of each travel day, allowing everyone to get to know one another during the trip. Tour managers like Hesseldon give a short introduction to the day's plans and a few tips to help the travelers as the weeks go by. But the best guides may be the visually impaired individuals themselves.

"All the sighted guides have to do is ask them how they would

like to be assisted, and describe the stairs or landscape. It works well because all the sighted guides have to do is be the visually impaired's eyes," says Hesseldon.

But traveling with visually impaired guests is less about sightseeing and more about a holistic sensory experience. Traveleyes, with the help of Malla Travel and Trek Services, designed an itinerary that incorporated

## Hearing for the deaf, seeing

Sarah Giri shares how she began helping Nepal's deaf and blind communities contribute to society

Sewa Bhattarai

Sarah Yonzan Giri never intended to become a sign-language expert. The wife of Nepal's famous Panchayat-era prime minister, she was living in Bangalore in 2002 when she wandered into a class for sign language by chance.

"The room was silent, but there was a lot of animated signing going on," Giri remembers. "They were shouting, but I could not hear them."

She had found her life's mission: advocacy of deaf rights. And recently, she has found that this passion extends to the rights of blind people as well. This has given her a unique vantage point



from which she can compare the two worlds, and understand and articulate the unique needs of their inhabitants.

Giri recalls her moment of epiphany: "I realised that I had been Deaf with a capital D, or culturally deaf. I could hear very well, but I was completely deaf to the unique language of the deaf community."

Back in Nepal, she started helping the deaf community organise art exhibitions, since the visible world is so important to those whose hearing is impaired. Every wall in Giri's 3-storey house in Kathmandu is covered with works of deaf art — paintings that express the feelings and experiences of deaf people.

In one painting, bells clang and bricks fall to one side of the canvass, while feathers float on the other, suggesting that for deaf people, loud sounds fall as gently as down.

Giri says deaf people want a channel of communication with the rest of the world, but for that they need proper schools where

they can learn standardised sign languages. If not, they will be stuck with making improvised signs and communicating only with those close to them.

Every country has its own sign language — and learning at least standardised Nepali sign enables deaf people to communicate with others who know it in Nepal. It is best if they learn American sign too, which is quickly becoming the lingua franca for deaf people like English is for those who hear.

Giri herself is fluent in Nepali, Indian and American sign languages (each of which are completely different from each other) and communicates animatedly in all three. Her husband Tulsi Giri was always supportive of her work, but she took time off from it to care for him before his death in 2018.

One day after her husband passed away, Giri was walking along the Vishnumati when she heard a plaintive voice singing. "It was really strong and it touched my heart," recalls Giri, who on following the sound to its source

found the singer to be blind.

She invited him home, and along the way described everything to him: the roads, trees and buildings outside. Giri says she learnt then that sound is as important to the blind as visuals are to deaf people.

After working with people with two different types of disabilities, Giri has insights into their unique worlds. For example, the deaf have two names — one given by their parents which they may never have never heard and may not answer to, and one in sign language which they identify with.

"Lighting is very important for deaf people. Something that normal people would see as mysterious dim light settings would not appeal to them, because they cannot sign and talk there," she explains.

It is just the opposite with blind people, where light is not important, but sound and touch is. When Giri brings her blind friends home, she describes everything to them — the colour of her living room, the texture of the table in front of them, what lies behind



PHOTOS: TRAVELEYES

destinations and activities that would involve senses beyond sight.

To Tony Booth, a retiree who describes himself to some degree as an "ageing hippie" and who was a sighted guide during the trip, the experience was profoundly eye-opening. He says, "When you are travelling with visually impaired people, what you can see is sometimes of less interest to them. Your other senses become much more important. You become much more aware of what you can hear, what you can smell, what you can feel. You become aware of a different kind of world."

Booth also recalls the difficulties of having to navigate roads without sidewalks and the risk of getting hit by cavalier drivers -- a common issue faced by most visually impaired individuals in

Nepal. But despite the threat of collisions even while walking on pavements, the visually impaired tourists were happy to be guided by their sighted partners.

Ajay Manandhar, who is fondly referred to as 'AJ' by his clients and is the in-house guide at Malla Travel, says, "This was my first time working with visually impaired tourists and I really enjoyed the concept of having sighted travellers paired with visually impaired travellers. In the context of Nepal, disabled or elderly people don't have the chance to travel and trek but with initiatives like Traveleyes, this was made possible. It would be interesting to see something similar be implemented in Nepal." ❑

## for the blind

them or beside them.

She often takes blind friends on a walk to get them familiar with their surroundings because they may trip and fall in new places. "We can control things in familiar places, but the world is a live hazard for blind people," she says. "We put construction materials on pavements, and sometimes street animals are lying around."

Giri says she has learnt from the disabled community that they do not want to be just helped or pitied. They want to be contributing members of society.

Her fondest example is a recent outing to Raksha Nepal, an organisation that helps sexually exploited women, that she made with a band of blind musicians called Prayas. The visit was healing for both communities.

Giri also helped organise an IT challenge with Bright Star Society, founded by a blind friend Sushil Adhikari. Gautam Pokharel, the first blind person to pass the public service commission examinations and become a Nepal Telecom officer, won the challenge. Giri

speaks with pride about these men and about many activist friends within the blind community.

"I admire the work of Shristi KC, who lost her eyesight late in life and now helps friends through the organisation Blind Rocks," she says. "Laxmi Nepal, Sanjiva Shrestha, and Sarita Lamichane work on empowering women and help protect them from gender-based violence. This thread of sensitivity, interest in human values and spiritual quest runs right across the community," says Giri.

"The blind people often do not exercise correctly, because they cannot see how to do it. I want to give audio instructions for exercise for blind people, and am currently looking for open space in which to do so," she says.

With her rich immersion in these two contrasting worlds of experience, her sensitivity to difference, and her strong motivation to help, Giri is determined to do what she can to help Nepal's deaf and blind people. ❑

# Listening to the hearing impaired

In 2013, a government directive required every national television channel that broadcasts news to broadcast it in sign language at least once a day. Seven years later, even the government-owned NTV broadcasts news in sign language only once a week. The other channels don't bother.

The reason given for this is the lack of sign interpreters, and for NTV the lack of the extra camera needed to include sign narration.

According to Nepal's laws, sign-language interpreters should be available not just in public offices, but also for budget speeches and discussions in Parliament. Since there are only 20 recognised professional interpreters in the country, however, deaf people are not getting the facilities to which they are entitled.

In the first Constituent Assembly, the Parliament secretariat had employed interpreter Radha Bohora to sign for MP Raghav Vir Joshi from NCP (Samyukta). Joshi's private secretary Dinesh Shrestha also worked as an interpreter. But Parliament has not employed an interpreter after that.

"Even though it is not possible to provide interpretation facilities everywhere, they should be available in crucial places like hospitals, schools, and police stations," says K P Adhikari, president of National Deaf Federation Nepal.

The Sign Language Interpreter Association has 60 members. But many of them have since changed their profession. "Interpreters work on a project basis. When projects end, they become unemployed, so there is no professional security for them," explains the group's Shilu Sharma.

Nanu Shrestha Jayana used to present the news in sign language on Nepal Television. After working for more than 13 years as an interpreter, she quit. "We don't get regular work, so I could not stick to this profession. I still provide the service for free if anyone needs it," she says.

Dinesh Shrestha has been working as an

interpreter for 12 years, but does not have a certificate to prove his skills. Some countries require interpreters to study for two years and work for a year before being certified, but here there is disagreement about who should be responsible for certification. Interpreter Sanu Khimbaja believes the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare should issue the certificate, but the Ministry has passed the buck to the Ministry of Education.



The Nepali sign language also has a limited vocabulary, and interpreters are hard pressed to communicate difficult or subject-specific words and names of people and places. "There are many words for which there are no signs, and that creates difficulties when presenting news on television. We spell these words out, but we are not sure if the viewers understand the spellings," says Shilu Sharma.

Interpreter Dinesh Shrestha, who worked for former MP Joshi, also says he found his job difficult because there are no signs for many political and legal terms, and these are difficult to communicate through spelling.

The Deaf Federation has been working to further develop Nepali sign language, and five years ago it published a new dictionary with 4,700 words. ❑

Nunuta Rai

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# Nepal is a fine country

Our leaders have repeatedly promised to turn Nepal into a Singapore, and that has always seemed like a mirage. But thanks to the glorious dictatorship of the politburo that dream is finally coming true. Kathmandu, too, is becoming a 'Fine City'.

Having once nearly had to pay a double fine for hiding a bubble gum glob under a park bench on Sentosa Beach (SG\$500 for chewing contraband and SG\$1,000 for littering, making a grand total of SG\$1,500 plus 10% GST refundable at the airport) I have on all subsequent trips to the city state looked over my shoulder before repeating the heinous crime. And, I am proud to say, I have never been caught since.

There is no doubt that fines work. For example, Singapore has a fine of SG\$100 for not flushing the toilet. (Always wondered about that, though. How do they know? Do they have a hidden CCTV camera inside the cubicle?)

Being a Turd World country, however, Nepal must fine those who do flush unnecessarily, so that we can conserve our valuable water resources and not let them flow down the drain, as it were. For most Nepalis, 'flush' is a game of cards and not a waterfall in the loo. Let's keep

it that way.

The authorities showed a can-do attitude this week by reinstating stiff penalties for jaywalking. However, things have got so out of hand that fines may not suffice. We need corporal punishment as a deterrent to instil good behaviour in citizens.

Member of the Gandaki Provincial Legislature Deepak Manange has the right idea to get people to fall in line. This week, he manhandled a member of the Kaski branch of ANFA in Pokhara for perceived misdemeanours. It was wholly appropriate that The Right Honourable Manange lodged a flying kick on a football official. That should be a lesson to all those who do not treat public officials with the respect they deserve.

Any celebrity singer who henceforth refuses to put her coffee cup through the airport X-ray scanner, will be singled out for physical showdown. (Those with 33kg of golden ball bearings concealed in their false bottoms will be deemed national assets, and will not be X-rayed.)

Any school staff painting their building yellow will be beaten black and blue. Satire columnists will be kicked in the Ass.



The Ass



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Contact No: 9819009338  
Ason, Kamalakshi, Opposite to Prime Bank  
Contact No: 9841065706, 9808631557  
People's Plaza, Shop no. 107  
Contact No: 014157590  
Koteshwor, Opposite to Prime Bank  
Contact No: 9841368259, 9866474767  
Kumaripati, Opposite to Janata Bank  
Contact No: 9843144204  
Eyeplex Mall, 1<sup>st</sup> floor, Shop no. 24, New baneshwor  
Contact No: 9860806194

Old Baneshwor, Bhimsengola  
Contact No: 9851066632  
Civil Mall, Sundhara  
Contact No: 9861584279  
New-Baneshwor  
Contact No: 9851019207  
Balaju Bypass  
Contact No: 9851068289  
BG Mall, Gongabu, Shop no. 19  
Contact No: 9814145265  
Basundhara, Beside Ishan Hospital  
Contact No: 9851193433, 9843028501

## OUTSIDE VALLEY

Pokhara, Chiplehunga, Opposite to Trade Mall  
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Dharan, College Road  
Contact No: 9824311855  
Biratnagar, Traffic Chowk  
Contact No: 9824311855  
Bahrabise-4, Sindhupalchowk  
Contact No: 9851047099  
Birgunj, Adarshnagar, Beside Kailash Hotel  
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