

# CCTV Invigilation at Gadhimai Mela

## A public private partnership initiative to strengthen community security;

Gadhimai Mela 'a religious fair lasting for a month' takes place every five years at the Gadhimai temple premises of Bariyarpur in Bara district. The Mela held in November-December involves sacrificial slaughter of animals including water buffaloes, pigs, goats, chicken, rats, and pigeons – with the goal of



Bariyarpur, Bara district, November 2014. Devotees at the Gadhimai Mela.

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during such mass gatherings. During an interaction Strengthening Community Security (AVRSCS) project<sup>1</sup> with the District Chambers of Commerce of Bara and Parsa districts, a couple of businessmen highlighted the challenges and difficulties faced at the Gadhimai Mela. They shared that women and girls in particular were often targeted; being physically harassed, molested and their jewelries snatched away many times at the previous Melas. It was suggested that an effective invigilation of the event would deter such situation and address the security needs of the public, business communities as well as other stakeholders whilst at the same time make the policing of the regional fiesta much more efficient and effective. Chamber representatives committed to joining hands in availing support if such an invigilation mechanism would be established.

pleasing Gadhimai, the goddess of power. It is estimated that about five million people participate in the Mela from Nepal and the Indian states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. The sudden and high influx of people during the Mela brings a number of security challenges resulting out of criminal activities such as theft, pick-pocketing, jewelry-snatching, sexual harassment, rape, kidnapping, physical assaults etc. In general, security, especially of women, children, and senior citizens is a great concern during the Mela.

Criminal activities and ineffective security affects all individuals alike but more so the business community both at personal and business level organized by Armed Violence Reduction and



Bariyarpur, Bara district, November 2014. One of the CCTV cameras installed at the premises of Gadhimai temple.

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<sup>1</sup> The project is funded by the UN Peacebuilding Fund through the UN Peace Fund for Nepal

Capitalizing on the private sectors enthusiasm to address the above mentioned security challenges; during the recently completed Mela, the AVRSCS project mobilized resources embarking on a public private partnership in collaboration with Bara District Police Office, Gadhimai Mela Committee, and Bara District Chamber of Commerce. CCTV invigilation mechanism was installed covering different locations of the temple and surrounding areas during the period of the Mela with an aim of deterring criminals and improving security. For this, AVRSCS project mobilized approximately NRs 500,000 to provide 16 CCTV cameras to be installed in the temple premises and a surveillance monitor to be located at the command post of the Nepal Police, whilst the Gadhimai Mela Committee contributed installation cost of approximately NRs. 100,000.00. The Bara Chamber of Commerce in addition also committed to contribute the camera relocation cost worth close to NPR 300,000.

"The installation of CCTV camera played a key role in deterring criminal activities as it psychologically discouraged such acts," says Mr. Motilal Kushwaha, Secretary of Gadhimai Mela Committee for the last two seasons of the Mela and further added "The number of criminal incidents has reduced by 40-50 percent this year". Similar observation comes from the Nepal Police side as well. "The footage of the CCTV cameras was instrumental in helping us analyze security context," claims Mr. Rabindra Regmi, Deputy Superintendent of Police. "The analysis of the footage helped us to identify problem spots, so we could mobilize police personnel swiftly and provided quick response where needed."



Bariyapur, Bara, November 2014. Preparation ongoing for the CCTV surveillance of Mela at the command post of Nepal Police. © Sanjay Kumar Gupta/ AVRSCS/UNDP

Now the Mela is over, the CCTV cameras have been relocated to Kalaiya, the headquarters of Bara district for installation at key locations of the town as recommended in the community security planning process being undertaken through the project. The operations room of the Bara District Police Office will be monitoring the CCTV network to bolster security in the district headquarters.

The partnership amongst the project, key government security bodies, District Chamber of Commerce and the Mela Committee has set a precedent for successful public-private partnership for collaboration, capitalizing on the private sectors' corporate social responsibility commitments in realizing mutually beneficial security results and has laid foundation for the successful implementation of the project's community security plans being developed at local level.