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## Bulldozing democracy

Last year, when Nepal held its first local elections in two decades, people hoped that there would finally be development, transparency and accountability at the grassroots.

But just seven months after they were sworn in, many of the mayors, village council chiefs and ward committee members are showing more interest in using their office for personal gain rather than doing public service. A third of the representatives elected to local governments are contractors with shady reputations.

For the past 20 years of conflict and post-war transition, in the absence of elected local councils, construction contractors with political protection plundered natural resources. Most of these businessmen are now elected local politicians, and most are from the Nepali Congress (*Story: Page 13*).

At least 300 mayors and village council chiefs are members of the Federation of Contractor's Association of Nepal. Many more were elected who are not affiliated to the Federation, but still own small and medium-size construction firms or rent heavy equipment.

Many of them have been found to be abusing their authority to award road, bridge and other construction contracts to their own companies. Some have transferred their company ownerships to family members or relatives, but many have not even bothered to divest – blatantly awarding contracts to themselves.

Khim Lal Devkota, an expert on local governance and fiscal federalisation, told *Nepali Times*: "One third of mayors and village councils seem to have just one goal: amass personal

wealth rather than serve the people who elected them."

Many had anticipated this problem when political parties openly sold election tickets to wealthy and influential businessmen rather than political and social activists with integrity. UML Vice-Chair Yubaraj Gyawali was one of them, but his call for fielding honest candidates was ignored by his own party.

Today, Gyawali cannot hide his disappointment and says this is what happens when political parties give tickets to contractors and people elect them.

He says: "If we want good governance we need to elect good guys, it is a threat to our democracy if we elect overnight millionaires who plunder natural resources. The

people will be disillusioned with democracy and look for alternatives."

Former Chief Election Commissioner Neel Kantha Uprety says the fact that so many contractors with questionable pasts have been elected exposes deep structural flaws in the system. "Our electoral process needs reforms,

and one of the most urgent reforms is to make elections as inexpensive as possible," he says.

Allowing absentee ballots could be one way to make elections less expensive since that would mean many voters will not be physically present and prone to enticement and vote-buying.

Bibeksheel Sajha and some political activists have demanded absentee voting in our country, where a large proportion of the population is internal or overseas migrants.

Last month's Himalmedia Opinion Poll Survey 2018 showed that a majority of Nepalis support this demand. Of the 3,612 respondents, 82% approved of absentee voting while only 3.6% were against it.

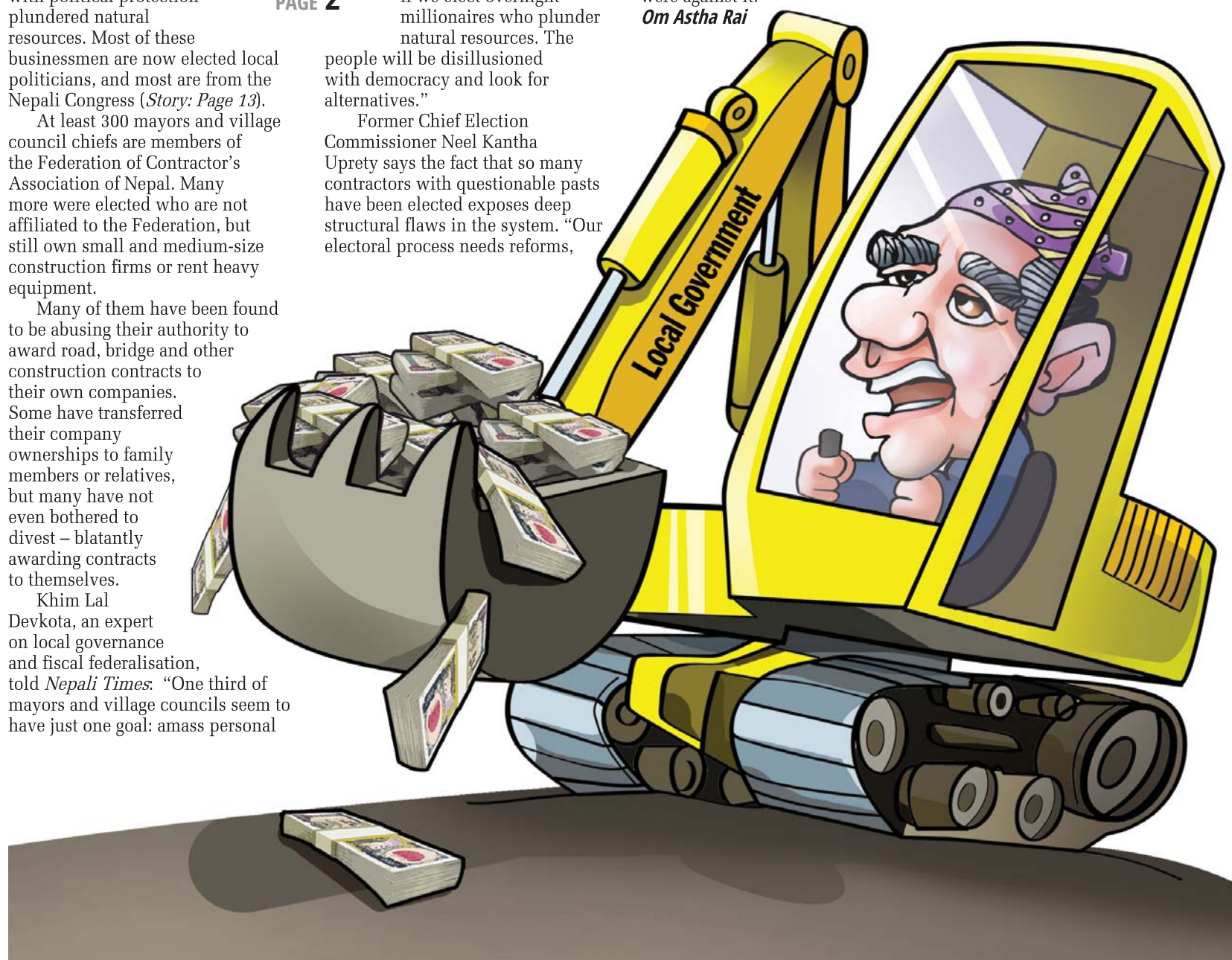
**Om Astha Rai**



## Learning to live with wild elephants

A village in Bardia tests an early warning system to alert them about approaching elephants.

PAGE 8-9



BHANU BHATTACHARAI

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# TRICKLEDOWN CORRUPTION

Rishing village in Tanahu elected Rajendra Krishna Shrestha of the Nepali Congress as village council chair in last year's local government elections. He is also the NC's regional head, is a building contractor by profession, and owns JCB excavators. After taking over as the head of the local government he has been giving out infrastructure contracts to friends and relatives who all rent his JCBs. Says an outraged local citizen in Rishing: "We have pointed this out many times, but it looks like everyone is in it together. The village chief is profiteering from his post."

An investigation in our sister publication, *Himal Khabarpatrika*, last week uncovered a sordid list of similar collusion and conflict of interest among mayors, village council members and ward chairs who were elected eight months ago. (*Translated story: page 13*)

In fact the Federation of Contractors' Associations of Nepal proclaims proudly that more than 300 of its members have been elected to positions in local governments. The Federation is still tallying a list of even more members elected to provincial and national assemblies.

Elected representatives can be from any profession. But a common theme among the businessmen who have been recently elected is that after taking office they have proceeded to award themselves contracts, rented out their equipment to local governments, concocted needless infrastructure projects, and left many of them unfinished even after being paid. Our investigation shows that honest administrators who have raised objections to such gangsterism have been sacked, roughed up, or transferred.

After VDCs and DDCs elected in 1997 lapsed in 2002, as the country was torn apart by conflict, and in the post-war transition, village and district councils were run by a local political cartels known as the 'All-party Mechanism'. We often reported in this paper that these were nothing more than all-party mechanisms for plunder. Rivers were mined for sand, the Chure hills were quarried, forests were logged, and land was grabbed. The last six months have shown that instead of being curbed, the wholesale ransacking of natural resources has, if anything, increased.

The first local elections in 20 years in April-May 2017 raised hopes that the people would finally elect urban and rural municipal governments that would be accountable. Grassroots democracy would now be empowered to deliver development and social services to the people's doorsteps.

Last year, we predicted optimistically that the new, inclusive local councils would remove kleptocrats and improve governance.

Indeed, in many cities and villages across the country local governments have moved quickly to catch up with lost time. They have formed a nationwide association of village heads and a mayors' pressure group has been lobbying a reluctant Kathmandu to follow the spirit of the constitution to devolve revenue-generation and decision-making.

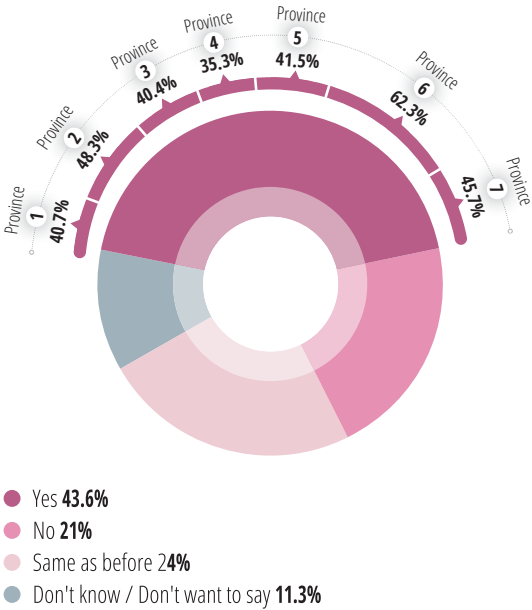
However, as our report shows, it has turned out just as many cynics had feared: the crooks got themselves elected. Contractors who earlier had to bribe VDC and DDC bureaucrats to bag infrastructure deals became candidates for local governments last year. Many of them used the power of money to get themselves elected, and now they no longer have to bribe anyone -- they simply hand over the business to themselves. Although the Nepali Congress tailed as the third largest party in elections to all three tiers of government last year, a majority of elected contractors, it turns out, are from the NC.

It is not the job of the mayor or the village chair to drive an excavator. The people have put great trust on their elected representatives, they must not squander this chance to prove themselves. If they do own businesses, they should divest immediately to avoid conflict of interest. Instead, what we have seen are mayors and village chiefs handing over management of their businesses to relatives or personal secretaries, and making sure their own companies bag contracts or rent their equipment.

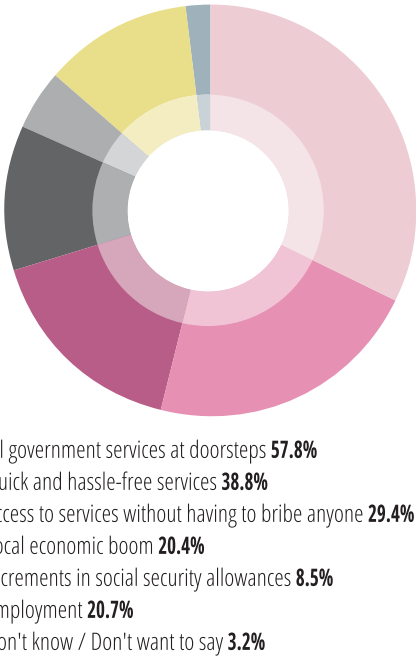
Last month's Himalmedia Public Opinion Survey 2018 showed that the people still have great hope in local governments improving their livelihoods. Provinces 2 and 6, which are the country's poorest, have the highest percentage of respondents who said that services have improved since local governments took office (*See charts, below*). Asked what they expect from the new local governments, almost all said they wanted efficient, honest and fast service delivery at the local level. But there is also considerable skepticism about whether the new local councils have the werewithal to fulfill those needs.

The national rot has trickled down to the local level. It is up to the state, civil society and local FM radios to spotlight this reckless abandonment of the promise of democracy.

Q. Have you been able to access services more easily and effectively from elected municipalities and village councils?



Q. What do you expect from elected municipalities and village councils?



## ONLINE PACKAGES



### RUN MIRA RUN

A world class runner and a familiar name in international races, Mira Rai now wants to offer the same opportunities and platform she had to other young Nepali athletes. Let us take you to Pharping where Rai organised a 12km mountain marathon last week and learn about what motivates her to devote herself to help other talented Nepali female runners. Story: page 7.



### ELEPHANT CEASEFIRE

Go online to watch a short documentary from Practical Action on how wild elephants terrorise villagers in Sri Lanka, and how human-pachyderm conflict can be handled. Our print centrespread on page 8-9 examines how an early warning system can save lives.

## OLD SCHOOL

Elizabeth Hawley remembered ... so many stories of the fearsome lady, the terror of mountaineers, etc. But I always found her the most charming, erudite and witty companion when visiting her Dili Bazar flat for lunch with Dudley Spain in days bygone. Ever sharp, she once told me "never use two syllables where one will do, people write too much in Nepal." I sat in awe at her 'pre-computer memory' (something she shared with Col. Jimmy Roberts of Mountain Travel), a near-total recall of facts, figures and other data minutiae. Elizabeth Hawley was also one of the most self-effacing people, truly interested far more in the world around her to see or assimilate the fascination she held for others. Elizabeth Hawley, a Dame of the Old School, in whose death we all lose an icon and the finest mentor, but retain treasured memories.

Marcus Cotton

## THE END POINT

Sometimes we need to start from the end point ('Cleaner air with green buses', Bhushan Tuladhar, #895) then see how to get there:

1. Ban and remove non-compliant vehicles
2. Ban on old vehicles
3. Ban non-electric motorbikes, etc
4. Increase charging stations
5. Ban new petrol pumps

namah

## INNOVATIVE TOURISM

The present congestion will be relieved when international airports outside Kathmandu come on line. While the Bhairawa and Pokhara airports are billed as tourist magnets, they should serve as more efficient transit conduits than what we now have for migrant workers. Modi visit in 2014 proves we can clean up Kathmandu.

Joe Niemczura

## CLEAN ENERGY

Private entrepreneurs should be given full support by Nepalis to harness the country's hydropower ('Electric shock to fossil industry', Kunda Dixit, #894). It would reduce our dependence on India and clean up our air.

Arun Sharma

## WHAT'S TRENDING



### Cleaner air with green busses

Nepal's petroleum imports are growing exponentially. Just converting some diesel buses to electric can be a game changer for improving Kathmandu's air quality. This commentary was widely shared on social media and garnered much support. Go online and find out about Sajha Yatayat's effort to restore electric public transport in the Valley.

- Most reached and shared on Facebook
- Most popular on Twitter



### From Liz Hawley in Kathmandu

Elizabeth Hawley passed away on 26 January, aged 95. This moving tribute to her life and work in Nepal as a legendary chronicler of Himalayan climbing was the most visited and commented story from last week. Visit nepalitimes.com to watch a short film about the journalist who came to Kathmandu in 1959, and never left.

- Most visited online page
- Most commented

## QUOTE TWEETS

**Nepali Times @nepalitimes**  
Converting Kathmandu's public buses to #electric can dramatically reduce air pollution, writes @BhushanTuladhar. Read article: <http://bit.ly/2DW04d7> #pollution #Kathmandu #electricbuses #AirPollution #Transportation #publichealth

**david seddon @pigreen**  
Updating the truck fleet and outlawing all diesel SUVs would also help reduce both pollution and congestion.

**Nepali Times @nepalitimes**  
As both a successful woman in a man's world & a highly visible foreigner recording Nepal's history, we are all in her debt. Liz Hawley defied conventions of her time, & determined to live life on her own terms & in her own incomparable style.

**Helen Clark @HelenClarkNZ**  
#RIP Elizabeth Hawley. Former #NZ Honorary Consul in #Nepal & chronicler of #Himalayan ascents. #Kathmandu resident since 1960. An extraordinary life. Short video here captures the essence of this remarkable woman.

Weekly Internet Poll #896

Q. Is the slow transition to the elected government making you pessimistic about the future?

Total votes: 111

- Yes 67%
- No 24%
- Don't know 9%

Weekly Internet Poll #897  
To vote go to: [www.nepalitimes.com](http://www.nepalitimes.com)

Q. Do you think police is doing enough to investigate complaints of rape?





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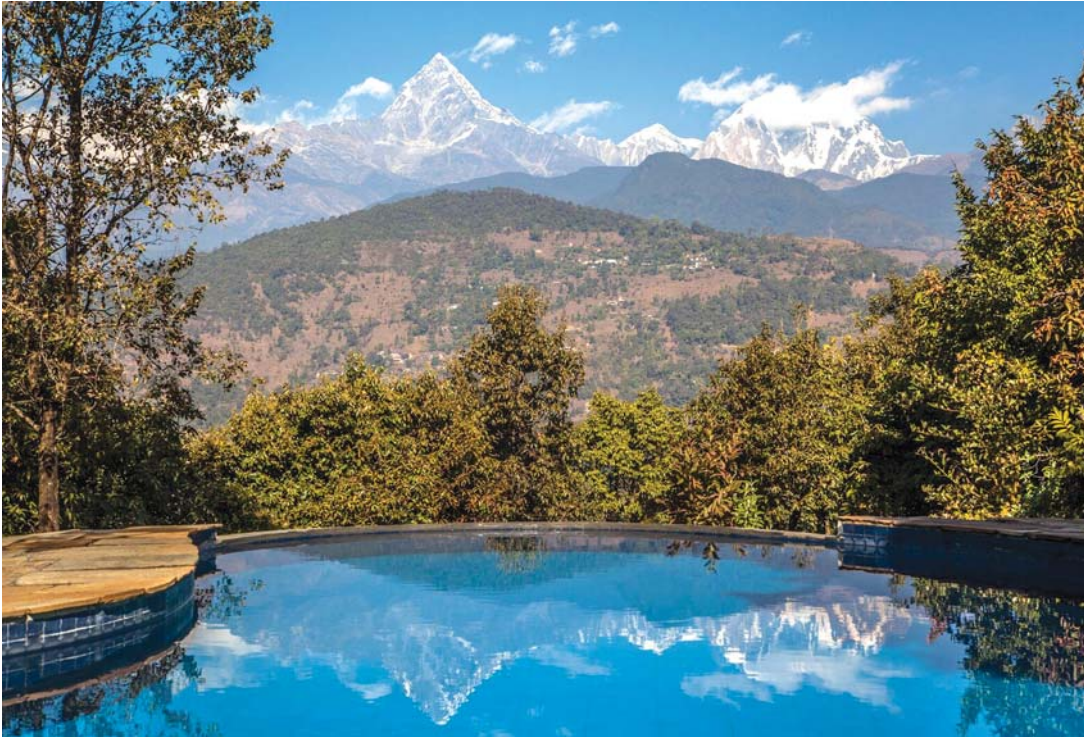


# No tiger, no mountain

Visiting Tiger Mountain when the peaks are not visible forces us to explore the forest and birds



KUNDA DIXIT



THOMAS L KELLY

The air has been surprisingly clear for most of this winter over Central Nepal, and the Himalayan peaks were out in their full glory. A holiday plan to see the Super Blue Blood Moon on 31 January from Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge, therefore, promised to be a once-in-a-lifetime event.

Nestled at 1,200m on a ridge, Tiger Mountain commands an unparalleled vista from Gurja Himal in the west, along a jagged horizon of the Annapurnas, Machapuchhre's skyscraping pyramid, Lamjung Himal, right up to Manaslu and Himalchuli to the east.

People don't come to Tiger Mountain to see tigers, although an occasional leopard does stroll by at night. They come here for the mountains after seeing tigers in Bardia or Chitwan.

Last week, the wind direction suddenly shifted and the whole of Nepal was enveloped in thick brown haze. After a 7 hour wait at Kathmandu's domestic airport the view from cruising altitude was spectacular. You could see that the pollution leveled off at 3,000m and the Indo-Gangetic plains were shrouded in a dirty blanket of smog that was being blown up the valleys

to the mountains.

Going to Tiger Mountain when the peaks are not visible, and when the smog had blocked out a rare total lunar eclipse was an important life lesson: many things don't work out as planned, there is no point getting worked up about something beyond your control, make the best of what you have, and value the smaller things in life that you take for granted. The Zen masters taught this long ago, but it has lapsed in an age of instant gratification and the pursuit of value for money.

The next morning, a hesitant sun rose from behind the forested ridge that faded into lighter shades of grey in the distance. Of all the plant species on the planet, 3% are found in Nepal, many of them in and around Pokhara with its great altitude variation and heavy annual rainfall.

The trees and thick undergrowth of the community forests around Tiger Mountain are a favourite for birds, with 332 of Nepal's 884 species here. Two new sightings were recorded last year: White-fronted Goose and Short-eared Owl. There are 279 species of butterflies, and a wide variety of dragon- and damselflies.

## NOW YOU SEE IT NOW YOU DON'T:

Ornithologist Hari Bhandari (*left*) spotted 20 species of birds in 45 minutes one morning last week at Tiger Mountain when the peaks were covered by haze.

On clear days, the same swimming pool has a stunning reflection of Machapuchhre and Annapurna III (*right*).

Within 45 minutes of setting off, bird guide Hari Bhandari had spotted 20 species: Greater Barbet, Blue-throated Barbet, Blue-naped Pita, Himalayan Griffon, White-throated Fantail, Rufus Gorgeted Flycatcher, Crimson Sunbird, and many more.

Coming across a gregarious flock of Grey Tree Pies, Bhandari whispers it is probably because there is an owl nearby, and sure enough he makes out with binoculars an Asian Barn Owl perched on a branch.

The ridge where Tiger Mountain is situated was first located by trekking pioneer Jimmy Roberts while trying to find prominent hilltops to erect radio masts for the 1960 elections. It then became a camping spot for Prince Charles' trek to Nepal in 1979, and the

'Royal Trek' that it popularised as an alternative to the classical trek: more relaxed day hikes in a relatively accessible location, with good views and rich flora and fauna.

This year marks Tiger Mountain's 20th anniversary, and the resort which has got a Gold award from Travelife for sustainability, offers a model for the kind of tourism Nepal should be promoting: homegrown high-value eco-tourism that uses local products and showcases the best of Nepal's scenery, nature and culture.

Says owner manager Marcus

Cotton: "Nepal should be trying to meet revenue targets from tourism, not just chase numbers."

A long scar is just visible through the haze to the south: the runway of the new regional airport that will be completed in 2021 allowing direct international flights into Pokhara for a lot more tourists.

Most will come for the Annapurnas, but Pokhara has a lot more to offer than mountains. Tour operators and hotel investors need a Plan B for days and seasons when the mountains are not visible. 🇳🇵

**Kunda Dixit**



KUNDA DIXIT

## POKHARA FLORA

Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge is set in a luxuriant evergreen warm-temperate Schima-Castanopsis forest which is a haven for plants and wildlife. The forests are in excellent condition with a high diversity of trees and shrubs, including the Rhododendron arboretum, Nepal's national flower.

The community forest is managed to promote the sustainable use of plant resources, and local people use many of the trees and shrubs for food, fodder, medicines and energy needs. Walking through the

forests with guides reveal these many uses these wild plants have. Around village houses are giant figs and other useful trees not found in the forests. Orchids and other epiphytes thrive in the humid woodlands, and are an indicator of the clean air. The natural jungle is also home to many birds which feed on nectar in the flowers and fleshy fruits.

**Mark Watson**  
Editor-in-Chief, *Flora of Nepal*  
Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh

prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

### Istanbul more frequent

Turkish Airlines will resume daily operations between Istanbul-Kathmandu by adding two more weekly flights from 24 September 2018, indicating a growth in passenger demand on this sector in the post-monsoon and holiday season.

### Stall no.D1

Aiming to create a foothold in Nepali market, Nippon Paint of India has participated in the 4th Nepal Buildcon International Expo 2018, holding on 9-11 February. It will display a range of hi-tech eco-friendly decorative paint products at Stall No.D1.

### Aged JW

Johnnie Walker introduced a new blended scotch whisky, Johnnie Walker Aged 18 Years that has hints of vanilla, almonds, orange peel and a wisp of subtle smoke. The whisky is said to be crafted from Scotland's finest smooth and complex 18 year-old whiskies, each hand-selected by Master Blender Jim Beveridge.

### Painting schools

Berger Paints Nepal will be providing paint at discounted price to build or reconstruct approximately 3,000 schools in earthquake affected districts through Rotary District 3292's Rotary Nepal Literacy Mission project.

### CG combo

Chaudhary Group has unveiled new flagship Chinese smart phones Meizu PRO 7, M6 and M5s. Priced at Rs47,499, Rs18,199/19,499 and Rs18,799, the phones integrate top-notch hardware configurations with dual screens and dual cameras.

### Tags and phones

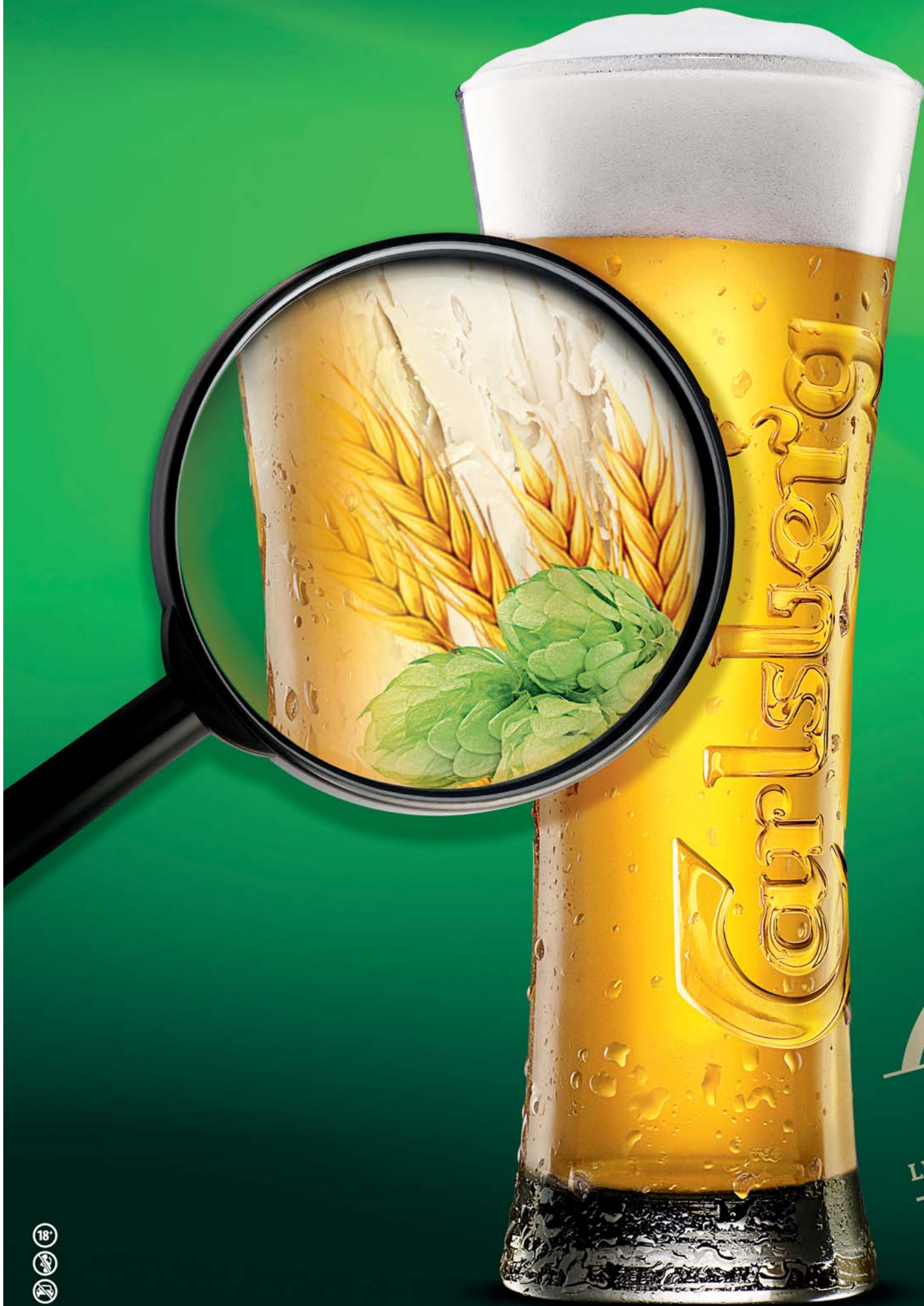
Samsung has launched Galaxy Tab A 7.0 and Galaxy A8+ Smartphone in Kathmandu with price tags of Rs15,900 and Rs59,990.

### prabhu BANK



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# Relearning to build back better

Earthquakes provide Nepal with a regular opportunity to revive traditional art

After the earthquake, Nepal has to rebuild 700,000 houses and over 700 monuments. This can be seen as an enormous calamity, or as a big opportunity to jump start the handicraft industry and revive the arts.



1/2 FULL  
Anil Chitrakar

The demand for their unique skill sets to rebuild better homes with traditional features can promote local skills and materials, as is happening in parts of Patan and Bhaktapur. The first monument to be restored after the earthquake was Bouddha after it raised Rs230 million in cash and 30kg in gold from devout donors. Similar restoration of the hundreds of other monuments could generate a lot more funds to revive the traditional art of wood carving and metalwork.

Nepal needs to keep its young people at home by providing them gainful employment, and a revival of the vernacular art and craft could do just that. Politics related to the diverse identity of Nepalis is also a great opportunity to re-design, re-create and recover the jewelry, musical instruments, textile, utensils and food heritage of each group -- skills and knowledge often preserved by families across Nepal.

As each group celebrates its new year, perform rituals and give away gifts, the demand will grow and create a new economy at the local level. If tourists like these objects, it could translate into more



**PASSED DOWN:** Naresh Raj Shakya is reviving his ancestral profession of wood carving in Bungamati as he struggles to keep up with demand for monument reconstruction after the 2015 earthquake.

GOPEN RAI

revenue. As people become richer, they will want many of these objects in precious metal and as an investment or savings as has been the culture for a long time in Nepal.

There is great demand in the West for Tibetan artifacts. As new trade routes and pilgrimage sites open up between Nepal and China, the demand for art and craft with Tibetan designs and themes is also going to rise. Tibetan carpets woven in Nepal are still popular souvenir items, and can be upgraded.



In the Kailash Sacred Landscape and among the growing number of pilgrims there will be a demand for ritual objects to offer and bring back. The need for silver and brass water vessels (instead of plastic

bottles) to take back holy water from Lake Mansarovar could revive the brass and silver industry.

The demand for Buddhist art can grow if we think beyond Lumbini and the Kathmandu Valley and integrate Kushinagar, Sarnath, Bodhgaya, and later maybe even

venture beyond to Taxilla, Nalanda and Xian.

Design input is critical in this process, and the objects must be as functional as possible. These need to be of use in our daily lives, not dust collectors in show cases. They have to be easy to use and easy to repair and clean.

With the Belt and Road Initiative we could even be exporting craft into the European market in bulk by train. The Silk Road was historically both the means and an end for trade. It kept this whole region prosperous for a long time and can help our art and craft to thrive again.

There will be challenges. For example, artists and handmade craft and art cannot compete with mass produced 'Made in China' souvenirs. Assembly line Ganesh figurines have hit the Kathmandu market, and many Nepali artists are working in China to make the moulds for the mass production of Nepali artifacts.

With 3D printing technology, antique handcrafted pieces can be replicated cheaply and with very little effort. There are a number of short term projects to help artists keep up with the changing landscape, but these efforts need to be sustained.

Issues like line of credit, authenticity, certification and cash incentives for exporters, and general ease of doing business will take longer to establish.

There is also the issue of incentives, and the middlemen and women who seem to make much more than the artists themselves. Everyone wants to sell and few want to produce. Finding the right balance for the way prices and profits are distributed along the value chain is critical if we are to encourage masterpieces in the market and not just cheap replicas.

Copyright is often non-existent. It has become a joke that 'copyright' means copying without making any mistakes. How do we go about protecting the intellectual property of the designer and master artists?

It seems that all the art pieces in our cities and towns in the form of an open museum are referred to as 'priceless' -- until they are stolen and auctioned globally. 🇳🇵

**Anil Chitrakar** is President of Siddharth Inc

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The overcast skies on Tuesday and Wednesday was caused by a long swathe of cloud that stretched all the way from the Indian Ocean to China, although thick and wide it did not bring the much-needed precipitation to the Himalaya. Now that the system has passed, the weekend looks sunny and bright. The wind is from the west, which means the plains haze will reduce and the mountains will be out in style. Maximum temperature in Kathmandu will climb into the 20s, but the nights will still be chilly.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
20° 4°	20° 5°	21° 8°

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# Mira Rai racing to help other runners

DUKSANGH SHERPA



PHOTO: GOPEN RAI

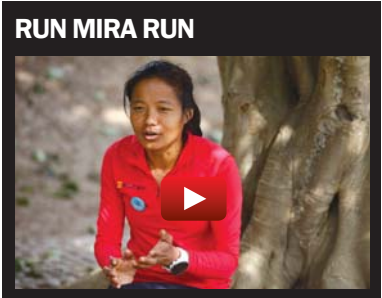
After gaining speedy international recognition as a trail runner, Mira Rai now wants to offer the same opportunities she had to other young Nepali athletes. Desperate for a job, Mira Rai nearly migrated to Malaysia for work, but decided instead to devote herself to the sport. With the help of mentors who spotted her talent and supported her training and participation in international tournaments, Rai is now a world class runner and a familiar name in international races. Last week, Rai flew straight back to Nepal from Hong Kong after participating in Vibram 100km Ultra trail race to organise a 12km mountain marathon in Pharping, the last in a series of ten races organised by Trail Running Nepal. Rai herself has set an example to others about how to overcome adversity to achieve goals. After major wins in 2014 and 2015, Mira suffered knee injuries and a ligament tear requiring surgery.

This did not hold her back for long: not only did she return to running but also started organising major races in Nepal. Rai has accomplished in four years what most athletes take a decade. From winning numerous national and international trail races, sky running championships, ultra marathons, to being named National Geographic Adventurer of the Year 2017, Rai is now devoting herself to helping others like her. “Everything that I have achieved so far has been possible because of the opportunities that I got through my mentors and supporters,” Rai told us last week in Pharping. “Without that, I would have never become the Mira that I am today.” Last year, Rai took the rising running star Humi Budha Magar who won the Bhojpur Trail Race to Hong Kong. Magar also won last week’s Pharping race in the women’s category. Rai is now selecting and training a group of young Nepali runners for the



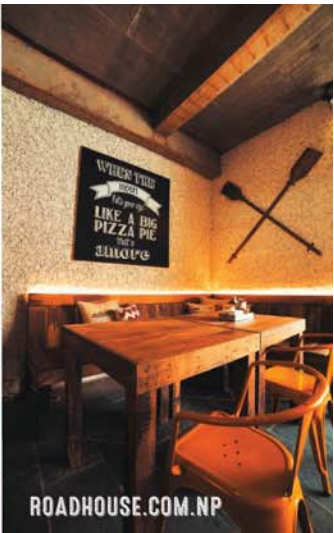
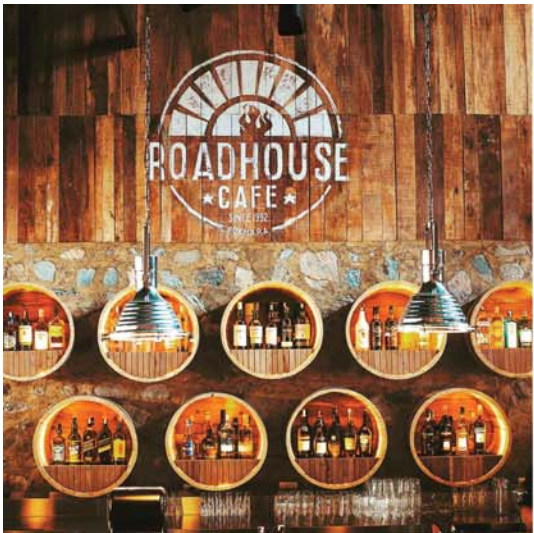
December 2018 Oxfam Trailwalker 100km race in Hong Kong. “Several male runners from Nepal have participated in this event, but there is still little participation of female Nepali runners. It’s time for change,” she adds emphatically. Despite her accomplishments and determination, Mira Rai remains humble and grounded. She says this is because of her background of struggle and single-minded pursuit of her goal. Four years ago, just before she became a celebrity after winning her first 50km race in Nepal, Rai had just got her Malaysian work visa and was all set to leave. Her karate coach Dhurba Bikram Malla convinced her not to go, and instead train further in martial arts. She stayed and met other runners who encouraged her to participate in an upcoming race, which she won. This got her noticed by Richard Bull from Trail Running Nepal, who then went on to mentor and support her training.

Mira Rai hasn’t looked back since. She is currently part of the Salomon trail running team which has been sponsoring her since 2016. Rai is now in a race against time to help others, providing a platform through which talented female runners receive the same breaks she received. She says: “I want to give back the help I got when I first started.” 🇳🇵



Watch a short film about Mira Rai where she explains what motivated her to remain in Nepal, train hard to win international acclaim as a trail runner, and why she now wants to help other talented Nepali girls like her.

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





# How humans can live

SHEREN SHRESTHA and  
GOKARNA JUNG THAPA in BARDIA

Conservationists are testing early warning devices to reduce damage from increasing conflict between people and wild elephants in Nepal and other parts of South Asia.

As human settlements encroach on traditional routes for elephant migration, fiercely protective adult elephants demolish buildings, overturn cars and gore farmers who have tried to chase them away.

In Nepal, 18 people were killed in 27 wild elephant attacks in 2016 alone and two elephants were killed by villagers in retaliation. India saw more than 400 people and 100 elephants killed in wildlife encounters, and in Sri Lanka 88 people and 279 elephants were killed in the same year.

A photograph last year of an elephant and calf being torched with tar balls in India won awards and drew international attention to the hostility the pachyderms face near human settlements. While such conflict cannot be completely eradicated, they can be reduced.

Now, conservationists in Nepal are exploring both traditional and modern knowledge to devise conflict-prevention and mitigation strategies. Particularly, experience with smart Early Warning Systems (EWS) that employ motion detectors and automatic dissemination through mobile SMS that have saved many lives in Bardia, can be shared with neighbouring countries.

Bardia National Park and WWF Nepal collaborated with Engineering Adda Nepal to test the warning system in Pattharbojhi village between January-June 2017.

Located within Khata Wildlife Corridor connecting Bardia National Park with Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary in India, the village faces frequent and intense conflicts with elephants. Two people were killed and 19 houses destroyed by elephants in 2016 here.

Strategically placed hybrid sensors using a combination of acoustic and seismic signals detect elephant movement, automatically setting off a siren, and sending SMS alerts to selected phone numbers in the vicinity.

The sensors were tested on captive elephants to record data on sound and motion associated with elephant movement, and this was integrated into an algorithm to accurately identify elephants and remove false positives.

For the trial, sensors were placed



KRISHNA SINJALI

**DO'S AND DONT'S:** Elephant conservationists say trying to frighten migrating elephants like this villager in eastern Nepal (left) can make them angrier and more destructive. Pattharbojhi v



**1** Migration paths like the Babai River (*above*) or the Khata Wildlife Corridor (*map*) are frequented by wild elephants and are near human habitation.

## THIS IS NOT A DRILL



**2** Geophone motion sensors are placed at strategic locations where elephants roam.

**3** These devices analyse the frequency of vibrations to filter out non-elephant activity.

at 5 metre intervals in the periphery of Pattharbojhi village with its known entry points for elephants. During the six months last year, some 21 instances of attempted entry of elephants were identified. The EWS had a 82% success rate in sounding siren

alarms, and sending SMS alerts worked 70% of the time.

A review of the cases showed two main causes for missed alarms: the siren system was compromised due to rats chewing up the wires, while SMS alerts were halted by

service provider after the pre-paid amount was consumed.

The team is working to resolve these issues by upgrading the wi-fi mechanism, and is on a deal with the telecom service provider. The next trial will be conducted in the Bardia



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# e with wild elephants



SHEREN SHRESTHA

illage (right) that lies on the path wild elephants regularly take need a longer-term solution than just early warning.



4

When positively identified as wild elephant movement, the information is transmitted via the telecom system as SMS to selected phones in the vicinity, or via social media groups.

5

The SMS also trigger alarms on solar-powered sirens on watch towers near villages.

National Park buffer zone by extending the detection range so that there will be more warning time. The team will also document the behavioural response of elephants in order to further improve the system.

The EWS can save lives by warning of

elephants in the vicinity, however, it cannot address the root of human-elephant conflict which is related to habitat encroachment and public awareness.

Complexities on ground mean that a combination of responses needs to be

customised to specific locales. Immediate short-term solutions will include people being made aware of dealing with elephants in the right manner, and accepting that there may never be a permanent solution. Actions such as setting off firecrackers and rattling



pots, installing fences have been used to prevent physical encounters with elephants – they sometimes work, but at other times make them react even more angrily.

Elephants are highly intelligent beings, with incredible memory and learning instincts. They need a wide range and enormous resources in - food, water and space, for survival. If they need to eat, they will find food. If they need to move, they will find a way. Conservationists are trying to find long-term solutions like alternatives to crops that wild elephants prefer, or even granting elephants their traditional right of way.

Ultimately we have to fall back on human understanding and empathy for the sentience of these animals. But even so, given demographic pressures on the wilds along the India-Nepal border, our solutions may at best be temporary. Increasingly, scientists are finding how animals adapt to human-modified environments. We may just have to return the favour by adapting to their presence. 🐘

With inputs from Kanchan Thapa and Sabita Malla of WWF Nepal.



Watch educational video about human-elephant conflict in Sri Lanka made for Practical Action.

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# GETAWAY





# Hunger for justice

Ganga Maya Adhikari refuses to give up her struggle for justice

MAKENZIE STALLO

Ganga Maya Adhikari was preparing dinner for her husband Nanda Prasad when someone knocked on their door in Phujel village of Gorkha one late evening in 2004. What was behind the door would change their lives forever.

The visitor told the Adhikari couple that their son, Krishna, had met with an accident in Chitwan. It was already late, but Nanda Prasad decided to go to see his son that very night.

When Nanda Prasad reached Bharatpur after a night long bus ride, he learnt that his son had not met with any accident — he had in fact been kidnapped, tortured and killed by Maoist cadre.

“My husband saw a bullet wound in my son’s head, and he screamed,” Ganga Maya recalls. “He asked what had happened but the Maoists quickly poured kerosene on the body and set it on fire.” She said they wanted to destroy all evidence before his wounds could be documented.

The Adhikaris came to Kathmandu seeking justice for their murdered son. Even after Nanda Prasad died after a prolonged hunger strike, Ganga Maya has not given up. She has now been on a continuous hunger strike, being fed intravenously by doctors at Bir Hospital, for three years. She vows to not break it until there is justice.

Krishna Prasad was just 17 when he was accused of being a spy and taken away, dragged behind a motorcycle in a sack and executed. Ganga Maya says their son was not spying on anyone: “He was just an innocent young boy.”

She says the men who killed their son repeatedly thrashed her husband. They were forced to flee their home in Phujel and come



MAKENZIE STALLO



GOPEN RAI

to Kathmandu for safety and justice. They went to the courts but were always turned away. When the couple staged a sit-in in front of the Prime Minister’s residence in Baluwatar

in 2014, they were arrested and thrown in jail for ‘disturbing the peace’. Maoist ideologue Baburam Bhattarai, who was elected from Gorkha in the 2008 elections, was prime minister at the time.

While in prison for 49 days, the Adhikaris vowed to not eat anything until justice was done. Even after being released, they continued with their hunger strike. Nanda Prasad died after 334 days of fasting, leaving Ganga Maya alone to fight for their son.

She is currently being force-fed glucose, insulin and other liquids while her husband’s body is slowly decomposing in the morgue of Teaching Hospital up the road in Maharajganj.

Three years ago, the government decided

to compensate them for their son’s life. But they refused to take the money. That same year, a district court issued an arrest warrant for the 13 men charged with Krishna’s murder. One of the accused, Rudra Acharya, subsequently fled to Northern Ireland, according to Amnesty International.

On 21 December 2015, the Supreme Court ordered the police to take Chhabilal Paudel, the main accused, into judicial custody, but the ruling has not yet been implemented while he is being protected by the Maoists.

Despite the delay in justice, Ganga Maya has not lost hope that her son’s murderers will be behind the bars one day. “Sometimes I ask myself: why am I living?” she says. “But I tell myself: if I die, no one will fight for my son.”

Charan Prasain, a human rights activist for Amnesty International since 1996, says: “If the Adhikaris do not get justice, it will prove that everything is justified in politics. But it should not be justified. A crime is a crime, and criminals must be punished.”

It has been nearly 14 years since Krishna Prasad was killed, but justice is still elusive in this long drawn out case. Like her, thousands of other conflict victims wait for justice.

The government this week extended the tenure of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) by one more year, but the Himalmedia Public Opinion Survey 2018 shows a majority of people do not believe the transitional justice body will complete its mandate even in the extended period.

In early January 2018, the Chitwan district court postponed hearing in the Krishna Prasad murder case for 19th time. But that did not discouraged Ganga Maya from seeking justice. She held a press conference to warn that she would go to any extent.

Ganga Maya enjoys support from some human rights activists, but not from political parties. Even if everyone abandons her, she is determined to keep up her lonely struggle. 🇳🇵

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

Go online for past coverage of Krishna Prasad Adhikari's murder.



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Bartika Eam Rai

Khai

BEST PERFORMANCE BY A GROUP OR DUO WITH VOCAL



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Ganesha Gananayak

BEST ROCK VOCAL PERFORMANCE



Axix

Chyangba

RECORD OF THE YEAR



Hemant Rana

Saili





# The Age of Shadows

For those looking for something different to watch at home when there is nothing in the theatres except for a controversial Bollywood film and a tired sequel or two, the Korean film *The Age of Shadows* (2016) is now available in its noirish glory, all 140 minutes of it.



**MUST SEE**  
Sophia Pande

Made as an ode to the resistance movement against the Japanese takeover over of Korea that stretched over decades in the early 20th Century, starting in 1910, the film tells the story of a team of committed fighters who will stop at nothing to release their beloved country from the possession of the haughty Japanese who rule over it, and part of China with an iron fist.

The crux of the story is centred around several key figures including a resistance fighter turned policeman informant for the Japanese, Lee Jung-chool (Song Kang-ho). Lee's allegiances are tested when he is cajoled and manipulated by the resistance fighters held together by the ingenuity and fortitude of a key figure, Kim Woo-jin (Gong Yoo), an antiques dealer who plays the game of suave businessman while organising for explosives and anarchist experts from Hungary to be smuggled from Shanghai into Seoul.

Beautifully filmed with an attention to lighting and framing that echoes in the tradition of the great film noirs of the Hollywood studio system, the movie exhibits the sophistication of Korean filmmaking, underscored by great acting from the leads who take a complex, sometimes convoluted storyline and make it riveting by

focusing on the strong, complicated personalities that inhabit the film.

This is a story of heroism laced with an understanding of what it takes to be a resistance fighter; the film is strongest when the characters are showing their mettle, unflinching at the manipulations and hardships they have to endure in their fight for freedom.

Entered by Korea for the Best Foreign Language category, but missing the nomination, this is a fine film out of a country that now produces gems of independent cinema, albeit, in this particular case, also supported by the behemoth Warner Brothers.

World cinema has always pushed the boundaries of form all over the globe, and while *The Age of Shadows* does follow a hallowed Hollywood tradition, the film breaks boundaries in its depiction of good and bad, with Kang-ho's character playing one of the most interesting, conflicted characters I've seen onscreen for a long time.

It is a shame that films don't pay more such attention to character development the world over, with Nepali films sticking to tropes that make you nauseous even watching the trailers, Bollywood films no less clichéd in their hackneyed renditions of men and women, and Hollywood, the great trend-setter and shaper of psyches all over the world no less lazy when it comes to portraying the complexity of people through our evolution. *The Age of Shadows* is a refreshing, grave portrait of a multifaceted set of people who are not blindly brave, making sacrifices that illuminate their humanity.



Watch trailer online

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

## HAPPENINGS



INDIAN EMBASSY

**LOVE THY YOUR NEIGHBOUR:** India's External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj calls on outgoing UML Chair KP Oli at Baluwater on Thursday. She conveyed Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's message that New Delhi is ready to work with the new government, likely to be led by Oli.



RSS

**ALL SMILES:** Kathmandu Mayor Bidya Sundar Shakya casts his vote during National Assembly Elections in Jawalakhel polling station on Wednesday.



RSS

**INVESTMENT IN SCIENCE:** Korean Ambassador Park Young Sik with Finance Secretary Shankar Prasad Adhikari (*far right*) in Kathmandu on Tuesday after signing an agreement to provide \$10 million grant assistance to promote science and technology.



RSS

**HOMES SWEET HOMES:** President Bidya Devi Bhandari inspecting a model Dalit settlement in Rautahat on Tuesday built by the Dhurmus Sunti Foundation set up by comedian duo Sitaram Kattel (left) and Kunjana Ghimire (right). - RSS



GOPEN RAI

**DIVINE CHILD:** Five-year-old Nihira Bajracharya, newly appointed Kumari Living Goddess of Patan at the residence of her high priest on Monday.

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# Elected contractors

**MUKESH POKHREL**

Himal Khabarpatrika 4-10 Feburary

The Nepali people had great hopes that the first elected government in 20 years would bring a new wave of development, but recent trends show that many elected mayors, village heads and ward members are construction contractors. They have not divested from their companies, but instead are awarding projects to themselves, which is a clear case of conflict of interest.

“About one-third of elected representatives got themselves elected to profit from their businesses, the other one-third want to get to work but don’t know how. We have to monitor those who want to profit, and train those who want to contribute to development,” says expert on federalism and local government Khimlal Devkota.

A nationwide investigation has shown widespread conflict of interest as hundreds of elected local officials are literally awarding themselves construction contracts. According to the Federation of Contractors' Associations of Nepal, more than 300 construction company owners were elected in last year's local elections. There is no figure for how many are among the representatives elected to provincial and national assemblies.

For example, Yam Bahadur Malla was a well known Parbat-based construction entrepreneur, after the first phase of elections he became the Nepali Congress head of Jaljala village where he has been awarding his own Ramkrishna Construction Service and Kali Gandaki Crusher Industry company major construction projects. He ploughed money he earned from his business to get himself elected, and now has nominally transferred ownership of his company to his cousin, Indra Malla.

Said one ward chair: "He has all the excavators and bulldozers, and we have found it is easier just to use them."

Bhim Bahadur Thapa of the NC was elected mayor of Sunwal municipality in Nawalparasi. He is also the owner of a magnesite mine in Palpa that supplies raw material to cement factories in the region. He is the owner of Tirupati Construction Pvt Ltd, and his company has got contracts to build roads.

“Thapa dominated all the sand mining and construction projects here even before elections, after he became mayor himself it has become much easier for him to get contracts,” says one ward member here.

After getting elected as NC mayor of Kusma in Parbat district, Thapa transferred the ownership of his company Suryodaya Construction Service to his personal secretary. That company is now involved in all major construction work in Kusma.

Newly-elected head Roshan Gurung of Mahashila village has hired an excavator from his own company for a construction project claiming that his rental is less than other companies. In Parbat, Bhimsen Gurung who is the head of Paiyu village is also a contractor.

The Ward chair of Butwal sub-metropolis Bhim Shrestha owns Arniko Construction Company which is building a bridge nearby.

Over in Okhaldhunga, Navaraj KC, NC chair of Champadevi village, also owns a construction company that was awarded Rs70 million for a road construction contract. In Manebhanjyang village of the same district, the NC village council chair



LAXMAN KC

Moti Rai has got the village to buy a bulldozer.

In Arghakhanchi, Tika Magar, Maoist chair of Sitganga Municipality, has hired his own heavy equipment for road construction. The ward members of Sitganga have also bought bulldozers and rented them out to

their municipality.

In Bajura in the far-west, the NC Mayor Padam Giuri of Budinanda Municipality is the owner of Ashish Construction Service Pvt Ltd which is now building the District Police Office and a school whose construction is funded by the Indian Embassy.

The Mayor of Parsuram Municipality in Dadeldhura too is a well known construction entrepreneur, his Rajendra Construction Service Pvt Ltd has not been able to complete major construction projects in the district due to multiple breaches of contract. The Construction Association in

Sankhuwasabha brought out an ad in the local paper congratulating its members: Mayor Musari Khatiwada of the UML in Khadbari, Mayor Bidur Lingthep of the UML in Madi Municipality and village chair Pasang Norbu Sherpa.

Village chair Ayub Ansari in Sunsari owns Joya and Brothers Pvt Ltd. In Dhankuta, the newly-elected chair of Sagurigadi village Kuma Yakkha also owns construction companies.

Elected representatives continue to be involved in earthquake reconstruction contracts, like the NC's village chair in Gorkha Dhanbahadur Gurung who owns a construction company involved in a Rs130 million earthquake memorial. In remote Rukum, most village council members are busy buying excavators.

Any civil servant who opposes the elected officials is harassed or even beaten up. Samsheer Rai was transferred four months after he was brought in as an administrator to the Necha-Salyan village council in Solu Khumbu because he refused to sign the payment for past road construction by the elected village chair Dumphkumar Bastola, as it had no proper paperwork.

*Inputs from: Kamal Rimal in Biratnagar, Yuvaraj Shrestha in Pokhara, Durga Sharma in Parbat, Dipak Gyawali in Butwal and Laxman KC in Rukum.*

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# Not pushed around anymore

A young school girl from a remote Nepali village dares to take a molester to court

SAHINA SHRESTHA

Dressed in pink trousers and a jacket, Anamika fiddles with her fingers as she settles in a chair. She is petite, has beautiful dark eyes, her long hair is henna dyed and she speaks with a strong Tamang accent. When she smiles, deep dimples form on both cheeks. In her hometown of Tipling in Dhading, a two-day journey up torturous roads from Kathmandu, she was often scolded for her direct manners. But even her teachers and family admit she is courageous and fierce.

“I don’t like nonsense and I don’t trust men,” she says, adding with a smile, “my brother always

wonders if I am actually related to the family at all. My sisters are all very mild mannered.”

Just this morning Anamika heard that Kaji, the man who had attempted to rape her, was released on bail in Dhading. She is now in a shelter in Kathmandu.

“I don’t know what will happen now,” she says, eyes downcast. It had taken a lot for her and the family to lodge a complaint against Kaji, who was a friend of her brother Shyam.

Kaji is also from Tipling and is 21 years older than her: he is known to have political connections with local leaders. Kaji had a job with a relief NGO that distributed rice in the village after the earthquake, which meant impoverished villagers were obliged to him.

On a chilly Saturday morning last month, Kaji and her brother were taking in the sun outside the house when Anamika returned from



## Silent no more



MAPCARTO

The scenic village of Tipling (*above*) in the lap of Ganesh Himal in northern Dhading is the last settlement on the Nepal side of the border with Tibet. So close to Kathmandu, and yet it takes two days to reach here.

Like most of Nepal, many young men and women have migrated to the cities or overseas. Those who remain in these mountainsides ravaged by the 2015 earthquake depend on their millet and corn fields, or work as porters for aid agencies.

The government school and the only health post in the village are short of teachers, nurses and medicines. The nearest police station is two hours away. The cell phone signal only became available since last year. Very few of the girls here go to school and even those who do, drop out by Grade 5, making them vulnerable to abuse, abduction and early marriage.

“There are many cases of child marriage and pregnancy in the village,” says Tek Raj Paudel, a Jesuit priest who teaches at the local school. Girls as young as 11 elope and there are a few 13-14 year olds who are pregnant.

The child protection agency ChoraChhori Nepal has helped bring some of the girls to Kathmandu, where they can continue their education and get skills training.

“If we weren’t here, we would probably have had children by now, like many of our friends in the village,” says 12th Grader Reena. Children are left alone in the village, as parents take livestock up to high pasture.

“One of the major problems girls face

is that at night if a girl is single, there are men who sneak into the house and harass and abuse girls,” says Melisa, another 12th Grader. “Even when she speaks out, there is hardly any support as people say it is a custom. Instead the blame is put on the girl.”

The police station is too far away, and even when they do complain, they are intimidated by local men. Many young girls from the village are now leaving for the Gulf to work as domestic help, most have lied about their age to get passports.

“Some have genuine reasons to earn, like someone in the family is sick. But most often it is to escape predatory men and early marriage,” explains Reena.

The girls say there is no support mechanism in the village, where poverty, lack of education and awareness makes it all the more difficult to fight back.

Says Jesuit priest Paudel: “The girls here are brave. But sadly they are not aware of their rights.”



church. While she was folding laundry, the two entered the house. After a while her brother went outside, not thinking twice about leaving his sister alone, because Kaji was a friend.

Finding her alone, Kaji made his move, but to his surprise Anamika fought back. “I did not have time to think. I knew what he was doing was wrong, so I kicked him with all my might,” recalls Anamika. When she tried to escape, he grabbed her hand, she got hold of a kettle and hit him again.

Hearing the ruckus, Shyam came back to find things strewn about the room, the floor wet and his sister crying. Kaji ran off, while Shyam tried coaxing his sister into telling him what happened.

It was only when their elder sister Rama arrived that Anamika finally opened up. The neighbours and family set out to search for Kaji and finally caught him. But instead of remorse, Kaji threatened the family.

Anamika went to the police station in Dhading to lodge a complaint, where Kaji’s family tried to strike a deal. His friends tried to intimidate the police and her family by saying that kidnapping for marriage was part of the village tradition. The family finally lodged an FIR, and the police told them to wait for a court date.

Back in the village, the elderly women pressured the family to take back the case. “How are we going to eat if he goes to jail,” they asked. Anamika was incensed, and remembers asking them: “Is rice more precious to you than a girl’s dignity?” They did not have an answer.

Others told Anamika that it was part of their culture, she should accept it and not over-react. The practice of men abducting women to marry them still exists in some parts of Nepal, although it is less prevalent than before.

“It may have been their culture, but if someone comes into my home and attacks me, that is not culture,” says a defiant Anamika.

Kaji had previously harassed Anamika’s older sister Sita, but she had kept quiet about it thinking that she might burden her little brother and sister.

“Since, Anamika chose to speak up, there have been whispers in the village from women who say that Kaji used to harass all of them saying it was in return for the rice he provided,” Shyam now remembers.

There are times when Anamika feels guilty about reporting the incident, but she cannot bear to think what would have happened if she hadn’t.

“I don’t think I did anything bad by fighting back and reporting it to the police. I want him to be punished. If my sister and others had spoken out in the past, I wouldn’t have had to face this. I don’t want others going through what I did just because I kept quiet,” says Anamika.

To ensure her safety, the charity ChoraChhori Nepal, which was informed of the case by a local pastor, has brought Anamika to its shelter, where she is receiving psychosocial counselling to cope with the trauma.

In Dhading, Anamika’s brother-in-law Pratap received a call this week. “They said that Kaji was out on Rs25,000 bail. We were never even informed of the hearing,” he told *Nepali Times* over the phone from Dhading.

Anamika wants to go back home to her friends even if Kaji is out on bail: “Of course I want to go back. That is my home. If he misbehaves again I will beat him up.” 🇳🇵

Some names have been changed.

# #UsToo

- Two weeks ago, a woman from Lalitpur was late to return home from work. When her husband set out to search for her, he met three policemen who told him, “Oh, she is pretty. Maybe she ran off with someone. Come by tomorrow to report her missing.” In the morning she was found half naked, with deep gashes on her head and body, left for dead. Her sister registered a request to open an investigation. After gaining consciousness, the victim gave a detailed account of what happened and named the perpetrators. The police then arrested the suspects. The victim positively identified them in a line-up and the case was taken to court after further investigation. However, citing insufficient evidence, the judge released the accused without bail.
- In Darbar Marg earlier this month, four men raped a 22-year-old woman behind closed doors in a hotel. They put her in a taxi and directed the driver to take her home. The woman asked the driver to take her to the police station saying she had been raped. Instead of registering the complaint, the police allegedly tried to settle the case. The victim disappeared for a few days after which she changed her statement saying it wasn’t rape. Investigators say she may have been coerced.
- In Itahari of Sunsari, two men raped a 14-year-old girl. When the matter went to the police, the girl named both the perpetrators, one of whom was caught. But instead of registering the case, the police helped mediate a Rs3 million settlement between the family of the perpetrator and the victim.

These are just some of the recent cases in the past few weeks which prove that even when girls do come forward to report rape cases, the police and court system are the first hurdles. In the past six months, 60 rape cases have been reported in Kathmandu Valley alone. Many more went unreported because of fear and social stigma. Last year 156 cases were registered and there were 135 the year before.

“If you want to look at the real picture of patriarchy, just look at the judiciary,” says Mohna Ansari, member of National Human Rights Commission. “These cases are hardly a priority and they rarely appear in discussions and discourse.”

While a lot of money has been spent by donors and the state on ‘capacity building’ and behavioural correction of Nepal Police and the infrastructure of the judiciary, there hasn’t been much of a change in attitude towards women even when they overcome enormous social

pressures to not report crimes.

There have even been cases when defence lawyers have argued that by saying it is rape and punishing the perpetrator, the victim’s future may be tarnished. During cross-examination, the victim’s personal character is often questioned. In the Darbar Marg case, medical examination results showing that the victim had been ‘previously sexually active’ is being widely used in the public discourse to say that she wasn’t raped.

Last year, a young victim told the reporter that when she went to register her case, the way the police questioned her made her uncomfortable and she was made to feel guilty.

“Rape is a crime against the state, it is not something that can be settled,” says lawyer Sushma Gautam. “But unless the victim blaming stops, and the victim support mechanism is made stronger, women won’t be able to come forward.”

Sahina Shrestha



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# Touching a raw nerve

Having spent the past two weeks in the company of a dental surgeon in a hard hat who has been boring deep inside my oral cavity with a pneumatic drill seeking to strike gold in the bedrock, I would like to ask readers to sit back, relax and take in this blow-by-blow account of the torture:

**Day 1:** While lying fully reclined with the footrest in an upright position, I had ample time to reconstruct in my mind the entire family tree of the Romanovs. This is getting to be almost as bloody as the Russian Revolution, but Czars had it relatively painless in comparison.

**Day 2:** Dentists take a mandatory semester in medical school in which they practice extracting tusks from unanaesthetised African bull elephants before they are allowed to use the same techniques on hominoid patients.

**Day 3:** If I somehow don't make it through this one, I would like to be reincarnated as a dental surgeon in my next life. Not only can you carry out archaeological digs to excavate fossilised remains of a family barbecue which, after carbon dating, are found to be the relics of an ex-goat from the winter of the year 1977 AD, you can also laugh all the way to the bank.

**Day 4:** Dentistry is one of the few professions ever invented in recent human history where the

torturer is actually paid handsomely to inflict pain on other human beings. The only other profession is, of course, of a Thai-style boxer masquerading as a masseur who can dislocate every ball-and-socket joint in one's skeletal system at a highly discounted off-season rate right there on the beach at Koh Samet.

**Day 5:** Today I got my first bill. The doc said I can pay in installments. Maybe I need a bank loan. There is a direct correlation between the degree of pain and the size of the bill.

**Day 8:** At the risk of touching a raw nerve here among those who don't see the humour in having their precious ivories plundered by bounty hunters disguised as dentists, let me recount a professional trade joke told to me by my own dentist. It comes from the horse's mouth.

Q: What is the difference between a dentist and a New York Yankee baseball fan?  
A: One yanks for the roots, and other roots for the yanks.

**Day 15:** Hahaha. Ouch. It hurts when you laugh. But as days go by, there is less and less to laugh about as one by one I lose my incisors, my canines and finally my felines. Soon, I will only be able to gnash my gums while worrying about the state of the nation.



The Ass

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