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# Power centre

In a month or so, when the new Parliament and seven state assemblies come into being, Nepal will join a list of countries ruled by federal governments.

Parliamentary and provincial elections being held simultaneously in two phases (26 November and 7 December) will be the last step towards replacing Nepal's obsolete unitary state with a federal system.

But electing the Parliament and state assemblies does not necessarily ensure the kind of decentralisation that Nepalis have long needed. As the director of The Asia Foundation Nepal, George Varughese, argues in a commentary (page 4), those who ran and benefitted from the centralised system are desperately clinging to the status quo.

'It shows how difficult it is to change a mindset towards orchestrating governance and development from Kathmandu,' he writes.

That each province will elect its own parliament from these polls is what makes them really historic. But no political party has come up with manifestos exclusively for provinces, and only a very few prominent faces are in the race to be in the state assemblies.

In every constituency, a parliamentary candidate is leading his (rarely her) party's election campaign and provincial candidates are simply following along like

sidekicks. This reveals the top leaders' proclivity for the unitary setup, and how disinterested they are in real decentralisation.

Apart from 275 members of the new Parliament, 550 members of state assemblies will also be elected over the next two weeks. But the government is yet to choose provincial capitals and appoint state chiefs.

The weeks following the polls could be a window for the government to sort out all these logistical and technical issues. Even then, there will be hurdles. The biggest of them is the lack of authority accorded to provincial governments.

Khimlal Devkota, an expert on fiscal federalisation, says: "The centre has decentralised so little revenue

rights that provincial MPs will not have money even to buy fuel."

Devkota describes these elections as the last hurdle to cross before federalising the country, but warns that provinces will not survive without additional fiscal autonomy.

"Once these elections are over, we must revisit and revise constitutional provisions about fiscal devolution," he says.

"Decentralisation of duties won't suffice. We need to federalise fiscal rights as well."  
**Om Astha Rai**



More rhinos means more encounters  
 National park may be the victim of its own conservation success story

PAGE 8-9



BHANU BHATTARAI



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# UNCHARTED TERRITORY

Earlier this year, after Nepal's first local elections in 20 years, the new mayors and village council heads looked lost. There were no clear guidelines about their roles and responsibilities, their jurisdiction and budget. Many did not even have offices to work from.

This exact scenario is going to repeat itself after parliamentary and provincial elections, the first phase of which takes place in 32 mountain and hill districts next week. The second phase will be held in the remaining 45 districts on 7 Dec.

The 275 members of the new federal Parliament, who will be elected both directly and through proportional representation quotas, may not face problems of logistics and confusion about their responsibilities. But the 550 members of seven state assemblies will be in uncharted territory — they will probably waste months, if not years, trying to figure out what their roles.

With only days to go, the government has not even prepared for the appointments of the chiefs of state. As per the Constitution, the seven chiefs are supposed to chair the first meeting of the state assembly within 20 days after elections, and appoint chief ministers within 35 days.

Another potential hot potato is the selection of provincial capitals. An independent report has proposed seven cities, but the government is sitting on the report before elections, fearing a political

backlash. Small problems have a tendency to blow up into major crises in Nepal, and the establishment's inability to foresee them is why Nepal is where it is today.

As one cynical official in the Obama White House once said, a disaster is a great political opportunity. The 2015 earthquake provided politicians a god-given chance to prove to voters their abilities. The aftermath of the quake provided more openings for politicians to show they could rush relief and reconstruction during an emergency, but politics got in the way as the National Reconstruction Authority became a proxy battleground.

Nearly three years after the earthquake, therefore, survivors have been left largely to fend for themselves (See our analysis on 14-15). The election provides one last chance for newly-elected, local, provincial and national representatives to get things right, not just on reconstruction but also earthquake preparedness in the rest of the country, as well as long-term development.

These elections should have been a historic chance for us to make a course correction and move the country forward. But it pains us to say that even before voting starts, we have already squandered the chance to set things right by selecting notorious outlaws and failed personas from the past as candidates for making the laws of the land.



GOPEN RAI

GUEST EDITORIAL  
YUBARAJ BHUSAL

## Real reconstruction authorities

This year's local, provincial and parliamentary elections may have delayed post-earthquake reconstruction, but they will eventually be the key to building back better.

The first priority of the 550 members of seven state assemblies, who will be elected from the two phases of polls this month, will be to set up and run provincial governments. But they will also have to expedite reconstruction work. In the provinces where the 2015 earthquake and this year's floods have caused devastation, provincial governments must expedite reconstruction, and introduce effective plans for disaster preparedness.

But local governments will have to be more instrumental in reconstruction than all the new chief ministers, state ministers or provincial MPs. Fortunately, local elections have already been held, and most elected mayors and village/ward council heads have already got into the full swing of reconstruction.

When the earthquake hit central Nepal in April 2015, there were no elected mayors or village chiefs to lead or coordinate relief and reconstruction. It had been nearly a decade and a half since elected local governments had ceased to exist and fresh elections looked uncertain. So the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) needed to set up as many as 22 local offices in earthquake-affected districts to smoothly distribute housing grants and to coordinate

rebuilding.

Since we now have local governments as well as provincial governments, we must downsize the NRA and hand over responsibility of reconstruction to provincial, municipal, village and ward councils. These elected local councils can and need to function as real reconstruction authorities.

The 131 municipal and village councils of the 14 earthquake-affected districts can reach out to quake survivors more easily through their 1,196 ward councils. We need to start dissolving the NRA's local offices, enabling new local governments to absorb engineers, overseers and other staff involved in reconstruction.

Once these local councils begin to function as local reconstruction authorities, provincial governments can act as nodal agencies. This shift will significantly reduce the role of the NRA, and eventually lead to its dissolution. But before that, the NRA needs to help empower provincial and local governments to carry out reconstruction work.



Yubaraj Bhusal is the new CEO of the National Reconstruction Authority.

Times.com

### ONLINE PACKAGES



COMING OF AGE

Nisha Budha was born in Jumla, but unlike many of her peers got a good education. She returned to defy the norms and taboos of her community to empower herself. Now, she aspires to do the same for others. Watch excerpts of *Daughters of the Curved Moon*, a documentary on the female trekking guide's life. Also read her profile on Page 7.



TEMPLE RESURRECTION

The Bhaidega temple was the second highest monument in the Patan palace square until it came down in the 1934 earthquake. It was finally being reconstructed when another earthquake struck in April 2015. Now, artisans are using old photographs and drawings to restore the temple to its pre-1934 glory. Watch video of their work.

### NO PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

That so few women have been chosen as representatives in areas where women are the majority suggests that proportional representation in these elections is a joke ('Masculine representation', Yuvaraj Shrestha and Gopan Gartaula, #884).

Alex Ferguson

There is no one to blame if you do not stand up for your rights yourself.

Bivek Karki

### NEPALI-CHINESE SHOEMAKER

He was born and raised in Nepal, raising his entire family here ('Kathmandu's sole', Shreejana Shrestha, #884). He is an entrepreneur creating jobs for numbers of people. Yet, has no Nepali Citizenship. I think Nepal should be investing in people like him.

Suresh Uprety

It is outrageous for Mr Wong not to have Nepali citizenship, he was born in Nepal and his family have been in Nepal for more than half a century, and he is raising Nepal's economy paying taxes through his business.

Neema Acharya

Great job with the video of the Chinese-Nepali shoemaker. Loved it.

Kishor Karki

Mr Wong makes shoes from very good quality leather and the hand work is very fitting and comfortable.

Mohan Bdr Adhikary

### GUEST EDITORIAL

Very good initiative on the part of *Nepali Times* to invite readers to write in their own editorials (Reader's Editorial, by Julia Thomas, #883). But please do not feel obliged to print criticism just for the sake of criticism. We have been loyal readers of your paper, and you should stick to your convictions. We feel you have been steadfast in your support for democracy, free press, inclusiveness and rule of law. Your paper is a trend-setter, and at the cutting edge of innovation online. Well done.

Jon Petersen

### WHAT'S TRENDING



### Kathmandu's sole

by Shreejana Shrestha  
Wong Shiao Leung's ancestors migrated to India from China more than 150 years ago, and his father moved from Kolkata to Kathmandu during the 1962 Sino-Indian war, a time when many Chinese in India were taken to internment camps. Today, the Wongs live in Kathmandu and have continued to preserve their roots by making leather shoes and speaking Hakka.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

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### Masculine election

by Yuvaraj Shrestha and Gopal Gartaula  
When Nepal holds its first parliamentary and provincial elections on 26 November and 7 December, men and women will be participating in the electoral process in almost equal numbers. But their roles will be largely different: while mostly men will be contesting elections, women will be casting votes. Our report from Pokhara and Jhapa was widely shared on social media. Go online to read the story: nepalitimes.com.

Most popular on Twitter

### QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @nepalitimes  
A carbon neutral Nepal is possible. We just need the right policies to switch to water and sunlight, says Anil Chitrakar in his fortnightly column 1/2 Full http://bit.ly/2z9NqJ5

Dipendra Yadav @manraja7  
Carbon Negative Bhutan has been possible. Nepal can follow the basics from them to make it possible.

Nepali Times @nepalitimes  
#Kathmandu Valley generates 800 tons of solid waste every day out of which more than 60% is still organic, which could technically be composted. But since #garbage is not segregated, it adds to the weight and bulk of the trash. http://bit.ly/2hD3bWN

Avishek Shah @Avishek001  
dull government...there are several environmentalist to manage solid waste!

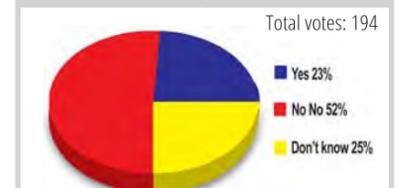
Airline Guy @GuyAirline  
Is it too expensive or hazardous to segregate the trash?

Nepali Times @nepalitimes  
The fact that the #stateless #Rohingyas have no country to return to poses a serious political #crisis for the entire region. -Tapan Bose, Secretary General of South Asia Forum for Human Rights http://bit.ly/2zFsfOD

Prakash Moktan @PRAMOK  
Why India cannot extend more help for settlements of Rohingyas...? Who are these people and their background How long have they been in Burma? What language and dialect do they speak and write...

Times Weekly Internet Poll #884

Q. Following recent high-profile arrests, do you the CIAA is now committed to punishing corrupt officials?



Weekly Internet Poll #885  
To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Do the federal and provincial elections, which start next week, finally signal a new political era for Nepal?



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A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER 20 YEARS



To repeat an anecdote from an earlier column, in a southern African country some years ago, a friend was told excitedly by a Danish diplomat: "I am applying for Nepal as my next posting."

"Why?"

"Because in Nepal you can get politically engaged like nowhere else."



**ON THE WAY UP**  
Kanak Mani Dixit

The Danish Embassy has evacuated from Nepal, but that exchange encapsulates the donor interventionism that has had society in its grip for much of the past decade. After the peace process began in 2006, Kathmandu's political leadership allowed the Western embassies and agencies to engage in adventurism in peace-building and constitution-writing, which derailed the first and delayed the latter.

The more excitable among the donors engaged in 'social engineering', severely straining inter-

# Leave the

## Incoming ambassadors and donor agency heads have an opportunity to learn from the past

community relations. Thankfully, the level-headedness of citizens (rather than good sense of the political and civic leadership) prevented a communal inferno.

The final round of elections as dictated by the new Constitution is about to happen, and Nepal is heading towards normalisation after a 20-year hiatus – a decade of conflict, another of transition – and one expects the incoming leadership in the donor agencies and embassies will be there to assist rather than obstruct.

With both India and China expected to be more aggressive in Kathmandu as they vie for influence, it is all the more vital for the others to support Nepal's developmental efforts rather than be snagged in geopolitical nets or the political whirlpool.

The course-correction will not be easy, however. Embassies and donors agencies (including hybrid 'diplo-donor' entities)

do not have strong institutional memory. And, barring exceptions, 'national staffers' prefer to stroke pre-existing prejudices.

There is lack of useful literature on the past decade of socio-political churning, because the material available in English is mostly donor-funded – the relevant term being 'reification', where consultants help create realities according to the donor's perceived bias/preferences.

The excessive distrust of the Kathmandu establishment that was refined by Ian Martin of the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) continues to be the leitmotif for agencies defining their programs and priorities. Martin's deputy Tamrat Samuel is today senior political adviser to the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, and hence one can expect some continuity to the international community's superannuated perceptions.



# The centre tries to hold

## Diehard functionaries of a centralised, unitary state fight tooth and nail to preserve the status quo

Within the next two weeks Nepalis will complete constitutionally-mandated elections and hope to move on from an elongated, post-conflict transition to a period of stabilisation. All parties to the elections must remain committed to the completion of the three electoral stages essential to the realisation of a more stable, democratic Nepal.



### COMMENT

George Varughese

At a glance, implementation of the 2015 Constitution appears to be on track and all three governments envisaged ought to be in place on schedule by January 2018. However, we are witnessing a struggle between those who believe authority derives from another government and those who would rather use the covenant of a codified and written Constitution.

Between May and September 2017, Nepalis elected over 35,000 representatives to run 753 local governments. A majority of those elected do not have previous experience in government, and a significant number were previously contractors, real estate agents and middlemen. How they will govern in the public interest should be of greater concern than the relative incapability of the others who have been elected.

Despite the increase in the numerical representation of women in government, from previous handfuls to over 14,000 elected representatives now, the challenges of leadership are manifold: not only must these newly-elected women be accepted, they are also expected to perform at par or better.



Troublingly, with the exception of 93% of newly-elected deputy mayors, women and Dalits have been relegated to tertiary roles in local government.

It is apparent that the location of these new leaders in executive decision-making within local government has been deliberately maneuvered so that their inputs count for less. Political parties have done the minimum necessary, and grudgingly, to meet constitutional requirements. Sadly, a casualty of these electoral maneuvers is the

further marginalisation of Dalit men in local government.

Despite such contrived handicaps, that judicial committees are now headed by mostly female deputy mayors should give us all hope that access to justice locally will improve. As women, and with previous experience in mediation, social mobilisation, healthcare, and community action, they come prepared more than their male peers to the representational task. The opportunity exists, therefore, to design carefully targeted initiatives

to take advantage of electoral successes, even if they appear to be mixed with systemic constraints at the outset.

That said, it is disheartening to witness diehard functionaries of a previously centralised, unitary state fighting tooth and nail to preserve as much of the status quo as possible. The directives, regulations and acts mooted by government in recent months show how difficult it is to change a mindset oriented towards orchestrating governance and development from Kathmandu.

Changing the hearts and minds of those who feel threatened, so that they accept and support constitutional provisions for shared and self-rule, is likely to be the costliest and most wasteful of efforts that can be anticipated.

Chances are high that provincial and federal elections will return even fewer positive results for marginalised populations and favour those with privilege, deep pockets and narrow self-interest. Importantly, however, constitutional provisions for local

# politics to us

On the whole, directly and indirectly, the legacy of UNMIN has been to lengthen the peace process, complicate constitution-writing, deepen communitarian divides and coddle the above-ground Maoists even as they cheated on democracy and transitional justice. Hopefully, some day, a scholar with access to the UN Secretariat archives will set the record straight on UNMIN.

UNMIN's wake continues to jostle the ship of state, as seen for example in the interventionist diplo-donors who acted so brazenly to try and prevent local government elections of the past year. While some of the involved individuals have thankfully departed, and as least one ambassador seems to have come around, there are still some souls who continue to act with impunity. Not least, the leadership of governance-focused 'basket funds' of bilateral and multilateral provenance privileging advocacy of a single just cause while ignoring a myriad other just causes.

The suggestion to the new arrivals among diplomats,

donor agency heads and INGO leadership would be: Nepali players (political and civic) have messed up, and so have many of your immediate predecessors. Let us take credit where it is due (inclusion as part of the national discourse if not, as yet, reality; the new Constitution; elected local government; etc.) and focus on what remains to be done.

The urgent tasks now include tamping down inter-community polarisation; promoting transitional justice (including accountability for conflict era excess) and human rights; challenging rocketing corruption; and developing independent civil society in the provinces.

The restructuring of the state is leading us into unknown terrain populated by districts, provinces and local municipalities. Nepal can come out as an exemplary experiment of local self-government in South Asia if the national polity as well as the international community concentrate on implementing and improving the Constitution.

But please, leave the 'social engineering' to Nepalis. 🇳🇵

government provide reassurance that the power and resources needed to address local interests and needs are now, more than ever, within reach if opportunity is seized. It is now conceivable that newly-elected leaders in provinces and municipalities can address previously intractable development problems in a more effective manner. Each provincial and municipal government must find its own constitutionally empowered way to raise revenues and address needs. The arena of accountability has shifted much closer to home, and those in new leadership can no longer pass the buck to Kathmandu.

By early 2018, one federal government, seven provincial governments and 753 municipal governments will be in place with co-equal standing under the Constitution. The anxieties of those who stand to lose power and the eagerness of those with newfound power must be tempered by the existential challenges that lie immediately ahead of this new republic. First, newly-elected leadership will have to focus on accommodating these three nested power centres and their distinct preferences, needs and interests. Working out the jurisdiction, authority and resources for each one will require time, as well as a nuanced approach.

It is important to maintain perspective and situate elections in the larger agenda of governance reform in Nepal. We must take into account both the distribution of power and the tension between institutions of representation and institutions of restraint in conditioning state and non-state actions towards more accountability, transparency and justice. Without this accounting, the impunity of the past several years will remain distributed and entrenched across Nepali society. Much remains to be done, let us embrace the task. 🇳🇵

*George Varughese is Nepal country director of The Asia Foundation. Go online for a longer version of this comment.*

## prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

### Hyatt award

Thanks to nominations from its guests, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu has received the Service Excellence Award 2017, Asia and Australasia,



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Tourism and Civil Aviation, organised the seminar 'Nepal Tourism: Opportunities and Challenges' on 17 November at Soaltee Crown Plaza.

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prabhu BANK



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The first big political event I have any memory of is the first People's Movement of 1990. I was just six years old. I remember reading slogans against the king scrawled on the wall of the Panchayat Bhavan building adjacent to our house in Waling of Syangja district.



The situation was tense. Trucks full of policemen descended at the town, as groups of local youth pelted stones at them. Some of us children made fliers with black cloth and shouted slogans, mimicking the political activists.

Elections followed, and there was a sense of euphoria. People were made to feel that they had won. The sense of achievement was passed down to the common people, and we children also felt it. Prajatantra, as the limited democracy under the king was known, became a household term, even for us.

As I grew up, Nepal travelled a turbulent, but interesting, political journey. We lived through a limited democracy, and a limited armed struggle that ended in an unfinished communist revolution at a time when communism was failing the world over. Finally we attained Loktantra: democracy without the monarchy.

Nepal spent 30 years under the direct rule of the king in the name of the Panchayat system. Another decade and a half has already been invested in formalising an inclusive democracy without the monarchy. Through struggles, debates and conflicts, a clear political path



# Key to the future

Leaders and activists interested in shaping Nepal's future should focus on shaping up the elections

BIKRAM RAI

seems to be finally emerging for Nepal.

Elections say a lot about a society. In Nepal's case, elections clearly display the imperfections of the political system. It makes sense to study the making of the elections in order to identify what our leaders and activists should be focusing on.

If we consider the agenda, the

two elections for the Constituent Assembly were remarkable. Issues of identity, social inclusion and representation dominated campaigning in the first CA election, but the major driving force was the need for peace. Nepal had experienced the pain of conflict for a decade, and they wanted an end to it at any cost. The Maoists were most suitably placed

to cash in on that desire.

The second CA elections were a little different: issues of identity were already sidelined, and most the candidates focussed on local development. The first CA had failed, and the country had been operating under an interim Constitution for more than six years. Although the priority should have been constitutional issues,

people were jaded, so the parties promised development instead.

The local elections earlier this year finally helped to realign the political focus from grand narratives to real issues. They also signalled an end to the uncertainty that characterised the transition period. 'Prosperity has peaked' was the common theme of the main political parties.

Building upon the local elections, the present polls are also focusing on prosperity. This clear common agenda of all the political parties reflects the rising aspirations of the people. It also corroborates their rising economic status. The middle class in Nepal is growing fast despite the uncertain political era we have gone through.

Although there is a broad consensus on the need for prosperity, concrete details of policy shifts are rarely revealed by the major parties. How elections are being fought and won speaks a lot about how we will be governed for the next few decades.

We are hearing many haphazard promises without plans to support them. There is little or no culture of discourse or

debate between the candidates, and there are no platforms for questioning them on policy issues. Even when debates are organised, candidates arrogantly do not turn up. This shows that leaders are not prepared to lead and as a result, people are hesitant to select them, knowing they are apt to take power for granted.

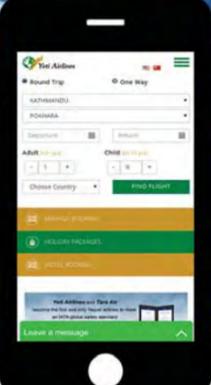
The forthcoming elections are the first under the new Constitution, and it's probably too early to start whining about imperfections. But elections are at the centre of the whole democratic system: they institutionalise the transfer of power, set the entire process in motion and also create role models for society.

A political journey, of an individual, a party, a society or a nation, is literally walked from election to election. They shape the future in a democracy. Therefore it makes a lot of sense to make an extra effort now in order to safeguard our political future. 🇳🇵



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The consistently crisp and clear air is due to the westerly wind, which is keeping pollution from the plains at bay. With temperatures dipping into the single digits, the overnight inversion layer is asserting itself, with misty mornings in Kathmandu, other valleys and the Tarai. Expect some passing clouds over the weekend, but mostly fine and dry for election week.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
20° 7°	19° 8°	21° 8°

# Woman who moved mountains

Nisha Budha found her freedom, and hopes to free her sisters in Jumla as well



ROCKY PRAJAPATI

## SMRITI BASNET

**C**lad in a hefty down jacket and a pair of rugged jeans, Nisha Budha looks like an average Kathmandu urbanite. But she is anything but average.

Born in a village near Jumla Bazar, Budha grew up in a family and community steeped in patriarchy, alcoholism, dated norms and taboos. The accumulation of these experiences led the 31-year-old to consciously make some bold decisions with the support of her family.

Her father, a businessman, played an important role by educating all his six children. He took Nisha on trips to India where she gained exposure to a different world, learnt new languages and ways of living.

"I grew up always asking 'Why can't I?' I respect tradition, but I

knew there were things in Jumla that were very wrong," said Nidha Budha, who is profiled in the documentary *Daughters of the Curved Moon* that was screened at the Film South Asia documentary festival in Kathmandu recently.

Filmed over several years, the documentary is Budha's coming-of-age story, as she returns to Jumla after six years of living and working as a trekking guide in Pokhara. The film follows the young woman as she questions age-old traditions, and tactfully provide her neighbours logical alternatives. Her progressiveness and no-nonsense approach to life are in stark contrast with the rigid mores of her home as she discusses sensitive issues like sexual health, menstruation and gender inequality.

*Daughters of the Curved Moon* was produced by Miranda Morton Yap and Sophie Dia Pegru who have successfully conveyed

on screen Budha's vivacious nature and contrast her childlike innocence with what it means to be a woman in Jumla even today.

"My brother and I used to draw lots to see who would get to go with our father to India," Budha told us during a break at the documentary festival. Her father enrolled her in a school in Chandigarh, where she learnt the value of education the hard way.

"I was a bad student in Nepal," confides Budha recalling how she used to skip school and not pay attention to her studies. But in school in India, she was forced to mend her ways.

"If there is no education, there is nothing. It is dark without education," she states.

It breaks her heart to see many young women dropping out of school only to be married off by their parents. "Everyone keeps asking me when I am going to get married," says Budha who has got

used to dodging this question.

After graduated from school, she returned to Nepal in 2010 and was determined to stand on her own feet. She joined an eco-tourism training organised by Empowering Women of Nepal which started by the trekking agency 3 Sisters in Pokhara. That is when she met Morton, who was impressed with her strength of character and commitment to social reform.

"I never knew Nepal was so beautiful, I felt proud as a trekking guide," says Budha who has taken tourists to Everest and Annapurna Base Camps, Langtang, Upper Mustang, and Rara.

Budha's next goal is to see more and more women from her village become independent. For this, she has inherited the priority her father placed on sending children to school, and his belief that educating girls was the key.

Growing up from being a tough girl to a wise woman, Nisha Budha

counts herself fortunate among women in Nepal, who are often trapped by traditions and taboos. She says: "My father used to tell me I would remember him after he was gone, and that is exactly what has happened."

Now, she hopes to pass on the values and life lessons she has learnt to other women in Jumla and beyond.



Watch *Daughters of the Curved Moon*, a documentary inspired by and based on Nisha Budha's life

nepalimes.com

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**ELECTRON**

# Wedding Gift Guide

**ALEX DUDLEY**  
in CHITWAN

Even before reaching Chitwan National Park, visitors to Nepal notice abundant imagery of the sanctuary's most celebrated animal: the Greater One-horned Rhinoceros. It appears on posters at Kathmandu airport, a pair guards the steps of a temple that collapsed in the 2015 earthquake, and in Sauraha it is on hotel murals and wood carvings for sale to tourists.

Live rhinos are the park's most important attraction but rhinos often venture outside its boundaries, and a video of one roaming the streets of Sauraha at night has gone viral on YouTube. The rhino has a place in Nepali culture: it is featured on a bank note and *gaida* is now shorthand for Rs100.

In his book, *The Soul of the Rhino*, Hemanta Mishra says the main impetus for setting up Chitwan National Park was to conserve rhinos. Nepal's secular political parties wanted to elevate the rhino as the national animal during Constitution drafting, but it lost out to the cow.

The combination of army patrols inside Chitwan and economic growth and enfranchisement of communities in the buffer zones has been credited with the near-zero poaching, and an increase of

employed in the Tharu buffer zones.

The buffer zone model has benefited villagers outside the park and allowed for a revival of the aboriginal Tharu culture through homestay tourism. Yet the under representation of Tharus in the National Trust for Nature Conservation and as buffer zone chairpersons means there remain shortcomings in participatory conservation.

In addition, the recent reduction of the thatch-grass gathering period from three months to just three days a year has placed severe constraints on the traditional Tharu lifestyle. To maintain the Tharu's commitment to rhino conservation, it may be necessary to ensure their greater representation in the NTNC and buffer zone committees, along with a relaxation of the laws limiting buffer zone cultivation.

For all of the diverse ethnicities inhabiting the Tarai, a more streamlined program of compensation for wildlife-caused losses is overdue. The government recently doubled the amount paid for medical treatment for injuries to Rs20,000 and Rs100,000 to relatives of villagers killed by marauding animals. However, there are long delays in disbursement and no compensation to buffer zone farmers for crop damage.

A recent study of villages near Bardia National Park and Kosi Tappu Nature Reserve found almost universal support for a trust fund financed by monthly contributions from members, which would compensate for destruction caused by elephants.

In combination with the use of wildlife-detering technologies, the strategy would allow buffer zone residents greater say in conservation policy and also streamline compensation.

It is also up to the NTNC to inform Sauraha residents about the importance of Nepal's most



**SAVE THE RHINO:** A pair of rhinos guards the Siddhi Lakshmi Temple in Bhaktapur that was destroyed in the 2015 earthquake.

Rhino grazing near the buffer zone in Chitwan recently (*right*).

Honeybee fences used by Chepang villagers in the Beldada Community Forest in Chitwan to deter raids by wildlife (*below, right*) and Chepang villagers who have prospered after switching from rhino poaching to conservation.

Wall painting of a rhino in a Sauraha hotel (*below, overleaf*).

the rhino population from less than 400 at the end of the conflict in 2006 to 645 today.

But nine people in the park's vicinity have died in rhino attacks in the past few years and the animal is not popular with farmers, whose crops are regularly raided. While the lack of retaliatory killings highlights the high priority Nepalis accord to safeguarding rhinos, such tolerance cannot be taken for granted.

Early warning through smart cameras could alert villagers of impending wild animal attacks, as has been done by conservationists in Kenya and India. Cameras there recognise and photograph incoming elephants, and then alert villagers through text messages.

Another mechanism to prevent human-animal conflict, already employed by Chepang villagers outside Chitwan, is bee fences. First innovated in Kenya in 2012 to reduce crop-raiding by African elephants, these devices use honeybees to various ends: deter animals, produce honey for farmers and to pollinate crops.

Conservationists have recently seen the need to enlist Chepang villagers in the fight against poaching through youth-based patrols modeled on those long

successful and long-rooted conservation policies. Translocation of rhinos from Chitwan to Bardia and Sukla Phanta National Parks has created insurance populations and allowed for the spreading of eco-tourism revenue in the Tarai.

The NTNC needs to more closely engage the public on translocation, highlighting the risk of confining the country's rhino population to one locale and the promise of reducing local crop destruction and human fatalities.

Nepal offers a beacon of hope in the bleak landscape of international rhinoceros conservation. Yet with effective policing inside the parks and the elimination of domestic wildlife smuggling networks, the country could be a victim of its own conservation success story. More rhinos means greater chances of human encounters, and tension with Chitwan's farmers could mount.

Nepal doesn't need a radical departure from its current strategy, it just needs to strengthen community-based conservation mechanisms already in place while improving the efficiency of compensation for wildlife damage.

*Alex Dudley has studied human-wildlife conflict in Tanzania's Arusha National Park.*

# More rhinos means more encounters

## National park may be the victim of its own conservation success story



es



ALL PHOTOS: ALEX DUDLEY



# EVENTS



## Yala Newami,

This exhibition by photographer Bjørn features a series of images of the people of Kathmandu Valley reflects the ancient and vibrant culture of the Newars.  
19 November -19 December, 5:30-10pm,  
Yala Mandala, Kwalkhu Road, Patan, Entry: Free, (01) 5536690

## Tradition subverted,

An exhibition that explores self-identity and gender identification while engaging viewers in a dialogue about urbanisation and ecology, by artists Erina Tamrakar and Asha Dangol.  
13 October-3 December, 11am-10:30pm, Yala Mandala, Kwalkhu Road, Patan, (01) 5536690

## Power, politics and war,

Save the date for a solo exhibition of paintings and drawings by Mann Gurung.  
8-27 November, 11am-5pm, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited, (01) 4218048, (01) 4433930

## Khabar Garaun 1145,

Come for the lauch of the National Women Commission's Helpline *Khabar Garaun 1145*, a 24-hour, toll free number. To be followed by plenary sessions on various themes.  
10 December, 11am-3:30, Nepal Administrative College (STAFF college), Jawalakhel, (01) 4256701

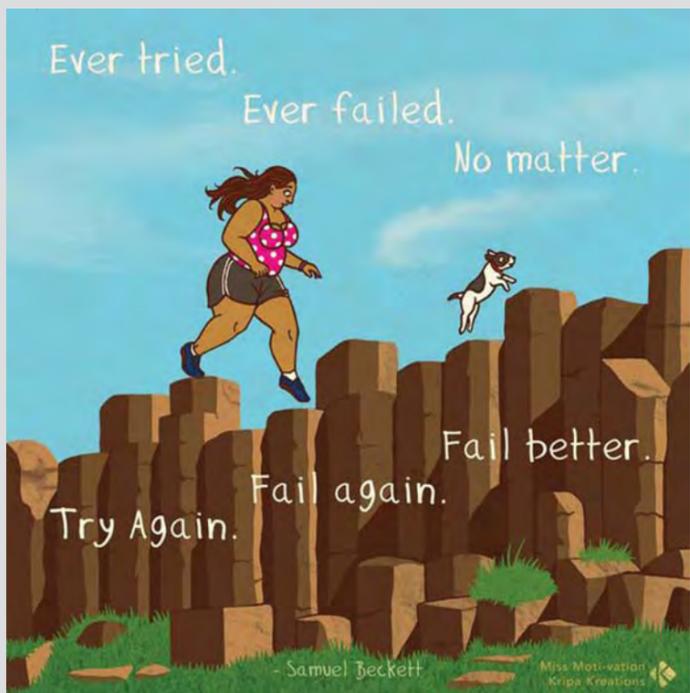


## Beyond Journals,

A one-week exhibition featuring the creative world of Marina Vaptzarova, where the art of journals becomes an art of living.  
26 November- 2 December, Marina Vaptzarova Showroom, Baber Mahal Revisited  
info@marinavaptzarova.com

## MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



# MUSIC



## Swing night,

Make your weekend memorable at the Swing Night- BigBand Concert.  
25 November, 7:30pm, Moksh, Jhamsikhel, Rs 500, (01) 5013554, 9813556945, info@katjazz.com.np



## Nabin at Trishara,

Listen to your all-time-favourite singer, Nabin Kumar Bhattarai, perform live.  
2 December, 5pm onwards, Trishara, Lazimpat, (01) 4410200

## Tattwa live,

Make your weekend memorable at Shambala Garden with a taste of barbeque and live performances by Tattwa Band, just Rs2,000 per person (net).  
Every Friday, Shambala Garden, Hotel Shangri-La, (01) 4412999



## Sufi concert,

Book your seats to spend an evening listening to Ghajal and Sufi songs.  
25 November, 6:30pm onwards, Entry: Free, (01) 4221537, contact@thepaulines.com

## OUR PICK



## COCO

Opens in Kathmandu on 24 November

Directed by Lee Unkrich and co-directed by Adrian Molina, Pixar/Disney's COCO is about Miguel (Anthony Gonzalez), a 12-year-old inspiring musician who enters the magical Land of the Dead to solve the mystery of his family's ancestral ban on music. Gael García Bernal, Benjamin Bratt, Alanna Ubach, Renee Victor and Jaime Camil also star in this critically acclaimed animated movie, which is already the all-time highest grossing movie in Mexico.

# DINING



## The Vesper House,

Stop by for the best in Italian and all local favourites, in breezy outdoor seating. Also a great venue for wine connoisseurs.  
Jhamsikhel, (01) 5548179, www.vespercafe.com

## Capital Grill,

This American style diner offers a large assortment of appetisers and entrees to suit everyone's tastes.  
Bhatbhateni, (01) 4428426, grillcapital@gmail.com

## Bubbly brunch,

Book your seats and enjoy Saturday brunch with friends and family for only Rs1,500 per person (net). The amazing shawarma and pasta won't let you down.  
Every Saturday, 11am to 3pm, Shambala Garden and Club Sundhara, Shangri-La Hotel



## Lhakpa's Chulo,

Nepali dal bhat, Newari khaja, Swiss Rösti, Italian Risotto and Thai green curry – take your pick.  
Jhamsikhel, (01) 5542986

## The Bent Fork,

This European style restaurant offers the best salads and varieties of continental dishes. Cosy evenings with family and friends.  
Bishal Nagar, 9802049888

## Royal Saino Restaurant & Bar,

Enjoy garlic cheese momos at this friendly restaurant.  
Darbar Marg, (01) 1430890



## European Bakery,

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Chundevi, (01) 4422047

# GETAWAY



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## Meghauri Serai,

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Chitwan National Park 9801301969, 9851001548



## Hyatt Regency,

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Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, Boudha, (01) 5171234

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## AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 17-23 November



The only good thing we can say about air quality this week is that it is slightly better than last week. The concentration of particles less than 2.5 microns in diameter (PM 2.5), which are the most dangerous because they don't just lodge themselves deep in the lungs but can also enter the bloodstream, stayed in the 'Unhealthy' red band all week. This weekly summary graph of air pollution is a collaboration between the US Embassy in Kathmandu and *Nepali Times*, based on measurements from monitoring stations in Phora Darbar and Ratna Park.  
<https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>

SAHINA SHRESTHA

In a city whose temples and squares are part of the living culture, it pains 70-year-old Mohan Maiya Jha that no one is coming to offer prayers at the Bhaidega temple in the southwest corner of Patan Darbar Square. Jha's family has been performing the ritual worship at the Shiva temple for generations.

While devotees throng nearby temples, hardly anyone worships the structure at the edge of the square. The temple has also been largely forgotten by Guthi Sansthan, the agency responsible for supporting festivals and cultural activities.

Bhaidega is a story of why it is important to preserve physical monuments in order to save Kathmandu Valley's intangible heritage.

The temple is now being restored based on its original three-tiered pagoda design, and Jha is hopeful the temple's importance will also be restored: "People will come to pray and maybe there will even be a huge mela during Srawan Mondays dedicated to Shiva."



HERITAGE LIVE!

Unlike other temples in Patan's palace square, which were built by royalty, Bhaidega was erected in 1678 by a commoner,

Bhagirath Bhaiya, who rose to become part of the city's nobility. It commemorated the Shiva temple at Kashi Vishwanath in Banaras that was destroyed on the orders of Moghul emperor Aurangzeb nine years earlier. Bhaidega was the second-tallest temple in the square before it collapsed in the 1934 earthquake. While many of the others were restored to their original form, Bhaidega was ironically rebuilt in the Moghul stucco dome architectural style.

"We felt the need to go back and restore the temple because so much of the ambience of the Kathmandu towns was lost as we couldn't manage to rebuild everything in 1934," recalls Kanak Mani Dixit, vice-chair of the Cultural Heritage Preservation Group that was formed by a group of citizens to rebuild the temple. "It needed to go back to its original form, not only out of respect towards the person who built it but also for the people who have



**CARVING A NICHE:** A woodworker carves a strut for the Bhaidega reconstruction in Patan based on old photographs (left). The temple before it was destroyed in the 1934 earthquake, and after (below). An architectural drawing of the Bhaidega restoration.

BIKRAM RAI

# Tangible restoration

Destroyed in the 1934 earthquake, Patan's Bhaidega temple is finally being rebuilt after the 2015 disaster



appreciated that temple through the centuries."

Reconstruction had started on 26 February 2015, exactly two months before the earthquake.

With assistance from well-wishers, conservation architects, historians and activists, the group located photographs of the temple in the collection of Felix Brandt in Germany. Taken around 1920, they helped provide a sense of the size and original design of Bhaidegah.

Carved wooden struts and pillars from the temple were discovered in the Patan Museum storeroom, and a detailed watercolour of the woodwork of the first-floor struts, made by Henry Oldfield in 1853, helped confirm they belonged to the temple and provided a guide for the new

woodwork.

Rebuilding slowed after the 2015 earthquake as attention was divided, but the interruption was also an opportunity to build back better, says conservation architect Rohit Ranjitkar. "Before the earthquake, plans were to rebuild on the existing foundation and plinth but after the earthquake we investigated the foundation and strengthened it as well. If small interventions and improvisations make it safe, why not do it," Ranjitkar told us.

Reconstruction is staying as true as possible to traditional methods, using wood, mud and bricks, while ensuring that the temple is structurally sound. Foundation work is now complete and the carved doors of the ground floor



have been installed.

"Times have changed and we don't have guthis like before to carry out maintenance from time to time. Moreover, resources, skills and knowledge are getting scarce so we need to plan for long-term," says Ranjitkar.

Half the estimated Rs60 million for the restoration has been contributed by Lalitpur Municipality, the Norwegian Embassy and Prithvi Pande of Nepal Investment Bank. The project could be completed in less than three years if the balance can be raised.

Once completed, Bhaidega will once more be the second tallest temple in the square, and it is hoped that the project will not only act as an economic catalyst but also a means to revive historical interest, reinforce local identity, as well as motivate craftsmen to carry out similar projects elsewhere.

Says Dixit, "The longer you wait to rebuild tangible heritage, the weaker your intangible culture will get." 🇳🇵



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# Atomic Blonde

If halfway through watching *Atomic Blonde*, the new, slick, action-filled, visceral, Charlize Theron vehicle, you feel a bit of déjà vu it is because the film is basically a remake of *John Wick* (2014), the Keanu Reeves

unapologetic ode to the kind of stylised violence that gets our adrenaline pumping in the cinema without weighing overly on our conscience.

If you are not in the mood for it, don't watch. But for those who like the genre, this is one of the better films: following the path of pulpy violence adorned with some of the best fistfight action sequences seen recently on cinema.

The plot is convoluted but interesting enough, with Theron as Lorraine Broughton, an MI6 agent who is sent to Berlin in 1989 on the eve of the falling of the wall. She is possibly the toughest cookie (barring Reeves as John Wick) ever seen in the genre, unwavering as she weaves her way through the decadent underworld of Berlin, guided by her instincts and wits even as she is misguided by her

fellow MI6 agent David Percival (James McAvoy), who has stayed just long enough in East Berlin to go thoroughly rogue.

The object of the mission – one that makes Broughton go atomic – is the recovery of a list taken from a murdered MI6 agent that, of course, has the name of every Western agent in the Soviet Union. Everyone is out to get it, for various purposes, and Theron's motivations come into doubt as well when a double agent named Satchel is thought to be concealed within this now notorious list.

Theron is spectacular as Broughton, an elegant, hard as nails weapon with a bit of heart. Her character is totally flat, but her persona is not, with the same incredibly stylish construction that made Reeves' John Wick so very popular.

*Atomic Blonde* was barred from theatres in Nepal by the censors due to its extreme, exhilarating action sequences, but also due to the prudishness of those who think that a lesbian love scene is somehow more "risqué" than a straight one. One can only imagine the looks on the faces of the censors while watching this wild, unapologetic film – but since you can choose for yourself as an adult, a decision that was, unfortunately, taken out of our hands, you can now make up your own mind.

Theron has set the tone for female action heroes without conceding her femininity. Now it remains to be seen if she herself and several others can follow and hold up in the footsteps of this particular, explosive, riveting, searingly memorable blonde.



**MUST SEE**  
Sophia Pande

instrument that revived his career as an action hero a few years ago; tailoring his talents to what the man is best: a blank face with the astonishing ability to turn grueling fights into balletic set pieces

Directed by David Leitch, who was an un-credited, co-director for *John Wick*, *Atomic Blonde* is a fast, fun, and completely explosive,



Watch trailer online

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

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Tulsipur : 082-562575

## HAPPENINGS



BIKRAM RAI

**SETTING SON:** Chairman of the CPN Maoist (Centre), Pushpa Kamal Dahal, performs the final rites of his son, Prakash Dahal, at Pashupati on Sunday.



ICIMOD

**SOLAR BUYBACK:** Nepal Electricity Authority Managing Director Kulman Ghising (centre) and ICIMOD Director General David Molden (right) inaugurate ICIMOD's reverse metering system which will send excess solar-generated energy to the national grid.



JICA

**WORK IN PROGRESS:** Akihiro Nagashima, a former Japanese national football player and currently a popular sports news anchor in Japan, inspects rehabilitation at Kathmandu Darbar Square on Wednesday.



GOPEN RAI

**FUSION SOUL:** Ani Choying Drolma performs during the 'Songs of the Himalayas' concert with Indian musicians at Rastriya Nachghar, Jamal, on Sunday.



QATAR AIRWAYS

**TOURISM TAKES FLIGHT:** Minister of Tourism and Civil Aviation Jitendra Narayan Dev inaugurates Nepal-Tourism Opportunities and Challenges Seminar, organised by Qatar Airways on Friday. Qatar Airways manager Jayprakash Nair (second from right) and Deepak Raj Joshi of the Nepal Tourism Board (left) are also in the picture.



Rs10 billion for security. Candidates spending such a huge amount of money in a short period of time could have short-term positive impacts on the economy, but could eventually weaken democracy. Poor but principled politicians will be further marginalised, and a tiny section of wealthy but dubious people will capture power. Building contractors and businessmen first spend hefty amounts to secure party tickets, and then disburse even bigger amounts to win votes. Gyawali says that even

# Election economy

Ramesh Kumar in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 19-25 November

हिमाल

Two Grade A building contractors, who have won tickets from the NC and UML parties to contest parliamentary elections in Rasuwa district, brought local public transport to a virtual halt last month when they hired hundreds of vehicles to ferry their supporters to the Election Commission to register their candidacies.

Since then, NC's Mohan Acharya and UML's Janardan Dhakal have tried to outdo each other by holding huge election rallies and organising lavish feasts for cadres every day.

Rasuwa's polls exemplify how expensive elections have become in Nepal. In this sparsely populated mountain district candidates have spent millions of rupees to flex their muscles to try to win votes.

It is difficult to predict how much will be spent in this year's parliamentary and provincial elections, scheduled for 26 November and 7 December. The government, political parties and contributors have set aside

about Rs50 billion. But this figure does not include the money that individual candidates are clandestinely spending to win votes. Economist Keshav Acharya estimates that about Rs100 billion will be spent openly and secretly on these elections.

The EC has fixed ceilings of Rs2.5 million and Rs1.5 million for parliamentary and provincial candidates respectively. If all the 1,945 parliamentary candidates stick to the EC ceiling, they will spend nearly Rs5 billion. Another Rs5 billion will be spent by the 3,239 provincial candidates, if they do not exceed the ceiling.

Yet, it is an open secret that most candidates, especially potential winners, will spend much more than permitted. Piecing together information collected from candidates, party functionaries and supporters, it would be safe to say that candidates, including those vying for proportional representation seats, will spend Rs30 billion.

By comparison, the EC has a budget of more than Rs10 billion, and the government is spending

committed cadres have become morally corrupt, and will not support election campaigns without being paid.

Who gives politicians so much money to splurge on their election campaigns? "It is us," says Shekhar Golchha, Vice President of the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI). "Businessmen and the election campaigns of those parties that carry forward their agendas."

But it is not as simple as it sounds. There are threats, intimidation and extortion. Politicians tell businessmen: if you do not support us now, we will not support you in future. A businessman told us: "First, we have to pay parties, then their individual candidates."

Some businessmen have switched off their mobile phones, hoping to evade political extortion. But others are openly funding election campaigns. For them, it is an investment — and they will get their Return on Investment when the parties they've funded are in power.

UML leader Yubaraj Gyawali, who refused to contest elections citing his inability to mobilise resources, says: "Politics in Nepal is now dominated by those who win elections by spending millions and earn billions by looting the country."



# 135 ministers

Bhagwan Khanal in *Karobar Daily*, 22 November

कारोबार

If you are annoyed by a jumbo cabinet, get ready to be outraged: Nepal may have as many as 135 ministers after the elections.

Up to 825 MPs (275 in the federal Parliament and 550 in seven state assemblies) will be elected in the two rounds of parliamentary and provincial polls on 26 Nov. and 7 Dec.

As per the new Constitution, the Prime Minister cannot appoint more than 25 ministers in the federal setup, so the federal cabinet will not be as big as it is now. But there will be more ministers in provinces.

The Constitution allows a chief

minister to appoint up to 20% of the members of state assemblies as ministers. So seven chief ministers could appoint as many as 110 ministers. Province 3, which includes Kathmandu Valley, could have the most ministers (22), followed by Province 2 (21). The lowest number of ministers will likely be in Province 6.

It's not a constitutional obligation to appoint this many ministers. But it is likely that there will be many aspirants, all putting tremendous pressure on the Prime Minister and chief ministers to become part of the cabinet.

More ministers means a bigger burden on the state exchequer, and it will be a challenge for the central and provincial governments to manage financial resources.



Signpost: Election 2017

अन्वपूर्ण

Rajesh KC in *Annapurna Post*, 20 November

### QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“It is not compulsory for the Madhes to be part of Nepal forever”

The election manifesto of the Rastriya Janata Party Nepal, as reported by nepallive.com, 23 November.

SENSODYNE

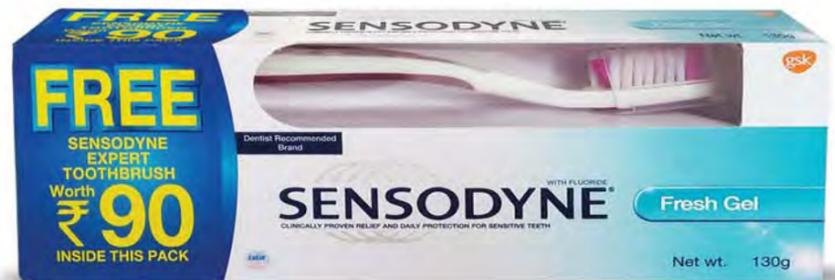
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# Voting amidst the ruins

Elections further delay earthquake reconstruction

**SHREEJANA SHRESTHA**  
in KAVRE

Ishwori Paudel of Mandan Deupur municipality of Kavre has gone to his bank 10 times for the second tranche of the government's earthquake reconstruction grant of Rs150,000 for his house. He still hasn't got the money.

"I was supposed to get the second instalment two months ago,

but I still haven't, and they just told me the money is delayed because of the elections," he says.

Paudel's house was destroyed in the 2015 earthquake and he was one of the 667,662 beneficiaries identified by the government to receive the housing grants. Almost three years later, most survivors are struggling to get the money.

After receiving his first tranche of Rs 50,000 Paudel started building a new house as per a seismic-resistant design approved by an

engineer and forwarded for a green light from the local ward office.

"The ward chair is busy with elections, but it should not be an excuse when it comes to compensating quake victims like me," laments Paudel.

Several other families in Paudel's ward also haven't received their second instalment, and 34 families never even got their first tranche.

In the past, reconstruction work was delayed due to government

negligence, mismanagement and frequent changes of the CEO at the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA). Now, the elections are also delaying rebuilding.

NRA CEO Govind Pokharel stepped down from his post to vie for a parliamentary seat in Pyuthan, and it will take time for his replacement, Yubaraj Bhusal, to master the NRA's files. Bhusal will be the agency's fourth CEO in two years. Meanwhile, many quake survivors are hunkering down for a

third winter in tents.

Jhalak Paudel, who heads Paudel's Ward 8 in Mandan Deupur municipality, told *Nepal Times* his workload has increased three-fold because of the upcoming polls.

"As of now I am not just the head of the ward. I have election-related multiple responsibilities and I am not able to find time to look after the reconstruction process," says Paudel.

The fourth in a series of reports by The Asia Foundation, *Aid*

## Information gap slows

Life is slowly improving for many Nepalis whose homes were destroyed or damaged in the 2015 earthquakes but there are notable exceptions and, overall, major uncertainty about the reconstruction process.

These findings are based on the fourth in a series of surveys conducted by The Asia Foundation in April 2017, which were published in October. The first round of research was done in June 2015, the second in February-March 2016 and the third in September 2016.

The 4th survey interviewed nearly 4,854 respondents in 11 earthquake-affected districts.

It found that, under the Nepal Rural Housing Reconstruction Program (NRHRP), 40% of people in earthquake-affected areas were receiving recovery or reconstruction assistance compared to just 15% in September 2016. Seventy-four percent were living in their own homes, compared to 60% right after the earthquakes.

However, as previous surveys stressed, some groups were lagging behind. "The marginalised — low caste, low income groups, widows and the disabled — and those who live in more remote areas are more likely to remain in shelters and have found it much harder to move home," said the report.

The document also sounded the alarm about a growing reliance on borrowing money. Between September 2016 and April 2017, borrowers — most likely to be households that had a low income before the earthquake, people of low caste or those with disabilities — took loans averaging RS363,193, a threefold increase since June 2015.

The survey also found that political parties had virtually ceased their support for rebuilding, although they were increasingly busy with elections at the local level. 59% of people in all affected districts were dissatisfied with local political parties' assistance with disaster relief. (See above)

By April 2017, nearly all of those who

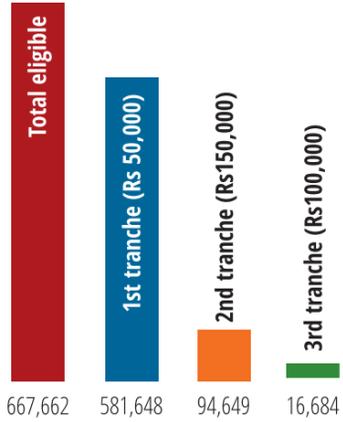




BIKRAM RAI

### CASH TO REBUILD

Total number of households destroyed in the earthquake eligible for government grants. Those who have received the first, second and third installments of the promised Rs300,000 so far.



report recommends finding ways to continue reconstruction while the Election Code of Conduct is in force for the provincial and national elections.

The on-going campaigns for provincial and parliamentary elections have affected the reconstruction process in many ways, yet none of the political parties has included reconstruction in election manifestos — proving once more the apathy and neglect of earthquake victims by the political leadership.

Rudra Malla of the NRA office in Sindhupalchok is now deployed at the Election Office. He says he hasn't seen any parties talk about reconstruction during their campaigning in his district.

Other rebuilding work is also at a standstill, he explains. "It is difficult to start any new agreement with development partners, even if they want," says Malla, adding, "at the same time people don't want to go for masonry or other training because the election campaigns are like carnivals."

New NRA CEO Bhusal disagrees that the overall delay in reconstruction has been caused by elections. "The real reason is the structural problem of the NRA," he told us, admitting that poll campaigning could have distracted people from rebuilding.

Bhusal notes that hiring inefficient engineers was the biggest reason for the NRA's past delays. "I have ensured that the new 1,100 engineers were hired on the basis of merit and will perform their best," he said. (See Guest Editorial, page 2).

Asked about providing shelter to quake victims this winter, he shared an ambitious plan to train 54,000 masons and carpenters in the next two months, and to move 60% of private households to safer homes within six months.

Many of the voters in the 14 earthquake-affected districts have heard such promises before. 🇳🇵

and Recovery in Post-Earthquake Nepal, reveals that quake victims felt that preparations for the local elections earlier this year affected reconstruction. (See below)

'The main impacts were the temporary suspension of the distribution of reconstruction cash grants, NRA's grievance management and NGOs' and INGOs' work,' the report notes.

Released in October and based on surveys of earthquake-affected households in April 2017, the

# reconstruction

were eligible for the RHRP grant had received the first instalment, the survey found. Most of them found it easy or somewhat easy to access the first tranche. However, taking the next step was more difficult for many.

'While reconstruction of private houses started to progress significantly in late 2016,' the report says, 'it had slowed down again by early 2017 due to labour shortages, high prices for construction labour and materials, high transportation costs and delays in the inspection process and the disbursement of the second instalment of the housing reconstruction grant.'

In fact, many households that received the first tranche did not, or did not plan

to, use the money to rebuild. Only 37% of people said in April that they would use the grant for the intended purpose of building a new house using an approved, safe model, a drop from 44% in September 2016.

'Households are confused about timelines and the requirements needed to receive the second instalment of the housing grant. People also lack information on procedures, requirements and technical standards, which has delayed the ability of people to take informed decisions about rebuilding,' concludes the report. 🇳🇵

**Marty Logan**

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## Wildlife diplomacy

Buried in election-dominated headlines this past week were several items of news that did not get the attention they deserved. The first was the bomb threat at the Supreme Court on Tuesday that led to the premature closure of the Full Bench Restaurant & Bar.

But if you read the fine print, you'd have noted that the threat was made from a landline to the Supreme Court toll-free number by a guy who said he had 'mistakenly planted three bombs in the court premises that will go off at 12:15'.

The other item, which bagged the First Runner-up Award in the Interesting News Category, was that Nepal has now attained self-sufficiency in egg production. As a country that has never been under a foreign yoke, it is good to know that henceforth we also have our own yolk.

The third item that caught the Ass' attention this week was Mr Dalai Lama (Peace Be Upon Him) casting doubts about Gautam Buddha being born in Nepal. The likelihood of His Holiness being allowed to visit Lumbini is now even more remote. Even god-men need diplomatic skills, and HH the DL could learn a thing or two from Nepal's mastery of the art of wildlife diplomacy.

One of the reasons Nepal was never colonised was because the British viceroys and emperors were allowed to hunt tigers

and rhinos to the brink of extinction. Later, we dispatched charismatic mammals in exchange for hydropower plants and other infrastructure. There have been glitches, like the time a few years ago when a rhino named 'Ramesh' that was being shipped to Japan was nearly not allowed to travel because he had on him a horn that would have technically made him a trafficker in wildlife contraband.

Nepal's zoological diplomacy, however, has not lived up to its full potential. We have a lot more animals we could ship off in return for stuff. The urban crow is an endangered species in many developed countries. Nepal has a surplus. The law of supply and demand dictates that we export the entire cohort of Kathmandu to a crow-deficit country like Norway as our roving ambassadors in exchange for salmon and red herrings.

Then there is the common housefly, which has been wiped out in Europe but of which we have swarms in Shyam's Bus Stop Tea Shop, ready for translocation. The pack of howling dingos that defend the neighbourhood trash heap can all be sent off to South Korea where dogs are regarded as man's best food. Not to be outdone, this Ass also offers himself up as ambassador and plenipotentiary to any country MoFA deems fit.



The Ass

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