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## PRO-women

Thanks to the new Constitution, women who were under-represented in the First Past the Post results will get seats in federal and provincial assemblies via Proportional Representation quotas.

The unexpectedly wide margin with which the UML swept the provincial and parliamentary elections has put the Left Alliance in a celebratory mood, but it comes with a tinge of worry for male members in the party's proportional representation (PR) list.

Since only two of its candidates won in direct elections, the UML will now have to nominate mostly women among the 40 or so of its PR quota to make up for the shortfall. The new Constitution stipulates that 33% of the members of both houses of Parliament have to be women. However, only 6 of the 275 members

are women – only 2.2%. At least 85 of the PR members nominated to the Lower House (about 77%) will have to be female to make up for the shortfall – and the UML will have to come up with the most women because of its big win.

The Maoists will be under slightly less pressure, and although not a single female

Nepali Congress candidate won in the First Past the Post vote, the party is in a easier position to fill the women's quota – but only because it won so few seats overall.

Ironically, the first parliamentary elections under an inclusive new Constitution has

seen many fewer women winning the polls compared to previous Constituent Assembly elections. The gender ratio is almost as skewed in the election results for the seven new provincial assemblies, where only 18 women have been elected out of a total of 550 members (3.3%) in the seven assemblies. The parties will now have to come up with 164 women members to make up for the shortfall, and even here the UML must nominate the most women.

Political analysts have seen this as a great leap forward in constitutionally-guaranteed representation of women, Dalits, Madhesis and Janajatis in federal and provincial legislatures. District-level women cadre of all the parties will now be part of law-making bodies.

### THE PROMISED LAND EDITORIAL

### ELECTORAL REFORM

GUEST EDITORIAL

BY BHOJRAJ POKHAREL

PAGE 2



## EQUUS

Animal activists work for the welfare of Nepal's hard-working mules and donkeys

### The Marston menagerie

PAGE 7-9



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# THE PROMISED LAND

The mood after every election in Nepal since 1960 is always upbeat. It is what comes after, that lets the people down. Voters go to the polling stations in overwhelming numbers, and wait patiently in line for hours to dutifully cast their ballots, only to be let down by the same leaders they elect over and over again.

The 70% turnout in last week's election was expected and polling and vote-counting went smoothly in most places. The real surprise was the landslide that the UML-Maoist combine mustered. Pundits have dissected the unprecedented victory, citing their stability-prosperity slogan, the united focus on individual races to defeat incumbents, the complacency and weak leadership in the Congress, and the disarray in the Democratic Alliance.

The Congress' scare tactic of warning about Communist dictatorship didn't work: in fact voters showed that they don't mind bringing in a bulldozer to shake things up.



GUEST EDITORIAL  
BHOJRAJ POKHAREL

## Electoral reform

Nepal recently held three elections with overwhelming participation of voters. We have made remarkable improvements in recent years in overall management and in making elected bodies more inclusive. Compared to the past, campaigning is now more peaceful and biometrics and digitalisation have been introduced in voter registration.

However, we need to take some further steps to improve the electoral process and strengthen democracy. Political parties can still easily manipulate the current electoral system, which creates confusion among voters. The process has to be made more voter-friendly and less prone to manipulation by the political leadership.

The Election Commission (EC) didn't have adequate time to educate the people, so we need to provide civic education, make voters' education a continuous process and design separate ballot papers to reduce the number of invalid papers in the future.

More than 4.4 million people are working in foreign countries. We need to fix election dates in the Constitution so that everyone can enjoy voting rights. Doing so will allow people working or studying abroad to come to Nepal to vote. And with an early voting system they would have enough time to travel to Nepal to cast their ballots. It is even possible to allow Nepalis living abroad to vote

A lot of Nepalis cannot vote even they are living within the country because of the need to travel to the home district. We must improve the electoral system so that

This is a huge lesson for the NC, which had lost its way long ago and strayed far from BP Koirala's social democratic path. As a web post this week put it: 'The NC needs to first drain the swamp, hit reset... and not rinse and repeat.' Indeed, the NC needs to set its own house in order, and now play the check and balance role of the parliamentary opposition. The Left, too, has to keep the promise of its Promised Land.

We are moving into the uncharted territory of federalism. Six months after local elections, the main parties have been reluctant to grant municipalities and villages the autonomy they are supposed to enjoy. Federalism is about political devolution, and a strong centre must abide by the spirit of the Constitution to grant the regions autonomy, and not try to squeeze them by choking off their money supply. It was Nepal's centralised polity that neglected large parts of the country and excluded many in the past. This Constitution was crafted to set that right.

The Left Alliance was an electoral marriage of convenience for elections. It remains to be seen whether it will lead to the communist parties uniting. The Maoists appear to have also been partly motivated by the need to brush wartime excesses under the carpet. Many candidates who took part in human rights violations have become legislators. One of the pre-requisites to stability is the re-establishment of the rule of law, ending impunity and ad hoc governance.

Recent elections have also exposed the need for electoral reforms (*see Guest Editorial by Bhojraj Pokharel below*). These are some of the serious inadequacies that need to fixed:

- Allow absentee balloting. Nearly 20% of voters were disenfranchised this time because they could not travel to home districts to vote.
- Force parties to be transparent about electoral financing, and set limits to expenses.
- Lift the ban on public transport on E-day.
- Make voter education more effective by mobilising social networking sites.
- Clean up leakage and waste within the Election Commission.

people can vote from where they are temporally living or working inside the country. Early voting and allowing public transport on the day of election will make it easier for people to exercise their voting rights. Election Day should be like any other day and voters must have accessibility.

Fixing the election date in the Constitution will make planning and management cost effective and easier for the government, the EC, political parties and the voters.

It is also time we devolved voter registration and election-related logistics management to the local governments. Doing so will help the EC to stay more focused on policy, planning, capacity-building, overall supervision and monitoring aspects of the election.

Voting has been made too expensive for the government and the candidates. The influence of money challenges the quality of representation. Political parties must be publicly funded to increase their efficiency and transparency.

All castes, communities and regions were included in the Constitution-drafting process through proportional representation. We need to retain this voting system in the next election as well to help excluded communities to enjoy equal rights.



**Bhojraj Pokharel** is a former Chief Election Commissioner. Watch interview with him online.

## ONLINE PACKAGES



### BRICK SEASON

Thousands of equines and their child handlers come from India to work in Kathmandu's brick kilns in winter. The animals are often over worked, but activists have started helping the donkeys and mules. Watch our video of the animals hard at work.



### THE MONK AND THE SARUS

Lumbini is not only the birthplace of the Buddha, but also home to the sacred Sarus crane. However, the birds' wetland habitat is threatened by plans to build hotels. Watch the story of one monk's struggle to preserve the birds and the sanctity of Lumbini.



### NT STUDIO

Catch former Chief Election Commissioner Bhojraj Pokharel speaking about lessons learnt from the recently held elections, and his proposals for electoral reform, in this episode of *Nepali Times Studio*.

### CONNECTIVITY AND POLITICS

The border to the south is too soft for our comfort as we have been overwhelmed by people swarming across ('Banking on connectivity', Anil Chitrakar, #886). The soft border has also resulted in wanton exploitation of Nepali natural resources. Before we see the advantages of broader partnership we need to be treated as a sovereign country first. It will get even more complex with our "pradesh" dealing with their "states" behind the back of both central governments.

Anupam

### NO JUSTICE

There is oppression everywhere, not just in South Africa or Nepal ('The freedom to be free', Kunda Dixit, #886). In Nepal, corrupted politicians are untouchable, verily Gods. Nepalis will continue to die in the Middle East.

Hemant Rai

### WORKING WOMEN

A beautiful portraits and stories ('Working women', Sanjog Rai, #886). We need to appreciate the women in our lives more.

Shivam Paudel

### CHAOS AND INSTABILITY

Great infographics (Bullet to ballot', Santa Gaha Magar, #887). However, mark my words we're nose diving further into chaos and instability by handing over power to the notorious Maoist and UML coalition.

Swapnil Acharya

## WHAT'S TRENDING



### Bullet to ballot

by *Santa Gaha Magar*  
Nepal finally looks poised for future stability after holding three elections within six months. The historic timeline accompanying this analysis of Nepal's transition was widely popular with readers last week. Visit [nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com) for an interactive version of the timeline, showing 21 years of conflict and transition.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Most popular on Twitter

### The Nepali dream

by *Dinkar Nepal*  
Audacity, ambition and a drive to stay and help Nepal motivated four millennials and will help pave the way to the country's socio-economic reform. Read more about them online.

Most visited online page

### State of uncertain stability

by *Om Astha Rai*  
Whoever the final winner, the new government will be keenly watched to see if it behaves any differently from the political cartel of the past, whether Kathmandu will really devolve power, and if Nepal is finally and truly on a path to development, job creation and prosperity.

Most commented

## QUOTE TWEETS

**Nepali Times** @nepalitimes  
EDITORIAL The main challenge now is to fix the broken bits in the constitution, sort out knotty issues like provincial names, boundaries, their rights and responsibilities. <http://bit.ly/2kc8Fjc>

**Cheryl Saunders** @CherylSaunders1  
Nice piece, on the challenges of federal transition in Nepal. 'Knotty issues', indeed.

**Kunda Dixit** @kundadixit  
This morning's post-election print edition of @nepalitimes with historical timeline on centerfold showing last 21 years of war and waste. Got your copy?

**Madhu Acharya** @Madhu2067  
Wow wonderful timeline! Should definitely bring out a full page framable version too! It's the history we lived!

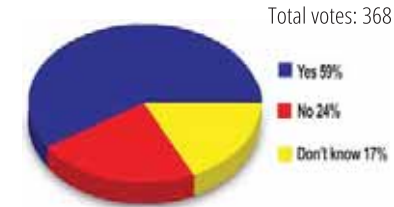
**Nepali Times** @nepalitimes  
After holding all the three tiers of elections, Nepal enters into a state of uncertain stability. READ <http://bit.ly/2j13IGS> @omastharai #NepalVotes2017 #NepalElections2017

**Padam Sangroula** @Sangroulapp  
It is the duty of all honest intellectuals to seed hope of prosperity and growth for stability.



Weekly Internet Poll #888

Q. Do you think this election will make Nepal politically more stable?



Weekly Internet Poll #889  
To vote go to: [www.nepalitimes.com](http://www.nepalitimes.com)

Q. Should wetlands be preserved at Lumbini or are more hotels a priority?



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# The great leap to prosperity

With the end of World War II, Nepal was aware of the winds of change in the world and took a very smart step of sending a 'goodwill' mission to Washington DC in October 1946. The result was that on 25 April 1947 Nepal and the United States established diplomatic relations.

We are currently celebrating the 70th anniversary of Nepal-America relations with various programs. In those seven decades, the US has helped Nepal eradicate



**½ FULL**  
Anil Chitrakar

malaria, built a ropeway to Kathmandu (now defunct), contributed to the East-West highway, and established the forestry campus and agriculture college in Pokhara and Chitwan. Many of us went to some of the best US universities on full scholarships. Peace Corps volunteers became the first foreigners to reach remote Nepali villages and became ambassadors for the millions of Americans who came here as back-packers and hippies.

1947 was also the year Britain granted independence to India and Pakistan. Only three years later, Nepal and the Republic of India signed a treaty of peace and friendship and trade and commerce. This treaty continues to be a source of debate and suspicion in Nepal, even though many have not read it.

In 1949, China declared its intention to 'liberate' Tibet, and it was not until 1955 that Nepal and the People's Republic of China

Nepal is a mouse that has to learn to live with two big tomcats in the neighbourhood, one red and the other saffron



established full diplomatic relations – eight years after the US. Nepal no doubt benefited from having the US as an ally as America's power in the world grew. Strong bilateral relations have worked as the third leg of the stool – helping Nepal remain stable. Nepal

made a smart move then and must continue to be as smart as it was in 1947.

America took over the world not so much with its military might but rather with its popular culture, food, Hollywood movies and cartoons like Tom and Jerry. The plot of Tom

and Jerry is very relevant for a country like Nepal that needs to be clever, agile and able to stay ahead of the game, given we live next to two big countries.

There is an episode of Tom and Jerry that you can get on YouTube (*Jerry's Cousin*) that is especially relevant to Nepal. Chinese reformer Deng Xiaoping, the leader credited for leading China to economic prosperity, once said that it didn't matter if the cat is black or white as long as it caught mice. Like the quick-thinking Jerry, Nepal today has to deal with two tomcats, one is red the other saffron.

A big challenge today in Nepal, where one in four have left the country and more are planning to do the same, is that there is a tendency to not be risk takers but to play safe and play the 'second mouse'. This mindset is to watch and see what happens to the first mouse. If the first mouse gets killed at the mouse trap, the second mouse gets the cheese.

What we need is a Nepali society that supports new ideas and risk-taking entrepreneurs, and creates the supporting ecosystem for their enterprises to flourish. Silicon Valley startups have a lot to teach us. We can offer Nepal as the new innovation centre for entrepreneurs who use our strategic location between two of the world's largest markets.

Many Nepalis today have cousins in the USA who support them back home. Nepal has done well to have Washington as an ally, friend and cousin. The next 70 years of the Asian Century should cement these relations for co-prosperity. 🇳🇵

**Anil Chitrakar** is President of Siddharthinc. ½ Full is his fortnightly column in Nepali Times.

# Elections and everyday democracy

Vignettes from election day in Sindhupalchok

Free and fair elections act as the ultimate benchmark in assessing whether a society is democratic or not. With the recently concluded parliamentary and provincial elections, politicians and optimists would like us to believe



**COMMENT**  
Sangita Thebe Limbu

that Nepal has marked an end to its protracted transition period and now the journey is towards political stability and economic prosperity. Beyond the rhetoric, however, what is the status of democracy in everyday life?

It was evening and the temperature had dropped below 10 degrees at Pipaldanda, a small village located an hour's walk from Chautara, the headquarter of Sindhupalchok district. With all the electoral preparations done, the polling officer was conducting a final pre-election meeting.

I looked around the polling station at the Siddhi Kamaladevi School, still scarred by the 2015 earthquake. The single-storey building that housed three classrooms had many cracks, one of the rooms was missing a wall, and the doors in the remaining two had come off their hinges. On a wall outside, along with pictures of Buddha and Laxmi Prasad Devkota, was a quotation: 'Even if I don't carry a khukri... I will destroy the injustices of this world using my pen.'



**VOTING AGAINST NEGLECT:** The polling booth at the run-down Siddhi Kamaladevi School in Pipaldanda of Sindhupalchok showed why these elections are important: to expedite post-earthquake reconstruction and manage local schools better.

The elections were happening on school grounds that didn't even have a proper classroom. Let alone fighting the injustices of this world, it seems the most pressing battles for students here are to cope with freezing cold winters in rooms without walls and finding a decent toilet. Across Nepal, elections were happening in dilapidated schools and crumbling public spaces that aptly represent decades of failed promises, a history of isolation from the centre and the persistently dire state of the country.

Januka Parajuli, the newly elected deputy mayor of Chautara Sangachokgadi municipality, is in her well-furnished office explaining how centralised governance is the key reason for Sindhupalchok's underdevelopment despite it being so close to the capital. And now that the local government



PHOTOS: SANGITA THEBE LIMBU

is in place and the process of institutionalising federalism is well under way, things will improve. Such optimism does not carry through as we travel further into the remote village of Kadambas on dirt tracks.

The concept of centre is relative. Just like the Kathmandu-centric approach to governance creates and marginalises peripheral spaces, the district headquarter-centric approach pretty much does the same. A few hours from the town centre and still within the boundaries of the municipality, there are settlements that lack water, electricity and proper housing. Yet, even in those places, party flags, posters and pamphlets were ubiquitous, all promising the staple political servings of stability, development and transformation.

On election day in one of the polling stations in Kadambas, an elderly female voter came accompanied by a young man. She was walking barefoot and from her clothes, it looked like she had come directly from work in a farm. The young man took the lead and voted on her behalf. The female voter exercised her franchise albeit indirectly but whether she voted by choice, what that vote meant for her and whether it will make a difference to her life are difficult things to speculate.

An election is a process that reaffirms the status of ordinary people as citizens and reconnects them to the state. Yet, the circumstances under which people are voting, the realities of their everyday lives, and the actual choices they have to vote or not to vote are all likely to determine if elections can be more than just a perfunctory democratic exercise. 🇳🇵

**Sangita Thebe Limbu** is a Research Fellow at Martin Chautari.





PHOTOS: SUE CARPENTER

SUE CARPENTER

Ten years ago, I was living in Pokhara teaching photography to give girls a voice. Their photos showed such vibrancy and talent that the British Council hosted two exhibitions of their work in Kathmandu. Looking back at an article I wrote in *Nepali Times* then, one girl stood out: Belmaya Nepali.

At 14, she was a natural feminist from an under-served community who had struggled in Nepal’s patriarchal society. Fast forward to 2014, and Belmaya had fallen back into a life of poverty and hardship. She got married at 19, had a baby daughter and moved to her husband’s Tarai village. Now they were back in Pokhara, living in a tiny, windowless room. Sitting on the concrete rooftop, she told me of the troubles she had endured. “I’ve never seen happiness in my life, she said, “and I don’t think I’ll ever find it.”

Belmaya was orphaned at the age of nine, and had to cut grass and collect firewood before school. Her teacher mocked her for having “a brain filled with cow dung”, and Belmaya was so hurt she dropped out. “If I could have continued my studies, I could have found a better job. I wouldn’t have to ask my brothers for help. I wouldn’t have to be dependent on my husband,’ she said.

Her life was about to change, however. Belmaya grasped the opportunity to learn filmmaking skills to continue her love of photography. It put not just the camera but its power into her hands, to tell stories from her perspective.

Since 2014, I have been following her journey into filmmaking for a feature documentary, *I Am Belmaya*. With the forces of family and society against her and a lifetime of disappointments, Belmaya could so easily have dropped out. But she not only stuck with the training, she used what she had learnt to transform her domestic life.

Last year Belmaya made her graduation film, *Educate Our Daughters* — a personal, short documentary about the importance of education for girls, through the prism of her own lost childhood and her hopes for her daughter, now a sparky five-year-old. Towards the end of the film, in an unconscious echo of her 14-year-old self, Belmaya states, “I want to go back to my village and show them what a girl can do.”

She did just that, creating a pop-up cinema to screen her film to family and neighbours. It was a magical evening, with her community finally understanding and celebrating her mission to tell powerful stories that challenge the status quo.

There followed her first professional commission from Thomson Reuters Foundation, *Rowing Against the Flow*, about

boatwomen struggling to compete in a man’s world, and she is now planning a film about female foeticide in Nepal. Now, both her films have been selected for the Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival next week.

Ten years after her photos were exhibited in the capital, Belmaya has come full circle in showing what a girl can do. Girls can excel at anything. Like boys, they just need the opportunities. 🇳🇵

*Belmaya will present her films at KIMFF at 3.30pm on Sunday 17 December*  
*Sue Carpenter is a British photojournalist and filmmaker*  
[www.belmaya.com](http://www.belmaya.com)

**TEN YEARS LATER:** Belmaya Nepali in Pokhara in 2006 using a camera to record her life, and in 2016 filming *Educate Our Daughters*.



prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

Hybrid power

A wind-solar generation plant in Hariharpurgadi of Sindhuli has started producing 110 kWh of energy per day for 83 rural households. The project is a joint undertaking of the Asian Development Bank and Alternative Energy Promotion Centre.

Go St Petersburg

Qatar Airways will launch its new service, using a Boeing 777, to St Petersburg, Russia on 19 December, connecting the Russian cultural destination to many parts of the world, including Nepal via Doha.

Fording it

Ford has inaugurated its GO Ford’s Extended Sales and Service Outlet in Chabahil for its global product

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Direct deal

Turkish Airlines has announced a codeshare agreement with Brazil’s Azul, allowing customers to purchase tickets directly from Turkish Airlines sales channels to fly to Brazilian destinations.

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# Bardiya beginnings

How Nepal’s wild west was opened to eco tourism 30 years ago

Today if you want to visit the jungles of Bardiya, the drive from Nepalganj airport takes less than two hours. Things were very different back in 1983 when Tiger Tops was first asked to build a camp in Royal Bardiya National Park, thus opening up Nepal’s neglected western districts. It was



easier to drive through India than struggle with the poor roads and river crossings on the Nepali side of the border. The East-West highway and the magnificent single-tower suspension bridge across the Karnali River at Chisapani changed all that, but not until 1994. Even today, the western regions receive only a fraction of Nepal’s foreign tourists.

Leaving the charmless sprawl of Nepalganj and its incipient ribbon development, head north towards the distant hazy hills and speed down the East-West highway, taking care to avoid the occasional bullock cart, herd of goats or bright ladies balancing loads on their heads. Peering over the concrete balustrade of the Babai Bridge, gharial and marsh mugger crocodiles bask greyly on a sandbank, warming their reptilian blood in the pale afternoon sun. After an hour or so, the farmland gives way to sal forest, until the exciting moment when you turn left at an unremarkable truck stop village, down a dusty lane that leads across the river and into the Park.

One spring afternoon, my boss Jim Edwards asked me to accompany him to a meeting with Prabhakar SJB Rana, august chairman of Kathmandu’s Soaltee



Oberoi Hotel and respected doyen of Nepal’s blossoming tourism industry. We drove across town in the back of Jim’s green Range Rover with Jit Bahadur, the diminutive driver perched on a pile of cushions to see over the wheel.

Across acres of dark polished wood with our feet in deep-pile carpets, Prabhakar smiled kindly over his half-frame glasses. “My father has the government concession for a tourism operation in Bardiya, and we would like

Tiger Tops to develop it. The short grassland *phanta* in Bardiya where our family used to hunt are fantastic for wildlife viewing – tiger of course, no rhinos but wild elephant, swamp deer and blackbuck, and in the rivers, mahseer and freshwater dolphin. Very complementary to Chitwan!” Prabakar’s distinctively high voice was shrill with excitement.

Jim was characteristically unfazed by the daunting logistics and enormity of the task. That is why he was so much fun to work with: he had vision, charm and confidence, and trusted me to help make things happen. Besides, aristocratic Nepali partners could cut through the bureaucratic maze, appealing to Jim’s cavalier business methods.

At his father’s sprawling palace across the Bagmati, General Nara greeted us warmly. A formidable former police chief and sportsman of impeccable blue blood, his two daughters were royal princesses married to the King’s uncles. Framed photos of

Hitler and Mussolini hung in the portico, and the fountain in front of the house I never saw working. A sprightly old man with a gamy leg and infectious laugh, General Nara exuded ruling privilege to his dying day.

Rani Nara, comfortable in her cardigan and jewels, fussed sociably with the tea. Beneath the dusty chandeliers, silvered mirrors and Rana portraits, Jim nailed details of the Karnali deal, and I sat there wondering what we were getting ourselves into.

On the first staff recce to Bardiya — we liked military terminology at Tiger Tops — it took Balam Thapa three whole days and two nights sleeping rough to reach from Nepalganj, and one Land Rover was wrecked in the process. The terrain was remote and rugged, and the Park so little known, so seldom visited. Stocky and serious, Balam was every khaki-clad inch a naturalist of the old school, trained by Chuck McDougal, knowledgeable, committed and reliable. Jim had entrusted him with his skinny 17-year-old nephew. “Look after him,” Jim said, placing Steve Webster’s hand into Balam’s. “He’s fresh from the Channel Islands and needs an adventure.”

With the Park warden, Balam identified the glorious riverside site that would become Karnali Tented Camp, high on a bluff backing onto the jungle. He found land on the forest boundary for Karnali Lodge, with space enough for the elephant camp, staff quarters, vegetable garden and fishpond. By 1987 the tented camp was underway with a simple central golghar, 12 safari tents and shared bathroom blocks made of grass and bamboo. The lodge opened later, in 1989.

My misgivings had been premature. Bardiya’s newly accessible biodiversity became a magnet for wildlife devotees, filmmakers and scientists, an established part of Nepal’s more adventurous circuit for enthusiasts. With its exemplary sightings, Leonardo DiCaprio was shown his first tiger at the lodge, igniting his current commitment to their conservation, and the tented camp was always a favourite, especially at this time of year for family Christmas visits.

Balam was the first of many distinguished Tiger Tops Karnali managers — Chandra Thapa, Dushyant Singh, Pradeep Rana, Gauree Malakar — until he left for a Norwegian university scholarship. Nowadays, Balam teaches chemistry in Sheffield, with an English wife and three sons. 🇳🇵

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Lazimpat, Kathmandu

### Calendar of Events

<b>20th DEC onwards...</b> <b>Delicatessen at</b> <i>The Shangri-La Bakery</i> Xmas Delights Includes Traditional Yule Logs, Minced Pies, Christmas Cakes, Plum Pudding, Cookies, Chocolates, Gift Hampers etc....	<b>24th DEC</b> <b>Christmas Eve Dinner</b> 4 Course Christmas Eve Dinner @ NRS. 2,500 Nett Per Person Christmas Eve buffet Dinner @ NRS. 3,333 Nett per person Live Carol Singing The Lobby at 5:30 pm onwards Live Piano Performance The Lobby 7:00 PM onwards	<b>25th DEC</b> <b>Christmas Day Brunch</b> @ <b>The Lost Horizon Cafe</b> NRS. 2,500 Nett Per Person	<b>31st DEC</b> <b>New Year's Eve Party</b> Live Performance by Deepak Bajracharya Celebrity/Model Dancer DJ Session Lavish Gala Dinner Attractive Door Prizes at Pavilion & The Courtyard Valet Parking Warm Environment Taxi Service at fixed price Ticket Price: Single NRS. 7,499 Nett Couple NRS. 11,999 Nett	<b>1st JAN</b> <b>New Year's Day Bubbly Brunch</b> @ <b>The Lost Horizon Cafe</b> <b>2018</b> NRS. 2,500 Nett Per Person
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The powerful westerly disturbance that dumped rain and snow to northern India and western Nepal early this week looked like it would also bring much needed precipitation to Kathmandu, but it mysteriously fizzled out after Pokhara. Nepal's hydropower plants desperately need more water, as production has fallen by one-third and the shortfall is being made up by more power imports from India. The weekend looks bright and sunny with smog buildup till noon in Kathmandu Valley due to overnight inversion. Afternoon breeze will blow it away.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
23° 8°	22° 6°	22° 6°

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# The Marston menagerie



DOGS, DUCKS AND DONKEYS: Wendy with a duck named Dick (*left*) which she rescued from a butcher just before his head was sliced off.

Puja the donkey (*below, left*) was born and raised in the Marston home in Sanepa, and recently saved the house from being burnt down.



Wendy and Robin Marston were away from their Sanepa home two weeks ago when they got a frantic call. Their house was on fire. They rushed back to see smoke rising and lots of ash from the burnt grass and hay in the backyard.

The Marston's store of straw and hay had caught fire, and their pet donkey Puja had brayed loudly until people working inside rushed out to extinguish the flames.

"Puja is our heroine. She is intelligent and smart and very inquisitive: she likes to walk around to see what is going on," says Wendy, who with her husband Robin have lived in Nepal for 40 years, rescuing and caring for four generations of abandoned and sick animals.

The British couple currently has two donkeys, two ducks, four cats, four dogs and a sheep in their backyard.

First thing every morning, Wendy feeds her 13 animals, then heads out on her rounds of Patan to take care of street dogs, most of whom she knows by name. The dogs are so used to her, they wait for Wendy every morning.

"When I saw them hungry, I knew I should do something," says Wendy, who started to feed street dogs 20 years ago, and brought home the ones that needed care. She also raises money for children burn victims at government hospitals in Kathmandu, and does other charity work.

There are an estimated 22,500 dogs on the streets of Kathmandu, and many suffer from under-nutrition, infections, mange and other injuries and illnesses. But the

work of animal rights activists has reduced the number of strays.

"There are a lot fewer street dogs who are looking very sick and hungry these days," says Robin, a trekking entrepreneur.

Robin rescued Puja's mother from a brick factory near Chobhar nine years ago, taking her home in the back of his car. After three months, the Marstons got the rescued donkey examined for a possible hernia. It turned out that she was pregnant, and Puja was born. Her mother died soon after, and the Marstons got Puja a sheep named Shobhaa (after Shobhaa De, the Indian writer) for company.

The other donkey, Jasmine, was an orphan when she was rescued from a brick factory a year after Puja was born. "They are like sisters, but sometimes they are difficult and sulky to each other," Wendy explains.

The 13 animals are taken together for walks around the Sanepa neighbourhood every morning and evening. This includes Dick and Daisy, two ducks saved by Wendy from the butcher's knife in the nick of time.

For 40 years, there have been animals in the Marston yard. Says Wendy: "We didn't look for them, they came looking for us. They allow us to live with them."

Ziyu Lin

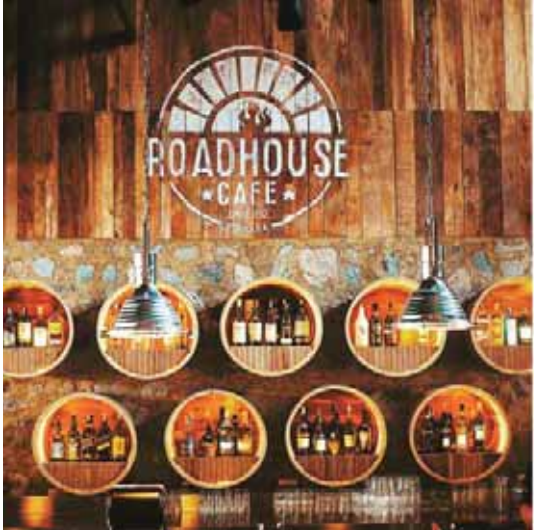
## PUJA AND SHOBHAA



Watch short film about Wendy and Robin Marston, who have been living with donkeys, sheep, ducks, dogs and cats in their backyard for 40 years.

nepalitimes.com

PHOTOS: ZIYU LIN



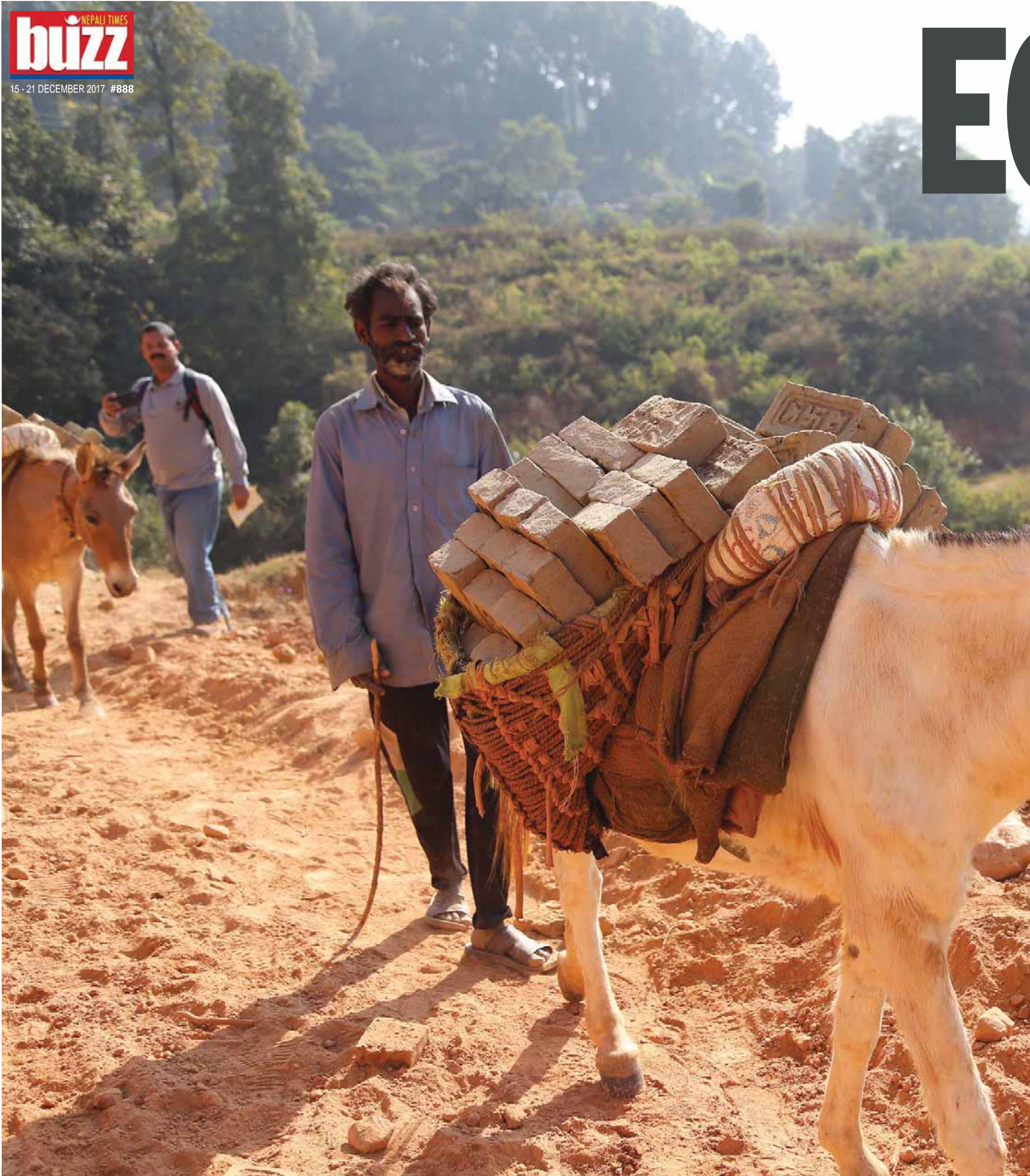
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NOW IN POKHARA

HALLAN CHOWK, LAKESIDE







Mules have longer ears than their parents. They have great perseverance and endurance.



# SKIN TRADE

Besides being in demand as beasts of burden, donkeys are also wanted in China, where the skin of the animals is used in a traditional cosmetic called *ejiao* to make people look younger.

According to the latest donkey skin trade report by The Donkey Sanctuary UK, donkey populations worldwide are facing a crisis due to increased demand from China, where the population of domestic donkeys has dropped from 9.4 million to 5.4 million in the last 20 years. Demand in China is 4 million donkey skins a year, with the largest manufacturer of *ejiao*, Dong'e Ejiao, alone consuming 1.5 million skins annually. China produces only 1.5 million donkey skins annually, the rest have to be imported.

Ethiopia, Kenya and Niger, where donkeys are vital for fetching water, are losing their donkeys to the Chinese

market, while some Chinese companies have set up slaughterhouses in Ethiopia to export donkey skins to China. "They bring the donkeys in trucks and kill about 200 of them every night, pack the skin and transport them by sea to China," Bojia E Duguman of The Donkey Sanctuary Ethiopia told the Asia for Animals Conference in Kathmandu last week.

Uganda, Tanzania, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Senegal have officially banned the donkey skin trade, and the Ethiopian government also shut down two slaughterhouses early this year.

Although there is no evidence that Nepali donkey skin is being smuggled into China, Alex Mayer of The Donkey Sanctuary UK says that Nepal should start taking precautions because the market for the skins is right next door. "Nepal can act now to stop the flow of donkeys coming from India to China," Mayer said, adding that Nepal needs its donkeys for transport as well as to produce mules.



# QUUS

Animal activists work for the welfare of Nepal's mules and donkeys



Birwa is a 15-year-old from India just arrived in Kathmandu Valley. He and his mule will work here till June.

ZIYU LIN  
in DHADING

Soon after sunrise on a chilly winter morning, the donkeys are getting ready for another day carrying bricks at a kiln in Dhading. All day, they carry loads of up to 45kg of freshly-baked red bricks, making more than 30 roundtrips up and down the hillside. Some of them have their fore and hind legs tied so they do not stray.

During the brick season from December to June, thousands of equines together with their child handlers, come from India to work in the 300 or so kilns in Kathmandu and surrounding districts. Brick factories pay owners according to the number of bricks they deliver every day, and there is a tendency to overwork the animals.

Eight years ago, activists from Animal Nepal started working for the welfare of donkeys and mules

toiling in brick factories. Nineteen factories in Dhading currently get help from Animal Nepal and UK-based The Donkey Sanctuary, whose Equine Outreach Program currently helps 21 donkeys, 359 mules and 177 horses in the district.

Atish Kumar Yadav from Animal Nepal explains that education includes telling owners that cutting donkey's ears does not prevent tetanus, and to ensure that the animals are properly fed.

Says Yadav: "We have found equine owners are now more conscious about the health of their animals. They call us more frequently, and they believe in us. Factory owners now provide money every week for nutritious food for the animals."

Indian equine owner Ajmal Kasgar has just brought 24 mules and 6 horses to Dhading for the season, each costing up to Rs70,000.

"Mules have incredible perseverance and endurance, that is why I prefer them," says Kasgar, who will sell the mules to Nepali villagers for ferrying work in the mountains. He will take the horses and donkeys back to India during the monsoon. Kasgar says business is flourishing because of the post-earthquake demand for bricks for reconstruction.

Bharat Adhikari, who owns the Raktakali Brick Factory in Dhading, confirms that the brick business is thriving, and adds that many kilns are moving out of Kathmandu because of congestion. As demand increases, Adhikari is now planning to phase out mules and mechanise transportation. 🇳🇵

## Mule, horse donkey

Genetically, it is easy to differentiate donkeys, mules and horses. Donkeys have 62 chromosomes, mules have 63 while horses have 64. Donkeys are the hardest to breed, because typically a donkey only gives birth to a single foal after a year of pregnancy. Like humans, donkeys tend to get stressed from overwork, have small family groups and need space to walk around.

Mules are offspring of female horses and male donkeys. They have been used by humans for centuries as load-bearers and cart-pullers. Mules possess characteristics of both parents, including perseverance and endurance, but are unable to reproduce. They have a longer lifespan and longer ears than their equine cousins. Their mothers, horses, are herd animals and tend to spend their time in large groups while donkeys tend to form bonds with only one other of their kind.

### BRICK SEASON



Watch our video of donkeys and mules arriving from India to work in brick factories on the outskirts of Kathmandu Valley during the coming winter season.

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



Each donkey ferries up to 45kg of bricks to the furnaces for baking.



A handler guides newcomer mules just arrived from India to a brick kiln near Kathmandu for a winter of hard labour.



EVENTS



15<sup>TH</sup> **kiMff**

Pick your favourite movies from the list of more than 70 films, including 15 in the 'Nepal Panorama' category, at the 15th Kathmandu International Film Festival (KIMFF).  
14-18 December, Kumari Hall, Kamalpokhari, (01) 4440635

**15 December**  
*Lachhamaniya* (Nepal), Bikas Neupane, 16 mins  
*The Last Honey Hunter* (Nepal), Ben Knight, 35 mins  
*Midnight Sun* (Italy/Canada), Roger Spottiswood, Brando Quilici, 98 mins  
*An Sooye Khaban/Beyond the Street* (Iran), Seyed Ahmad Mirhashemi, 23 mins

**16 December**  
*Even When I Fall* (UK), Sky Neal, Kate McIarnon, 89 mins  
*Thank You for the Rain* (Norway/UK), Julia Dahr, 88 mins  
*Mama* (Poland), Wojtek Kozakiewicz, 45 mins

**17 December**  
*Waiau-toa Odyssey* (New Zealand), Simon Waterhouse, 13 mins  
*Teriberka.Live* (Nepal/ Russia), Yuliya Varentsova, 41 mins  
*Singing with Angry Bird* (South Korea), Hyewon Jee, 88 mins

**18 December**  
*Toni Hagen's Nepal* (Nepal), Toni Hagen, 45 mins  
*Sopra il fiume* (Italy), Vanina Lappa, 74 mins  
*Sandakphu: A 4K Timelapse Adventure* (India), Nirmoy Modak 5 mins

For more films and timings, visit kimff.org.



**Bird watching,**

Join a half-day nature walk via the Nagarkot panoramic hiking trail to raise awareness about the importance of greenery for the conservation of birds and biodiversity.  
16 December, 6:30am-1pm, Nepal Tourism Board, Kathmandu, (01) 4417805, Rs1,500, included: light breakfast, lunch, two-way transportation

**Nepal-India exhibition,**

22 artists from Nepal and India will showcase their diverse artworks on the themes of women, gods, culture, life and many more.  
11 December, 4:30 pm, Nepal Art Council, Baber Mahal, Kathmandu, (01) 4220735

**Silver jubilee,**

Alumni event to celebrate 25 years of Rato Bangala School.  
21 December, 5:30pm, Rato Bangala School, Patan Dhoka, (01) 5522614



**International beer fest,**

Get to taste more than 60 varieties of beers from local and international breweries and vendors at the first International beer festival. The event is followed by live music.  
16 December, 12pm-8pm, Tangalwood, Naxal, Rs 2,000, (01) 5543018, <http://nepalinternationalbeerfestival.com/>

MUSIC



**Ash King live,**

A chance to catch superstar Ash King live in Nepal. He will performing his hit songs from Half Girlfriend, Bang Bang and Bodyguard, among others.  
13 January, 7-10pm, Karma Bar and Lounge, Tripureswor, 9851104277

**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



**Acoustic gig,**

Singer Rajesh Nepali and pianist Ayub Bhandari will be playing some great acoustic numbers.  
29 December, 7-10pm, Evoke Café and Bistro, Jhamsikhel, 9851111051

**Jazzy night,**

Tap to the beats of jazz with Hson Shrestha, Babin Wagle and Kshitiz KC  
15 December, 7pm onwards, Places restaurant and bar, Sat Ghumti Marg, (01) 4700413

**OUR PICK**



Opens in Kathmandu on 15 December

This 3D computer-animated comedy by Blue Sky Studio and 20th Century Fox Animation, who previously brought us the hit *Rio* and the *Ice Age* series, is based on beloved children's book *The Story of Ferdinand* by Munro Leaf and Robert Lawson. Ferdinand (voiced by John Cena) is a Spanish bull who prefers sniffing flowers and chasing butterflies to fighting in an arena. But when he is mistaken for a dangerous beast, he is captured and taken away from his home. An adventure ensues.

DINING



**Lhakpa's Chulo,**

Nepali dal-bhat, Newari khaja, Swiss Rösti, Italian risotto, and Thai green curry. Take your pick.  
Jhamsikhel, (01) 5542986

**Sing-Ma,**

Get food-court experience with authentic eats from Singapore and Malaysia. Tip: try the blueberry cheese cake.  
Jhamsikhel, (01) 5009092, 9813453650

**Tabela,**

Satisfy your taste buds with exotic biryani this weekend.  
Narayan Chaur, Naxal, 9851198615



**Falcha,**

Give in to the twin pleasures of lemon jeera chicken and mutton handi kabab.  
Jhamsikhel, 9851013475

**Café Jireh,**

For a peaceful evening and the best firewood pizza.  
Bhaisipati, (01) 5592102

**Last Friday Bar & Grill,**

Indian cuisine, anyone? Tip: try the kabab.  
Lazimpat, (01) 4002170



**Gyakok at Ghangri,**

Heat up with Ghangri special Gyakok at a special price of Rs995 (exclusive of taxes). Complementary drink included.  
Valid till 31 December. Boudha, Ghangri Botique Hotel, (01)4482888

GETAWAY



**Temple Tree Resort and Spa,**

A peaceful place to stay, complete with a swimming pool, massage parlour and sauna. Once you've arrived, it'll be hard to leave.  
Gaurighat, Lakeside, (061) 465819

**Park Village Resort,**

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**Buddha Maya Gardens,**

Add value to your travel in Lumbini with a stay at probably the best hotel in the area.  
Lumbini, (71) 580220, 9801033109, [info@ktmgh.com](mailto:info@ktmgh.com)

**Mango Tree Lodge,**

Culture walks, rafting in the Karnali, wildlife exploration, and jungle safari at Bardia National Park.  
Bhetani, Bardia, (084)402008, [info@mangotreelodge.com](mailto:info@mangotreelodge.com)

**Tranquility Spa,**

De-stress, relax and pamper yourself with a wide range of massages at any of the spa's nine branches in Nepal.  
[www.tranquilityspa.com.np](http://www.tranquilityspa.com.np)



**Hotel Landmark Pokhara,**

For the best views of Phewa Lake. Enrich your stay with cultural performances every evening.  
Lakeside Pokhara, (61) 462908, 9851059096

**Jhule Mountain Resort,**

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Shivapuri-Nagarjun National Park, Lapsiphedhi-3, Jhule, (01) 6212399

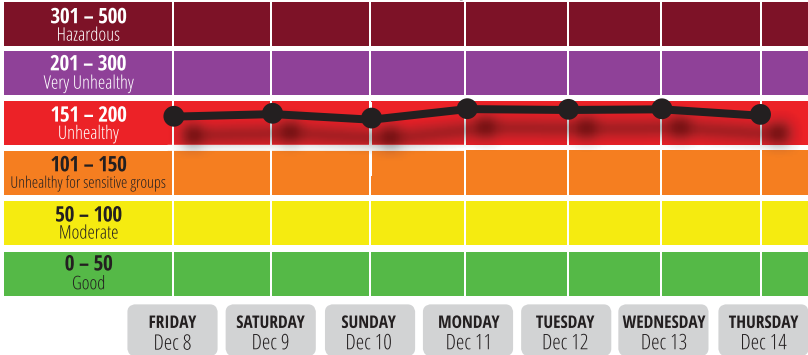
**MISS MOTI-VATION**

KRIPA JOSHI



**AIR QUALITY INDEX**

KATHMANDU, 8-14 December



The Air Quality Index for the past week shows the air at ground level in Kathmandu in the Unhealthy red band. These are average daily figures, and the worrying thing is that the Index is worse during the morning and evening peak hours when the concentration of dangerously small particles in the air is highest. The air is going to be consistently bad in the coming weeks as well since there is no sign of a westerly disturbance bringing rain to the Valley.  
<https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>



# Prehistoric paintings in Mustang

SAHINA SHRESTHA

Till now, the most interesting archaeological finds in Upper Mustang were sky caves containing human remains 1,500 years old, and scriptures and textiles suggesting the region's links to the ancient Silk Road.

But recently, anthropologists have discovered 90 rock paintings made of red and yellow ochre that they say could rewrite the history of the people of this part of Nepal that juts into the Tibetan Plateau. The paintings of wild yaks, horses and other animals, with depictions of the crescent moon and human figures, were found on rock faces in the Kya and Ludak Valleys in the eastern part of Mustang.

"The paintings and inscriptions are different in style, execution, composition and placement, suggesting that they are from various historical periods," says Fidel Devkota, who had been documenting the impact of climate change in Mustang for the past 10 years when he came across the rock art which are in such a remote location, even local herders didn't know of them.

At the Kya Valley site, the paintings were found on a cliff facing southeast towards Bhrikuti Himal, and although the Ludak rock art site is exposed it was only found three years ago.

Devkota collaborated with John Vincent Bellezza, an archaeologist and cultural historian specialising on Tibet, and the two have jointly published a paper, 'Obscured for Centuries: The Lost Rock Art of Lo Mustang', documenting the discovery.

As carbon dating has not yet been done, Bellezza compared the rock art and inscriptions, based on Devkota's photographs, with the rock art in western

Nepali art history will have to be revised after the recent discovery of rock paintings in Upper Mustang



FIDEL DEVKOTA

Tibet, Sipti and Ladakh. He dates some of the paintings as far back as pre-7th century CE.

"The first phase of paintings is prehistoric but the later phases are clearly motivated by Buddhism and Yungdrung Bon religious practices," writes Devkota in the paper.

The rock art depicts hunting and other wild animal-human interaction, birth giving, anthropomorphic portraits, tiered shrines and other sacred symbols. Belleza writes that the rock art in Kya and Ludak focuses on the beliefs, values and activities of the painters, although pinpointing their specific traditions is difficult. It is also difficult to discern whether the artists were pastoralists or agriculturists or both.

Given that the Shar-ri region was visited by prominent masters of Tibetan Buddhism and adherents of the Bon Po, Devkota writes that more detailed examination of the rock art and other sites may lead to identification of important centres of the faiths here. He also notes that the pigments have faded and some of the relics have deteriorated, while the sites are vulnerable to rock slides and erosion, revealing an urgent need to protect the sites from rockfalls and the harsh climate of the plateau.

Says Devkota: "Even if we cannot preserve it on site, we should at least have proper documentation for the future because if we lose it now, we may never fully understand what these works represent."



PURUSHOTTAM LOCHAN SHRESTHA

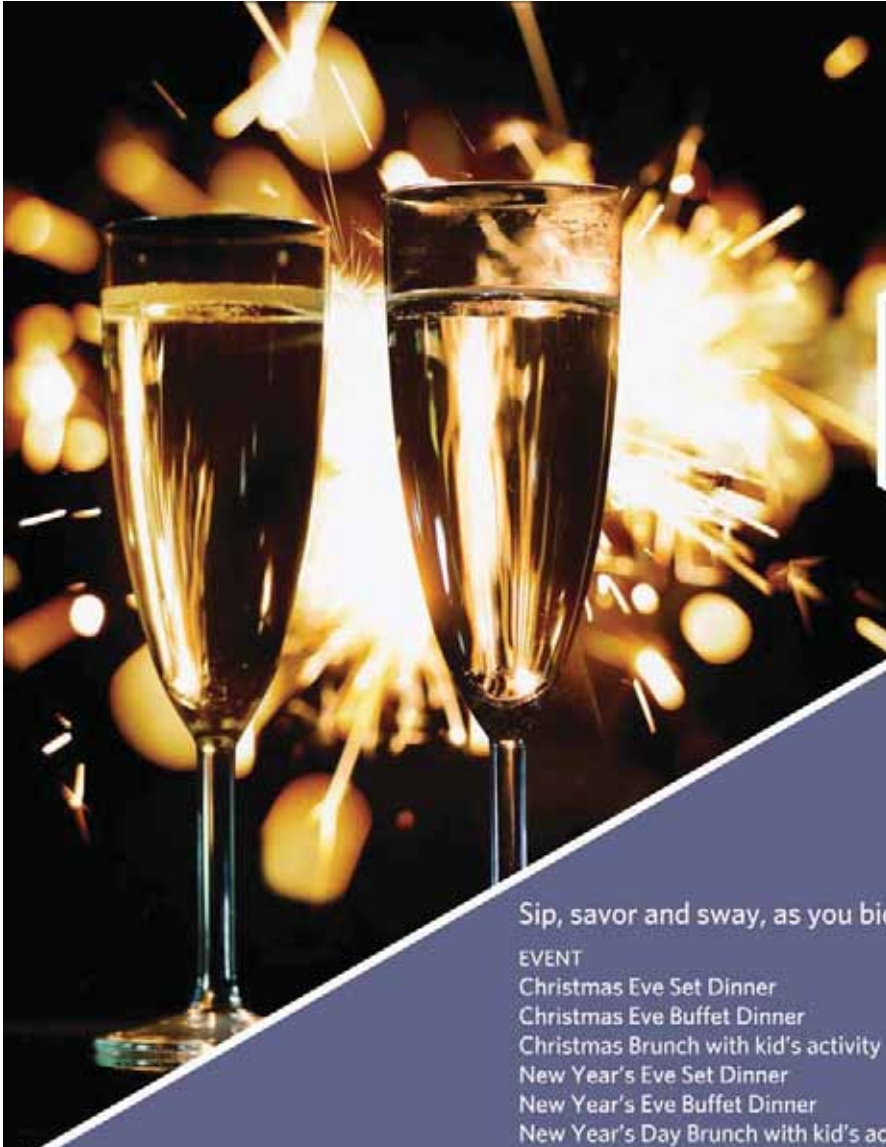
## QUARRY ART

Professor Purushottam Lochan Shrestha was on a field visit to Changu Hill overlooking Kathmandu with his students four years ago when a shopkeeper mentioned paintings in the nearby Kalika Gufa. Curious, Shrestha found the cave and came upon hitherto unknown art works from the Malla era. There were paintings of a helmeted soldier, another of Hanuman carrying a mountain and two others of King Pratap Malla kneeling.

To the south of Bhaktapur in Tathali, Shrestha later discovered rock edicts from the Malla period carved into three huge rockfaces. The 15 inscriptions dating back 700 years mention that the rocks from here were used to build the Vatsala Temple in Bhaktapur, which came down in the 2015 earthquake. There are also paintings of elephants and horses.

Since the findings, Shrestha has been on a one-man search, without any government help, for other cave and rock inscriptions that could throw more light into the early history of Kathmandu Valley.

"Rock paintings and inscriptions provide a rare window to our history: we need more research," says Shrestha, who has documented the findings in a recent book, *Guha, Guhalekh, Guhachitra ewam anya Sampada*. "There are rock quarries with ancient paintings that are in danger of being lost forever."



Christmas & New Year Celebration


Sip, savor and sway, as you bid adieu to 2017 and welcome 2018 !

EVENT	VENUE	DATE	RATE
Christmas Eve Set Dinner	Rox Restaurant	24 Dec	4600
Christmas Eve Buffet Dinner	The Cafe	24 Dec	3100
Christmas Brunch with kid's activity	The Cafe	25 Dec	3000
New Year's Eve Set Dinner	Rox Restaurant	31 Dec	5700
New Year's Eve Buffet Dinner	The Cafe	31 Dec	5000
New Year's Day Brunch with kid's activity	The Cafe	01 Jan	2600

\*Grand dessert buffet will be laid out in the lobby on New Year's eve along with a live band.  
\*The rates are exclusive of applicable service charge and government taxes.


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# Murder on the Orient Express

As someone who grew up reading Agatha Christie mysteries, I will say with some surety that aside from the most dour of fans, most will be happy with this latest, cheeky, lively and often weighty film adaptation of one of her most famous murder mysteries.



**MUST SEE**  
Sophia Pande

The film begins with a necessary introduction to the great, and beloved, Poirot (Kenneth Branagh, who stars and directs): for those who are unfamiliar with his foibles the man is extremely particular. But here, the director and writers have gone one step

further, recognising that Poirot is actually one of those people who has a disorder – one that demands order. It is this particularity that makes Poirot a brilliant detective, but also frequently causes him (self-admittedly) great stress, an effect that is often comedic in Christie's books, and sometimes in this adaptation, but is taken somewhat more seriously than a mere eccentricity here, giving the film a gravitas that others before it have fallen short of.

When Poirot gets on the Orient Express he is a tired man, weary of the world and the crime solving that has made him famous. He wants to rest, and read Dickens but that is not to be so: very soon after he boards, the Orient Express is blocked by an avalanche in the dead of winter (pardon the pun), with a packed train, a multiple stabbing and a set of extremely diverse but oddly connected passengers who come under Poirot's hawk-like scrutiny.

I cannot give anything away in this most complex, and most original, of whodunits, one that made Christie even more famous (if that were indeed possible) for her innovation. The film will leave you guessing but, more importantly, it will leave you thinking. Often whodunits are just suspenseful thrillers but here, the writers have

understood that the horror and gravitas of the first murder that leads to this second one must be understood for the viewers to go along with the story's shocking dénouement.

Sometimes, crimes are committed and justice is not served. Often, we as regular citizens go about our lives oblivious of the harm that can come from being the victim of a crime where the perpetrator goes unpunished. The thousands of innocent victims whose lives were taken by the Maoists or the Army during our civil war, the millions of women sexually harassed by men who blithely walk around unscathed, snug in the knowledge that their standing as men keeps them safe in 'he said, she said' situations — all this becomes food for thought in light of this seemingly fluffy mystery film that takes on the challenge of developing a beloved fireside classic into a film appropriate for our times: when Nepal is in a post-war state with people desperate for truth and reconciliation, and the #MeToo campaign has yet to make any way for those who still live under their oppressors.

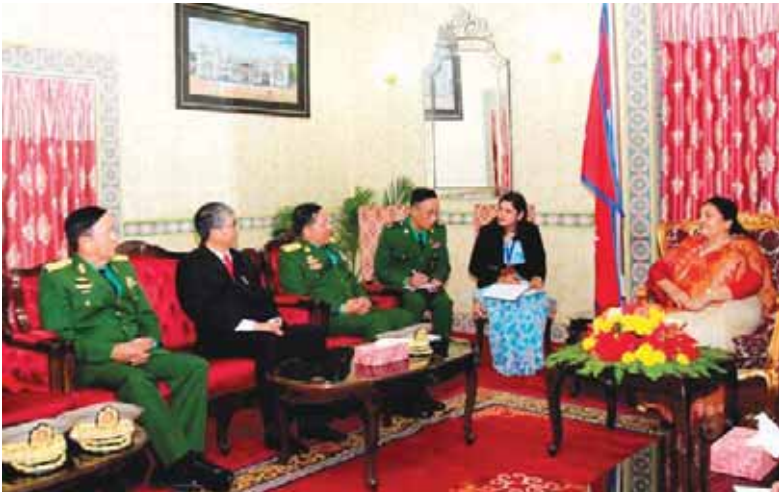
This is a great film for fans, but an even better one for those not acquainted with the great Hercule Poirot. Christie's books sold precisely because she was able to conjure up and define a detective like Poirot (my personal favourite amongst her recurring detectives), who takes on the knottiest of ethical issues without flinching: something we all could learn from.



Watch trailer online

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

## HAPPENINGS



RSS

**COURTESY CALL:** Commander-in-chief of Burma's Armed Forces, General Min Aung Hlaing, pays a courtesy call on President Bidya Devi Bhandari at Shital Niwas on Monday.



ADB NEPAL

**SUN AND WIND:** Nepal's largest wind-solar hybrid power system was inaugurated on Tuesday in Hariharpurgadi village, Sindhuli district. It is financed by a project supported by the Asian Development Bank (ADB).



KUNDA DIXIT

**BRONZE AGE:** Swiss Ambassador to Nepal Jorg Frieden (right) and Alex R Furger at the launch of Furger's book, 'The Gilded Buddha', at the Embassy of Switzerland in Patan on Wednesday.



BIKRAM RAI

**SPEAK OUT:** Gender activist Chandni Joshi speaks during the 'Raise Your Voice' program organised by the Zonta Club in Kathmandu on Sunday to mark 16 days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence.



BIKRAM RAI

**HOW'S THAT?** Nepal takes on Bangladesh in the opening match of the first International Wheelchair Cricket Tournament in Kathmandu on Thursday.

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# Lost her leg, but not her zeal

Baanta Khadka in *Nagarik*, 9 December

नागरिक

Mira Katwal was accompanying Nepali Congress provincial assembly candidate Narayan Karki on the campaign trail in Nepaltar of Udaypur on 29 November when a roadside bomb went off with a terrible bang. Their jeep was thrown into the air. Both were seriously injured, as was the driver and seven others.

Katwal and Karki were immediately airlifted to Kathmandu, where they are still at Teaching Hospital. While the nation's attention is focused on the election

results, those who risked their lives in the elections and became victims of violence, like these two, have been forgotten. Karki, 68, is a school principal. His left leg is broken in five places and his right leg in three. Katwal, 35, is a student of education and had to have her right leg amputated. Both are ideologically committed, and believed they were working to strengthen democracy, and never imagined that they would be injured in the kind of ambush more reminiscent of the conflict years.

Meeting her in hospital, Katwal doesn't show any pain or self-pity. "Cowards attack you from behind. I have lost my leg, but I haven't lost even an inch of my commitment and self-confidence," says Katwal, who has been active in student

politics. "I lost my leg while working for the party, and I will dedicate the rest of my life to the party."

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and senior NC leaders visited the two injured cadre in hospital, which the two injured cadre say has encouraged them. Katwal was born in a remote village of Udaypur and being the eldest, has taken it upon herself to send her brother and two sisters to school in Kathmandu.



NAGARIK



Katwal doesn't want vengeance against those who carried out the attack. Instead, she says: "I hope the cowards are driven to tears to see how I am struggling."

Karki has been a local school principal for 17 years and was campaigning for a seat in the provincial assembly. He is known as a selfless person who has no enemies and is devoted to helping others. He blames the wrong schooling of political workers for the violence, and is even more pained that two of his former students were involved in the bomb attack on his group. He blames himself for not being a more inspirational teacher.

"We should not have to suffer as we have in the past. The younger generation of leaders must rise up to stop this," he says.

# Why is Myanmar's general here?

BBC Nepali, 12 December

BBC नेपाली

Myanmar's army chief, who is accused of masterminding the ethnic cleansing of his country's Rohingya people, is in Kathmandu on a four-day visit. The Nepal Army said he is here to study Nepal's peace process, especially the demobilisation of the rebel fighters.

Several human rights activists have criticised the visit of someone accused of gross human rights violations, saying the timing is not right. However, Nepali officials maintain that the Rohingya issue is Myanmar's internal affair unconnected with General Min Aung Hlaing's visit to Nepal. Some 600,000 Rohingyas have fled Myanmar to Bangladesh since August, in what the United Nations has characterised as a 'textbook case of ethnic cleansing'. This has brought widespread international criticism of Myanmar's democracy warrior and Nobel Peace Prize winner, Aung San Suu Kyi.

"The visit exposes Nepal's lack of adherence to its responsibility to uphold international law, and shows support for gross violations of human rights," said activist Govinda Bandi. Other activists say Nepal should have been much more sensitive to the fact that it



has just been voted into the UN Human Rights Council.

According to Nepal Army spokesman Nainraj Dahal: "This visit was solely intended to improve bilateral relations, and there has been no discussion at the level of the Nepal government or Nepal Army about the international reaction."

Former Nepal Army General Balananda Sharma, who has worked on the Myanmar peace process, agreed that Gen Haing's visit should not be seen from the perspective of that country's internal affairs.

Gen Sharma, who was in charge of the secretariat managing the integration of Maoist fighters into the Nepal Army, added:

"They also need to end their 70-year insurgencies: it is good he is here to hear about our experience in the peace process." Of the insurgent groups in Myanmar, the government has peace agreements with eight and efforts are on to bring 13 others into a truce.

This is not the first time that senior officials and political leaders of Myanmar have visited Nepal to meet the prime minister and politicians.

Nepali activists say officials here should alert Myanmar's military personnel about the need to investigate war crimes. But others also say that the process of Myanmar's efforts to ensure transitional justice should not be derailed by its Rohingya crisis.

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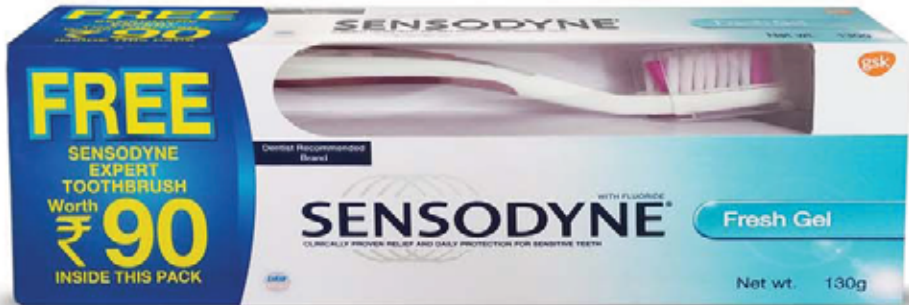
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# Cranes replace cranes in

Nepalis are proud about Lumbini, but not outraged about its development



INTERNATIONAL CRANE FOUNDATION

OM ASTHA RAI

in LUMBINI

When Kenzō Tange was asked to draw up a master plan for Lumbini in 1978, the famous Japanese architect's vision was to develop the nativity site as a forested and tranquil place reflecting the Buddha's teachings of compassion and frugality.

Although progress on the Lumbini Master Plan has been sluggish, successive governments over the last 40 years have largely followed Tange's original blueprint for the World Heritage Site. But now, a proposal to build luxury hotels inside Lumbini's core area threatens to mangle the master plan and disturb the sanctity of the Buddha's birthplace in Nepal.

Three years ago, when Dipak Chandra Amatya, a confidante of UML leader Jhala Nath Khanal, was Nepal's Culture Minister, he set up a committee to review the master plan, which then directed the Lumbini Development Trust (LDT) to allow at least four deluxe hotels and one international meditation centre inside the protected zone.

Tange, one of the most eminent architects of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, also designed the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. But the LDT got an administrative staff, Iman Singh Muktan, to make alterations to Tange's master plan. Now deputy mayor of Rapti municipality in Chitwan, Muktan admits his five-member committee did not consult anyone to approve the proposal

to build more hotels within the Lumbini World Heritage site.

"We did not have enough time and resources to consult people, and we did not really mean what we wrote in it: the LDT should not have taken our proposal seriously," Muktan now confesses.

Nevertheless, the Lumbini Trust used Muktan's recommendation to allow the construction of more hotels at the northern end of Tange's design, adjacent to the Peace Stupa (*see map, overleaf*).

Ajitman Tamang, who retired as the member secretary of the LDT this month, told *Nepali Times* he had also invited Thailand's Dhammakaya temple to build a huge international meditation centre in Lumbini.

Dhammakaya is one of the most powerful and controversial Buddhist sects in Thailand, and wants to build a guesthouse that can accommodate up to 1,000 pilgrims. Sources say UML leader Khanal's son, who was implicated in a construction scandal at Bhairawa's new international airport, and a Patan-based idol exporter are involved in the hotel project.

So far, there are only three hotels (Kasai, Hokke and a pilgrimage centre) inside the Lumbini site, and lack of space in the Tange blueprint for more high-end hotels. So, the LDT is planning to make room by building over adjacent wetlands that are habitat for endangered Sarus cranes and other migratory birds.

Tamang justifies the construction, arguing: "If you want

more pilgrimage tourism, you have to build more accommodation for it."

Although Lumbini does have a shortage of rooms for pilgrims, there are 20 hotels outside the protected area catering to all levels of tourists. But land is expensive and ownership fragmented, so investors cannot find suitable sites for big luxury hotels outside the nativity zone. Leasing land inside Lumbini would not only be cheaper but owners could also charge premium room rates from wealthy pilgrims.

Gitu Giri, a professor at Lumbini University and the author of several books says: "The Kenzō Tange master plan may be old, but it is not outdated. No one should modify it without proper assessment, and if the changes are for commercial purposes we should not allow that to happen." 📺

## THE MONK AND THE SARUS



Wetlands inside Lumbini's protected area have been home to the sacred Sarus cranes since the Buddha's time. Now, there is a proposal to build high-end resorts on them. Watch video of Venerable Metteya, who is leading opposition to the hotel plan.

nepalitimes.com

## "Pilgrims come there to pray, not watch birds..."

Lumbini is not only the birthplace of the Buddha, but also home to the Sarus crane (*Antigone antigone*), the tallest flying bird in the world and an iconic species of wetlands.

Legend has it that the Buddha once rescued a wounded crane and set the bird free in the jungles of Lumbini. The Buddha is seen in many historic drawings with a crane, and scholars believe that these non-migratory cranes have inhabited Lumbini for at least the last two millennia.

However, the majestic birds are now on the brink of extinction in South Asia because of habitat destruction, pesticide use, electrocution and hunting. If Lumbini's wetlands are converted into luxury hotels, the holy site would lose its remaining population of 150 cranes. Zakir Hussain, a 40-year-old farmer in Lumbini, says: "When we were young, we used to see lots of them, these days they are rare."

A 100-hectare bird sanctuary was set up in the New Lumbini Village along the northern perimeter of the Lumbini Master Plan by the International Crane

Foundation, which had taken the land on a 50-year lease from the Lumbini Development Trust (LDT).

The Foundation reserved the natural wetlands and built ponds inside the sanctuary so the cranes could mate, hatch and raise chicks during the monsoon. The protected habitat is now threatened by plans to allow new hotels on the wetlands and its surroundings.

"For some people, wetlands are wastelands," says Venerable Metteya, a Buddhist monk who has been working with the Foundation to protect Lumbini's cranes. "The loss of the Sarus sanctuary will be a devastating blow for crane conservation in Nepal."

Metteya, whose official name is Awadesh Tripathi, was recently appointed Vice Chair of the LDT, and his first order of business will be to protect Lumbini's holy birds.

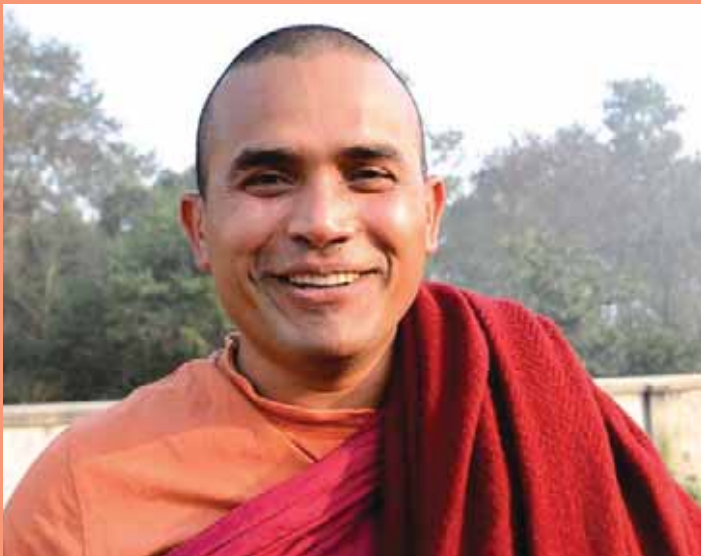
But Ajitman Tamang, former LDT member secretary supports the hotel plan, saying: "People come to Lumbini to pray, not to watch birds."



INTERNATIONAL CRANE FOUNDATION



# Buddha's birthplace



## “Save the Sarus”

Venerable Metteya (Awadhesh Tripathi) was recently appointed Vice Chair of the Lumbini Development Trust. As a Buddhist monk and scholar, he has been active in the protection of Lumbini's cranes. Just days before his appointment, *Nepali Times* spoke to the monk about why it is important to save the birds. Excerpts:

**Nepali Times:** Tell us about Sarus cranes, and the threats they face.  
**Venerable Metteya:** Sarus cranes are endangered mainly because of habitat loss. They nest in wetlands close to farms, but land is scarce and there is encroachment. The use of pesticides has poisoned the cranes' food cycle. Their egg shells have become thinner, and the hatching rate is low. High-power transmission lines are another threat to the low-flying cranes.

**Is it possible for the hotels and the wetlands to co-exist?**  
Kenzō Tange's idea was to leave 60% of Lumbini as a nature preserve, and the crane sanctuary was a vital part of that plan. The preservation of Sarus cranes will enhance the cultural values and significance of Lumbini. Building hotels where the cranes live is not what we want to see in Lumbini. That is not the legacy we want to leave behind for future generations. The Buddha was born under a tree, got enlightenment under a tree, and passed away under a tree. His teachings reflect this harmony between humans and nature. Tange's Lumbini Master Plan reflected that.

**Why is it important to save the Sarus crane?**  
Farmers in Lumbini believe that if Sarus cranes align in their farms they will have a better harvest. There is also scientific evidence that the cranes eat bugs and insects that destroy crops. The birds' wetland habitat also helps recharge ground water by acting as natural sponges and filtering pollutants. They are a vital part of the ecosystem, and we must preserve them.



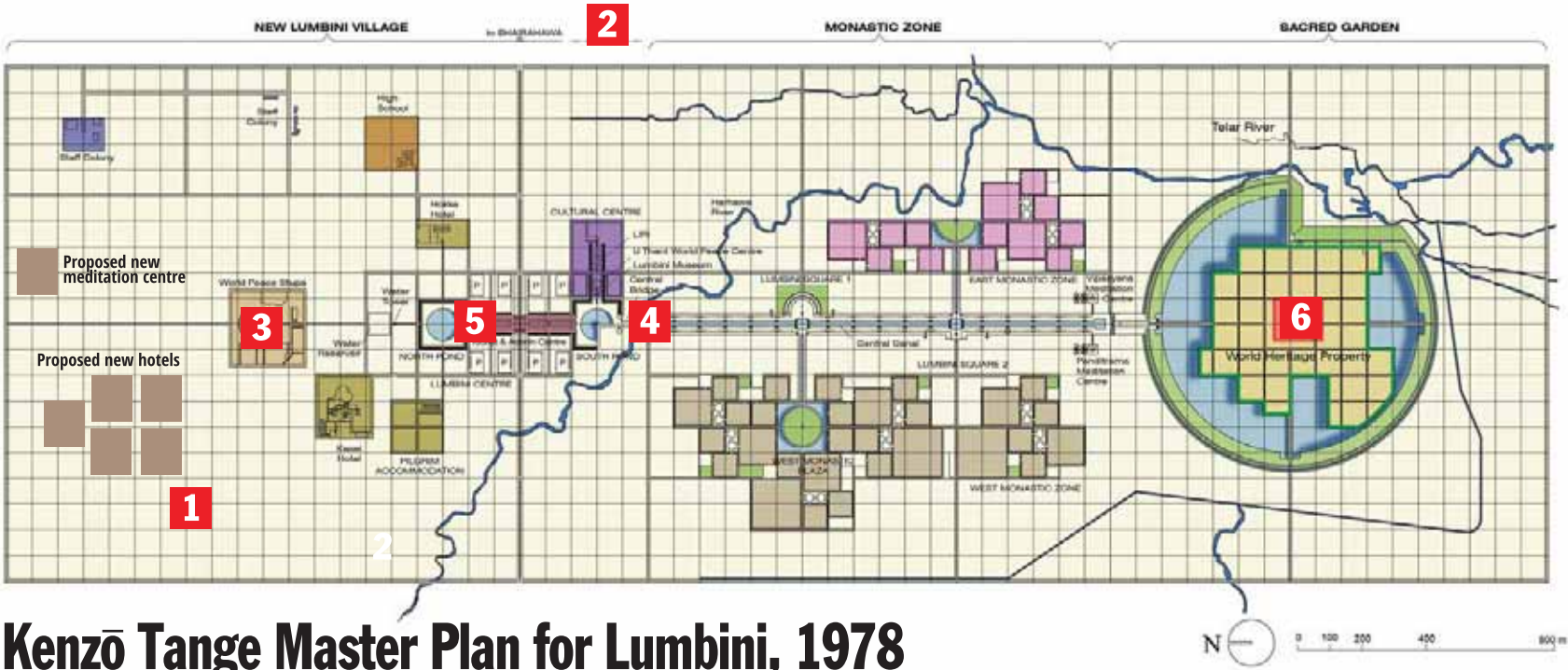
1 New concrete structures are already coming up next to the crane sanctuary in the wetland inside Lumbini's protected zone.



2 Lumbini is now a rectangular green oasis in the middle of farms and factories along the densely-populated Bhairawa-Butwal industrial corridor. Pollution from the factories is already affecting the tranquility and pristine environment of Buddha's birthplace.



3 The Peace Stupa marks the northern edge of the axis of Kenzō Tange's Lumbini Master Plan. The stupa is adjacent to the crane sanctuary, where five new luxury hotels are proposed to be built.



Kenzō Tange Master Plan for Lumbini, 1978



4 The view north from the eternal Peace Lamp up the Central Canal towards the Peace Stupa.



5 The under construction Lumbini Museum.



6 The Mayadevi Temple at the Sacred Garden is the inner sanctum of Lumbini, where Buddhist pilgrims from all over the world congregate.





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# Provincial mindset

Now that we have elections out of the way, and the wheat has been separated from the chaff, the nation's attention has turned to the subject everyone has avoided so far: federal provinces, their names and boundaries, as well as the governors and chief ministers thereof.

So far we have said we will cross that bridge when we come to it, but we cannot keep putting it off. Sooner or later, we have to bite the bullet, take the bull by the horns, and cross the Rubicon.

No political discussion in Nepal these days is complete unless you have uttered the 'F' word. When talk around the family dining table turns to federal provinces, as it often does, minors have to be sent to bed early because parents punctuate their sentences with "WTF" (What the Federation!)

To avoid coming to blows, the political leadership in its infinite wisdom decided to name federal provinces after single digits. However, there is again talk of adding provinces and changing their boundaries, and in the interest of pragmatism and flexibility, we propose to revive the following map with names that should satisfy everyone: After that we will have

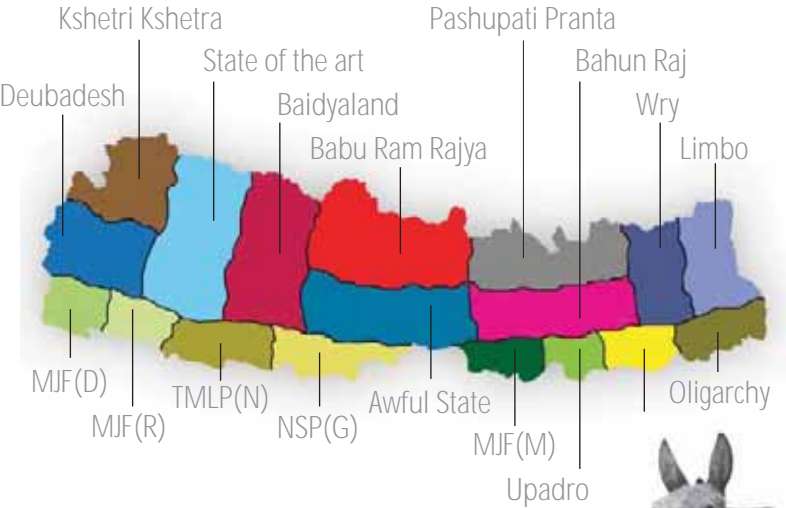
making Dadeldhura the summer capital and Dhangadi the winter capital.

Province 3 is also seeing a tussle between Patan and Hetauda. The ideal way out is to connect the two with a tunnel, locate the capital underground somewhere equidistant between the two and name the capital Patauda.

Similarly, Province 2 may soon go to war over whether its provincial capital should be located in Birganj or Janakpur, and the only compromise the Ass can think of is to temporarily locate it in Darbhanga until a mutually acceptable solution can be found.

Now that the atheists have nearly an absolute majority in the house, the path is open to roll back secularism from the Constitution and turn Nepal back into a god-fearing nation once more. This, of course, is going to open a whole new can of worms in a Pandora's Box about whether Nepal should be a Succulent Republic or revert back to a Hindu Kingdom.

Since all dispute resolution is about compromise, we can meet midpoint and declare that some of the federal provinces will have the option of declaring themselves Secular Monarchies if they so wish.



to decide on where the capitals of these provinces will be. There is already a battle royal brewing in Province 7 about whether to locate the HQ in the hills or plains. Since neither side is giving an inch, the only solution we can think of is



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