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Populism and polls

When UML MPs reached Parliament on Thursday to obstruct proceedings as they have for the past two weeks, they found out the House had already been adjourned until next week. A notice pasted at the entrance (right) read that it was because of 'Special Reasons'.

No prize for guessing what these special reasons are. It has now become a standard practice to postpone Parliament whenever there is no consensus on a debate.

But there are signs the deadlock is finally ending. The Big Three parties are closer to a consensus to hold local elections. NC President Sher Bahadur Deuba on Thursday said: "We have a deal, and no one can stop us from holding all three elections in the next 14 months."

But the UML is still wary of the election bill the government tabled in Parliament on Wednesday. UML secretary Pradip Gyawali told *Nepali Times* that Deuba misled the opposition by



first saying polls would be based on existing constituencies. "Now he says elections will follow new structures," he stated.

The extended deadline to propose new municipal and village councils in place of existing municipalities and VDCs expired on Thursday, but the Local Level Restructuring Commission is still struggling to rearrange local bodies in Province 2 due to obstruction by Madhesi parties.

Sadbhavana Party leader Rajendra Mahato has warned that

local elections in the Tarai will not be held as long as the constitution is not amended. "Old or new local structures, elections cannot take place without amending the constitution," he told journalists.

The UML says elections should be the government's priority rather than the amendment. "The minority should stop ruling the majority," Gyawali said. "Otherwise the deadlock will continue."

However, political scientist Krishna Pokharel warns that the Big Three should not repeat the mistake they made while promulgating the constitution: "Madhesi parties have hardened their stance after being left out, and if that happens again, they will obstruct elections just like how they are obstructing local body restructuring in the Tarai."

Om Astha Rai

HEADS WE LOSE, TAILS WE LOSE
EDITORIAL
PAGE 2



BLOCKING TIGERS

In 2010 during a big international conference on tigers, Nepal pledged to double its tiger population by 2022.

But meeting that target looks doubtful not because of poaching but because of the fragmentation of the tiger's range by transmission lines, highways and a proposed railway.



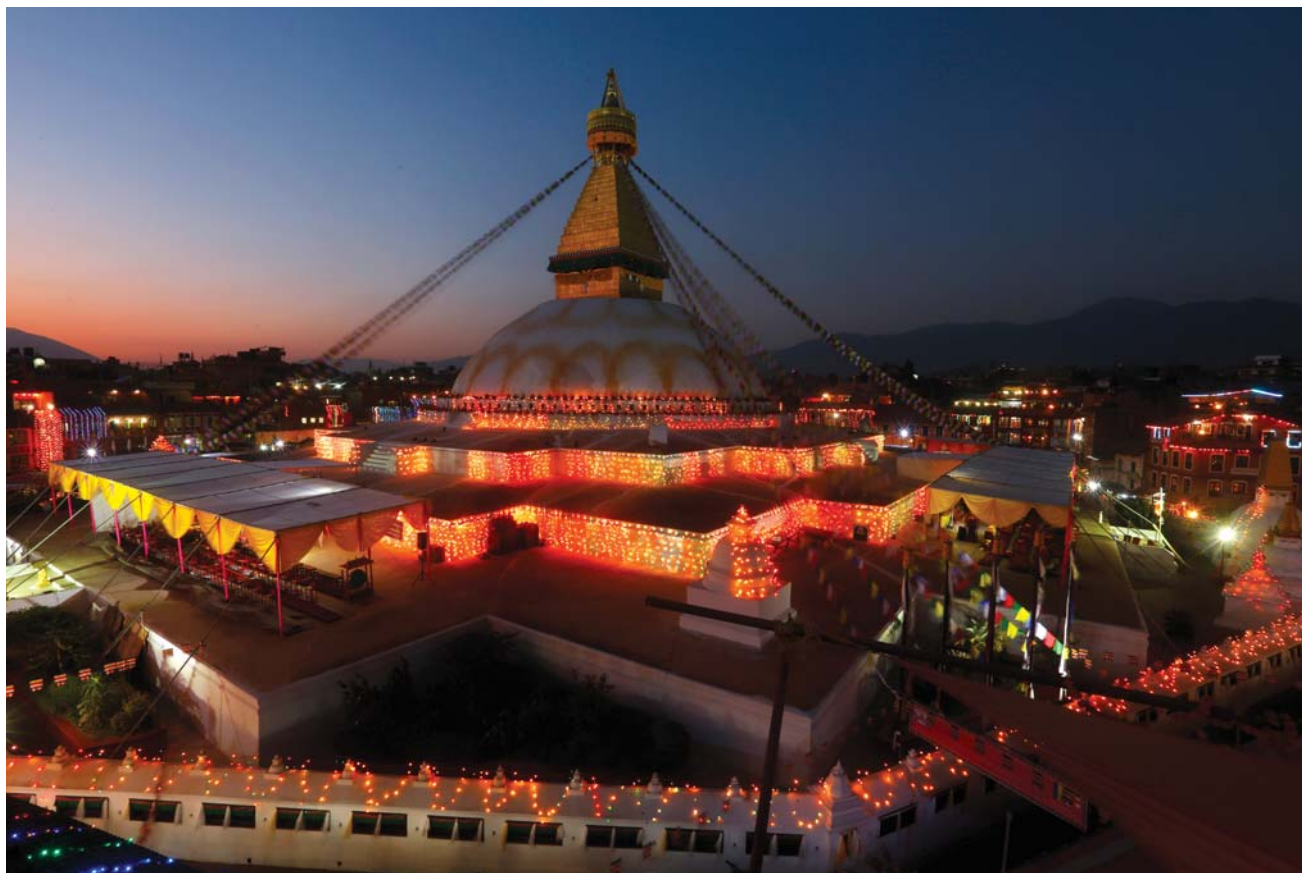
More stories INSIDE

BY OM ASTHA RAI
PAGE 14-15

THE BOUDHA KORA

It has only been a month since Boudhanath was reopened after its repair and consecration, and it is once again crowded with devotees and tourists circumambulating the shrine. The stupa is one of the holiest Buddhist sites in Nepal, and pilgrims and tourists are flocking to the many shops, cafes and even meditation centres that surround it. *Nepali Times* presents a comprehensive guide to places to eat and things to do in Boudha.

PAGE 8-9



GOPEN RAI

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GOING PLACES TOGETHER

HEADS WE LOSE, TAILS WE LOSE

Separating hills and plains may lead to violence, keeping hills and plains together may also lead to violence.

If we were to update readers in one sentence about the state of affairs in Kathmandu as 2016 draws to a close it would be with this: Debate in parliament about constitutional amendments on federalism is deadlocked because of elections, but elections themselves are necessary to prevent a deadlock on the constitution.

So, which comes first, the constitution or elections, has become a chicken or egg question. On one side of this debate is Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, his Maoist-Centre and Nepali Congress coalition comrades who want to register the second amendment bill in Parliament to untangle the political knot. The opposition UML is sticking to its demand that the hill districts of Province 5 cannot under any circumstances be grafted into Province 4. To ram the point home, the UML has obstructed parliament, and spearheaded mammoth cross-party protests in Butwal and other towns of Central Nepal against chopping up Province 5.

The question in everyone’s mind is: if this is the kind of opposition and hill-plains friction that greets plans to change boundaries in Province 5, imagine the kind of possible bloodshed that will accompany any attempts to gerrymander with Jhapa, Morang and Sunsari in Province 2 and Kailali and Kanchanpur in Province 7. Nepal is in a heads we lose, tails we lose situation: separating hills and plains may lead to violence, and keeping hills and plains together may also lead to violence. Yet, there is no alternative to finding a compromise suitable to all. Prolonging this uncertainty will push Nepal further into instability and a constitutional void if elections are not held in 13 months.

Obstruction of parliament is already impacting on pending legislations, including bills dealing with the implementation of the new constitution, or the impeachment process against CIAA chief Lokman Singh Karki. The dispute is now seriously impacting on the election timetable for local, provincial and federal polls. The expiration date of the current Parliament is 21 January 2018, and no one knows what will happen if the three elections are not completed by



then. There is no precedent in Nepali history to deal with that contingency. The biggest casualty of that vacuum will be the Constitution drafted by the Constituent Assembly.

Since it is electoral reckoning that has deadlocked negotiations on the constitution amendments, that is where efforts must be made to find a way out. The Madhesi parties are convinced that the boundaries of future federal provinces will determine their continued existence. The Nepali Congress hopes to use a Madhes-friendly second amendment to bolster its support in coming elections and regain its once-dominant position in the Tarai. The Maoist-Centre, for its part, wants to use the amendment to reclaim the support of Janajatis whom it promised provinces based on ethnic identity.

The UML is playing the nationalist (read anti-Indian) card to the hilt by labelling the second amendment an Indian game plan. The party is making itself out to be the only one that can safeguard the country’s sovereignty and independence. In this, the Maoist-NC plan to amputate Province 5 has become the UML’s most potent weapon for next year’s elections.

All political forces in Nepal are doing what parties usually do: ensure an electoral upper hand. The only problem is that populism and polls usually lead to disaster. The only way to ease the current volatility, confirm election dates, and steer the country away from a risky future is for the leaders of the biggest and second biggest parties (NC and the UML) to put their heads together. Sher Bahadur Deuba and K P Oli did so this week, but it was more of a chance meeting than anything else.

As we see it, a clear compromise is possible if the NC can accept a national government after the constitution goes into force, and for the UML to agree that the second amendment is necessary for the proper implementation of the constitution.

Such a trade-off can pave the way for three tiers of elections and give the country and its long-suffering people some much needed breathing space.

Times

THIS WEEK



Most reached on Facebook

At home abroad by Jessica Cortis

Heritage homes in Kathmandu’s historic towns appeal to a new breed of visitors (15,165 people reached)

Most shared on Facebook

At home abroad by Jessica Cortis

(24 shares)

Most visited online page

Speaking truth to power by Shreejana Shrestha (5,338 views)

Most popular on Twitter

Speaking truth to power by Shreejana Shrestha (67 retweets, 80 likes)

Most commented

Power Struggle, Editorial

YOUR SAY

www.nepalitimes.com

MOTHERS

I have worked in a USAID-funded program in Jumla in the early 90s and then in the DFID-funded Safe Motherhood Project in 2007-2009. So I know this story is real, and really frustrating (‘The gods will be angry’, Mina Sharma and Prakash Singh #836). But I believe this stubborn belief will eventually give way. And we must also celebrate the little successes that this story tells us. All the women featured in this story seem to have visited health posts and were educated about better practices. This is possible because of Nepal’s community health volunteer program. In the 90s, it was amazing just to hear that there were health workers in the villages. Meanwhile, I wonder if there is not an NGO willing to provide Safe Birth kits like nutritious bars, floor and wall coverings that would help alleviate some of the threats that mothers face in these cold and stuffy sheds.

Wilda Campbell

The gods never want their beautiful creations to suffer like this. This is all ignorance and illiteracy.

Annapurna Kunwar

POWER

Kudos for this reporting, but it doesn’t go far enough (‘Speaking truth to power’, Shreejana Shrestha, #836). Expose all the nefarious interests that had been keeping us in the dark all these years. Who were the companies providing these kickbacks? All the NEA Chiefs, Electricity Ministers and Secretaries of the last decade need to be investigated and punished. Only then will we have a permanent solution.

Abhishek B

Nepal Tourism Board’s slogan ‘once is not enough’ sounds a bit obscene (‘Getting used to electricity again’, the Ass, #836). We need another slogan to attract tourists to Nepal.

Prakash Moktan

LITTLE BHUTAN

Now they are more ‘settled’, and they should pick up their fight for equal rights and democracy in their homeland (‘Little Bhutan’, Gopal Gartaula, #836). They need to lobby with the governments of their new countries to put pressure on Bhutan to ensure democracy and human rights.

Gosam

रघु @rabish308

This is probably the first time we are reading about officials taking bribe to deliberately create load-shedding.

Nepali Times @nepalitimes

Why were Nepalis kept in the dark for so long?

Arpan @arpanshr

We need to know who these 183 & 70 consumers who benefited from load shedding are. Who will identify these corrupt people?

Nepali Times @nepalitimes

For the first time in a long time, we have seen a government that has actually solved a problem faced by the public

Times

nepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll #837

Q. Who should be more responsible to break the political deadlock?

Total votes: 286

NC-Maoist 38.22%

UML 31.24%

Madhesi parties 30.54%

Weekly Internet Poll #838

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Q. What is the biggest threat to wildlife?

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Nepal-China trade goes

Daigou sellers turn to WeChat and TaoBao to sell Nepali handicrafts in China



PICS: PAN LAN

QIU TIAN and PAN LAN

While souvenir shops in Kathmandu and Patan are worried that the number of Chinese tourists had dropped by half after last year's earthquake, Nepali handicrafts have found a foothold in the Chinese market through an informal social network called Daigou.

The network specialises in



TRANSBOUNDARY E-COMMERCE:
A worker (left, above) wraps a Buddha statue before being shipped to China.

A screenshot of the Chinese online shop TaoBao featuring Nepali bead products (left).

Yanli Wu's courier company in Thamel (above) provides services to more than 30 Daigou shopping agents.

buying and selling exotic items unavailable or hard to find in China, usually through social media network WeChat or the e-commerce site TaoBao.

In Nepal, this grey market operates through a network of professional agents and individual buyers in Thamel who visit Nepal regularly to source popular items like Buddha statues, Thangkas, Bodhi Citta beads, wood carvings and silver

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accessories. There are an estimated 100 Chinese in Kathmandu involved in the Daigou business, according to supplier Yong Qiang who has lived in Thamel for over three years.

“Nepali souvenirs have a cult following in China, and people are willing to spend quite a lot of money to acquire items from here,” explains Ye Zi, another Chinese traveller who is a Daigou member and has a lot of confidence in the market in China for Nepali products. This September alone, she bought Thangkas, silver items and wood carvings worth Rs 473,000 in Kathmandu, and sold them through Chinese e-commerce sites within three months for a profit of Rs 315,000.

The margins are so high that Daigou groups have now expanded from mainland China to Taiwan. A Google search for ‘Nepal Daigou’ in Mandarin directs customers to the Facebook page of Kitty Inc. based in Taipei with nearly 25,000 followers.

The owner, Kitty, has named her e-shop after herself and explains: “For the Taiwanese, Nepal is an exotic and mysterious place. The products are unique and appealing because they reflect Nepal’s culture and heritage.”

For the past three years, Kitty has been operating a cooperative in Thamel that manufactures customised jewelry for clients in Taiwan.

The rapidly growing market is also a big source of revenue for Kathmandu-based express courier services which are a part of the logistical supply chain. Yanli Wu opened a branch of Shen Tong, a Chinese courier company, on Thamel’s Amrit Marg three months before the 2015 earthquake and has among her customers 30 Daigou shopping agents who use her courier service to ship products to China.

Reliable supply and logistics are crucial for this business, as Daigou member Ren Fan found out the hard way. He decided to quit after spending months struggling with uncertain quality of Nepali products and unreliable shipment from Kathmandu.

“When people sense any chance of making a fortune, they will swarm into it,” Wu told *Nepali Times*. “If the trade with China grows, I am sure there will be many more Chinese courier companies here.”

With so many suppliers and fierce competition, Daigou members have opted to specialise. Some deal only in Bodhi Citta beads (*see box*), or like ShidaChe, have registered a company that sells Rs 8 million worth of khukuris from Nepal in China.

Daigou also operates from Australia, importing items like milk powder (because of fears of contamination in China) and from Europe (designer luxury items). In Nepal, Daigou sales mainly involve religious artefacts and handicrafts.

Mo Yanhu has been selling carved bronze Buddhas in China, and says: “The details on the face of Nepal’s Buddha statues are exquisite, better than the mass-produced mechanised factories in China. Our customers prefer Made in Nepal Buddhas to Made in China ones.” 🇳🇵



Bead exports

With intense competition to sell Nepali cultural products in China, some Daigou agents have specialised in

high-value items like sacred Bodhi Citta seeds which are used in Buddhist prayer beads.

Also called two-eyed Bodhi beads, they are seeds of trees that grow in the wild and are found abundantly in Nepal’s midhills. In recent years they have become a source of good income for Nepali farmers.

Yundan Jiacao is a professional Daigou agent who has been selling Bodhi Citta prayer beads on WeChat and sources his seeds from villages in Kavre district to the east of Kathmandu Valley, buying up to Rs 200,000 worth of the holy seeds on each trip.

“Purchase at the place of origin is very important because the competitors may get there before me,” says Jiacao, who has to establish long-term relationships with Kavre farmers to ensure supply. “Daigou business is hugely competitive and you have to invest a lot of effort.”

Wu Baohua (*pictured above at left*), another Daigou online retailer has three e-commerce sites on TaoBao, and says bead prices have dropped from Rs 4,400 for a set to Rs 3,100 this year because of oversupply. He adds: “A major attribute of e-commerce is using sales to earn traffic, so the huge competition makes many people sacrifice profits to increase sales.”

prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

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31 March 2017. Customers can avail this offer till 31 March 2017.

Aiming high

Pemba Sherpa bagged the first prize in the Calsberg Golf 2016 that concluded last week



in Gokarna Forest Resort. The event saw participation of around 100 players from all over the country.

Helping hand

Authorised dealer of Volkswagen in Nepal, Pooja International, handed over basic utilities



such as home appliances, furniture, electronic equipments, bicycles, stationery items and more to One Love One World, an NGO working with street and community children.

A good 2016

Qatar Airways which was currently operating



flights in 23 destinations in Africa added Seychelles as its new getaway.



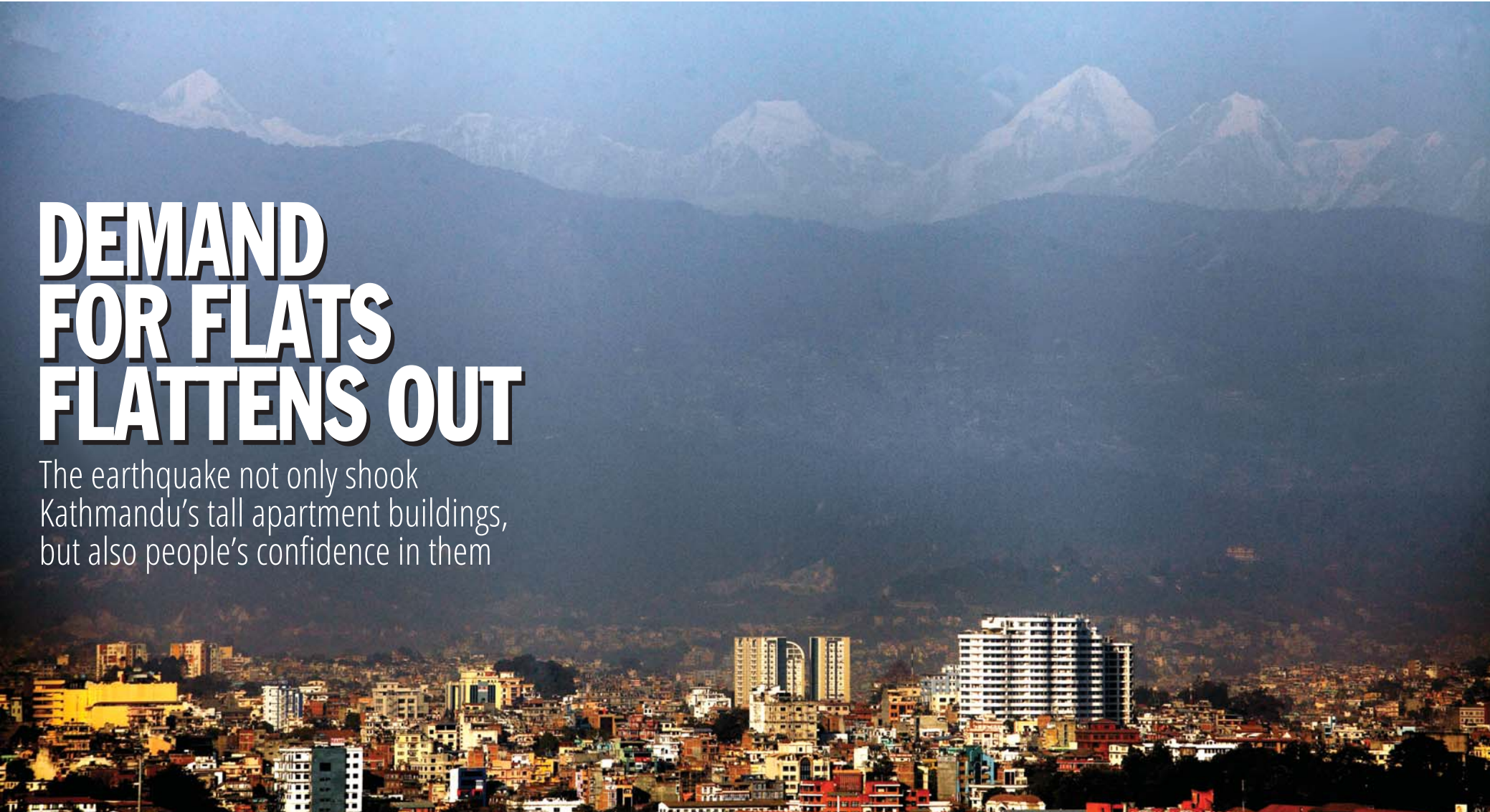
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DEMAND FOR FLATS FLATTENS OUT

The earthquake not only shook Kathmandu’s tall apartment buildings, but also people’s confidence in them

RAMESHWAR BOHARA

Everyone is selling, but no one is buying, or investing. That just about summarises the status of Nepal’s apartment industry.

Having suffered physical damage during last year’s earthquake, developers are struggling to assuage a wary public about the safety of their high-rises.

After the earthquake, not a single investor has sought permission to build new apartments in Kathmandu Valley. Those who had already obtained permits have postponed plans, others have cancelled projects. Those with damaged buildings have done patchwork repairs for their flats, but there are few takers.

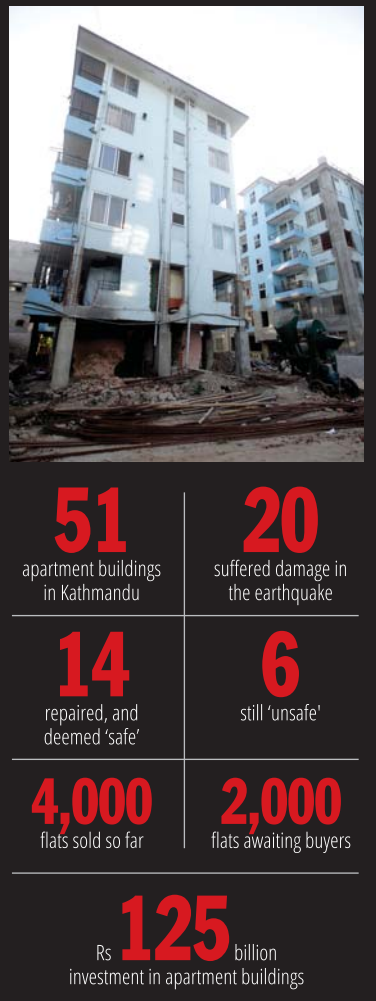
“Builders have no confidence that they can sell apartments,” says an engineer at the Department of Urban Development and Building Construction (DUDBC), the government body that issues licenses for apartment

construction.

The DUDBC had issued the first license to build an apartment in Kathmandu in 2004 and until last year’s earthquake, the DUDBC had issued licenses for 71 apartment buildings. But only 51 were actually constructed. As many as 20 apartment buildings suffered cracks, and even structural damage. Of them, 14 were deemed ‘safe’ after being repaired, but six are still ‘unsafe’.

Six apartment buildings were under-construction, and investors have not shown urgency to complete these projects after the earthquake. Eco Housing and Realty Company had obtained permission to build a high-rise building with 108 flat units in Babar Mahal, but has shelved its project. Orchid Holdings has also cancelled its plan to build an apartment with 48 flat units in Rabi Bhawan.

At least 2,000 units are waiting buyers, and many families who left their damaged apartments after the earthquake are still scared to return there. Nepal



Land and Housing Developers Association (NLHDA) says Rs 125 billion has been invested in Kathmandu’s apartments, and a large portion of this investment is now at risk.

The earthquake did not damage all high-rises that form Kathmandu’s skyline. More than 30 of them withstood the jolt, and were deemed safe by a technical team of the DUDBC. But those that violated the building code and used substandard construction material suffered structural damage, and this frightened buyers and investors alike.

“People are now scared to live in high-rise buildings, and this is because of a few unscrupulous builders,” says Minman Shrestha of NLHDA.

Binayak Apartment in Baluwatar nearly collapsed and would have killed 20 families living there. A Detail Damage Evaluation revealed it flouted guidelines.

“Arbitrarily tinkering with the approved design can be disastrous,” says DUDBC engineer

Sagar Krishna Joshi. The ISME Housing Company sold flats of Binayak Apartment without a project completion certificate from the DUDBC.

In Kuleshwor, two blocks of eight-storey apartments of Oriental Colony also suffered heavy damage. Their pillars on the ground floor were cracked and the building nearly collapsed. An investigation revealed that the builder had not used as many iron rods as cited in the approved design. The DUDBC slapped a fine of Rs 50,000, and asked its owner to submit a retrofitting design.

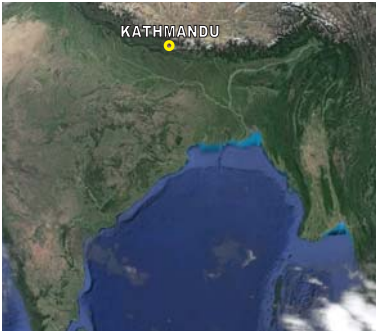
“We need a policy to award those who build by the rule, and punish those who risk people’s lives by arbitrarily altering the design and using low-quality material,” says the DUDBC Kathmandu Division Chief Basanta Rai. “If not, it would be difficult to restore people’s faith in high-rises.”

(Centre for Investigative Journalism)

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This year's polar vortex has brought Arctic weather down into Central Asia, and combined with the circulation from the northwest due to Cyclone Vardah, temperatures right across northern India have plummeted. Which explains the premature fog on the Indo-Gangetic plains, including the Nepal Tarai. In Kathmandu, the maxima have fallen below 20 Celsius, and the minima are also below normal. The expected effect of Vardah did not materialize because it made landfall much more to the south than originally predicted. So more cold, but sunny days in store for the Valley.

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BIKRAM RAI

HOSPITAL

Kesang Tseten's latest film tells the story of how dedicated doctors strive valiantly to save lives in remote Nepal

Indeed, the film-maker has been criticised for documentaries that lack in clear take-home message. But one of the things that keeps Tseten going is his love of encountering experiences and transmuting them into a form of expression. The biggest challenge, he believes, is trying to reimagine how something can be done.

Tseten wanted to be a writer and graduated in journalism from Columbia University in New York, but after his first book was rejected by a publisher, he started exploring film-making.

"The sensibility is the same, so I don't feel I have changed because of the medium," Tseten explains. "I don't make films that are morally one dimensional because that's not how the world is. I make the film to discover the film."

Motivated by the Buddhist notion of Sunyata (Nothingness), Tseten lives by the belief that nothing is intrinsically or eternally real. Informed by this mantra, he develops a level of relativity in all his films.

"I try to break down the jaggedness and judgemental nature and capture the essence of the subject," he says, and *Hospital* is a true example of the way Tseten uses juxtaposition and camera cuts to highlight this. The carefully considered piecing together of footage from patients within the hospital offers a visual insight into the humanity in Nepalis, and sometimes the lack of it.

The filmmaker admits that whilst many of his documentaries are sad, they hold a degree of relevance and offer hope. In *Who Will be a Gurkha* which won the top KIMFF Award in 2012, Tseten uses *cinema verite* technique to film the recruitment process, bringing out the desperation, hopes and disappointments of would-be recruits with sometimes tragi-comic humour.

"It's more than work for me. It becomes artistic when there is an interest in my own people, society and issues which is what I present," Tseten tells us, "Gurkha recruitment is a part of Nepali history, so while going off to join the Gurkhas is tragic, there's also an aspect of humanity that cannot be ignored." 🇳🇵

JESSICA CORTIS

How do you take the raw reality of remote Nepal, with all its poverty, discrimination, disease, birth and death and turn it into an uplifting story of sacrifice and dedication?

Nepal's most accomplished documentary maker, Kesang Tseten, has a knack of bringing out in his films the best in people. He looks for the flower that grows amidst the squalour, and tries to spread a message of hope. Like his previous documentary *We Corner People*, his latest film, *Hospital*, returns to rural Nepal to portray a hospital in Kalikot where ordinary health workers accomplish extraordinary things.

Tseten once again took the 14th annual Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival (KIMFF) by storm with the screening of *Hospital* to a packed auditorium on 11 December. The film intrusively, and at the

same time subtly, captures the reality of everyday life-saving in the Kalikot Hospital.

With raw footage of a mother giving birth to her baby in the first ten minutes of the film, Tseten tests us with shocking visuals and forces us to watch what it means to be a doctor and nurse in an under-staffed, under-equipped and over-burdened rural hospital in a far-flung district.

In his trademark no-narration style, the director skilfully weaves together the diversity in Nepali culture, the nature of humanity, and the state of Nepal's health system into the storyboard to heighten the challenge of saving lives where there is so little to work with and so much at stake.

"I had imagined hospitals to be associated with sickness and dying, but I soon saw the beauty in how people deal with the array of situations they are faced with," he told *Nepali Times* after the KIMFF show on Sunday.

Tseten's interest in capturing the organic

portrayal of Nepali people in his films is nothing new. His previous documentaries have brought audiences up close with migrant workers and their families, people caught up in conflict, the recruitment of Gurkha soldiers, and the yet-to-be released *The Trembling Mountain*, which won second prize this year at KIMFF, looks at how faith and a sense of community allowed Langtang villagers to recover from last year's tragedy.

Tseten is a documentary maker in the true sense, he says he is only trying to document in film Nepal's pluralistic society with its diverse range of characters, and how they cope with hardships.

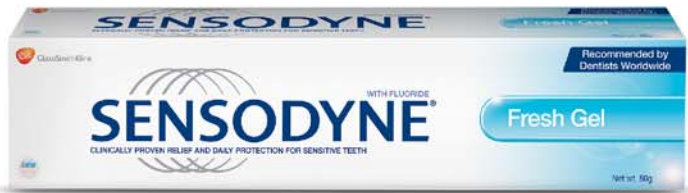
"I find the characters in my films to be very lyrical, and I tend not to say that I'm doing this for humanity. I'm just interested in people and their social setting," Tseten says modestly. Indeed, the film-maker lets his characters speak for themselves, there is no preachiness or prescription, and no conclusion and closure.



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PICS: PAN LAN

Roadhouse Café

Dine on Italian pizzas baked in wood-fired ovens. Enjoy cheesy delights in the bright and sun-warmed rooftop terrace which offers a panoramic view of Boudhanath and creates an intimate vibe for friends to meet up over a cappuccino.
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Tushita Heaven Handicrafts

This is the place where you can learn thangka painting from scratch with courses and facilities for beginners and a cosy lobby for students to practice. It usually takes three to four years for a person to fully master the art of thangka painting, so if time is of the essence, consider buying some of the work done by Tushita's junior artists.
(01) 4916246, www.thangkatushita.com



Harati Maa Handicraft

After the earthquake last year, shops in Boudhanath experienced dwindling sales. The number of Chinese tourists, who form the bulk of the customers, decreased by half. But the price of silver jewelry and Buddha statues are the same as before the earthquake. Delicate handicrafts that will make the perfect souvenir and presents for folks back home.
(01) 4916605, www.haratimaa.webs.com

THE BOU

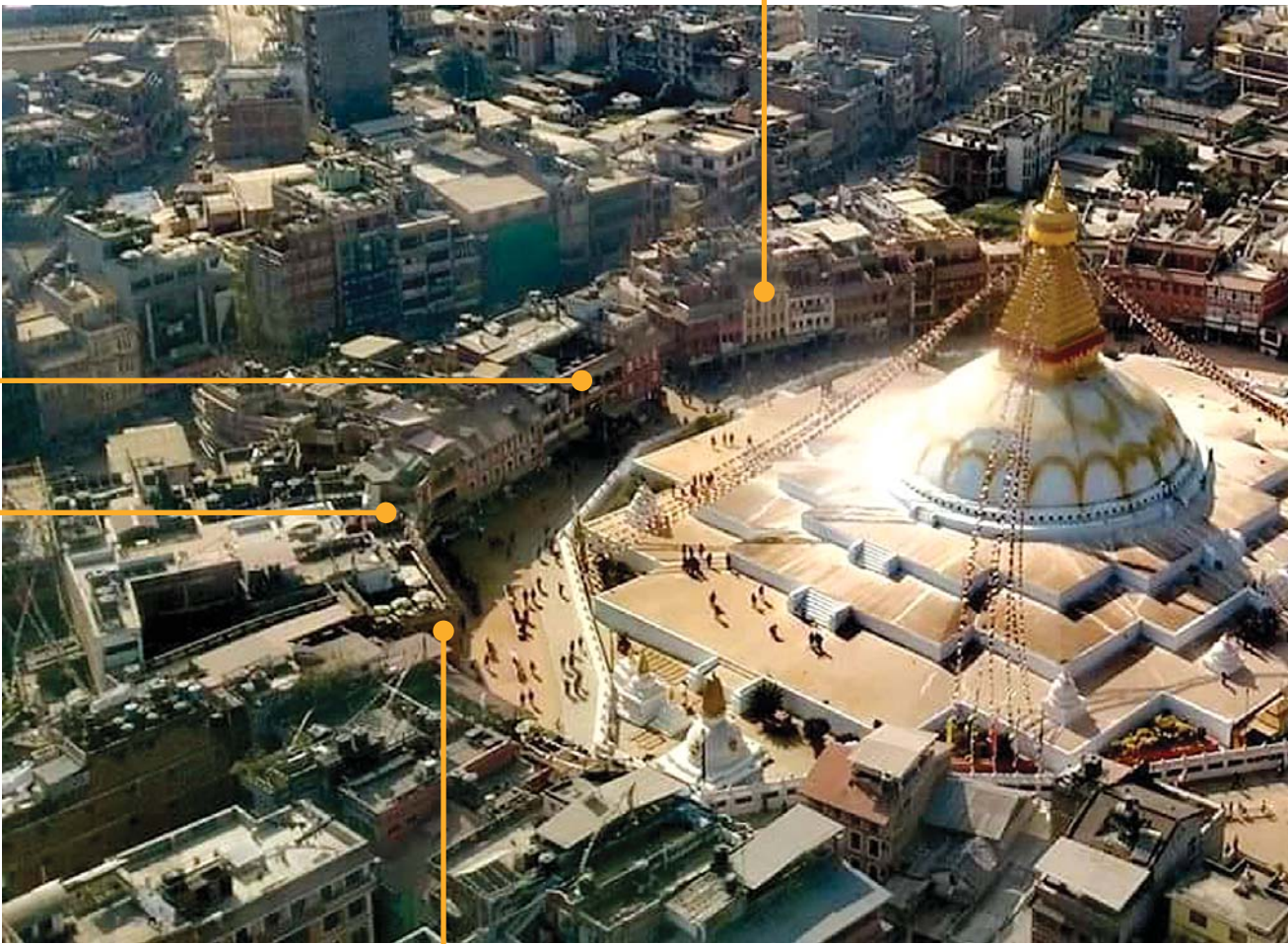
It has not even been a month since Boudhanath was reopened after its repair and consecration, and it is once again crowded with devotees and tourists circumambulating the shrine. The stupa is one of the holiest Buddhist sites in Nepal, and tourists flock to the many shops, cafes and even meditation centres that surround it. “If they didn’t tell me, I would have never known,” remarked

Claudia Gaebel from Germany looking at the great white dome of Boudhanath. It’s Gaebel’s first visit to Nepal and for her, the trip has been a spiritual one. Although busier and louder than Lumbini, she also feels the area surrounding the Boudhanath stupa is more integrated than Swayambhunath. Since its reopening, tourists like Gaebel have returned to the site, and the stupa is once more alive with the soft chant of Buddhist monks



Pho 99 Vietnamese Noodle House

This local Nepali chain offers a variety of traditional Vietnamese dishes and drinks. House Special noodle soup has an authentic taste. Appetisers there are refreshing but the most interesting are the spring rolls. If you love coffee, it is recommended that you have the imported traditional Vietnamese coffee in its distinctive hourglass-style cup.



JESSICA CORTIS

Boudha Stupa Thangka Centre

Master the art of thangka painting with the help of local craftsmen in this cosy workshop overlooking the back of the stupa. Spend a productive day learning about Buddhist philosophy. Open six days a week, the centre also offers one-day training including a crash course in colouring, canvas making, colour making, filling colours, shading and more. Purchase an intricately done thangka or two from the art school which has been around for more than a decade.
(01) 4916490

UDHA KORA

and the smell of burning incense. It is hard to believe the shrine was covered in scaffolding just a month ago.

Showing a small group of British travelers around, tour guide Suraj Sharma says he had no customers for six months after the April 2015 earthquake. But tourist numbers are up again, and even the reconstruction of the stupa became an attraction.

"It is a UNESCO World Heritage site so many tourists were

interested to see how the work was being carried out," said Sharma. "Buddhism is not a religion but a way of life, tourists come because they enjoy the vibe of the place."

Restoration work on the stupa began in May 2015 with generous contributions from Buddhist groups and volunteers, and the shrine is the first heritage site in Kathmandu to be reconstructed since the earthquake.

Chinese tourist Jianfeng Zhang says he cannot tell any difference between the reconstructed stupa and the original when he visited in 2012. "I love it here because it's an amazing place to photograph," he said.

Jessica Cortis, Smriti Basnet, Pan Lan, and Qiu Tian



nepalitimes.com

Watch video



Himalayan Java

The most western-style coffee shop in Boudhanath. Started in 1999, Himalayan Java has become a local coffee chain. Offering a spacious and neat surrounding, enjoy an espresso made from local coffee beans which have a unique and special taste. The manager says the goal is to be the Starbucks of Nepal. Judge for yourself.

(01) 4422519



TEMBA LAMA



JESSICA CORTIS

Kunga Restaurant

Indulge in Tibetan cuisine and culture as you share a meal with friends in outdoor huts. Choose from a wide menu range catering to all types of tastes. For a real Tibetan experience this winter, thukpa the traditional noodle soup would be a good choice.

(01) 4915117



JESSICA CORTIS

Sechen Monastery

The green lawns of the monastery lend a pleasant backdrop for the Buddhist monks who often walk in the garden. Admire the Buddhist architecture and quaint colour scheme that brightens up the surroundings. With an abundance of shade, find yourself a seat and meditate or sit with a friend and enjoy the peace that Boudanath brings to all who visit.

Rabsel Garden Café

Make your way to the peaceful gardens of the Sechen Monastery. A veranda and courtyard covered with greenery makes for a serene atmosphere. The vegetarian menu offers a range of freshly prepared dishes including homemade pasta, quiche, pies and traditional Nepali cuisine. With all proceeds from the café going to the Monastery, you won't regret spending money on a meal here.

guesthouse.nepal@shechen.org (01) 5178209



JESSICA CORTIS

White Gumpa

A few minutes walk from the stupa, the insides of the monastery damaged during the April 2015 earthquake has not been repaired yet. But one can still go for a quiet stroll or pick a spot in the big grounds of the monastery and mediate for a while.



RAISA PANDE

Sound Planetarium

Experience peace and calm with a quick sound therapy session away from the hustle and bustle of the stupa and a stone's throw away from the White Gumpa. Treatment for vitality, menstrual cycle regulation and PMS to Aura Harmonisation, the planetarium has it all. Also opt for training courses and unwind. Take home with you not only the art of therapy but also some planet singing bowls from the shop offering a variety of these healingtools.

www.soundplanetarium.com, info@soundplanetarium.com, 9843193204 / 9823086179

EVENTS



Morning Coffee Queries,

For interesting business ideas and experiences, entrepreneurs, students and start-ups can participate in Monday morning coffee queries. 19 December, 9 to 11 am, Bodhi Books and Bakes, Maharajgunj, Tickets: <http://www.clockb.com/events/48>

Bird trail,

Head out to Phulchoki hill for a day of bird watching with fellow bird lovers led by Ramesh Chaudhary. 17 December, 7 am onwards, Meeting point: Godawari buspark, (01) 4417805/4420213

Christmas party,

Food, drinks, live French music, games and surprises at Alliance Française Kathmandu. 17 December, 2 to 7 pm, Alliance Française Kathmandu, Teku, (01) 4242832



Community arts,

Take part in a two-day arts training for activists and teachers facilitated by MABELLEarts's Leah Houston and Michael Burt from Making Room Community Arts. 25 & 26 December, NexUs Culture Nepal, Maitri Marg, nexusculturenepal@gmail.com, Register at: <https://goo.gl/forms/nwz2LoHRLpU2D5GD2>, Rs 500

Scenic trail,

Run or hike through the scenic 15 kilometres of Changu Narayan to Nagarkot trail. All proceeds go to the Nagarkot Buddha Peace Garden and Clean Green Nagarkot movement. Both way transportation provided. 17 December, 9851192617/98414111789/975 1041507, carondhoju@gmail.com, Fee: Rs 1500, Transport provided from Nepal Tourism Board

Rajman's Kathmandu,

Don't miss out on the exhibition of artist Rajman Singh's mid-19th century drawings of Kathmandu Valley. Until 16 December, Taragaon Museum, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, Boudha, (01) 5178334

Brazilian cinema,

Don't miss the screening of Brazilian feature films and documentaries. Passes can be collected from the Brazilian Embassy, Maharajgunj. 18 December (Yatra 3 pm & Heleno 5 pm), Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka, (01) 472 1462 /3



Yoga bootcamp,

Mark your calendars for rigorous, energetic and intense four-days of yoga bootcamp. 18 to 31 December, Sooriya Wellness and Yoga centre, Lajimpat, sooriyawellness@gmail.com

Phantom of the Opera,

Mark your calendars for the re-adaptation of Andrew Lloyd Weber's The Phantom of the Opera by Malpi International School students. 20 December, 5 pm onwards, 21 December, 3 pm onwards, Nepal Academy Hall, Tickets Available at: School City Office, Kamladi, (01) 4169119, Tukche Thakali Kitchen, Gairidhara, (01) 4430356, School Office, (011) 440080

MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



MUSIC



Rubik Joshi,

Get ready for a night of fun and fine tunes as you listen to singer song-writer Rubik Joshi perform some hit music. 16 December, 7.30 to 10.30 pm, Base Camp, Jhamsikhel, 9841226397, Fee: Rs 200

Open mic night,

Grab the mic and sing your heart out at the House of Music every Tuesday. House of Music, Thamel, 9851075172



Music for a cause,

Be a part of this music event, organised by Drokpo, to raise funds for a pilgrimage for senior citizens. 17 December, 3 pm onwards, Behind Shechen Monastery, Mahankal, 9860113462

Acoustic night,

Tap to the beats and hum to the tunes as Adrian Pradhan, Almoda Rana Uprety, Anuprastha, Neetesh Kunwar belt out some of their hits. 17 December, 7 pm onwards, Karma, Tripureshor



Live performance,

Get into the Christmas spirit and come along to a day of live performances by 1974 A.D, Sabin Rai, Sugam Pokharel, Almoda Uprety and more. With mouth watering food from restaurants all around Nepal, don't miss out on a fun day of music. 25 December, 11 am to 6 pm, Jawalakhel Football Ground, 9861060827

DINING



Ghar-e-kabab,

Serving the best of north Indian cuisine, with live Sarod recitals on some days. Hotel Annapurna, Darbar Marg, (01) 4221711

Hyatt Regency,

Christmas goodies on offer. Choose your favourite from a variety of cakes, pies, puddings, cookies and chocolates. 16 to 31 December, 12 to 9 pm, Lobby lounge, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, Boudha, (01) 5171234



Haus Café,

Pastas, pizzas, desserts, Haus does everything with equal perfection. Pulchok, (01) 2211777

Darbar Restaurant and Bar,

Outlet specialising in delicious Japanese food and drinks, and also Continental and Nepali staples; spacious parking and a lush green garden. Hotel Kaze Darbar, Kamalpokhari, (01)4420737



Phat Kath,

Offering French-ish food, a takeaway crêperie, low tables and hookahs for hippies, tables and chairs for normal people, and a formidable hip hop soundtrack for everyone. Thamel, 9816696571

GETAWAY



Atithi Resort,

A perfect place to stay, nearby pool, massage, sauna, and delicious food of your choice. Shantipatan, Lakeside, Pokhara. (061)466760 /400207, info@atithiresort.com

Balthali Village Resort,

A small, cosy retreat with a bird's eye view of green terrace fields dotted with ochre painted houses. Balthali, Kabhre, 9851075818



Hotel Landmark,

Made entirely from traditional Nepali brick and woodcraft, this hotel is rich not only in heritage, but also in services and boasts an award winning restaurant, the Hungry Eye. Pokhara, (061)462908/3096/4897, www.landmarkpokhara.com

Temple Tree Resort and Spa,

A peaceful place to stay, complete with a swimming pool, massage parlour, and sauna, it'll be hard to leave once you go in. Gaurighat, Lakeside, (61)465819



Raniban Retreat,

Situated at the other end of the Phewa lake and nested inside the Raniban forest and the World Peace Stupa, this retreat has one of the best views of the Annapurna range, Phewa lake, and Pokhara. World Peace Pagoda, Pokhara, (061)692136, 9841382053

THE EMBASSY OF BRAZIL IN KATHMANDU WILL PROMOTE THE SCREENING OF FOUR BRAZILIAN FEATURE FILMS AND DOCUMENTARIES

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The electric age



The Soul Kia finally makes driving battery cars comfortable and affordable in Kathmandu

KUNDA DIXIT

As a journalist writing on environmental issues, being seen driving an electric car a decade ago was supposed to be a statement. Then, with chronic fuel shortages and last year's Blockade it became a necessity. Now, with the next generation of battery-powered crossovers coming into the market, there is no need anymore to punish yourself to be green.

The early model Reva bug was the size of a Mercury spaceship, and it took the dexterity of a cosmonaut to get in and out. But it was pain we were willing to inflict on ourselves to forsake fossil fuels. The joke was on the drivers waiting for days in petrol queues at Sajha or Army pumps as the Nepal Oil Corruption ensured a never-ending petrol shortage.

Taking a Kia Soul eV on a test flight to Bhaishapati last week, it seemed that all the sacrifice of the past ten years was worth it. Here, finally, is a battery car that has all the comforts and perks of the latest SUV for a fraction of the price because taxes on electric vehicles have been slashed. Besides, if you are a climate denier and embarrassed in the Age of Trump to flaunt a green image, then the Soul eV looks exactly the same outside and inside as the fossil Soul. No one need know you have gone green. The car even has a virtual engine sound to fool neighbours.

After driving tiny semi-experimental battery guinea pigs for a decade, it is good to see that environmental awareness and advances in lithium battery technology have propelled electric vehicles to go mainstream internationally. At the top of the food chain you have the high-caste Tesla S and X. In the mid-rung, Tesla is unveiling the Model 3 and the Toyota

Mirai. The third tier is populated by the likes Chevy Bolt, Volkswagen e-Golf, Nissan Leaf and the subject of our review today, the Kia Soul eV.

The Soul is a five-door hatchback with a range of up to 180km, with an interior as spacious as a SUV with plenty of leg and belly room. The 109HP motor under the front hood is powered by 32.7kWh of lithium ion polymer batteries located under the rear seats. Like all electric vehicles, the torque is phenomenal especially when zooming off from stationary position.

Full charging with the supplied 10A

plug takes about 6 hours, but the car is also equipped for a DC CHAdeMO which allows full fast-charge in 30 minutes. Kia is trying to install the first of these in Kurintar so you can charge your Kia while having lunch on the way to Pokhara.

To appeal to customers used to luxury crossovers and the finer things in life, Kia has added gimmicks like heated and cooled seats (even at the back), heated steering wheel (so you don't need gloves in winter), keyless entry, full sun roof, mood lighting like in 787 Dreamliners, and an autohold so that you don't slide backwards downhill on

the Bhaishapati slope. (The Soul doesn't have handbrakes!)

For those of you with fancy cars accustomed to envious looks from pedestrians, the boxy Kia's goofy demeanour will be a bit of a let-down. This car doesn't get wolf-whistles. But, hey, beauty is in the eye of the beholder and as long as the interior is comfortable who cares what other drivers think -- let them wait in the petrol lines.

Internationally, however, the Soul will face stiff competition from the Tesla Model 3 which is priced even cheaper than the Soul eV at \$35,000, is sleekness personified, and has a 300km range. The Soul will also have to upgrade its battery to keep up with the range offered by next-gen Bolts and Leafs which are in the same price category.

After the Nepal government, in its infinite wisdom cut taxes this year, electric vehicles are suddenly more affordable. The Soul eV+ (with sunroof and other accoutrements) is priced at Rs 5.8 million and the standard Soul eV is Rs 5.6 million - compared to the Rs 8.5 million for the petrol Soul. Taxes for electric vehicles are now down to 23% while fossil fuel cars are still at 243%. Savings in petrol and the annual Rs 30,000 road tax also make the Soul very cheap to operate.

Hybrids like Prius and Insight never made it to Nepal, and Tesla won't be here for a while. So, as the only electric car besides the Mahindra e20 (reviewed for comparison, left) currently available in Kathmandu, the Soul makes you swoon. 📺

e20 adds doors



Anyone who has been driving a Mahindra Reva e20 for a while knows the kind of contortions passengers have to make to get into the back seat. While most things about the first battery car in the Nepal market was perfect for Kathmandu, it was getting in and out that was a problem. Mahindra has solved this with the five-door e20 Plus which was launched in India last month and will soon be in showrooms here.

We have reviewed the e20 in this paper before and there isn't much to add, except to highlight the

new features in the Plus version. Speaking of doors, the other inconvenience of the standard e20 was that the hatch had to be opened to plug the car for overnight recharge. The socket is now outside to make it look like a refueling inlet.

Mahindra has made a wise decision to upgrade the e20 rather than convert its unpopular Verito model to battery, and which didn't sell well at all. It has kept the aerodynamic silhouette while adding trademark Mahindra grille in front, redoing the rear end, and making the car look much snazzier.

The other important improvement is that the 72V lithium battery pack in the P8 variant which gives the motor a peak torque of 91Nm and 40 HP. The P8 therefore has a top speed now of an impressive 130km/h and a range of 140km, 20 km more than the standard e20. Other additions are an anti-rollback and a REVive 'limp home mode' of 10km when the battery runs low.

The P4 variant is 40% less than the cost of the P8 but has a range of only 110km. Win some lose some.



nepalitimes.com

Watch video







WHITE SUN

Since his debut feature *Highway* (2012), Deepak Rauniyar has worked quietly and steadily towards honing his craft, and now with the international premiere of *White Sun* four years on, all of his hard work, focus, and passion have paid off in the form of this second, pertinent, quiet but intense film about politics, social conscience, the aftermath of war, and above all, that rare currency that is hope.



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

Highway already showed indications of the kind of filmmaker that Rauniyar aspired to be, and while it was not universally adored, personally, I thought that the film indicated the birth of a distinctive voice in Nepali cinema, one that strove towards emulating neo-realism, setting aside the theatricalities that continue with

emerging film-makers today who try to portray aspects of what ails our society but lack the maturity and discipline to ring true, despite (usually) the best of intentions. The finest accomplishment of *White Sun* - the story of two brothers who went separate ways during the conflict in Nepal with one joining the Maoist insurgents, and the other the police - is to bring the Nepali language, as it is really spoken colloquially, to the big screen without the cringe-worthy, histrionic cadences that have haunted former film productions. The words that come out the mouths of the main characters, the brothers, Chandra (Dayahang Rai), Suraj (Rabindra Singh Baniya), and Durga (Asha Maya Magrati) the estranged wife of Chandra, are quietly spoken and deeply truthful to the experience of the everyman and woman who has suffered through the conflict and encountered the ongoing apathy of Kathmandu-centric politicians oblivious to the grievances of

the people who both fought for and elected them. Current ongoing grotesque injustices are personified by Durga's inability to get her illegitimate daughter Pooja (Sumi Malla) a citizenship card, without which she cannot go to school; a first step of the many in denying those Nepalis without a nagarikta any rights. Example after example of the real struggles of the Nepali people are written into a carefully structured script that delicately touches on painful issues without assigning blame. As the film unfolds, we become deeply involved in the struggle that Chandra faces as he returns to his home village, confronted by the conundrum of how to carry his deceased father's body to the river through rough, rocky steep terrain with only his hostile brother to help (the rest of the villagers are either too young or too old to carry such a burden), plagued by guilt at the sight of the lovely, outspoken woman whom he abandoned during the war but stayed to take care of his ailing father, and followed around by a young orphaned boy, Badri (Amrit Pariyar) who thinks the world of him until he realises his role during the conflict. *White Sun* or *Seto Surya* with its finely wrought, persuasive performance is a rare piece of filmmaking. May there be many more to come from this talented voice that speaks for so many of us. 🇳🇵

nepalitimes.com
Trailer

HAPPENINGS



RSS

CLOCK TICKS: UML Chair KP Oli reaches communist leader Narayan Man Bijukchhe's home in Bhaktapur on Wednesday to discuss a strategy to foil the second amendment bill.



RSS

PASANG BACK IN THE JUNGLE: Vice President Nanda Kishor Pun enjoys an elephant safari in Chitwan National Park on Monday. His war name was Comrade Pasang.



GOPEN RAI

DEMOLITION MEN: A bulldozer demolishes illegally-built structures in Gongabu Bus Park in Kathmandu on Thursday.



RAWJENDRA KC

MY BODY: Nanita Maharjan returns home on Friday from Thailand where she won a medal in an international body building championship.



GOPEN RAI

SMALL STEPS: A girl clad in ethnic attire matches Sakela dance steps with older women during the Udhauri festival of the Rai community in Lalitpur on Tuesday.

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Elephant: Assets
Tail: Disclosure

नागरिक

Robin Sayami in *Nagarik*, 15 December

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“ I would have been a billionaire if I had sold electricity to industries instead of ending load-shedding ”

Energy Minister Janardan Sharma in
www.bizmandu.com 13 December

“No polls in the Tarai”

Sadbhavana Party Chair Rajendra Mahato in an interview in *Naya Patrika*, 15 December



गयाँ पत्रिका

Naya Patrika: The Big Three are preparing to hold local elections without first restructuring existing local government bodies. Will the Madhesi parties agree?

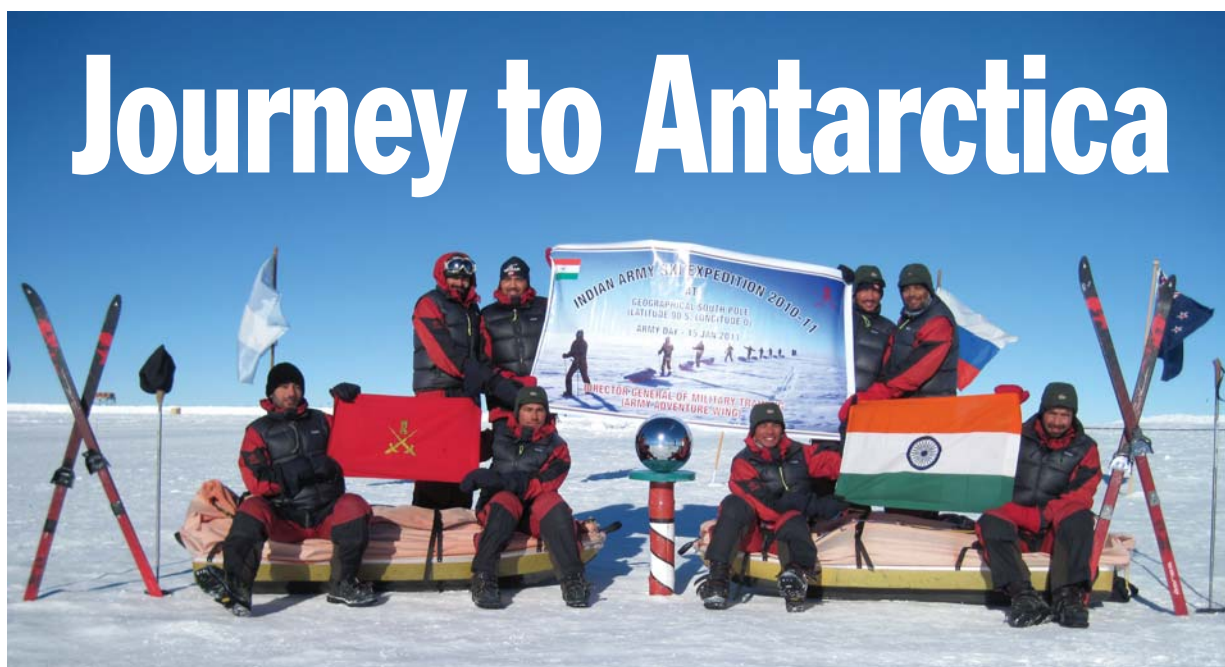
Rajendra Mahato: It is a mistake to think that these three parties can sort out everything among themselves. They pushed through the constitution, but were they able to implement it? They cannot hold elections without addressing our demands by amending the constitution. If not, we will boycott elections.

The Madhesi parties have obstructed the restructuring of local government bodies, and are against elections to existing local bodies. What do you really want?

Whether before or after restructuring local bodies, elections cannot take place in the Tarai as long as our demands remain unaddressed. We are ready to participate in the restructuring of local bodies only after the constitution is amended to address our demands. Even the second constitution amendment bill that is now in Parliament does not address our issues. It needs to be revised before being passed.

What if your rigidity causes federalism to fail?

That is what the three major parties want. By refusing to show flexibility on our demands, they are not only threatening federalism but all our political achievements. Madhesi need federalism more than they do. The constitution they imposed on us is a betrayal of the mandate they got from the people. And the biggest proof of it is that they are still unable to go to the Tarai to defend the constitution they pushed through. Unless the constitution is made acceptable to Madhesi people, we reject every decision by the government, not just elections.



Dipak Gyawali in *Himal
Khabarpatrika*, (11-17 December)

हिमाल
खबरपत्रिका

BUTWAL — How many Nepalis have reached Antarctica? Not many. But three Nepalis who have reached the southern continent are living in Butwal and remember fondly their great adventure.

Bhuwan Singh Biswakarma (64), Ram Bahadur Khatri (56) and Arjun Kumar Thapa (34) are from Butwal and all served in the Indian Army, visiting Antarctica at different times during their military careers. Among them,

Thapa was even part of a team that reached the South Pole in 2011 (*pictured, left*).

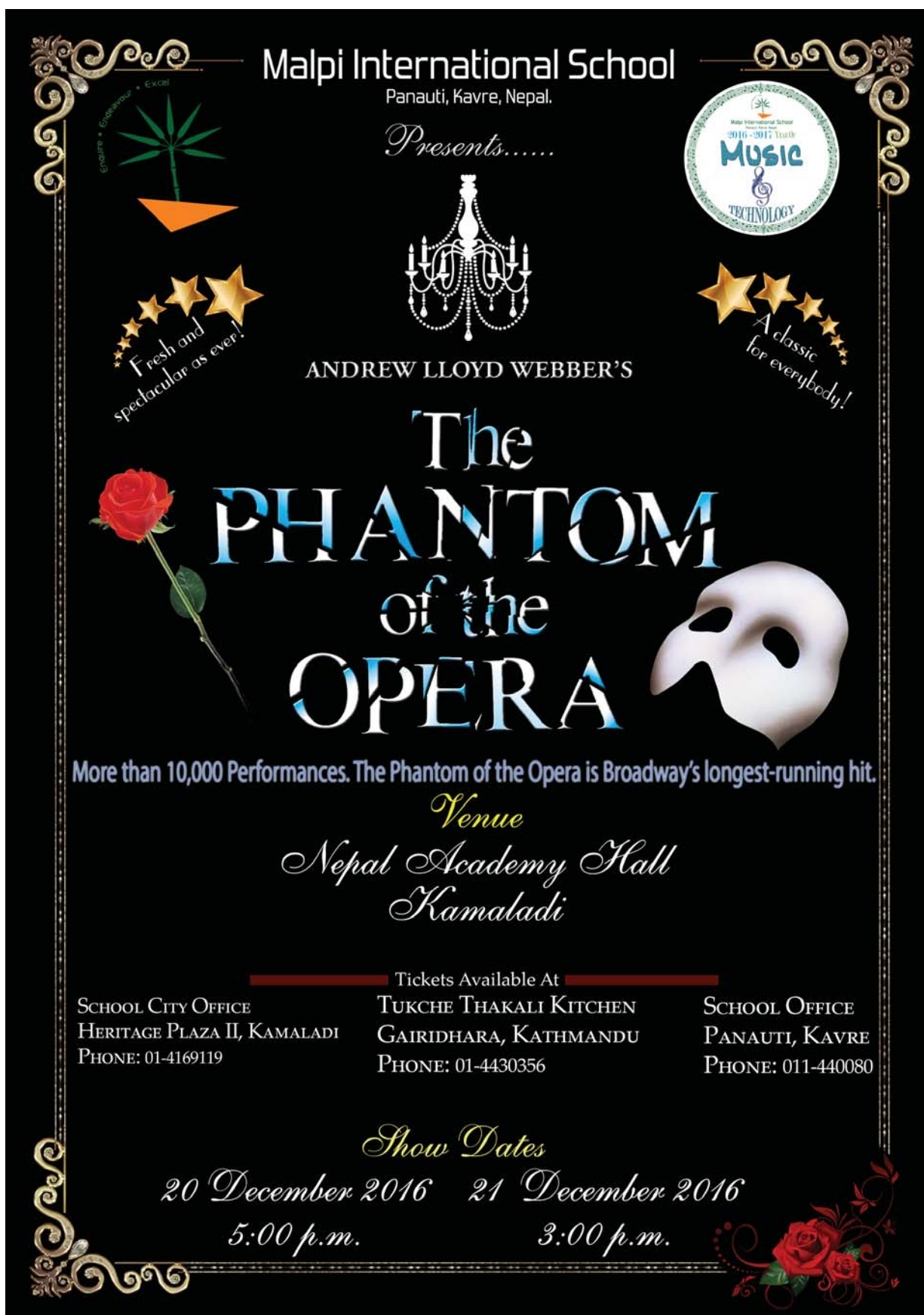
Biswakarma was actually felicitated by the Royal Palace as the first Nepali to reach Antarctica after going there as part of an Indian Army research team in 1986. Biswakarma still has a penguin egg that he brought back from there as a souvenir. He had taken Nepali topis on his expedition and has pictures of Indian scientists wearing the caps.

"There was a vast amount of ice, no human beings other than us," he recalls. "I was allowed to

speak to my wife on the phone
only once a month."

Biswakarma and Khatri have already retired, but Arjun Kumar Thapa is still with the Indian Army. After celebrating his 28th birthday at -48 Celsius on the South Pole, Thapa was on the Indian Army Everest Expedition in 2015. But his team returned from the Base Camp after the earthquake and deadly avalanche.

Thapa made it to the top this year, and says: "I found climbing Everest much easier than reaching the South Pole. The big difference is that Antarctica was pristine, but Mt Everest is full of litter."



Allow tigers to roam more



ROAD TO DESTRUCTION

Construction of transmission lines through protected forests is also destroying tiger habitats.

OM ASTHA RAI

Six years ago at a major tiger conference in Kathmandu, Nepal pledged to double its population of wild tigers by 2022. But that target now looks unattainable — not because of poaching but because of habitat destruction in the Tarai.

In 2010, Nepal had 121 adult tigers and that number has grown to 198 today mainly due to an effective anti-poaching campaign and the expansion of protected areas. But the tiger's range in the Tarai is seeing an explosion of the human population, urban expansion, the spread of highways, and transmission lines and irrigation canals criss-crossing the plains have fragmented the tiger habitat.

"Poaching is no longer the biggest threat to tiger conservation, it is the haphazard construction of roads, railways and other infrastructure," says Santosh Mani Nepal of World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Nepal.

After protests over the proposed alignment of the East-West Electric Railway, which

WWF NEPAL

Caught red handed with Red Pandas

SMRITI BASNET

Most news about the poaching of wildlife concerns charismatic mammals like tigers and rhinos, but lately there has been a mysterious spurt of smuggling of Red Panda hide within Nepal.

Last month alone, three men were arrested with pelts of Red Panda in Jorpati, and acting on a tipoff the Central Investigation Bureau (CIB) caught a 20 year-old Solu Khumbu boy with another Red Panda skin in Kapan. In the last four months there have been three raids all yielding pelts of the endangered Himalayan squirrel which fetch a high price in Nepal. There were 13 seizures of dead Red Panda in 2015/16 in Kathmandu, Rasuwa, Sindhupalchok, Birtamod. Red Pandas now top the list of contraband wildlife that also includes pangolins, leopards, tigers, rhinos and deer.



"While the government has been focusing on large animals like tigers and rhinos, traders have diverted their attention to smaller ones like Red Panda," said Damber Bista of Red Panda Network, which works to control poaching and conserve the animal's habitat in Nepal, India, Burma and China.

Habitat destruction has caused the population of the shy animals in Nepal to dwindle to less than 1,000. The new threat of poaching puts the endangered mammal at high risk. The animal that lives on tree

canopies in forests above 3,000m has been listed under Appendix I of CITES, the Vulnerable Category in the IUCN Red List and is also a protected mammal by the National Park and Wildlife Conservation Act 1973 of Nepal.

Officials are puzzled by the recent surge in Red Panda smuggling, but the CIB's Prabin Pokharel says it is due to "negative awareness" among locals about the value of the pelt, and he dismisses links to larger international networks.

Bista, for his part, thinks Red Panda fur and skin are made into hats that are gifted to newly weds in the Yunnan and Sichuan provinces of China. In Nepal, some ethnic groups have traditionally used them for cultural and religious purposes.

Conservation Officer Bhumi Raj Upadhyay formerly stationed in Rasuwa is convinced that Red Panda hides are being smuggled into China. Now Warden at the Api Nampa Conservation Area in Darchula of far-western Nepal, Upadhyay says the preferred smuggling route for wildlife contraband from India to China is through

Tinker in Nepal to Taklakot in Tibet.

"I don't have the exact specifics but the tigers we seize could be from either Nepal or India," Upadhyay told us.

In the eastern Tarai district of Jhapa, too, District Forest Officer Bodh Raj Subedi says some of the Red Panda hides seized could be from Darjeeling. "We don't yet have DNA analysis to determine where the skins originate," Subedi said, adding that in the six months he has been posted in Jhapa deer skin and pangolin scales from India have been seized.

Jhapa and Darchula have been identified as hot spots for illegal wildlife trade transit points in Nepal along with Pokhara (*see story, right*), Kathmandu, Humla, Dolpa, Mahendrangar, Dhangadi and Nepalganj.

Madhav Khadka of WWF says: "Nepal is both a source and a transit for wildlife smuggling. There is no interrelation between these two but we cannot view them independently as well when it comes to fighting wildlife crimes because of our location between India and China." 🇳🇵

Guarding against poachers

Every month, Parvati Poudel and Bishnu Maya Poudel (*pictured, left*) get dressed in matching black waterproof jackets and gumboots and set out to patrol

the Bhakarjung community forest in Dhikur Pokhari, an hour's drive from Pokhara.

The two women are joined by seven others and, armed with sickles and wooden sticks, inspect the forests for wildlife traps set by poachers, and try to track poachers.

"We are ready to go anytime if there is a need. We have grown up with the forest and protecting it is our duty," said Parvati Poudel, 60. Over the last three years, rampant poaching of kalij pheasants and barking deer for the illegal meat market in the city have all but stopped.

"Before we used to see flash lights in the middle of

the night and even hear gun shots, but not anymore," said 55-year-old Bishnu Poudel.

With active participation of village elders, and supported by the Hariyo Ban initiative, the village has become a successful model for home-grown anti-poaching activities.

"The young people have either migrated for work or are busy with their studies so it is up to us older folk to preserve nature for our children," said the leader of the anti-poaching unit, Durga Prasad Poudel.

Smriti Basnet in Kaski



SMRITI BASNET

e freely

Nepal's target of doubling its tiger population could be undermined by new infrastructure criss-crossing Tarai forests

could have divided the Chitwan National Park into two islands, the Department of Railways is now designing an alternative route. But simply circumventing the core area of the park will not be enough to protect the park in which most of Nepal's tigers live.

"Tigers roam around as far as the foothills of the Mahabharat range, so building a railway through the buffer zone instead of the core of the sanctuary is not enough. We need underpasses to allow unrestrained movement for tigers," says Chitwan National Park warden Ram Chandra Kandel.

The railway will not just threaten Chitwan, but the entire Tarai Arc Landscape – a jungle corridor for tigers and other wildlife. Besides the railway, Nepal is also building feeder roads in the Tarai, expanding the East-West Highway, new transmission lines and irrigation canals.

India is also building 550 km of road embankments along no man's land, which threatens to flood Nepali territory and also restrain the cross-border movement of tigers.



WWF Nepal says such 'linear infrastructure', if built haphazardly, could cause the tiger populations to dwindle again by destroying their habitat, restricting movement and affecting genetic dispersal. "This is insane: decades of investment and effort in conservation are at risk because

of the reckless infrastructure building," says Santosh Mani Nepal of WWF Nepal. To be sure, Nepal desperately needs better connectivity, greater agricultural productivity and economic growth, but conservation experts say it should not be achieved at the cost of endangering already endangered

species. Nearly a fourth of Nepal's total area has been set aside as national parks and wildlife reserves, with 20 protected areas and 13 buffer zones. More than 10,000 sq km of the country's territory can be considered tiger habitats. But experts say the total area is deceptive because if the territory is criss-crossed by railways, highways, transmission lines or irrigation canals the habitat will not be conducive to tiger conservation. Construction of infrastructure can be made wildlife-friendly, although it will cost more. Knowledge of wildlife migration routes can be taken into account to build wildlife passages over highways and rail lines. Most tigers prefer to walk along predictable routes, and WWF Nepal has identified five crossing points in Kailali, Kanchanpur and Bardiya and has proposed wildlife under-passes to facilitate their movement. At least 10 wildlife passages have been proposed along the Narayangad-Butwal section of the East West Highway, which is being widened with support from the Asian Development Bank. WWF India is also lobbying with the Indian government to build multiple under-passes along border roads to allow unrestrained trans-boundary movement for tigers. Even if these measures are not taken, Nepal's tiger population could reach the magic target of 242 tigers by 2022. But habitat fragmentation could soon dwindle the population of the endangered big cats after that. 🇳🇵



YUVARAJ SHRESTHA

TRANSIT CITY

Pokhara is emerging as an important city for the trans-shipment of wildlife contraband to international destinations and ironically, it is the result of the successful spread of community forestry in Central Nepal. In the last four months alone, police have recovered endangered animals in 16 raids ranging from common and clouded leopards, deer, fox, and Eurasian Eagle Owls. Suspects are all locals who have caught the animals for meat or to sell body parts. Earlier this year, villagers in Hansapur had found a dead leopard (pictured, above) hanging by a motorcycle chain. In another

instance, a deer with a bullet wound was found in Chhauthu. The culprits in both cases could not be traced. "It is mostly locals involved in the illegal wildlife trade, there have been no reports of outsiders being involved," said Bishwa Raj Poudel of Kaski's District Forest Office. One of the wildlife traders apprehended while trying to smuggle musk deer is Chandra Bahadur Rawat, who is from Jumla but had made Pokhara his base to source wildlife from Syangja, Baglung and Myagdi. He is now out on bail. "They can pay a security deposit and easily get out of jail and because of that their confidence has been boosted," said Forest Warden Ram Chandra Dhungana. According to Kedar Baral, Kaski's District Forest Officer, smugglers have been illegally trading musk deer, Tibetan antelopes, common and clouded leopard skin. He says: "Most of these items are making way to China, while the owls fetch a good price in the Gulf." Yuvaraj Shrestha in Pokhara

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New trafficking rules

Due to the amazing progress Nepal has made in the automobile industry by importing ever more cars even though there is no space left to drive them on, it is now possible to jet from Bhairawa to Kathmandu in 20 minutes and then spend the rest of the day getting into town from the airport. A traffic jam is a sure sign that a country's macro-economic engine is in full swing and advancing at an astounding eight centimetres per hour on the Tukucha Bridge.

The winter solstice is approaching and the days are getting shorter, which leaves us less time to get from Point A to Point B, and this means we must always have a Plan B. Forget amendments to the constitution, what we really need are amendments to traffic rules to shorten times for commuters. The ever vigilant Valley Traffic Police is therefore instituting these new rules with immediate effect:

1. All sidewalks are hereby declared Motorcycles Only to make more space on the road for cars. In an emergency, motorcycles can also use the pedestrian overhead bridges, and drive on top of cars like in the movies, to get to their destinations.

2. You may well ask, so where are the pedestrians supposed to walk? And that is a very good

question. My advice would be for all would-be pedestrians to just stay indoors because you will just clog up the streets and slow down traffic.

3. Last week, after being stuck at Durbar Morgue for two hours because of a Vice-Presidential Motorcade, I finally figured out why he has two pickups full of heavily-armed commandos in front and behind his bombproof limo. It is to prevent angry commuters from tearing the Veep asunder.

4. Cows, dogs, rhesus monkeys, uncastrated goats, zoo elephants, horse-drawn wedding carriages, water buffalos, chicken, and other wildlife can cross the road at their own convenience as long as they can satisfactorily explain to traffic police on duty when asked why it is that they want to get to the other side in the first place.

5. Using a mobile while driving a motorcycle is not allowed, be smart and use a smartphone.

6. A helmet is compulsory. But your wife squatting side-saddle behind you and your five-year-old sitting on the fuel tank don't need helmets.

7. A street centreline is just a suggestion, you may drive on the wrong side of the road at any time.

8. In the interest of road safety, seat-belts have been made mandatory at all times, even if your car hasn't moved since approximately 9:30 yesterday morning. This is to restrain drivers who want to get out and strangle someone.

9. Since passengers are going to be spending so much time in their cars, vehicles are required by law to be self-contained and retrofitted with the following accessories by January First:

- a. Toilet with shower
- b. Small restaurant and bar
- c. Gym with treadmill
- d. Broadband Internet connection
- e. Hypertension alarm to warn drivers if their blood pressure is hitting the roof in which case the car automatically turns into an ambulance with flashing lights and a siren which can rush to the nearest hospital and get there sometime in the course of the new year
- f. A fully-functioning barbershop with pedicure
- g. For emergencies, all cars must have rocket-propelled ejection seats.



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