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DIPENDRA BHANDARI

Sinkhole

It took the death of a school girl and a scary viral video of the miraculous escape of another 13-year-old for Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba this week to direct the government to make the capital's streets safer. Then, early Thursday, a car plunged into a crater that had suddenly opened up in Maharajganj. The sinkholes have come to symbolise Kathmandu's political quagmire.

Years of political instability, lack of accountability and a lethally sluggish bureaucracy have rendered Kathmandu Valley a death trap. The government hurried to patch up the holes this week, but in doing so they also plugged drains making the street flooding worse in some areas. This stop-gap approach is symptomatic of Deuba's way of

functioning. Six weeks into his fourth tenure as prime minister, he is still struggling to expand his cabinet since there are too many aspirants for limited ministerial berths.

The prime minister informed Madhes-based RJPN that amending the Constitution was not possible because he did not have the required two-thirds in Parliament. The RJPN knew that, of course, and is now even less inclined to take part in remaining local, provincial and parliamentary elections.

More ominously, a political sinkhole is opening up that threatens to swallow the Constitution itself. Frightened that they may fare even worse in provincial and parliamentary elections than in recent local

polls, the ruling coalition floated a trial balloon about Parliament extending its own life by a year beyond January 2018. It is purposely letting the commission entrusted with finalising provincial boundaries to dilly-dally, so that federal polls cannot be held. The UML is strongly opposed to the idea, but Deuba is dangling the carrot of a national government to convince the opposition.

SHADOW GOVERNMENT EDITORIAL
PAGE 2

METRO WITHOUT MAYOR
OM ASTHA RAI
in Bharatpur
PAGE 11

Whether the country will conduct remaining elections and transition smoothly to federalism, or sink into the quicksand, will largely depend on Deuba. The signs are not good: he has dealt democracy a body blow in every previous tenure as prime minister.

Om Astha Rai



Shooting the rapids

SO FAR SO GOOD
BY LISA CHOEGYAL

PAGE 6



GAG RULE

How Donald Trump's 'protecting life' policy may end up costing the lives of many Nepali women deprived of family planning

BY KATE RYAN

PAGE 8-9



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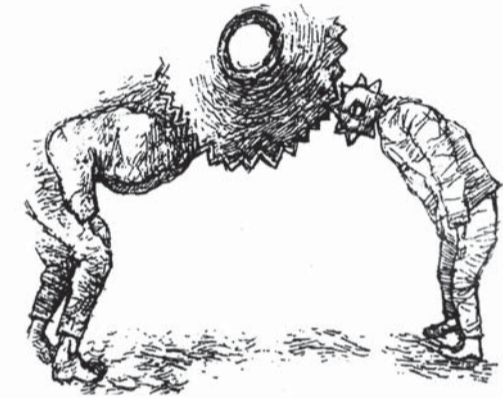


SHADOW GOVERNMENT

Not in recent memory has Nepal had a weaker government than now. The NC-Maoist coalition was forged after UML Prime Minister KP Oli had the rug pulled from under him by Pushpa Kamal Dahal last year. Like a love triangle, Dahal ditched Oli and hitched himself to Sher Bahadur Deuba. Under their “gentlemen’s agreement” Dahal became PM first and then handed the baton to Deuba in June.

Although the NC was the biggest party in Parliament after the 2013 CA elections, its moral mandate has been eroded by recent local elections. Deuba himself is PM for the fourth time, and is weak and indecisive, taking three weeks to cobble together a cabinet. He was ridiculed for reading out the wrong speech to flood victims in Saptari, and reviled on the Net for angrily refusing to answer questions on BBC’s Sajha Sawal.

The Maoist-Centre is a distant third in Parliament, and its once-revolutionary roar has become a meow. A party conclave this week analysed the reason for such a humiliating setback in local elections, and to chart out a future strategy for the third phase of local elections and for provincial and parliamentary polls later this year.



The Deuba coalition has concluded it will not be able to muster the two-thirds required in Parliament to amend the Constitution, as demanded by the Madhes-based parties, after the RPP decided not to be on board. It is therefore distributing ministerial portfolios to more parties. This is the paradox of Nepal’s *bhagbanda* politics: Issues of long-term national importance in the Constitution are decided by petty party interests for short-term cabinet posts.

The NC-Maoist coalition never really wanted the amendments anyway, so last week it hurriedly declared it could not meet Madhesi demands because of the RPP and UML. The Tarai-based RJPN has been weakened by a semi-mutiny in its ranks and its failure to stop local polls.

However, it will be a mistake if the ruling coalition and the main opposition use the enfeebled RJPN and FSN to ignore the demands of the disenfranchised in the mountains and Tarai for better representation and respect in the new Constitution. It will be an even bigger blunder if the main parties start acting on a plan being floated to extend Parliament after its mandate terminates in January 2018.

The UML may feel triumphant after the local election results and be tempted to twist the dagger, but it now has an even greater responsibility to bring disparate forces together. It is for this reason that a main opposition party in parliamentary systems is called a ‘shadow government’ – so it rises above differences to uphold the national interest. The UML should show leadership in pushing new amendments that address the grievances of the marginalised while at the same time safeguarding national unity.

GUEST EDITORIAL GOVIND POKHAREL

Rebuilding for all

Despite delays and the massive challenges ahead, the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) is catching up with the needs of survivors of the 2015 earthquake. Of the 1 million families surveyed, 749,796 were eligible for reconstruction grants, 599,324 households received the first tranche, 45,000 houses have been rebuilt and 115,000 are under construction, many yet to report to the NRA system. Half of affected schools are built.

After the Gujarat earthquake reconstruction was faster, but the institution that led the task had more decision-making authority and flexibility. Realising delays and grasping new opportunities, we are now working with newly-elected local governments empowered to make quick decisions to redress grievances, mobilise human resources and make recommendations for housing grants.

Because of socio-political pressure we have focussed so far on rebuilding private homes. But from this year we will broaden our efforts to include social infrastructure like gumbas, university buildings and living heritage. We will also support livelihood activities, private sector promotion, gender empowerment and social inclusion.

Our objective is to complete most rebuilding on schedule and strengthen the capacity of ministries and departments, the private sector and communities to be ready for the next possible earthquake. The most important lesson from this tragedy is the need to internalise the concept of Build Back Better. We are pleased to see this happening: for example, of the 80,000 mostly rural households that claimed second grants so far, less than 10% did not comply with resilience standards.

We will make stronger efforts to ensure that deprived and marginalised groups, including single mothers, the elderly, people with disabilities, the extreme poor, and Dalits, are not left behind. A mechanism to permit partnerships with the non-governmental sector to

address this issue has been liberalised. Extra grants of Rs2 million are earmarked for vulnerable households that need to be relocated because of landslide risk. The landless will also get an extra Rs200,000 if they wish to buy land and register it.

The NRA will launch an extensive retrofitting campaign so that, where possible, old houses that are maintaining rural scenic beauty, darbars and other traditional architecture will be preserved and made safer. Cost-effective correction manuals are being developed so that households that have not met compliance can improve easily and claim grants. Families will save a lot of money if they don’t have to demolish their homes, but retrofit them. We are revising our procurement policies for heritage reconstruction to permit community participation and to allow direct procurement of valuable products and traditional craftsmanship.

The social and economic components of reconstruction are as important as the physical ones. NRA is facilitating efforts to provide land certificates to those who never had them, including households belonging to *Guthi, Ailani, Birta*, etc, so they can receive government grants. The idea of economic reconstruction is that Nepalis should live in improved, safer houses and also have better livelihoods with higher incomes.

Our institutional capacities are weak, we lack skilled human resources and flexible financial mechanisms, and the country is in the midst of a political transition. Today the resource gap for physical rebuilding stands at \$3.9 billion but if we can add financing, we can complete most reconstruction in the next three years.



Govind Pokharel heads the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA).

ONLINE PACKAGES



RISING FROM THE RUBBLE

Ghusel Village was destroyed in the earthquake. Most families have either moved out or are spending their third monsoon in temporary huts. But not Tempa Lama. He is living in a sturdy house he built with his bare hands. Follow our reporter to this scenic village in South Lalitpur and see how Lama rebuild on his own, without government support, and also restored his family’s livelihood with a thriving vegetable farm, an orchard and dairy livestock.

REMEMBERING ELEPHANTS



Lucia de Vries’ interview with Jan Schmidt-Burbach of World Animal Protection (WAP) generated a vibrant debate on the *Nepali Times* site about the pros and cons of taming wild elephants to use them for safaris in Chitwan National Park and elsewhere. A sample of the feedback:

■ Thank you for highlighting the welfare conditions of captive elephants (‘Being taken for a ride’ Interview with Lucia De Vries, #867). We believe immediate action should be taken to improve standards for Chitwan’s safari elephants. Elephants are highly endangered and intelligent animals with complex needs that are hard to be met in captivity. The tourist rides greatly contribute to the suffering of these majestic animals. Consumer pressure is needed to force the elephant owners to improve conditions. We therefore encourage tour operators and tourists to remove elephant safaris and bathing from their itineraries. Nepal, known and appreciated for its wildlife protection and conservation efforts, has every bit of potential to introduce humane elephant tourism. Let’s not wait for more damning reports and disappointed guests to get started.

Elephant Watch Nepal

■ Misplaced animal activism. Nepal has more pressing problems finding livelihoods for its people. As long as elephants are treated well I see no reason why elephants can’t be used for safaris. Each elephant helps support hundreds of people with jobs. Should we also start banning pet cats dogs and only let them frolic in the wild?

Ken

■ And how should DNPWC capture large mammals for relocation or veterinary treatment if use of elephants is banned? The importance of these animals for conservation support is widely known and accepted, plus strolling inaccessible areas of lowland parks, etc. Surely the right approach is not banning elephant riding but sound husbandry?

Marcus Cotton

WHAT'S TRENDING



Unblocking an artery

by Sanjeev Sharma

Last week’s most viewed video was a hair-raising trip down the deadly 36-km Mugling-Narayangad highway, along vertical cliffs above the raging Trisuli River. Visit nepalimes.com and send us feedback about the never-ending reconstruction of the stretch of road.

Most reached and shared on Facebook
(12,715 people reached)

Water from sunlight

by Shreejana Shrestha

Many readers were fascinated by our video of the successful use of solar-powered irrigation pumps to lift subsistence farmers out of poverty in Kanchanpur. Thanks to the sun, families are better fed, children go to school and the men are not migrating.

Most popular on Twitter
(52 retweets, 74 likes)

Bhutan-Nepal bhai-bhai?

by Kanak Mani Dixit

The writer’s take on the role of Thimpu and Kathmandu in the India-China standoff over the strategic Doklam region of Bhutan was the most visited online page and generated the most comments. Go online to read up on the pointed feedback.

Most commented

Most visited online page
(2,500 views)

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @nepalimes
MUD GLORIOUS MUD What do you prefer on the streets of #Kathmandu? Mud or Dust? 73% voted for Mud. e-Poll: http://nepalimes.com #poll

Bhushan Tuladhar @BhushanTuladhar
Sad when Kathmanduites have to choose between clean air to breathe & muddy feet - safe & #PeopleFriendly street is not even a choice for us.

Nepali Times @nepalimes
Report @kantipurdaily Dolma Sherpa recounts how she landed up in a #Kuwait jail for a crime she didn’t commit http://bit.ly/2ttoEvS #Nepal

Rai Ritu @RaiRitu2
Innocent Nepalis are jailed for nothing around the world. Do you have any accounts Mother Nepal!

Nepali Times @nepalimes
GUEST EDITORIAL by Vidyadhar Mallik Find out what will & what won’t help #Nepal leapfrog in fighting #poverty. Read: http://bit.ly/2ZAEZz

david seddon @pigreen
All the so called development agencies need to think carefully about the in-effectiveness of their programmes and projects

Times Weekly Internet Poll #868

Q. Which country should Nepal be closer to: India, China, Both?

Total votes: 362

India	20%
China	28%
Both	52%

Weekly Internet Poll #869
To vote go to: www.nepalimes.com

Q. Who is mostly to blame for the state of roads?





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Influencing the influencers

Nepal wants and needs a credible political alternative to the existing parties

Looking at the current state of governance and delivery, there is little doubt that Nepal needs alternative politics. Much of what is wrong today stems from the murky backroom deals that characterise the way power is acquired and patronage dispensed.



CONNECTING DOTS
Dinkar Nepal

The entire eco-system of politics has been hollowed out by a corrupted establishment where no one has to atone for any misdeed, and there is little accountability. A failed three-time leader can rise to be chief executive yet again. This is why the idea of an alternative political force is being seriously considered.

Bibeksheel Nepali Dal and Sajha Party have been set up by motivated individuals who want an overhaul and detoxification of the political system. Since they were fighting for the same space, it made sense for the two to contest local elections together. A few of us even got together to try to convince the two parties to at least field common candidates for Kathmandu Municipality. There was pressure from social media, too. But it did not work.

When electoral considerations prompted arch-rivals like the Maoists and the NC — and even the RPP and UML — to collaborate, Sajha and Bibeksheel were contesting separately. This was a mistake but despite that, many of us secretly hoped they would do well. As the results so

far have shown, that expectation was far-fetched.

However, one clear impact of the election result seems to be a realisation within both parties that their future depends on a common struggle. That is a positive sign. However, a merger without analysing the causes for their poor showing could mean the two parties could learn the wrong lessons.

A section of the Kathmandu intelligentsia have concluded that the poor performance of the two parties in local elections was due to their lack of a strong ideological base. They assumed people vote for ideologies. However, the conduct of politics today and the formation of electoral alliances between parties diametrically opposed in ideology proves the opposite.

Despite the political chaos visible on the surface, there is at least an understanding that the basic framework of liberal democratic values is the common ground. This in a way resolves a lot of the ideological confusion: what remains is just a difference of degree over preferences for political labels. The assumption that the new parties have not done well in elections because they lack a clear political ideology, therefore, does not hold.

What, then, do the new parties lack? During and after the conflict, the Maoists were able to disguise their violent quest for power behind an intellectual coding. The liberal intelligentsia was swayed by their rigour, and many still cling to that belief. One lesson the new alternative parties can learn from the flawed



Maoist experiment is how to influence the influencers in the society. They have to create an intellectual army to fight their cause.

The recent elections showed that there are three types of political terrain in Nepal. First, there is the densely populated Kathmandu Valley, where the media is influential and voters have strong ties to traditional parties. The new parties did reasonably well in this constituency.

Second is the mid-hill rural

society, where either teachers or ex-servicemen are still the most influential people, traditional parties have a strong hold and people still have a loyalty to local social leaders. The new parties showed no presence here.

The third terrain is the plains districts, where presently the youth are swayed by the regionalist agenda, but the traditional parties, especially the NC, still have some standing. Caste-based politics holds sway, and the new parties need a clearer strategy here as elsewhere.

A catchy political agenda, like an executive presidential system of governance, could help the alternative forces gain ground. Nepal wants and needs a credible political alternative to the existing parties. Lot of young people have invested their hopes in the new parties, which is significant for the future. It would be a welcome move if the two parties came together, but it would be naïve to think that just the emergence of an alternative party will solve all problems in one stroke.

The presence of a strong alternative can be the beginning of a positive spiral in a country that has been mired in shadowy politics for more than 70 years. The corrupt cartels are entrenched, and it will be a challenge to hack away their tentacles, which penetrate every level of society. The new forces need to coalesce, and be clever in building alliances across all sectors of society. The sooner the better.

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Manchurian candidates

was Russia that burst that bubble is galling to many Americans.


Leaders of the Republican Party, which prides itself in matters related to national security and global dominance, however, have only mumbled some unintelligible

remarks. Trump, for his part, has never hidden his admiration for Putin and has dismissed the accusations of Russian attempts to influence the elections outright despite credible and mounting evidence. The last episode of Russian revelations ensnares both his eldest son and son-in-law.

Trump's victory owes in no small part to Russia's covert meddling in the 2016 presidential election. It weaponised misinformation, fake news and systematic trolling from a building in St. Petersburg. Russia-backed hackers got into the email server of the Democratic National Committee as well as that of Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton's campaign chair, John Podesta. The hackers stole

information and passed it to Wikileaks, which then leaked it drip by drip, always casting a shadow over Clinton. She had to contend with that even as she was embroiled in a controversy over her own private email server as Secretary of State. The dominant word of the campaign, according to a credible post-election survey, was 'email', and the focus on it appears to have affected the outcome.

Of course, there were other factors, but Russia did play a role in helping install a friendly government in America. Whether Putin will be rewarded by Trump — by, for example, allowing Russia total and unchallenged sway in eastern Europe and Syria, lifting or at least easing sanctions imposed on Russia, and returning its two seized diplomatic compounds in New York and Maryland — will depend on Congress, though Trump is moving to act on these.

Russia has succeeded in helping install a friendly government in an once-enemy country. 

ATLANTA -- Nepalis are all too familiar with the frequent rise and fall of governments: we have had 24 of them in the 26 years since the restoration of democracy in 1991.

Sometimes coalition partners switch so dizzyingly fast even veteran political analysts are left befuddled. And there are some political leaders (Kamal Thapa of the RPP and Bijay Kumar Gachchhedhar of the MPRF-D spring to mind) who seem to somehow become ministers no matter which coalition is ruling.



THE DEADLINE

Damakant Jayshi

Many in Kathmandu see an Indian hand in the creation or the collapse of successive governments in Singha Darbar. The Indians definitely have preferences but it doesn't always go according to plan, as we saw with the so-called 'covert and overt' attempts to prevent the UML's KP Oli from becoming prime minister in 2015.

Helping install or perpetuate a government that is perceived to be 'friendly' to a country's interest is not unique to India in Nepal. The United States has done that globally and for a long time. Indeed, US governments have installed war criminals in power because they are anti-communists, opening Washington to accusations of hypocrisy: that it purports to uphold human rights and democracy in its own land, but turns a blind eye to dictatorships around the world if they happen to suit their economic, strategic and security interests.

The Soviets did the same thing, and after a brief pause following the collapse of the USSR, the meddling has resumed again with Vladimir Putin. The Russian president isn't just trying to influence who gets to govern Ukraine or Georgia anymore, but seems to want to have a say in who doesn't get to be US president. To many Americans, perhaps with the exception of white supremacists, this has come as a shock. Former KGB operative Putin must be satisfied that he has taken revenge on a Cold War enemy and an adversarial power for the national humiliation created by the disintegration of the once mighty Soviet Union.

American democracy has a lot of flaws, some of them silly — like its electoral college — others more serious, like allowing partisan gerrymandering after every 10-year census. But its elections were thought to be safe from foreign meddling. That it

prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

Ola in Nepal

The Indian ride-hailing company Ola has said it is looking at expanding into Nepal as part of its foray into Sri Lanka and



Bangladesh, Indian media reports said. India's largest cab service is in 100 cities, and Nepal would be its first international venture. Meanwhile its rival Uber is investing \$1 billion in India this year after opting out of China.

Y5 2017

Chinese smartphone company Huawei has launched Huawei Y5 2017 in Nepal. The 8.5mm smartphone with 5-inch HD display is priced at Rs 15,400 and buyers get free selfie stick on every purchase.



Companion offer

Turkish Airlines is introducing 'Business Class Companion Offer' for passengers from Kathmandu transiting through Istanbul to destinations all over the world. The offer is valid for fares starting from Rs 141,876. The sale period starts from 15 September, with travel period valid until 30 September.

Reading with Qatar

Qatar Airways is distributing 10,000 books to children from low-income families in New York City under its summer reading program. The airline has also started its four times a week service to Skopje, Macedonia.



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Shooting the rapids

The pioneers of the early days of river running in Nepal

One of the more turbulent rapids on the Trisuli River trip is named Snell's Nose (or used to be). Col John Blashford Snell was on an early rafting recce helping Himalayan River Exploration to check out the viability of introducing river running to Nepal. He banged his face on an oar in the milky glacial torrent, resulting in a bloodied nose.



SO FAR SO GOOD

Lisa Choegyol

Known as JBS, John was a valued friend of Jim Edwards since their school days in the Channel Islands, a British army colonel convinced of the benefits of outdoor education. "Splendid trip," he wheezed on return to Kathmandu, adjusting his pith helmet and dabbing his tender nose. "I wouldn't have missed it for anything. Perfect for general punters as well as adventure training."

With loyal, long-suffering Judith and their two daughters, JBS became a frequent Nepal visitor, bringing scientists, celebrities and fundraising groups on trips that ranged from research on mammoth elephants in Bardia, dolphins in Karnali and snakes throughout the Tarai.

John's Boy Scout lust for adventure took him on Indiana Jones-inspired youth schemes and scientific expeditions all over the world. His Operations Drake and Raleigh programs transformed the lives of troubled inner city kids throughout Britain. JBS's War Office rooms in the heart of Whitehall brimmed with mysterious bulging kitbags, marked maps bristling with pins, and the busy comings and goings of hearty chaps and eager, decorative girls. The challenge began with a selection weekend of endurance and initiative tests, such as how to weigh a python



EARLY RAFTERS: (l-r) Lisa Van Gruisen, Jennifer Read, Angku Gurung, Vikram Onta, Lobsang Gyalpo, Manita Gurung and Jhak Pun in 1981 at the Himalayan River Exploration boathouse. *More pictures online.*

using only bathroom scales (by holding it and weighing yourself with and without the snake, for those of you who haven't worked it out).

Expeditions to the rainforests of Borneo, islands of Papua New Guinea, down the Nile and up the Sepik, rang with John's distinctive British bark and infectious enthusiasm. He cultivated an avid media following. "The swamps are rising!" he yelled down the phone to one journalist, winking at me as he jiggled his gin and tonic by the receiver for added effect.

JBS helped put Nepal rivers on the adventure map. Himalayan River Exploration was the first company to run commercial white water and float trips, using imported rubber boats with inflatable chambers and locally

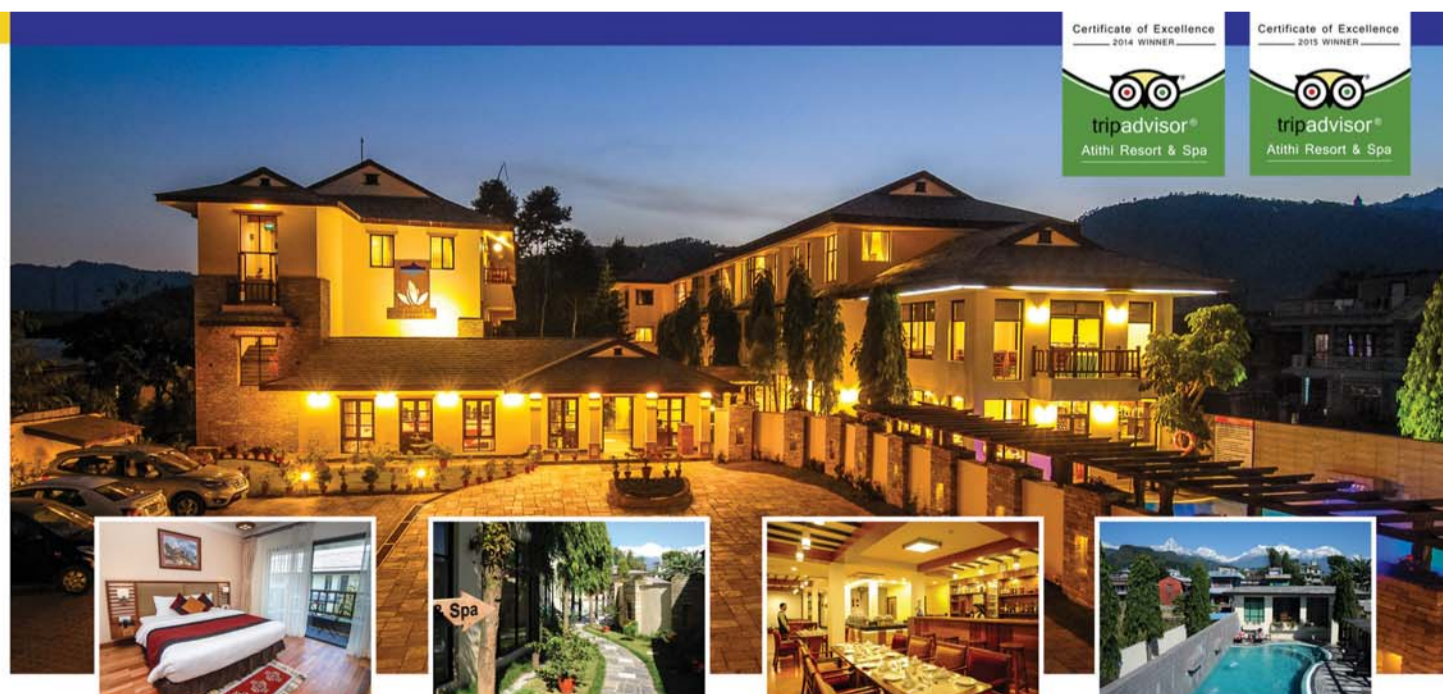
forged rowing frames instead of paddles. Guests had only to buckle up their lifejackets, follow the oarsman's instructions, hang on for dear life, and hope the boat didn't flip in the stronger waves. 'Upset' was the most daunting cascade on the Trisuli, fluctuating with rain, snow-melt and glacial runoff. Sunbathing, swimming and rubber tubing punctuated the quiet, flat stretches between rapids. Tiger Mountain itineraries started to feature river trips, connecting treks and Tarai wildlife.

Lobsang Gyalpo was HRE's first Nepali manager, then Mash Thapa with legends Basant, Chitra, Indra, Krishna, Kul, Megh, Mohit, Nima, PB, Stan and Yogi. These pioneers forged a culture of super-cool rafting guides

with their long hair, colourful bandanas and daring bravado. Their fitness and punishing work schedule nurtured HRE's rigorous operating standards, imported from America's Colorado River and Grand Canyon. Safety and emergency first aid were crucial as most of the multi-day trips were several days away from any road. There was precious little communication, no helicopters, nor other chance of rescue. On one of the first Bheri and Karnali river trips I joined in the Far West, we had to check out the bigger rapids on foot, and passed through villages that had clearly never seen a white face before.

In the 1970s, few roads followed Nepal's great rivers, their currents, whirlpools and rocks were unfamiliar, and the

beaches pristine. The idea had grown out of Al and Jennifer Read's carefree weekend jaunts with other thrill-seeking expats living in Kathmandu. Our boss Jim Edwards, scenting a business opportunity, suggested they bring Mike Yager from Wyoming to assess the commercial realities, test the market with the likes of JBS, and begin training the first Nepali 'river-rats'. Daredevil kayakers and canoeists arrived and started bagging first descents on the Marsyangdi, Seti, Kali Gandaki and other remote rivers. Government regulations had to be changed to cover this new adventure activity. The idea stuck, and today river running has become a major component of Nepal tourism — with over 60 registered rafting agencies. 🇳🇵



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There is another intense monsoonal front advancing from the southeast, which will bring more sustained precipitation on Friday and over the weekend. It is a strong system that has evolved out of a circulation that hit Odisha earlier this week. This will replenish pockets of Nepal that have received deficient rainfall so far. However, it will increase the woes of urban areas that have inadequate drainage, unleash flooding and may trigger landslides along the mid-mountains. Snowfall expected down to 5,000m in eastern Nepal.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
27° 19°	27° 19°	27° 20°

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Walls as art, not barriers

Street artists Sanjay Dongol and Kiran Maharjan were working on a mural on a wall opposite Phora Darbar last week, braving the dust and pollution, when they were approached by a man who asked them what they were up to.

Dongol and Maharjan get it all the time: people stopping on the sidewalk to watch them work, or striking up a conversation. In the past six years the two have painted just about every available wall in town.

"It's one of the quirks about working as street artists," said Maharjan, "We get approached by clients who see our art on the streets."

The man who stopped his car at Phora Darbar was none other than Gautam Rana of Baber Mahal Revisited. He asked the two what they were doing afterwards, then promptly invited them over to his place. One morning this week Rana (known to friends as 'Jitu') watched as the two perched on scaffolding, painting a three-storey mural at Baber Mahal Revisited.

"Street murals democratise art, bringing it to the masses. I wanted to recognise the incredible creativity shown by these young artists," says Rana, who got Asian Paints to pitch in with the raw material.

Maharjan, who has been working as a street artist for six years, had approached art galleries in Thamel to display his work, only to get turned down. Then he discovered street art. "One day, I just realised that you don't need galleries and permission to show your work on the streets," he says.

Dongol pipes in: "And the best part is that it's perfectly legal in Nepal."

Kathmandu has seen an explosion of street murals, from the cubist panda near Bagmati Bridge to over 20 vibrant murals along Kuponhole — including a Buddha wearing headphones and a girl in traditional Nepali attire, holding a can of spray paint and writing 'Nayabhandaima



SHALEEN SHAH

MORE MURALS: Street artists Kiran Maharjan (top) and Sanjay Dongol at work on the three-storey Baber Mahal Revisited mural this week.

daraunupardaina' ('Don't be scared of what is new').

One mural on Kantipath, by Shradhha Shrestha, depicts a couple painted twice, weeping on one side but holding hands and carrying a pick axe and shovel on the other. Titled Hijo, Aja it symbolises the resurrection of Kathmandu from the rubble of the 2015 earthquakes. Hatemalo commemorated the nine temples that collapsed during the quake and Kolor Kathmandu painted 75 murals across the city, each representing one of Nepal's 75 districts.

Kiran and Sanjay are part of Art Lab, which is responsible for much of this street art. Its recent project, Prasad, held art workshops in six cities. "We wanted to give every emerging artist a voice, so they can express themselves and enrich the streets," says Maharjan.

Dongol remembers that after the 2015 earthquake many people in Kathmandu were afraid that walls would collapse. "We wanted to change this, make walls a comforting symbol, a canvas for Nepal's vibrant culture," he adds.

Art Lab has been painting over ugly political slogans on walls, but it is not without controversy. When France-based Outsiders Krew were invited by a local sadhu to paint the entrance to the Purohit Ghat temple they were accused of defacing a heritage site. After some debate the mural was allowed to stay.

"There is a fine line between what is comfortable for you and when it becomes a discomfort for others," Maharjan reminds us.

Shaleen Shah

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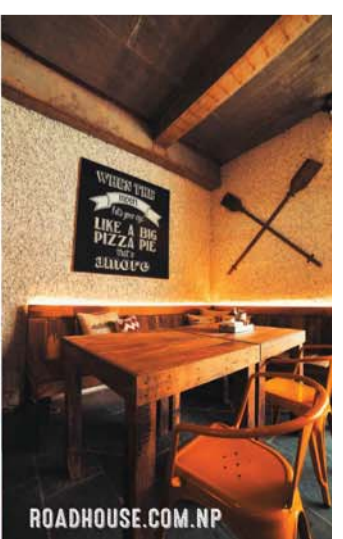
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Cutting the lifeline

'Protecting life' under the Trump administration in the US will put more Nepali women's lives on the line

KATE RYAN

Last week, governments and private partners gathered in London for the 2017 Family Planning Summit. The goal: to evaluate progress toward commitments to improve healthcare for more than 120 million women worldwide from 2012-2020.

More than half-way to 2020, only 30 million women have been reached. At a time when activities need to be sped up, the United States, the leading bilateral funder of family planning worldwide, just pulled out billions of dollars from organisations serving the world's poorest nations, claiming they funded abortion services.

"The United States is a very big country: the rules they implement affect small countries like Nepal," said Amu Singh Sijapati of the Family Planning Association of Nepal (FPAN). "It's not good to play politics with human health."

One month before the 2015

earthquake, the Nepal government committed to increase funding for family planning by 7% annually. Since then, Nepal has struggled to meet its goal. It partnered with international NGOs and private companies to close the gap and reach 1 million more women by 2020. But these partners may lose the majority of their funding.

In March, US President Donald Trump reinstated the Global Gag Rule or Mexico City Policy, which has repeatedly been removed by Democrats and reinstated by Republicans since 1984. Trump not only plans to cut funding to USAID, but to any organisation that offers abortion counselling, treatment or information on the topic.

As much as \$8 billion could be slashed, which will affect HIV treatment, cervical cancer testing, long-term birth control and maternal care. Trump renamed the policy Protecting Life in Global Health Assistance.

Featured below are three family planning organizations working in Nepal that are bracing for the impact:



"This is nothing new for us," sighed UNFPA Representative to Nepal Giulia Vallese (*above*), who recalls the agency scrambling after cuts under the Bush administration. But being familiar with cuts does not soften the blow. This year, Vallese is working with half her ideal operating budget.

UNFPA does not offer abortions, but counsels women who have undergone unsafe abortions and advises abortion providers on safe procedures. "Where abortion is legal, it should be safe," said Vallese, noting that abortion is one of the top three causes of maternal mortality.

The cut to UNFPA is separate from those resulting from the Global Gag Rule. It stems from the 1985 Kemp-Kasten Amendment, which claimed that UNFPA assisted China's forced abortions and sterilizations in the 1980s. There is no proof for this claim. Without US funds, most donations to UNFPA will be earmarked for specific projects. Less 'sexy' programs like humanitarian preparedness will suffer.



"You can't show results until an emergency hits," Vallese said. So contraceptive kits for the next earthquake will go unfunded. Additionally, treatments for pelvic organ prolapse (POP), obstetric fistula, cervical cancer and human papillomavirus are likely to lose. UNFPA offers free surgeries for women with uterine prolapse, but needs funds to reach women who will die from or live with these painful conditions for years. An estimated 1 million women in Nepal live with the condition.



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SUBIT KAZI TAMRAKAR

GAGGED: A counsellor for Marie Stopes International explaining contraception procedures to a woman at a clinic in Nepal. The group says the impact of Trump's funding cut will be "massive".



In 2015, the US provided FPAN \$5.5 million to train doctors and nurse practitioners and to boost its mobile camp, which provides 11 forms of family planning services to rural areas, including implants of intrauterine contraceptive devices. The camp, which could previously only run four to five months a year now operates year-round. This fund will run out in 2019, and rural women who need long-term care most will be out of options.

"A person who does not have money to eat will not make a seven-hour journey to receive family planning services," explained Amu Singh Sijapati (right).

FPAN did not receive US funding after the Bush

administration reinstated the Gag Rule, and now it is going to disappear again. It costs the organisation Rs100,000 just to train a new staff member in implant training, counselling and health services. Sijapati could scrap abortion-related services, sign the Gag Rule and save herself the trouble, but she said: "We were the first Nepali organisation to push for legal abortion, we can't sign this." ❏

Adolescent app

Taboos surrounding adolescent sex keep information limited to young people in Nepal. Now, the government is partnering with UNFPA to educate young people directly about their health.

The Chaudhary Foundation is supporting the project and other information dissemination efforts. They were the only representatives from Nepal at the London Family Planning Summit.

The public-private partners will roll out the phone app *Khulduli* ("Curiosity") to educate young people about reproductive health later this year. The app was designed for smartphones, and Chaudhary is developing a pre-loaded version for feature phones. They will test the first 100,000 this September, said Merina Ranjit, the assistant general manager.

"The young working-age population is high," says UNFPA representative Giulia Vallese. "Now is the time to invest in this generation."

The 'Marie Stopes Ladies' walk four or five days into the mountains to provide contraception, health care and counselling to Nepal's underserved. But in a few years, they may have to discontinue their work.

MSI will take a big financial hit from the Gag Rule, and repercussions will be felt worldwide, said country director Sophie Hodder (left). "MSI will lose, family planning will lose, full stop. The effects will be

absolutely massive," she said.

MSI is the leading provider of safe abortion services in Nepal. It has 36 clinics around the country, none of which are funded by USAID, so US government cuts will not affect abortion services.

Instead, the cuts will obstruct distribution of contraceptives, counselling or perhaps the helpline that receives 76,000 calls a year. Child marriage, low awareness about contraceptives and their limited availability hinder reproductive health.

Global commitments

The Guttmacher Institute estimates that 58% of abortions in Nepal were performed illegally in 2014, and that eight out of every 1,000 women of child-bearing age was treated for a medical complication due to an unsafe abortion that year. The same study showed that legalising abortion in Nepal helped to decrease maternal mortality from 580 deaths per 100,000 live births to 190 per 100,000 between 1995 and 2013.

But the current US administration does not call this a success. And though last week's summit resulted in \$2.5 billion in pledges to global care, US cuts will cripple the 2020 goal. While Nepal works to address the health needs of half its population, fundraising may become its biggest challenge yet.

Current levels of contraceptive and maternal care



100% coverage of contraceptive care, current level of maternal care



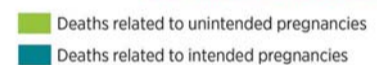
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100% coverage of contraceptive and maternal care



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EVENTS



Finger painting,

Children 5-10 years old can join this finger painting competition where they will recreate pictures using non-toxic, high quality paints.
22 July, 12 pm-2pm, Giggles Day Care, Kathmandu, Rs 750, 9810580333

Hold my hand,

Join the pilot session of the five-day Hold My Hand Nepal Feminist Summer School, which will discuss the politics of NGO Feminism in Nepal and beyond.
22 July, 12:30-2:30pm, Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka, holdmyhandnepal@gmail.com

Bonjour,

Register for three-hour weekend courses or 1.5-hour online classes every week and you'll soon be sounding like a native French speaker.
22 July, Alliance Française de Katmandou, Pulchok, 9am-12pm, Fee Rs 11,190 for 45 hours of classes, 9808418422



Click away,

Participate in a 5-day beginners photography workshop. Bring your own DSLR or compact camera. Application deadline: 5pm, 25 July
1-5 August, 10am-12pm, Sanskriti Space, Goshwara Road, Birganj, Fee Rs 2,000 9855092943

Open mic for Parkinson's,
Attend an event dedicated to Parkinson's: display your talent, share your story or simply be an audience member.
22 July, 11am onwards, Moksh, Jhamsikhel, Fee Rs 1,000 (welcome drink, snacks included) <https://www.facebook.com/parkinsonsnepal/>



True stories project,

An art exhibition to raise awareness about and against gender-based abuse, exploitation and human trafficking.
14-31 July, 10am-6pm, Patan Museum Lalitpur, (01) 4218048

A life in poems,

Spend an evening celebrating the poems of poet and writer Greta Rana.
30 July, 5:30-7pm, The Tulip International Club, Sanepa, 9801132008



Weekend hike,

Opt for a scenic hike on the Baghdwar-Okhrene-Sundarijal circuit this weekend. Registration deadline: 3pm, 21 July.
22 July, 6:45am-5:30pm, Bhrikuti Mandap Exhibition Hall Complex, Further information and fee: 01-4266559

Printmaking workshop,

Last day of printmaking art exhibit by various Nepali participants and Korean artist Hyun Ju Kim
21 July, 11am-5pm, Siddhartha Art Gallery Babar Mahal Revisited, (01) 4218048

MUSIC



Nepali fusion,

Tap to fusion beats with Suraj Tamang and Manda Band.
21 July, 6-10pm, CMD Multi-cuisine Restaurant & Bar, Tangal, Kathmandu, 9851011734, 9841780191

Music and food,

Listen to jazz group Jackowacho Trio, with organic food and drinks to get you into the swing of things.
21 July, 7-10pm, Places Restaurant & Bar Sath Ghumti Marga (01) 4700417



Saturday night live,

Spend the weekend with close friends swaying to the rhythms of Nepali band the Flow.
22 July, 6:30-9:30pm, Ai-La Lounge Restaurant, Kumaripati, Lalitpur, 9801018681

Soulful sufi,

Enjoy a live performance by Stamba band, and get special offers on food and beverages
21 July, 6-10:30pm, The Imperial Coffee Shop Lounge Bar, Lazimpat (01) 4419716

Biker music night,

Don't miss the chance to catch the King of Biker music, Pat Savage, perform some of his big hits.
21 July, 8-10 pm, CG Machaan, Pulchok, (01) 5554291

Musical evening,

Warm up your weekend listening to a classical music performance by members of the Seoul Philharmonic orchestra, The Felix Trio and Korea National University. Invitation only.
30 July, 4:30 pm onwards, Himalaya Hall, Hotel Himalaya, (01) 5523900

OUR PICK



VALERIAN
AND THE CITY OF A THOUSAND PLANETS
A French science fiction action film that takes you to another level of adventure. Based on the comic series Valerian and Laureline, the movie of legendary director Luc Besson centres on a dark force that threatens Alpha – home to species from a thousand planets. The main characters Valerine (Dane DeHaan) and Laureline (Cara Delevingne) play space and time-travelling agents from futuristic Earth who appoint themselves to safeguard Alpha and the future of the universe.

DINING



European Bakery,

For patties, éclairs, Swiss rolls, cookies, doughnuts and many more Saturday specials.
Chundevi, (01) 4422047

Monsoon Sundays,

Food connoisseurs can relish a succulent bbq with a choice of African, Arabic or Mediterranean specialities, along with access to the swimming pool.
23 July onwards, 12:30-3:30 pm, Rs 1,999 per person, Hyatt Regency www.kathmandu.regency.hyatt.com

Coffee break,

Visit this new outlet offering a wide range of beverages, from freshly brewed coffees to iced tea, smoothies, lassi and milkshakes, as well as bakery treats. Takeaway available.
Salesberry Department Store, Sitapaila Chok, 9801188409



The Bent Fork,

For a cosy evening with friends and family. This European style restaurant offers some of the best salads and varieties of continental dishes.
Bishal Nagar, 9802049888

Le Trio,

Some of the most succulent jhol momochas (soup momos) in town.
Narayanhiti Path and Jhamsikhel, (01) 4435440 / 5521647

Ventures Café,

Stop by for the best fusion menu and all local favourites and enjoy the breezy outdoors seating. A great venue for beer connoisseurs.
Baluwatar, 9851228014



Coffee Pasal,

A place to sip an aromatic cup of coffee while gazing at the Narayanhiti Museum.
Darbar Marg
Darbar Marg, (01) 4246483

Café Swotha,

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

Little Italy,

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Kamaladi Road, (01)4233577/ 4233578, 9801195000

GETAWAY



Meghauri Serai,

Spend a relaxing time fine dining then venture out for monsoon wildlife safaris in Chitwan, via the Monsoon offer at Taj Safari's Meghauri Serai.
Chitwan National Park
9801301969, 9851001548

Pataleban Vineyard Resort,

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Chisapani, Kathmandu, 9841679364, pataleban@mail.com.np

Glacier Hotel,

Good value and friendly service for travellers on the lap of Lake Phewa.
Gaurighat, Lakeside, Pokhara, (061)-463722, www.glacierenepal.com



Atithi Resort & Spa,

A quiet sanctuary that fuses Nepali tradition with modern amenities, complete with a fancy pool and a cosy restaurant.
Lakeside, Pokhara, (06)1466760, info@atithiresort.com

Mango Tree Lodge,

Culture walks, rafting in the Karnali, wildlife exploration and jungle safari at Bardia National Park.
Bhetani, Bardia, info@mangotree lodge.com

Park Village Resort,

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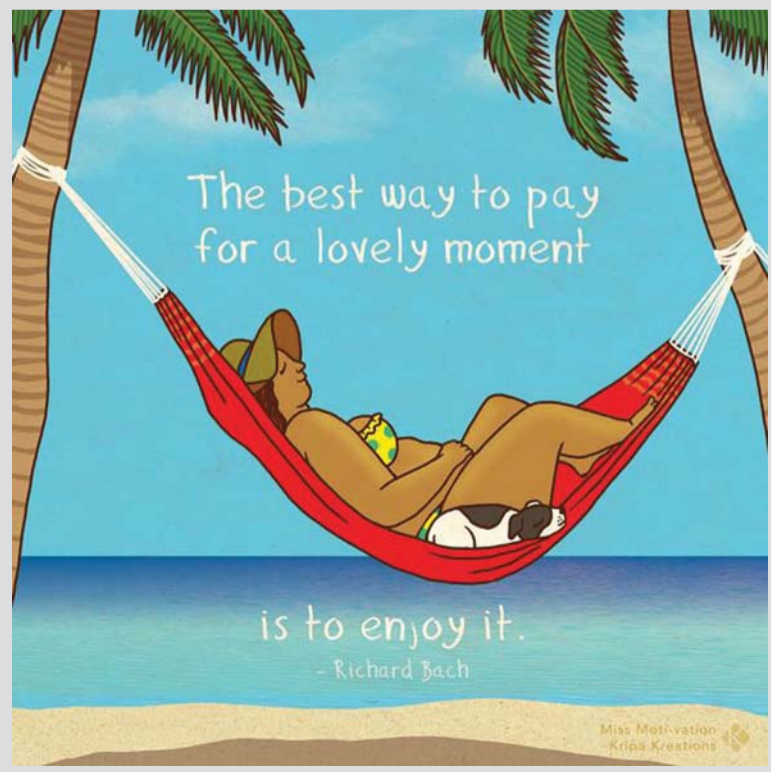


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MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



Metro without mayor

OM ASTHA RAI
in BHARATPUR

Mayors recently elected to four of Nepal's six metropolitan cities have already begun work. But Birganj does not yet have a mayor because it is in Province 2, where elections have been postponed twice and are now scheduled for September.

Bharatpur in Province 3 had elections in the first phase of polls in May, but the results are not out yet because the Maoist-Centre tore up a few ballot papers to disrupt the results when they found out their mayoral candidate was trailing behind the UML's.

For now, it looks like Province 2 elections may be held before the dispute over the Bharatpur ballot counting is settled. This week, the Supreme Court postponed its decision for the sixth time.

After the ballots were damaged on the night of 28 May, the opposition UML asked the Election Commission (EC) to consider those votes invalid, resume counting the remaining ballots and declare the winners. But the EC, apparently under pressure from the ruling Maoist-NC coalition, decided to re-conduct elections in Ward 19 of Bharatpur.

The torn votes were from this NC-dominated ward, and the Maoists were disappointed that they could not overtake the UML even when only 900 of 2,700 votes remained to be counted. The EC's decision was immediately challenged at the Supreme Court by two petitioners, but the decision has been postponed over and over again.



OM ASTHARA

Speaking to eye-witnesses present at the counting station close to midnight on 28 May, a picture emerges of a deliberate attempt by Maoist cadre to sabotage the polls when it looked certain that their candidate, Maoist Chairman Puspha Kamal Dahal's daughter, Renu, was headed for defeat by the UML's Devi Prasad Gyawali.

The counting was nearing the end two weeks after people of Bharatpur voted in the first phase of elections. At around 11:45 pm, Maoist cadre Madhu Neupane began to thump the table as a signal to others, and another Maoist cadre, Drona Siwakoti, followed suit. They then leaped over the table, and began tearing up ballot papers.

Police swiftly swung into action, and detained the two Maoists. However, they were just the decoy and as the two were taken away, other Maoists, including Standing Committee member Surya Subedi and Politburo Member Ghanshyam Dahal (Abinash), began tearing up more ballot papers.

One evening last week, under ominous looking monsoon clouds, Devi Prasad Gyawali appeared surprisingly composed as he surveyed the city that he has not been allowed to lead (pictured, above). As a visiting reporter asked him questions, he answered with a few of his own: Why is the Supreme Court taking so long to decide an open-and-shut case? Why were Maoist cadres Drona

Shiwakoti and Madhu Neupane released on bail? Why was the police officer who arrested them transferred out of Bharatpur? Does being the daughter of Maoist Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal mean that Renu Dahal can do anything she wants? Dahal was still Prime Minister when the Bharatpur ballot-tearing happened.

The then-PM had earlier persuaded Sher Bahadur Deuba to have the NC's own mayoral candidate, Dinesh Koirala, to withdraw in favour of Renu Dahal. The NC could have easily won Bharatpur, but Deuba's decision to partner with the Maoists helped Gyawali's campaign. When he was still Prime Minister, Dahal even flew to Bharatpur with Deuba to

campaign jointly for her. This enraged Congress supporters, who voted en masse for the UML.

Gyawali was leading the race by 784 votes when the ballot-tearing happened. The Maoists were hoping to overtake the UML with a 500-vote margin after Ward 19 was counted, and seal their victory with the results from their stronghold of Ward 20. When that did not happen, they took a two-hour break, called top leaders on the phone, probably including the party hierarchy in Kathmandu, and took the decision to tear up the ballot papers.

As he awaited the Supreme Court ruling, Gyawali said: "Maoists did not just tear up ballot papers, but attacked democracy as well." 🇳🇵

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at his ineptitude (yes he is just 15, but surely there is a limit to bumbling) and wait until he sorts himself out... right at the end.

At 2 hours and 13 minutes the film is way longer than it has any right to be, and as Parker gets his suit yanked away from him by Stark and finally learns to "be a man," we slowly wake from our stupor to pay attention because we know the finale will include the spark that is Downey Jr in his most famous, likeable bad boy role.

I still don't understand why there was a need for this Spider-Man film but I guess it isn't a dead loss. There are some surprises here, including an unexpected role for Parker's long time love MJ, who is set up as an interesting character but doesn't reveal herself till the very end.

Meanwhile, there are the usual American high school mean kids (does this really happen in the US? If so, god help all those children), a fairly banal evil dude, and some fun stuff from the Spidey suit's AI that keep us sane through Parker's fumbling; just enough to not walk out during the intermission — a painful ordeal in Nepal, seemingly tailored to an already noisy audience who giggle and talk loudly and pick up their cell phones during films as if the theatre is a personal space instead of a public one where mutual respect might benefit all. 🇳🇵



Peter Parker is back again, and while that may not raise your pulse rate, this Spider-Man reboot (the third since 2002) is just a little bit different, thankfully, than the uber-earnest iterations helmed

Marvel Universe, joining the Avengers in the finale of *Captain America: Civil War* (2016) where he makes his fighting debut while yammering in excitement at top speed, a quality that was endearing but quickly becomes fairly unbearable in a film just about him.

Filmed with professional ease and filled with wonderful characters such as the lovely, warm Marisa Tomei as Aunt May, and of course, Robert Downey Jr's Tony Stark, Jon Favreau as his loyal assistant Happy Hogan, and Jacob Batalon as Ned, Parker's nerdy best buddy, the film could have certainly done with less screen time for Parker, and more for his hilarious supporting cast.

The main problem with this film is that it doesn't vault over the boundaries of age and appeal to adults in the same way that it is great for teenagers. Parker is infuriatingly self-absorbed and stays that way for most of the film while we grit our teeth



by Tobey Maguire and Andrew Garfield, who made three and two Spidey films respectively in the course of the last 15 years. Unfortunately, Tom Holland as this Spider-Man, while strong enough as a lead, must also contend with a film that is written for teenagers and is therefore just that bit grating if you are not actually from said demographic.

Spider-Man: Homecoming deals with Peter Parker's return to the Big Apple after he partakes of the mad and wonderful excitement of the

HAPPENINGS



PMO

ECOLOGICAL TIES: Japan's State Minister for Environment, Tadahiko Ito, and Japanese Ambassador to Nepal Masashi Ogawa (left) with Prime Minister Deuba at Singha Darbar on Tuesday where they discussed cooperation for climate change adaptation.



EMBASSY OF FRANCE

COMMENT CA VA?: Vice President Nanda Kishor Pun and French Ambassador to Nepal Yves Carmona at the French National Day reception Friday in Kathmandu.



BIKRAM RAI

SIGN ME UP: New Chief Justice Gopal Parajuli assumes office in his Supreme Court chambers on Monday.



INDIAN EMBASSY

LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR: Indian ambassador Manjeev Singh Puri hands over a cheque for Rs23 million to Transport Secretary Devendra Karki at Singha Darbar on Monday.



DIPENDRA BHANDARI

WRONG TURN: A car fell into a sink hole left by contractors of the Melamchi water project in Maharajganj on Wednesday night. Two people were injured.

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“Insallah.”

Devendra Bhattarai in *Kantipur Koseli*, 15 July

क्रान्तिपुर

Dolma Sherpa wipes tears from her lashes and recounts how she landed in a Kuwait jail for 10 years. A lot has changed in that time. For example, she cannot speak her Sherpa mother tongue very well anymore and the Nepali she learnt is now has been Hindi-flavoured. She has picked up Arabic instead, and ends her sentences with “Insallah”.

Dolma was born in Chumchet of northern Gorkha, seven days walk from the nearest road. Remoteness and poverty prevented her from learning to read and write. At 15 she moved to Kathmandu in search of work, met Ang Tenzi Sherpa of Sindhupalchok, and got married. Her in-laws convinced her to go to the Gulf to work, so she left her two-year-old baby with relatives taking with her a dream that she would earn enough to send him to a proper school. Dolma was supposed to go to Oman, but recruiters took her across the border overland to Delhi, and then to Kuwait. The fatigue and trauma of 10 years is evident in her voice: “All I remember is going far away in a big plane.”

She did not know the language, had no skills, and she had no experience in an alien land. She first worked night-and-day for a Kuwaiti family, but the employer returned her to the agency after five months. She was then placed with another family

where there was a Filipina maid named Mayleen who had also left her baby behind. It helped that Mayleen spoke Arabic: she taught Dolma the language and trained her to do the housework. “We became close, we even shared a comb,” she recalls.

One night while her employers were away on holiday, Mayleen and Dolma were going up to their room when someone put a gloved hand on her mouth, while three others dragged Mayleen to her room. Dolma remembers struggling, but the man was too strong. Mayleen was shouting “Help, help” from her room for about half an hour.

“Then they pushed me to the other room, and forced me to touch Mayleen’s face and neck. She was quiet and her eyes were staring out,” Dolma says, sobbing. All the men were wearing gloves and were pretending to be police. They tied her hands and pushed her into the boot of their car, drove off, and threw her out by the side of a road near a canal.

Shouting for help, she walked for a long time before finding herself among people who all just stared at her. Among them was a Nepali woman who spoke to her and told her employer in Urdu what had happened. A Pakistani named Sagir Ahmed, he took Dolma to a nearby police station the next morning. Before leaving, he gave her his card and told her to contact him if she needed any help.

Police started investigating, taking her from one station to the



ANGAD DHAKAL

next. For a year, she had to go to court frequently, where a Hindi interpreter never adequately translated Dolma’s statements. On the day of the verdict, the police asked her to put her fingerprint on a document. It was the order for her execution.

Not knowing who to turn to she called the Pakistani who had rescued her, and told him that they had sentenced her to death for a crime she did not commit. He introduced her to Mitra Sinjali, a Nepali who helped Nepali workers who got into trouble in Kuwait. Dolma found

out only later that Nepalis around the world had started a ‘Save Dolma’ campaign. Jailmates told her she was all over Facebook and YouTube.

“It is like they say: when there is no one, there is always someone up there who helps. I couldn’t reach anyone, but Nepalis all over the world reached out to me. When I found that out, I shed tears of happiness for many days,” recalls Dolma.

She kept her hopes up all those years with memories of her mother in Chumchet, whom she hadn’t seen in 22 years, and her

son. Film-maker Kesang Tseten (who made the documentary *Saving Dolma*) sent her an album of photos of her family. She found solace in news clips of Govinda Mainali, who was falsely accused of murder, spent 15 years in a Japanese jail, and was finally released after being declared innocent.

The Embassy in Riyadh didn’t do much to help, and staff would hang up on her when she called. Other nationalities got daily allowances, but not Dolma and other Nepalis. They had to wash clothes of Kuwaiti prisoners to be able to afford their own soap. It was Mitra Sinjali who kept her spirits up. She found out her death sentence had been commuted only 3 years after the decision, and learned her life sentence had been reduced to 10 years only 2 years later. She found out 3 months ago that she would be sent back to Nepal.

Dolma returned to Kathmandu on 1 July. She says: “I will now go through any hardship to raise my son, I know what suffering means. I have endured enough.”

Dolma is thankful to her Pakistani benefactor Sagir Ahmed, Mitra Sinjali, Kesang Tseten, her fellow jailmates in Kuwait, and the thousands of Nepalis around the world who helped her.

Her advice to her Nepali sisters: “Try not to go abroad, especially avoid Kuwait. Even if you don’t have enough to eat, stay in Nepal. If you have to go, make sure you learn the language and a few skills. Only take the official route. There is no place like your motherland.”

Go online for full story in Nepali.

Crossborder policing

Rameshwar Bohara in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 16-22 July

हिमाल

Police in and around the Kathmandu Valley are equipped with state-of-the-art communication sets more advanced than anywhere else in Nepal. That is not because it is the capital, but because the Chinese helped Nepal Police with a Rs400 million digital radio communication system for Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Bhaktapur, Kavre, Sindhupalchok and Kaski districts. Unlike normal communication equipment used by police in other districts, the high-tech Chinese radio sets can make calls, take videos and broadcast them live. The six districts were not chosen randomly. They reflect Beijing’s priorities and concerns in Nepal about the activities of Tibetans. Many refugees fleeing Tibet enter Nepal through Sindhupalchok and Dolakha and access the Valley through Kavre. Kaski, too, has a sizeable Tibetan refugee population.

It is not just China. The US and India are also competing to access intelligence gathered by Nepal Police by equipping them with their own technology. Ex-DIG Hemanta Malla Thakuri says western countries realised long before China and India how they could benefit from the nationwide intelligence network of the Nepal Police.

The command centre at police headquarters in Naxal was connected via an intranet with 86 police units in 60 districts through a system installed by the US Government at a cost of Rs700 million in 2010. Police headquarters constantly monitors what is happening around the country through this network. The US also gifted the police with polygraph machines to use as lie detectors.

The US is interested in police surveillance of human traffickers,

wildlife poachers, drug smugglers and potential terrorists. It is also concerned about the welfare of Tibetan refugees in Nepal, and wants to keep track of what the Chinese are up to. The two countries are, therefore, using equipment they have gifted to Nepal Police to keep an eye on each other.

India is funding a new, state-of-the-art Rs8 billion police academy. The project, signed during the visit here by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2015, is now stalled after India accused Nepal of violating the agreement by unilaterally selecting contractors. Efforts are underway to sort out this issue. India donated 805 new vehicles to Nepal Police during the first Constituent Assembly elections in 2008, and topped it up with 443 new vehicles during the second CA elections in 2013.

Ex-DIG Thakuri says police eagerly wait for elections because they know the Indians are ready to gift them more pick-ups. However, there is also concern that the modern surveillance equipment can be used by Nepali officials to track the whereabouts of private individuals and to eavesdrop on their calls and data.

During the monarchy, the international community dealt directly with the Army for intelligence, arms sales, etc. But with

the conflict and the establishment of the Armed Police Force, India, China and the US cooperate with the Police instead. The international competition for influence has got so intense that two years ago Police Chief Upendra Kant Aryal sent out a circular warning department heads not to deal directly with foreign embassies in Kathmandu. He ended the letter with an ominous: ‘This is a final warning.’

Centre for Investigative Journalism



नागरिक

Dewan in *Nagarik*, 19 July

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“A constitutional amendment is not possible now. Our party leadership is preparing for local polls in Province 2 without an amendment”

Rastriya Janata Party-Nepal leader Hridayesh Tripathi in *www.onlinekhabar.com*, 20 July

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Build back alone



An earthquake survivor rebuilt his house and his family's livelihood all by himself

SHREEJANA SHRESTHA
in LALITPUR

Up in the forested mountains 25km south of Kathmandu, the village of Ghusel clings to a steep slope overlooking the gorge of the Bagmati River. This time of year, the monsoon mist spreads over the ridges like a gauze curtain. Airliners glide by through the narrow valley below, descending to Kathmandu airport.

All 376 houses in Ghusel were either completely destroyed or damaged in the earthquake, killing five people. Most families have moved out, and there are bushes growing from the ruins of their homes. Many who stayed are spending their third monsoon in temporary huts.

But not Tempa Lama (right). He is living in a sturdy house with concrete pillars and timber beams which he built with his bare hands and a loan. He also restored his family's thriving vegetable farm, an orchard and raises livestock.

"Waiting for the government housing grant was taking a

long time, so I mustered up the courage to take a Rs700,000 loan and rebuilt the house myself," says the 51-year old farmer, whose home is the only one so far to have been rebuilt in Ghusel.

One bright morning this week, Lama was sawing planks with an electric saw he rigged up himself. In between, he rushed off to add fodder for the buffaloes and inspect his maize field.

"I am thankful not to have to spend another rainy season under the tent. That is where I would still be if I had waited for the government," he says, proudly displaying his new house for

which he was mason, carpenter and plumber all rolled into one.

Lama used to be a landless farmer, and without waiting for handouts independently built a future for his family after moving



Rebuilding lives as important as

Even if earthquake families move into new houses, they need help finding jobs

Ganga Tamang left her village in Sindhupalchok six months after the 2015 earthquake to look for a job in Kathmandu so she could take care of her family still living in tin huts up in the mountains.

Her family house was so badly damaged they couldn't live in it anymore. The poultry shed collapsed, as did a small shop that was their source of cash income. Destitute, 20-year-old Ganga had no option but to migrate to Kathmandu, like thousands of other young men and women.

Although the family received the first tranche of the government's housing grant of Rs50,000, it just wasn't enough to put together salvaged material to build a makeshift shelter.

The family doesn't have

enough money now to start rebuilding as per designs approved by the government, which means they will not be eligible for the second tranche.

Earthquake recovery was an opportunity for Nepal to upgrade the skills of survivors, train them in construction techniques to stop out-migration and even attract Nepali workers back from abroad. A skilled concrete-layer or mason can earn up to Rs1,500 a day, which is more than what an unskilled Nepali worker earns in Malaysia or Qatar.

However, instead of creating new job opportunities the earthquake has actually accelerated out-migration. Those who remain behind, like Ganga's family, are being cared for by money sent home by family

members working in Kathmandu or abroad.

We put this to Govind Pokhrel, head of the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) and asked why rebuilding was taking so long. He replied: "No earthquake-affected country has completed reconstruction in two years. The NRA is focusing on private housing this year and will start working on rehabilitating livelihoods and creating jobs."

The NRA is planning to provide demand-based training in all rural municipalities of earthquake-affected districts in the coming year, and is working to make sure that its concept of 'Integrated model settlement' includes livelihood components.

The NRA has achieved modest success in what it calls 'social





PICS: SHREEJANA SHRESTHA



MAN POWER: Tempa Lama, 51, (left) got tired of waiting for government help and took a loan to rebuild his house destroyed in the 2015 earthquake. He is paying back the loan with income from his cash crops.

man of substance. "I am an old man but I am inspired by Tempa Lama. He has set an example for all of us with his skill and work ethic: everyone in the village is now saying we can rebuild ourselves," Ghimire tells us.

Lama earns a living with his carpentry, and on the side sells milk, honey, fruits, vegetables and seasonal cash crops. He is on track to pay back his loan.

Lama counts his blessings, and say he was lucky his buffaloes, cows and goats survived the quake. It would have been more difficult had they been killed. Lama's case illustrates how important it is for earthquake victims to have livelihood options. A housing grant alone is not enough: they need support to acquire skills and find jobs.

The National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) in Kathmandu says it will focus on 'socio-economic reconstruction' this year, specifically sustainable livelihood options (see *Guest Editorial, page 2*), but that it also needs to expedite the

reconstruction process.

Lama had already started rebuilding by the time he received the first tranche of the NRA's housing grant. He is constructing another house nearby, as grant recipients need to rebuild using government-approved designs.

Although some earthquake survivors in Ghusel have already received the second tranche, they don't want to rebuild their houses just yet. The money is not enough, and many would rather migrate and send money home.

Local trader Him Sen Satyal says about 15% of the earthquake survivors in Ghusel took the second tranche, but moved to Kathmandu or abroad, leaving their homes in ruins. 🇳🇵

RIISING FROM THE RUBBLE



Take a day trip to South Lalitpur's scenic Ghusel village to see how Tempa Lama rebuilt his home with his bare hands instead of waiting for the government. He has also rehabilitated his farm and livestock and pays back his loan with the income they generate.

nepalitimes.com

BUILDING BLOCKS

Of the almost **1 million** affected households surveyed, **749,796** were eligible for reconstruction grants.

630,449 families applied for the 1st tranche which **599,324** households received.

Only **80,000** have applied for the second installment of Rs150,000.

So far about **115,000** houses are under construction and **45,000** completed.

More than **40,000** survivors took skills training.



More than **4,100** schools completed of which **8,500** destroyed

63 heritage sites rebuilt of which **28** were UNESCO listed sites.



STEADFAST

Earth homes

Just before noon on 25 April 2015, there was an ominous subterranean roar, and the earth started shaking. The stone and mud houses in the village of Rayale, just over the southwestern ride of the Valley in Kavre, didn't stand a chance. Some 250 homes came down that day, killing 3 people in Rayale alone.

Rebuilding of such houses has been the main priority of the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA), but for various bureaucratic and political reasons the work has been delayed. Rigid house designs were proposed before villagers could receive grants, there were impractical suggestions for relocation, and the big promises of financial help from various prime ministers did not materialise.

Amidst this confusion, organisations like Steadfast-Nepal have quietly advanced rebuilding. It introduced an innovative technique using polypropylene bags filled with earth as the building blocks for new construction. Houses built with earthbags have better climate control, are earthquake resistant and resemble traditional houses.

Earthbag homes have thick walls that are firmly anchored with steel rods and wires, they are made with local materials and local labour, and preserve the traditional aesthetic and architecture – and can be completed within a month.

"They are cool during summers and warm in winters. We believe they represent a practical, localised approach to responding to the rural housing crisis after the earthquake," says Diana Silwal Pradhan of Steadfast-Nepal.

Govinda Pokharel, head of the NRA, attended the recent inauguration of 120 of the earthbag homes, and complimented the builders for the speed with which these strong houses were put up. Bhim Neupane, mayor of Panauti Municipality, and Kavre CDO Shiva Simkhada recommended that at least another 100 houses in Rayale could be built with this technology.

Earthbag technology has been used in many earthquake-affected districts for homes and schools, by organisations like Small World and Firststep Himalaya. (*More pics and links online.*)

Earthbag construction is cheap and can be done in easy steps:

- 1 Fill foundation bags with gravel and place in a shallow ditch
- 2 Support with vertical steel rods and horizontal barbed wire
- 3 For walls, fill bags 90% with moistened soil and tamp them down
- 4 Follow design for doors and windows
- 5 Add concrete ring beam for roof
- 6 Plaster

to Ghusel. Going by the way he is greeted, Lama seems popular in the village, and respected for his hard work, skills and integrity.

Lama's neighbour Chabilal Ghimire, 75, describes him as a

rebuilding homes



WORKING TO REBUILD: Ganga Tamang (left) her village after the earthquake, and is lucky to have found a job at Tranquility Spa in Kathmandu. She pays for her college and sends money home to her parents in the mountains.

reconstruction'. Because most young men have left rural areas, the agency has trained women in masonry and other building skills. It hopes to make new public infrastructure disabled-friendly, ensure improved access to bank accounts and that households comply with building codes.

Rebuilding livelihoods is important if Nepal is to graduate from its status of a least developed country to a lower middle-income one by 2030. To meet the goal of ending poverty in all forms, set out in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), people need to have sources of income wherever they are resettled.

Renaud Meyer, Country

Director of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), says balancing supply and demand is a must in the reconstruction process. He is encouraged by what he has seen in some of the earthquake districts.

"Having houses is not enough. Victims should have jobs. It is amazing to see how people re-equipped themselves with livelihood skills and tools through micro-entrepreneurship programs supported by UNDP," Meyer told *Nepali Times*, adding that the NRA had to convince donors to put money into economic reconstruction.

For Ganga Tamang, it is a busy time in Kathmandu. Besides her job in a spa, she is also paying for college and trying to save enough to send home. She says: "I want to save money to help my parents who lost their income in the earthquake. It is difficult for my family to rebuild our livelihood." 🇳🇵

Shreejana Shrestha



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#EnoughAlready

Nepal's rainy season gets a lot of bad press for its mud, leeches, diarrhoea (verbal and gastric) and flooded streets that swallow up Marutis. It is time for the Monsoon to hire a public relations firm to rebrand itself. The Ass, in the national interest, offers his services free-of-charge to promote precipitation as a destination.

First of all, we have to come up with a snazzier slogan than #OncelsNotEnough: people might think we are anticipating another earthquake. So, just off the top of my head, several catchy catchphrases come to mind:

- 'Visit Nepal: Hard Rain's a-gonna Fall'
- 'Wet Your Bed - in Nepal'
- 'Visit Patan: It Rains Cats, Dogs and Water Buffaloes'
- 'Have the Runs in the Rain'
- 'It Never Rains in Nepal, It Pours'
- 'Wallow in Waling'
- 'Stranded in Lukla? Take a Rain Cheque.'
- 'Avoid Airport Taxi - Take Boat To City'
- 'Come To Nepal & Start Own Umbrella Movement'
- 'Cross the Sewage Canal, and Travel To Nepal in Style'
- 'Visit World's Only Underwater World Heritage Site'

have ensured that the city's water supply is laced with the *Vibrio cholerae* bug, we can promote the city as an adventure destination. Slogan: 'Visit Nepal and Lose 10kg in 10 Days. Money Back Guarantee. Conditions Apply. See Fine Print. If in Doubt, Consult Lawyer and/or Gastroenterologist.'

Alert visitors will have noted that Kathmandu's road-widening project, which started some time during the reign of Emperor Amsuvarma, has turned the streets into sludge. The capital can capitalise on this and start a 'Glastonbury in Gwarko' Mud Festival where the NC and UML can engage in mud-slinging without any qualms.

But, seriously, the sludge will be an asset for Kathmandu's burgeoning spa services. Instead of paying an arm and a leg to get yourself covered from nose to toe in therapeutic volcanic mud, in Kathmandu



you can immerse yourself in goo to give your skin that younger, healthier tone. Kathmandu's roads may have potholes that eat up cars, but they are paved with good intentions.

Since all this deconstruction has also blocked the drains, Kathmandu Metropolitan City has decided to flood the city and replace rickshaws with gondolas and promote the Valley as the Venice of the East.

Warning: All gondolas must stop at zebra crossings to allow pedestrians to swim across.



The Ass

See? If we use our imagination, the sky is the limit when it comes to selling the rain to tourists. The Ministry of Foreigner Affairs, instead of jumping through hoops to strengthen bilateral ties with Djibouti, should instruct all our embassies to bring visitors to Kathmandu in the rainy season when the Valley becomes a lake again.

The gut reaction of many readers is to say: Wait a minute won't I contract diarrhoea and trigger a violent uprising? The answer to that is: "Yes." Now that Kathmandu's Public Utilitarians

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