



Challenges behind the wheels

Babita Shrestha (name changed), 31, lives in Kathmandu with her husband and two children. She has been working as a tempo driver for 11 years in the capital. Together with her husband, who is also a driver, she earns enough to sustain their livelihood and educate their two children.

Being a tempo driver, Babita faces a lot of challenges, especially from male counterparts. Insignificant and negligible issues that come along with driving a vehicle like a tempo is often made into a bigger issue by many men who try to take immoral advantages. These men include other male tempo drivers and policemen.

She recalls a situation when she was still learning to drive and her driving instructor offered to teach her in exchange for sex. At the time Babita didn't tell of the incident to her husband. Yet, she learned to drive the tempo from a driving institute and got her driving license.

Male tempo drivers create a significant negative working environment as they are constantly bullying, harassing, and eve-teasing her. On top of that, she has also been in situations where male passengers have tried to indirectly ask for sex and physically abused her by touching her intimate parts. There are about 350 women tempo drivers in Kathmandu and all of them surely have been victims of such harassments.

Another issue that female drivers face is an insufficient number of public toilets in the valley. The ones that are available are also unsafe to a large extent. Thus, women drivers are likely to face harassment even when using the toilets. It is even more difficult during the menstruation period because there are no proper places to change the sanitary napkins for us.