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## CONNECTED NEPALIS

A Nepal Media Landscape Survey conducted earlier this year by the Sharecast Initiative has brought out surprising new data about Internet access, social media, mobile phone usage, and the mass media in Nepal. Mobile phones are now the most prevalent communication device, with an overwhelming 96% of respondents owning handsets at the household level. Television ownership has overtaken radio, and is not only the main source of information for most Nepalis but also the one they trust the most. Some highlights:

- 96% of Nepali households have mobiles
- 56% own tv sets
- 29% have radios
- 63% have access to the Net
- 98% find Net content unreliable
- 86% in 16-24 age group use Facebook

**FACE-TO-FACE WITH FACEBOOK**  
EDITORIAL PAGE 2

**How Nepal's media landscape is being transformed**  
PAGE 14-15



BIKRAM RAI

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GOING PLACES TOGETHER



# FACE-TO-FACE WITH FACEBOOK

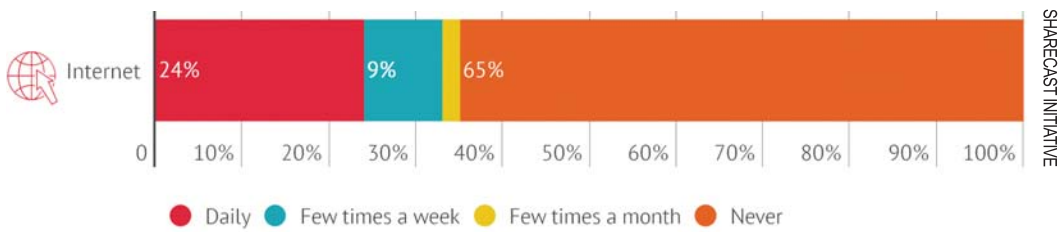
Half way through an interview with Britain’s Channel 4 News involving multiple hidden cameras last month, a person posing as an influential Sri Lankan political power broker asks Alexander Nix of Cambridge Analytica how he can help win an election for his candidate back home.

Cambridge Analytica doesn’t know this is a sting operation, and its staff boast about how they helped politicians in Kenya, Nigeria, India and the United States win elections by using vast amounts of Facebook data for micro-targeting voters, bespoke advertising and fake information. Nix then lays out how Analytica doesn’t just help clients use “deep digging” on rival candidates, but can also entrap them with bribes or Ukrainian call girls using hidden cameras. Ironically, Channel 4 was using the same sting technique to blow the lid off Cambridge Analytica.

That was in mid-March. By now the scandal has spread to Facebook, its questionable data sharing practices, its algorithms, and how they may have been used by the Russians to undermine Hillary Clinton in the 2015 US presidential election. The story is still unfolding as we go to press, and we don’t know who else it will drag down with it. But Mark Zuckerberg’s inability to defend his revenue model during a Congressional hearing in Washington on Wednesday now threatens to change the way the world’s largest, richest and most powerful Internet platform does business.

Many have argued that Facebook and social networking sites in general had it coming to them. They are hoping that, like some European countries, Facebook and others can finally be reigned in. There is an active worldwide #LeaveFacebook campaign that is gathering steam. But even so, many users say Facebook is too entrenched in their lives and it would not be possible to carry on normally without it. Indeed, data shows that most of you will be reading this Editorial by clicking links posted on the *Nepali Times* Facebook page.

## Access to media in Nepal



There are now more than 8 million Nepali Facebook users, and this does not count a couple of million more Nepalis domiciled elsewhere who log on to Facebook to keep in touch with family, friends and media back home. A Nepal Media Landscape Survey conducted earlier this year by the Sharecast Initiative (*see page 1, 14-15*) shows that among Internet users, 81% were on Facebook. In fact, among the 16-24 age group, Facebook use was 86%.

While the Cambridge Analytica/Facebook scandal and the manipulation of social media at election time has not got the attention it deserves here in Nepal, we will need to keep watch as the spread of Facebook throws open the possibility of future data mining for electoral advantage here, too.

Of much more immediate concern, however, is the lack of media literacy. Adolescents are using these platforms without being aware of privacy settings. The Police cyber crime division receives dozens of

complaints a day of public sharing of private images and videos, sometimes leading to suicides. There hasn’t been a definitive study yet, but anecdotal evidence points to the current epidemic of rape in India and Nepal being linked to the spread of hardcore pornography on the Internet. There have been reports of gang rapes where fellow-perpetrators recorded their crime on phone video.

We always knew the Internet was a double edged sword. It hasn’t lived up to its promise of leveling the information playing field and encouraging healthy debate on issues. Instead, it has fragmented audiences into echo-chambers that magnify extremist views. Algorithms and bots expose users to ever more radical ideologies ever more efficiently – mainly because that directly allows YouTube, Facebook and others to generate greater revenue.

Despite the gloom and doom, there is hope that the current scandal over Facebook will tame its wild ways, and force it to be more careful. It is not just a matter for the U.S. Congress, what America decides to do with Facebook will affect the whole world.

Here in Nepal, there is a silver lining in the Sharecast survey results in this issue. Despite the fact that such a large proportion of young men and women use Facebook, it seems less than 2% trust the information it contains. There is still far more trust of the mass media like tv and radio, although the low level of trust of newspapers and magazines (3%) is a bit troubling.

The distrust of information on the Net may actually insulate Nepalis from those using the platform to spread intolerance, extremism, bigotry and hate. Although more people will be online as mobile data spreads, the fact that 65% of Nepalis still do not use the Net means that it may actually buy us time to set things right and reduce the harm.



## ONLINE PACKAGES



### A WRITER'S JOURNEY

After nine years in the making, Shivani Singh Tharu’s debut novel *Kathmandu Ma Ek Din* has finally released. Tharu has had a successful modelling, television and radio career, but through it all, the essence of storytelling has always been what has driven her. Watch this short video where she talks about her journey and the challenges she had to overcome.

### UNCOVERING DARKNESS

A great exposé of the thieves who made us all live in the dark for so long ('How they kept Nepal in the dark ages', Ramesh Kumar, #904). Every single one of them needs to be thrown behind bars, their ill gotten wealth seized and as for those industrialists, they should be indicted for loss to the national economy.

Sonam L

■ They should be sued in court for all the damage. Put together all the psychological and financial cost which normal Nepalis had to suffer for such great number of years.

Binay Jung Pandey

■ Now that we know we were fooled by underhand dealings between the NEA corrupt industrialists you listed, it is time we boycotted their products.

Kiran Kafle

■ As if this is going to change anything. Everyone know about corruption of leaders, yet no action is taken. Evidence doesn't matter anymore, only power does.

Akaz Nepal

■ This is a genuine piece of investigation, let’s see if the government has the courage to bring the culprit to justice.

Khem Lakai

■ This would have been excellent journalism if it had uncovered the corruption before it was too late. This isn’t investigative, it’s reactionary. Now go and find where other corruption that currently exists, and root that out and maybe then you can save people from further misery, and help Nepal rise up.

Leah Cloud

■ Media was busy making Kul Man Ghising a hero by hiding actual villains. The media is also responsible for keeping Nepalis in the dark for 10 long years.

Om Karki

■ Journalists have done their part, Oli’s government should take the further initiative to punish the culprits. We spent hundreds of thousands for inverters and unnecessary alternatives. We don't need the compensation, we need you in jail for a long time. Disgraceful and shameless.

Devendra Raj Bhatta

■ How can something like this even happen? Keeping the entire freaking country in the dark, literally and figuratively and that too, for so many years. Can we do a follow up on this story? Too often, we've seen investigative journalism like this one followed by absolutely nothing... nada. Can we buck the trend here?

Srijan Nepal

## WHAT'S TRENDING

### How they kept Nepal in the dark ages

by Ramesh Kumar

Nepal’s prolonged power cuts from 2006-2016 were not due to undersupply but because of rampant corruption. This exposé generated phenomenal response from readers demanding action against the culprits. Visit [nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com) to read one of the most popular stories of the year, and let us know your thoughts on the matter.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Most commented

Most visited online page



### Bringing our gods home

by Sahina Shrestha

A 10th century Standing Buddha and a 12th century Uma Maheswar were returned to Nepal by The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York last week, but hundreds of other stolen objects are still out there. Go online for a video journey to Yattha Tole in our search for the exact location from where the holy idol of the Standing Buddha was stolen 30 years ago.

Most popular on Twitter

## QUOTE TWEETS

**Nepali Times** @nepalitimes  
Prolonged power cuts were not due to undersupply but because of rampant corruption. Investigative report @Raw\_Ku #powercut #Nepal #corruption

**Manjushree Thapa** @manjushreethapa  
All those winters we spent in Kathmandu with 12-14 hour power cuts, scrambling to get any work done...what a waste. Excellent investigation by @nepalitimes

**John Upton** @johnupton  
In winter 2014, because of corruption, Nepalis were enduring 14 hours of blackouts every day while the Nepal Electricity Authority was sending "uninterrupted electricity to selected cement factories, cotton mills and steel manufacturers." Great work by @nepalitimes.

**bharat koirala** @lampuchhre  
Congratulations for investigating a very serious crime affecting millions. An example of outstanding journalism!

**Ujwal Thapa** @ujwalthapa  
Must read. Must continue investigating. This is tantamount to betrayal to the country. #traitorism

**Om Prakash** @baizalla  
Why this late investigation ? Why didn't our investigative journalist investigate during that dark decade ? Do Nepal journalists are also part of that big corruption during dark decade ? Why they are so lagging in investigation ?

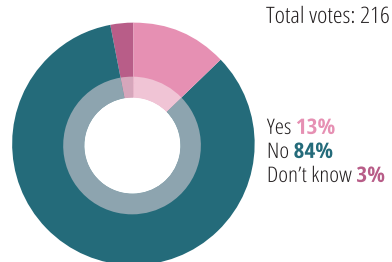
**Kunda Dixit** @kundadixit  
An 11th century Buddha, stolen 50 years ago, was returned to #Nepal by the @metmuseum in New York last week. Join @sahinashrestha of @nepalitimes on a video journey to the #Kathmandu neighbourhood and listen to what the priest has to say.

**Trishna Gurung** @TrishnaTweets  
Our gods are returning home to #Nepal. This @nepalitimes story makes my heart happy.



Weekly Internet Poll #905

Q. Should Chief Ministers be allowed to meet foreign ambassadors without informing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs?



Weekly Internet Poll #906  
To vote go to: [www.nepalitimes.com](http://www.nepalitimes.com)

Q. Do you think Kathmandu-Raxaul rail will ever be built?



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Associate Editor: Om Astha Rai | Design: Kiran Maharjan  
Published by Himalmedia Pvt Ltd | Patan Dhoka, Lalitpur | GPO Box 7251 Kathmandu  
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# Measuring what matters

Nepalis have rebuilt after every natural calamity of the past, but this time we got foreigners to do it for us

When the world has no more problems and challenges to resolve, we shall all have only three professions to choose from: art, music and cooking.

Proof of that are found in the lanes and courtyards of the ancient towns of Kathmandu Valley. We have done well on all three fronts. Our cultural and natural heritage



**1/2 FULL**  
Anil Chitrakar

of the Valley was once the envy of the world, and people came to experience and study them.

Then it became, and still is, an exotic tourist destination. The earthquake of 2015 destroyed over 700 of these globally unique monuments and people are not so sure if they will ever be restored again. One challenge is that the people who have been put in charge of the agencies dedicated for the purpose have no love for this culture, and seem to think wide roads and high rises are more important to turn this ancient civilisation into a modern metropolis.

Then there are the landlords who calculate that the more floors they can add on top of their precarious buildings, more rooms they can rent out. There is virtually no regard for heritage features.

The third is another section of



BIKRAM RAI

society which is now really good at begging. They are dependent on outsiders to fix whatever is broken or not working in this country. The way Bouddha was restored in record time with local resources and leadership is a real threat to this group that depends on handouts.

In each of the above we are measuring the wrong indices: how wide is the street, how much more can I earn in rent each month, and the size of the foreign grant for restoration. Kathmandu valley's heritage is being smothered, and this attitude could be the final nail in its coffin.

There are two challenges to heritage restoration that are critical: one is the land trust that historically provided the perpetual (annual) payment in grain to the artists, and secondly the guilds that were well organised for centuries to provide the needed skilled and knowledgeable human resources to carry out the restoration work on a regular basis.

The feudal state system of the past 250 years 'nationalised' a lot of the land to maintain the *Jagir* system, and the process continues today to expand roads, build offices/barracks and other infrastructure. There is a section of

Nepali society that cannot tolerate trees, open spaces and wetlands. They do not see Rani Pokhari as water storage and recharge system, but see it as prime real estate to enrich themselves and their political bosses.

Our country is so great that we have foreigners build us toilets, schools and health posts. They provide us garbage trucks and ambulances. Now, we are seeing our monuments being rebuilt with foreign aid (*picture of Hanuman Dhoka, above*). Within the next 100 years, there will surely be another earthquake or another manmade disaster. It is scary and sad to think

that the restoration we see of our monuments today could well be the last time they are rebuilt. It has happened to many cities and civilisations all over the world, and our heritage is next in line.

Unless politicians wake up to see that Nepalis have been rebuilding by themselves after every natural calamity of the past, not much will change. The tourism sector also needs to realise that it depends on having these monuments and the cultural heritage preserved into the future by ourselves.

Perhaps UNESCO will one day wake up to the fact that it has no work in Nepal because there are no more monuments to monitor and write emails about. What will happen if the young artists say we shall not give up without a fight? These monuments, the city, the culture and identity of an entire population will disappear if we are not willing to resist the forces bent upon destroying them.

It will be a difficult uphill battle, but it can be done. The people of Bhaktapur have shown leadership in conservation for decades, and Patan is doing it now. The people of Khokana are organising to defend heritage sites against infrastructure development.

We do not have to wait long to see which side will prevail. The question is: which side are you on? 🇳🇵

**Anil Chitrakar** is President of Siddharthinc.

## Electric car service centre



SIKUMA RAI

With the growing popularity of electric cars after the fuel crisis caused by the 2015 Blockade, it was only a question of time before someone opened a maintenance centre just for battery-operated vehicles in Kathmandu.

There are now over 350 Reva and e2O cars running on Kathmandu roads, so it seemed like the numbers had reached critical mass for Mahindra's authorised distributor for Nepal, Agni Energy, to establish a dedicated service centre in the Valley.

Agni's newly built facility in Kunpondol was inaugurated on Tuesday by *Nepali Times* editor, Kunda Dixit. The spacious service centre provides necessary before and after service for its e2O, eSupro and future electric models from the Mahindra stable. Cars can have pre-delivery inspection to wash, diagnoses, maintenance, charging and spare parts.

"We thought it was the right time for us to open an exclusive service centre as many countries have been announcing deadlines to convert to electric, and India has a target of 2030," said Cabinet Shrestha of Agni Energy (*pictured above*).

Agni was ahead of its time when it bought the Reva dealership from Lotus Energy 12 years ago. Then, the government was hesitant to support zero emission vehicles and customers were reluctant to switch from petrol.

However, with continuous lobbying by environmentalists, word of mouth appreciation of the benefits of electric by drivers, the popularity of the sleek, simple and light e2Os grew.

Electric car owners from various professions attending the inauguration on Tuesday said they were happy that the new service centre was being opened. Sudha Basnet, who owns a bright red

Reva, said: "As a doctor, we live a very stressful life. So for me, driving this EV is stress-free since the car is easy to drive, clean, can park anywhere and there are no hassles about refuelling."

Agni Energy's latest customer for the e2O model is the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) which bought three units. NEA Director Kul Man Ghising will drive one of them to work in Kathmandu.

Despite the growing popularity, the main challenges for electric vehicles still remain the lack of charging stations, no government subsidy, and public reluctance. Nepal has not gone beyond removing customs duty on imports.

Being a price conscious market, Mahindra plans to introduce a cheaper version of e2O Plus for Kathmandu roads with less power, according to Chaitanya Kagalkar, International Operations Manager of Mahindra. 🇳🇵

**Sikuma Rai**

### PRABHU BANK BIZ BRIEFS

#### Revised forecast

Asian Development Bank has projected the economic growth rate of Nepal for the fiscal year 2018-2019 to be 5.5 percent, provided that there is normal monsoon and mega projects like the 456 mega watt

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Upper Tamakosi Hydropower project is expedited. For the current fiscal year, the bank registered a growth of 4.9 percent, 0.2 percent more than what the Manila-based bank had previously forecast.

#### Global accolades

Qatar Airways was voted 'World's Best Business Class', 'Best Business Class: Middle East' and 'World's Top 10 Airline' in the 2018 TripAdvisor Travelers' Choice Awards. The Airways was also recognised



as a Travelers' Choice Winner for 'Airline: Middle East' and 'Economy Class: Middle East', gaining global recognition for the fourth time in the Airways' history.

#### Rising traffic

Turkish Airlines reached 80.5% load factor in the first quarter of 2018, this is the Airlines' highest LF in the last five years. Excluding transit passengers, the total



number of its international passengers went up by 28%, the airline said.

#### Royal blend

On Rajesh Bir Singh Tuladhar's acquirement of shares of Nepal Liquors Pvt Ltd from United Spirits Ltd, the company recently launched Royal Challenge Whisky, a grain



based crafted blend. The whisky is available in different sized packs at the price of Rs1,360 for 750ML, Rs680 for 375ML and Rs340 for 180ML.

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# Adventurers in a vanishing land

The world, and Nepal, have changed since the days of Wilfred Thesiger and Freya Stark

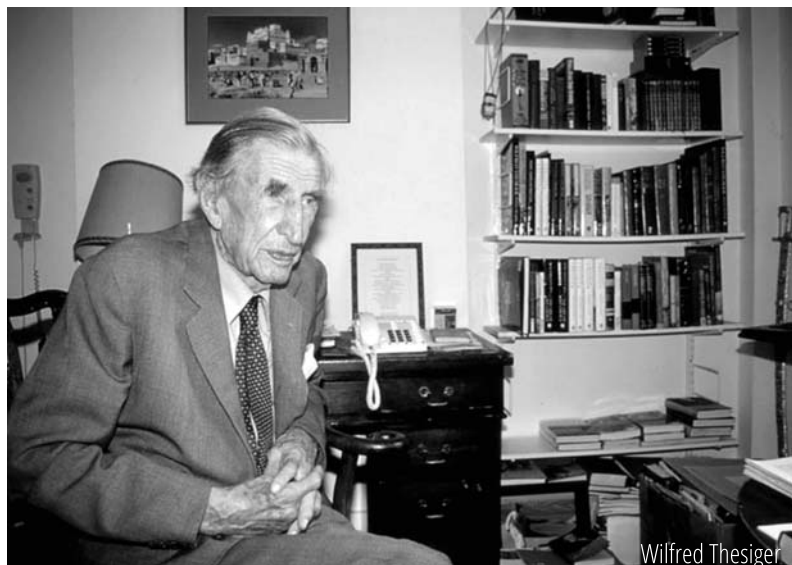
Dame Freya Stark looked around her with some bemusement as we left the bustle of Kathmandu airport and headed into town. “I feel we must be somewhere East of the Euphrates,” she said vaguely. Excited by my task of greeting the scholarly British-Italian travel



**SO FAR SO GOOD**  
Lisa Choegyal

writer, I was rather unnerved by her lack of attention to detail – it was after all her second visit to Nepal. The snow-covered peaks gleamed on the skyline as we drove through emerald terraced rice paddies in the limpid clear air of the Valley that spring afternoon in 1980 – not at all like the sand dunes and deserts of her preferred habitat.

By the time we reached the oasis of the Shangrila Hotel garden, the grand old lady of Arabist exploration had remembered that she is back in Nepal, this time to trek in the Manang region. We settled at a table and she reminds me how much she appreciates the muscled legs of the Nepali porters, and appreciates our arranging the same patient pony from Pokhara,



Wilfred Thesiger

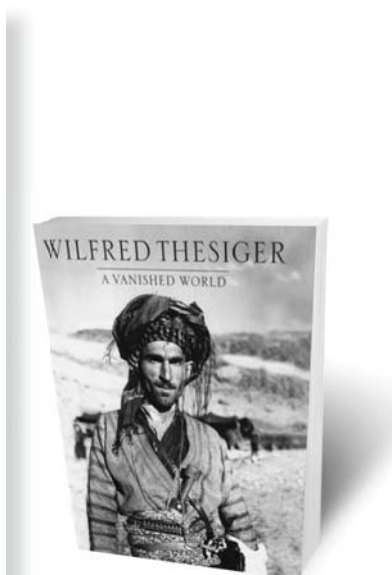
which she insists on calling Red Balls although its name is Red Bells.

On the freshly watered lawn a fountain gurgles softly in the sunshine whilst an attentive American group is being briefed. Sporting heavy boots, clean daypacks and keen expressions, they are handed handmade lokta paper Trek Permits and pour over the monochrome indigo maps which were all we had in those days.

Freya Stark, the first Westerner to journey through many Middle

Eastern regions, always had to wear a hat due to a childhood accident in which she lost her hair, scalped by some dreadful machine in her father's factory. Today she is dressed most unlike anyone's idea of an eccentric adventurer – pearls, a demure green dress and full-length leopard skin coat. I find myself hoping that the other hotel guests realise it is fake.

An avid admirer of this resourceful and fearless traveller, I was most struck by her remark that



Freya Stark

travel is really all about observation and attitude. “One can explore just as well in ones own back garden, just as long as you have the right view of life.”

It was with some alarm that we later discovered that this “poet of travel” had dreamed of dying in the Himalayas, lured no doubt by the romance of a dramatic end to an unconventional life.

Thankfully for Mountain Travel, Dame Freya failed to achieve this, instead dying at her Italian home in Asola a few months after her 100th birthday in 1993. She had written no less than 24 travel books and autobiographies, and eight volumes of letters from the 1930s, most of them now out of print.

Another nearly forgotten figure of early travel literature who appreciated Nepal was Sir Wilfred Thesiger KBE, DSO, FRAS, FRSL, FRGS, the unexpectedly beguiling hero of Iraq's Marsh Arabs and the naked warriors of Abyssinia who was most at home traversing African deserts and mapping Arabia's empty quarter.

Sir Wilfred preferred the challenges of travel on foot, or by traditional transport, be it camel, horse, mule, donkey or canoe armed only by a compass and the locals. He was said to resent the intrusion of any technical innovation that post-dated the steam engine. Adopting traditional dress of the nomadic people with

whom he travelled, he claimed to feel least comfortable in his own British culture and with his own kind. Thesiger's classic travel books are characterised by elegant prose, disdain for fellow travellers, and sublime black and white photographs.

I had not expected to like him so much. With his purist approach to travel it was with some trepidation that I met the gentleman explorer on his return from Tiger Tops, off the Twin Otter from Meghauli amidst the dust of Kathmandu's domestic airport. I expected scorn and contempt for the contrived tourism activities of 1980's Royal Chitwan National Park. Instead he was all aristocratic charm and effusive praise. The craggy features creased into a smile, the voice quintessentially Eton, Oxford and army. “Marvellous place, loved every minute of it,” he growled.

We dined at Jim's house in Sanepa, and amidst the dal baht and clatter I wallowed in his stories and listened wrapt to his requiem for a vanished world. In the candlelight Sir Wilfred's long, lived-in face was a moonscape of craters and regret: “The wild mountains, deserts, starlit skies and fierce tribes I adore are all but dead.”

Perhaps not by choice, Thesiger lived more than another decade, dying in England aged 93 in 2003. 🇬🇧



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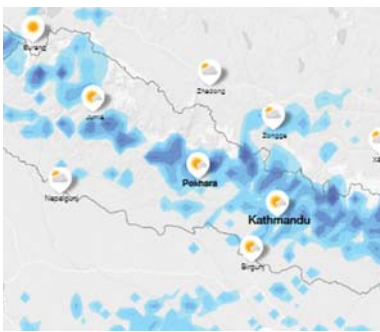


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# Shivani's Kathmandu

Shivani Singh Tharu took nine years to write the thriller *Kathmandu Ma Ek Din*

Duksangh Sherpa

Shivani Singh Tharu always knew she was born to be a storyteller. And so it was that through her colourful modelling career, television anchor, radio, and now as a novelist -- the core essence of telling a story has always been what has driven her.

Tharu's debut novel launched this week, *Kathmandu Ma Ek Din*, took nine years to write. It is a political thriller and revolves around a character named Ghurna from the plains who battles social injustice in the unstable politics of the post-conflict era after 2006.

"Most people think of me as someone from the fashion field, and do not really associate me with literature, but those who have known me personally know that I've always been into writing and reading," says Tharu, while autographing her book on Tuesday at the Russian Cultural Centre.

Since her childhood, Tharu has had a voracious appetite for everything from *Tintin* to *Tinkle*, and stories like *Amar Chitra Katha* to *Manohar Kahaniyan*. She admits to being constantly drawn to the intriguing, macabre and mysterious world of thrillers and detective dramas.

One of the biggest challenges of writing a novel for Tharu was to be able to write the kind of book that would satisfy the reader in herself. Now that it has been

published, she is going through what most writers often experience: a sense of emptiness because she misses the process of writing, the fun, the struggle and the exhaustion.

Language was another obstacle she had to overcome because Tharu herself admits she has difficulty with writing in Nepali. But she didn't let this deter her, and overcame the handicap by reading Nepali literature voraciously and doggedly. This is also her advice to aspiring writers: "To write, you have to read."

Asked about her next book, she laughs gently and says that it is a secret. "People have already given me a hard time for taking nine years to write this book," she says, "I am not making that same mistake again. I will only talk about my second book once it is ready."

Tharu's passion, energy and enthusiasm for the literary world is evident in her talent and personality. She knows mainstream Nepali men may not take her seriously because of her background, but

Tharu deflects the criticism saying she wants to be judged by her words.

She adds: "It is fine if some people cannot think of me as a serious writer. I know I am an underdog just now, and that's ok. I've always loved underdogs. I will continue to do what I love and enjoy, which is writing."



Watch a video profile of Shivani Singh Tharu where she talks about her journey of becoming an author, the many obstacles she had to overcome, and of the nine long years it took to complete her debut novel.

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**Sewa Bhattarai**  
in Kaski

The Mardi Trek is  
so wild you don't

# Go take a hike

The conundrum of writing about a tranquil place not yet discovered by mass tourism is that you become the reason it loses its tranquility. Tourism worldwide has a tendency to despoil a place by 'discovering' another new untouched destination.

Many trekkers are now coming to Nepal to get away from places where all you see are other trekkers. More and more, they are going for off the beaten treks to Kangchenjunga, Dolpo or Rolwaling. The Prime Minister is launching a tourism campaign from Rara Lake on New Year's Day. Who is going to tell him that it may not be such a good idea?

One of Nepal's hidden gems has always been the Mardi Trek. In fact for many years, those who went on it did not share their photographs, and did not brag about how stunningly scenic the trip



You walk on a carpet of petals through a fragrant

Locals say it never rains on Mardi Ridge, it pours. Or, it is snow and hail. True to form, there is a terrific hailstorm that morning at Forest Camp. At Low Camp (2,970m), the clouds open up just enough to offer a magnificent view of Mt Machhapuchhre, blanketed in fresh snow (*pictured*).

Badal Danda lives up to its name, with clouds obstructing the view. Snow starts falling by afternoon in light swirls and by morning it covers the trail. The narrow trail hugs the cliff on one side with a sheer drop on the other, the rhododendrons are now deep red, looking like shining drops of blood on the snowy slopes.

High Camp (3,550m) is above the tree-line, and the trail along the ridge becomes even more precarious en route to Viewpoint which doesn't





want to brag about  
once it is over so it  
remains that way

was because they did not want hordes of tourists descending (ascending) to its knife-like ridge that forms the southwestern spur of Mt Machhapuchhre.

Mardi (rhymes with ‘muddy’ not ‘hardy’) is indeed more out-of-this-world than all other other-worldly places in Nepal, or the planet. It has unbroken vistas, big sky, solitude and wilderness. And the surprising thing is how accessible it is now from Pokhara.

If you start from Dhampus, the Mardi route first follows the Annapurna Circuit for a short bit, then strikes off at Pitalam Deurali (2,050m) into and up a ridge ablaze with pink rhododendrons in this season.

forest.

It takes four hours to reach Forest Camp (2,500m) where there are supposed to be tea shops, but it is deserted. Unlike other popular trekking trails, the tea shops here are spaced more widely and since food has to be portered in, it is more expensive.

But there are signs that things may change soon. In anticipation of the growing popularity of the Mardi Trek, new rest houses are going up at a rapid pace. The lodges are all recently built, still smell of fresh wood and don’t even have names or menus yet. You just hope the new blue tin roofs do not photobomb the sweeping view of the Annapurnas.

offer any views by afternoon because of billowing mist. Mardi Base Camp (4,500m) is another two hour climb, but for that you will need climbing gear.

If you don’t want to return the way you came, there is a straight descent down the slope to Sidhing (1,700m) from where there are jeeps to Pokhara. there is also a trail further down to Lwong or Lumre.

A few wilderness areas in Nepal are so easy to get to, and offer in a microcosm the sheer verticality of the country as you climb from sub-tropical to Alpine and almost Arctic in four days. The unsurpassed view is a bonus. 🇳🇵



ALL PHOTOS: SEWA BHATTARAI



# NEW YEAR EVENTS 2075



## Purple Haze

Have a dramatic start to New Year 2075 with famous rock bands of Nepal: The Shadows Nepal and Robin and The New Revolution.  
13 April, 7pm onwards, Purple Haze, Thamel, Rs1,000, 9849276214

## New Year carnival

Fun fair and food accompanied by music and magic shows on the first day of 2075 with friends and family.  
14 April, 11am-6pm, Grand Norling Hotel's Resort, Mulpani, Rs100(adult), Rs50(child), (01) 4910193



## Fusion Mantra

Countdown to the New Year with live music by Fusion Mantra at the rooftop. The band plays fusion of Eastern and Western music.  
13 April, 2pm-12am, Octave Kathmandu, Woodland Complex, Darbar Marg, Rs1,000 (free for ladies), 9801009611

## Shangri-La's Eve party

Live performance by Tattva band, cultural dance troupe and lavish dinner.  
13 April, Shangri-La Hotel, Lazimpat, Rs2,500, (01) 4412999/ 9841449856



## Flora expo

Nation's biggest event for plant enthusiasts to display and purchase varieties of beautiful and exotic flowers and interesting new pots for home or office over the new year weekend.  
13-16 April, 10a-5pm, Bhrikutimandap Exhibition Hall

## Reopen Tab

Beers N' Cheers reopens with special events counting down to the New Year 2075: live music, open mic, EPL screening and beer offers.  
13 April, 3pm onwards, Beers N' Cheers, Jhamsikhel, (01) 5524860



## Sakhi

A powerful Maithili play about Nepal's civil war and its impact on everyday people written by Ramesh Ranjan Jha.  
13-21 April, 5:30-6:30pm, Shilpee Theatre, Battispatali Marg, (01) 4469621

## Farmers market

For thehealth conscious, take a new year resolution to buy only fresh and organic food product at the farmers market, 10 minutes away from Bouddha, and cook your own healthy and organic New Year's meal.  
14 April, 8am-8pm, LAVEE Residence, Ramhiti, Bouddha, 9808996175



## Phewa New Year festival

With the aim to save Pokhara's famous lake, the 15th edition of Phewa New Year Festival kicks off with 40 food and commercial stalls, discounted package offers, folk music, dance and comedy performances. Major attraction: signing competition of the cultural folklore 'Ratyauli'.  
13-15 April, 11am-10pm, Lakeside, Pokhara, Rs50 (dayt ime), Rs150 (night time)

## Road to 2075

7 international and Nepali artists share 2 stages for the Nepali New Year celebration. BLOT, SHFT, NISHAN, BKNOT will be playing the best of deep techno, progressive house & psy trance.  
13 April, 4pm onwards, Tangalwood Courtyard, Tangal, Rs1,500 (single), Rs2,000 (couple), (01) 9843635321



## Air\_Mc cube talk

Talk and presentation by artists on their works and life history: Bethany Mae Richards, who is seeking to understand cultural influences in life and Bidhata K.C. who is keen on exploring human's conflict in maintaining balance between modernity and traditional values.  
13 April, 4-7pm, Gallery MCUBE, Mitra Park, Chakupat, 9851170110

## Saturn moon

Playing jazz and 60's music, the band Saturn moon will be with you to countdown to the New Year.  
13 April, 5pm-1am, Royal Empire Boutique Hotel, Gairidhara, (01) 4000538/ 4000542

## Never-before seen Pokhara

97 photographs of Pokhara taken before 1950, collected by Sunil Ulak on display.  
13-15 April, Nepal Art Council, Babarmahal, (01) 4220735,

## Moksh

Groovy music and enchanting live performances by Martha Del Grandi, and Lama and the BoyZ Next door to make the eve of Nepali New Year a memorable one.  
13 April, 6pm-1am, Moksh, Jhamsikhel, Rs1,000 (before 9pm), Rs1,500 (after 9pm), (01) 5528362

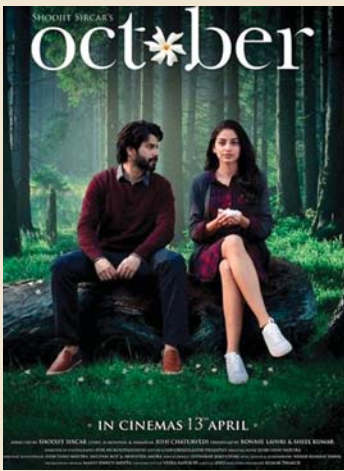
## Zero Mile

The indie-electronic band will be jamming at Base Camp on the eve of New Year 2075. Join in for good music.  
13 April, 8-10pm, Base Camp: Outdoor Lifestyle, Arun Thapa Chok, Jhamsikhel, 9841226397

## Bird watching

Celebrate New Years 2075 with birds. Meeting place: Godawari bus park.  
7 April, 7am onwards, Godawari Botanical Garden, 9846076194

### OUR PICK



Opens in Kathmandu on 13 April

October is a story of Dan (Varun Dhawan) and Shiuli (Banita Sandhu) who are classmates, doing their internship at a hotel. At 21, the two have nothing interesting going on in life until a sudden turn of events brings them closer. The emotional connection between them gradually transforms from an immature friendship to a love that's unlike any other. October is Shoojit Sircar's much-awaited film, venturing first time with Varun and newcomer Banita. It is written by Juhli Chaturvedi.

# DINING



## Sunrise Restaurant

Celebrate Nepali New Year's Eve with family and friends with a 6-course dinner and 3-piece instrumental classical music that will tantalise your taste buds and ears.  
13 April, 6:30-10:30pm, Hotel Yak & Yeti, Rs2,500, (01) 4248999 (Extension: 2885), 9801047544

## The Café

Experience a variety of Nepali ethnic food this new year. Indulge in authentic and unique culinary delights for a memorable celebration.  
13-27 April, 6:30-10pm, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, Boudha, Rs2,200 (single), (01) 5171234

## The Fun Café

Begin the New Year with a lavish Nepali buffet and live Nepali musical performance.  
13-14 April, Radisson Hotel Kathmandu, Rs1,800 (eve), Rs1,700 (lunch), Lazimpat, (01) 4411818



## The BLVD

Choose your favourite ingredients and toppings from a variety of delicious typical Newari specialties and homemade pickles for a very traditional New Year 2075 celebration.  
13-14 April, Lal Durbar, Kamaladi, (01) 4424190/ 4424191

## Kava Restaurant

Lavish buffet dinner, live BBQ counter, live music and 3 complimentary drinks on the eve of New Years 2075.  
13 April, 7pm onwards, Fairfield by Marriott, Thamel, Rs1,999 (Nett, single), Rs2,999 (Nett, couple), (01) 4217999

# GETAWAY



## Shangri-La Village Resort

Celebrate Nepali New Year 2075 by spending a night at the Village Resort, enjoying a candle light dinner with wine and a relaxing boat ride at Fewa Lake  
13 April- 4 May, Pokhara, Rs12,075 (Nett, couple), For reservation: (061) 462222, 9804116774

## Tiger Palace Resort

Enjoy Bhairahawa by spending the New Year's night at the luxurious Integrated Entertainment Resort facilitated with casino, swimming pool, spa and more.  
13 April, Bhairahawa, Rs3,500(single), Rs5,000 (couple), Rs1,500 (kids), (071) 512000



## The Last Resort

Enjoy the resort's 'ride and dive' package for 1 night and 2 days where bike or travel enthusiasts drive to The Last Resort and celebrate New Year's Eve with a unique experience of night bungee.  
13 April, The Last Resort Nepal, Bhotekoshi, Rs8,500 (for Nepalis), (01) 4700525/4701247

## Atithi Resort & Spa

Continuously on the top ten list of hotels in Nepal by TripAdvisor, the resort is a quiet sanctuary that fuses Nepali tradition with modern amenities. Spend the New Year's night here to make it remarkable.  
Lakeside, Pokhara, (061) 1466760

## Hotel Country Villa

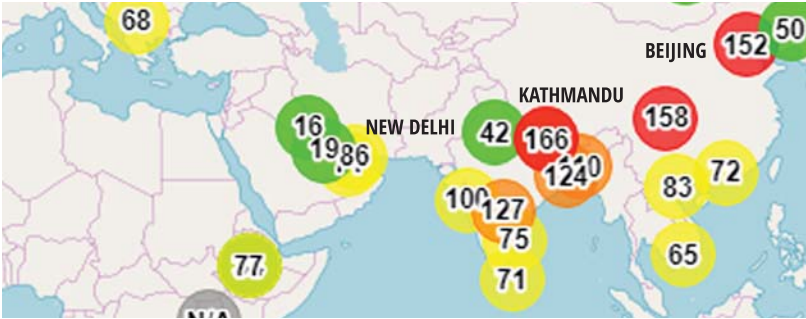
Rise and shine with New Year's sun after an exciting eve celebration at the hotel.  
13-14 April, Nagarkot, Rs9,999 (single), Rs11,999 (double), (01) 4700305, 9851192106

## Hyatt Regency

On Mother's Day, gift your dear mother a relaxing spa treatment at Club Oasis that includes manicure, aromatherapy massage and facial.  
13-30 April, Hyatt Regency, Boudha, Rs7,500, (01) 5171234

## AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 6 - 12 April



This is nothing to be proud of: Kathmandu's air quality this week was the worst in the world in the AirNow network website of the U.S. Department of State. Beijing slightly better on Thursday morning, and the Air Quality Index (AQI) in New Delhi was 42 – green/good. Kathmandu's AQI was in the 160s 'Unhealthy' level band every day of the past week, despite the occasional showers. The reason is unchecked pollution from vehicular emissions which even the rain has not been able to clean up. Follow hourly Kathmandu AQI measurements live on [www.nepaltimes.com](https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/)  
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# Why politicians pamper the military

Ramesh Kumar in  
*Himal Khabarpatrika*  
8-14 April

In September 2017, three months after this fiscal year’s budget was unveiled, a Cabinet meeting approved the Nepal Army’s proposal to buy three new helicopters, and the Finance Ministry had to fork up Rs418 million for the acquisition. One month later, the Army tabled another proposal to buy another aircraft which was also swiftly endorsed by the Cabinet. And the Finance Ministry sent an additional Rs80.56 million to the military. In January 2018, the Army sought another Rs1.70 billion to upgrade military aviation for search and rescue, and the government quickly handed over a cheque to that amount. No matter which government is in power, Nepal’s politicians quickly approve whatever the Army has in its wish list. In 2011, the Army sought Rs3 billion to buy two new MI-17 helicopters, but Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai sanctioned even more than what was asked, he gave Rs 3.5 billion. In 2016, during K P Oli’s first tenure as Prime Minister, Finance Minister Bishnu Poudel allotted Rs27 billion in non-budgetary resources for the military.

During the insurgency, when the military was mobilised in 2001 to defeat the Maoists, the government met every Army demand. But there is no longer a war to fight, there are no external threats, yet the Nepal Army’s budget keeps going up. One ex-Finance Secretary told us: “Political leaders have always feared a military coup, so they want to keep the Army happy. The monarchy is gone and the Army is now under civilian control, yet the old mindset persists.” But that is not the only reason. Another top Finance Ministry source puts it bluntly: “Politicians, the generals, everyone benefits from military procurements.” Corruption within the military is never investigated. The Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) does not have a mandate to question the generals. In every annual report, the Office of Auditor General



points out glaring irregularities in military procurement, but no one in government has ever taken any action. For this fiscal year, the finance ministry earmarked Rs44.16 billion for the army -- a 25% increase from last year. This is on top of the Rs4.72 billion the Army has already got this year -- Rs1 billion more for recurrent expenditure and Rs3.72 billion more for capital spending. The Finance Ministry has had to reallocate money earmarked for other programs to satisfy the generals. Finance Minister Yuba Raj Khatiwada in his White Paper this

month said the treasury was empty, it remains to be seen where he is going to get the cash to meet the Army’s demands for new helicopters and aircraft. “When the generals march into the Finance Minsitry with their armed body guards, no one can say no to them,” says one official. When Bimal Koirala was Finance Secretary, Army Chief Gen Prajwal SJB Rana reportedly threatened to throw him into the Bagmati River if the military’s budget request was not met. In case the Finance Ministry does muster the courage to turn down the Army’s request, the generals simply go up to the Prime Minister or Defence Minister and get it sanctioned. After the Cabinet approves a military budget demand, the Finance Ministry has no choice but to meet it. Ex-Finance Minister Devendra Raj Pandey asks: “Why do we need to have a budget plan if the Cabinet just hands over money arbitrarily to the military?”

- India giving railways and ships
- China gives Singha Darbar solar power
- Japan restoring heritage
- EU to work on agriculture, irrigation
- Americans to invest in education
- Korea to build hospitals

**Prime Minister:** The country is moving towards self-reliance and prosperity

नागरिक

Rabin Sayami in *Nagarik*, 12 April

**QUOTE OF THE WEEK**

“I will keep a record book where those who say I am a talker and not a doer can write their names. I will give them free tickets when Kathmandu-Pokhara railway comes into operation.”

Prime Minister KP Oli in an interview with *Nepal*, 8-14 April

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2017 was a good year for cinema. Among the nine films nominated for Best Picture almost all, barring the unnecessarily long *Dunkirk*, are special in their particular ways. Each of these films is distinctive in style, guided by the voices of their directors who want to push the boundaries of what can be done on film.



MUST SEE  
Sophia Pande

Steven Spielberg’s *The Post* is probably one of the most conventional of the films nominated this past year. Fortunately, it is so strong in its subject matter and in the force of the actors who guide the story that the film excels in its own right, even while it did not win the coveted golden statue.

Starring the great Meryl Streep

and the wonderful Tom Hanks, *The Post* tells the incredible true story of how *The Washington Post* threw aside all caution to publish the Pentagon Papers in 1971, papers that exposed how the White House administrations, extending back to Harry Truman, through to the current administration (at the time) of Richard Nixon had been aware that the Vietnam war was a lost cause. The thousands of pages long, comprehensive report had been commissioned in 1967 by the then Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara (Bruce Greenwood), who had held off exposing this dreadful secret that would surely have brought down any sitting president.

After *The New York Times* is barred by a court injunction from further publishing the strategically leaked papers, *The Post’s* editor in Chief Ben Bradlee (Hanks) lobbies, hard, for Katherine Graham

(Streep), the first female owner of any publication, to allow the paper to publish the hundreds of crucial stories that the report might generate.

This is a story about bravery, and doing what’s right, told without hyperbole, in the most matter of fact, but stirring of ways. Hanks and Streep square off as adversary and confidante, switching back and forth as each struggles with his or her ethics, trying to draw lines about how far they will go to expose the truth or retain their hard won space in the echelons of political society.

There is a particularly riveting line, uttered by the former military analyst Daniel Ellsberg (played by another great actor, Matthew Rhys), the original source who leaked the papers to *The New York Times*, when he says that to accuse a paper of betraying a president and committing crimes against the state is dangerously close to the President saying “I am the state” – a dreadful defaulting on the real tenet of democracy where the state is actually the people, who elect the head of state to represent their best interests. This is particularly prescient in present day America.

There is so much to love about *The Post*, the performances, the fascinating procedural revelations about how such stories are told by a truly committed media, the will of a woman to do the right thing, the reporters who bite on to the truth like little terriers that won’t let go, and finally the insights into why people are sometimes noble, despite our fears.



Watch trailer online

nepalitimes.com



RSS

**DEADLINE:** Prime Minister K P Oli, Chinese Ambassador Yu Hong and Minister for Energy Barsha Man Pun visit Upper Tamakosi Hydropower Project in Dolakha on Wednesday during which Oli wanted the 456MW project expedited.



RSS

**TOP COP:** Newly appointed Inspector General of Police Sarbendra Khanal receives his insignia from Home Secretary Prem Kumar Rai (*far left*) in Kathmandu on Wednesday.



KRISHNA PAUDEL

**SOLAR DARBAR:** Prime Minister KP Oli and Chinese Ambassador to Nepal Yu Hong, jointly inaugurate the Chinese-funded one-megawatt solar photovoltaic project, which was installed in Singha Darbar on Tuesday.



RSS

**ECONOMIC ROADMAP:** Asian Development Bank announced at a Press Meet on Wednesday that Nepal’s economic growth rate would rise to 5.5% in 2018-2019 if there is normal monsoon and infrastructure projects are expedited.



RSS

**CROWNING GLORY:** Former Miss Nepal Nikita Chandak crowns this year’s winner Shrinkhala Khatiwada in Kathmandu on Wednesday. The 22-year-old will represent Nepal in Miss World 2018 in China.

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# Lumbini burial

Annapurna Post, 12 April

अन्नपूर्ण

A group of 40 Taiwanese pilgrims last month buried the mortal remains of deceased family members at the holy Mayadevi Temple sanctuary in Lumbini. An internal inquiry has revealed that the Taiwanese bribed policemen and field staff of the Lumbini Development Trust to allow them to perform their funeral ritual and inter remains of dead relatives beneath a tree near the temple on 26 March.

Although the Trust administration knew about the case almost immediately, it had not bothered to investigate. But locals put pressure on the Trust to reveal the truth, and an inquiry panel was set up on 5 April. It found the Taiwanese had entered the temple area after office hours by paying Rs 1,000 to each of the 18 policemen, security guards and caretakers at the birthplace of the Buddha.



ANNAPURNA POST

They had brought teeth, nails and locks of hair of their departed family members all the way from Taiwan. These remains were wrapped in 14 plastic bags (*pictured*), which also contained ashes and rice grains. They dug a 0.5m x 0.5m hole in the ground where they placed all the remains and buried it.

Without the approval of the Trust and UNESCO, no one can carry out an excavation in the temple area. Pilgrims need to take off their shoes before going in, and they are not allowed to pluck flowers or damage plants. At the entrance, security guards examine bags of all pilgrims.

But the fact that the Taiwanese buried the remains of their dear ones by distributing just a few thousand rupees has exposed just how vulnerable the sacred temple is. The Trust has sought clarification from all caretakers who were on duty that day.

They told the inquiry panel they kept Botany Officer Sabbir Ahmed in the loop, but he has been found innocent. The Trust's Vice Chair Awadhesh Tripathi has defended Ahmed, saying he allowed the burial only outside the temple periphery.



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# How Nepal's media landscape

Some 4,145 respondents in 38 sample districts of all seven provinces were surveyed in January and February this year to measure their ownership of communication devices, mass media consumption patterns, and their views on the press itself.

The exercise was undertaken by Sharecast Initiative Nepal, and the 2018 survey was the third in a series supported by multiple Nepali organisations. The study also explores most popular radio and tv programs and stations, and current trends in social media engagement and Internet usage.

Province 4 led the way with the highest mobile phone ownership (99%) with 64% of them being smartphones. The province, of which Pokhara is the capital, also had 38% of its people using the Internet daily.

Mobile phones are by far the most common communication device in Nepal today with an overwhelming majority of 96% of respondents owning one at the household level, and individually they are owned by 90%. Of these, slightly more than half were smartphones, and only 18% of respondents said they used laptops, desktops or tablets at home.

Among the 35% who have access to regular Internet, 98% respondents said they use mobile phone for Net access. Only 5.2% of respondents said they used laptops/tablets for the Internet whereas only 0.8% respondents used personal computers.

Nearly three-fourths of those polled used mobile data to access Internet while only 19% said they had access to broadband Internet or WiFi at home.

Easy access to mobile data, smart phone penetration along with competitive rate from telecom companies are attracting mobile users to access the Internet on their phones. Broadband Wi-Fi is still limited in urban affluent households.

Among Internet users, Facebook was the highest (81%) with Messenger, IMO, YouTube, Viber and Whatsapp trailing close behind. In the 16-24 age group, Facebook use was 86%. An estimated 8 million Nepalis are said to be on Facebook, and is popular with both literate as well as illiterate people.

IMO is widely used to connect



with relatives in Middle East where migrants are working in the highest numbers. Even though it has risky privacy issues, IMO works well even with low bandwidth. Media digital aggregator HamroPatro was the only Nepali application mentioned as a favourite by 1.3%

Internet users.

In the electronic media, tv has overtaken radio with 56% of households now owning tv sets with only 29% having traditional radio receivers at home. Access to electricity, DTH and cable coupled with remittance savings,

(one in three respondents had someone from the household working abroad) being used to buy tv monitors. Interestingly, 56% of respondents said they tuned in to FM radio on their phones.

Press readership trails behind radio with only 21% of respondents

saying they had been able to get hold of a hardcopy in the last six months. Among those readers, only 6% said they read a paper daily, relying on radio and tv for local, national and international news.

Among the respondents, 35% said they had regular access to the

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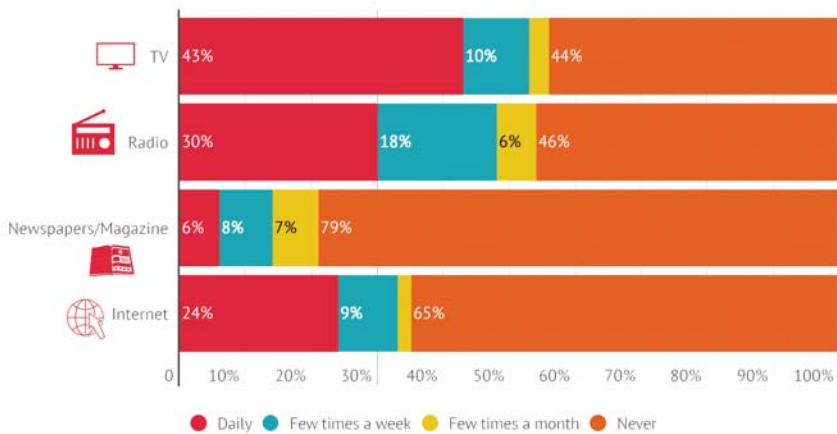


PHOTO: MADHU ACHARYA

Internet, with 24% of them using it daily. This finding contradicts the recent Nepal Telecom Authority data which is primarily based on the mobile simcard distribution and stated that 63% of Nepal's population had Internet access. One of the most interesting

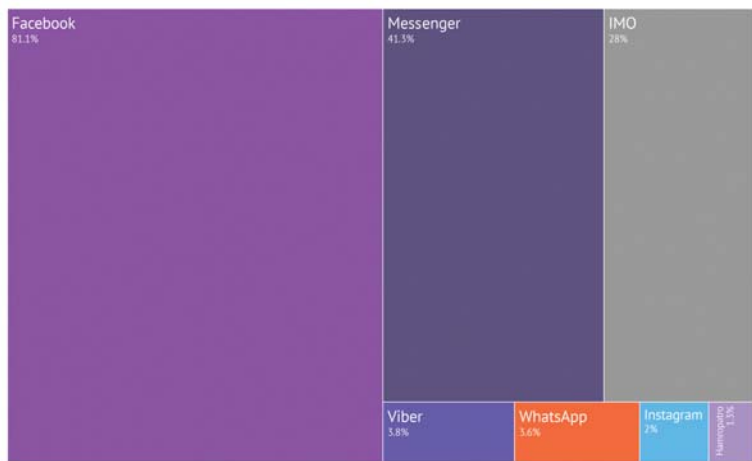
## Access to Media in Nepal

Sample: 4145

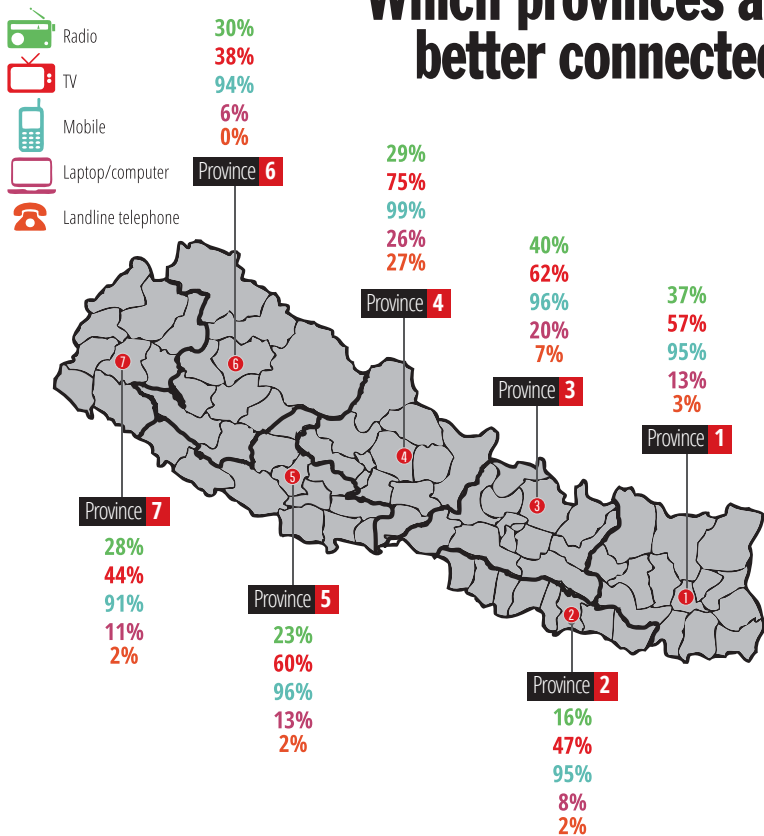


## Which application do you use most on Internet?

Sample: 1373



## Which provinces are better connected?



findings of this survey was in answers to the question about which source of news was most reliable. About a third said they trusted tv and radio, however only 3% trusted newspapers and less than 2% found information on the Internet to be reliable. Many

found neighbours to be much more trustworthy than the information available online. Unlike India and other countries in the region, the big chunk of people watching Nepali tv channels do so for news (85%) followed by entertainment (43%). When asked

why, a majority said they did not find Nepali entertainment programs particularly appropriate.

An overwhelming 86% of tv viewers watch programs in the evenings, and more women watch television than men in the evenings. The men watch more tv in the mornings. This is true across variables such as age, province, ecological regions, caste, education and occupation.

Of tv users 35% of households have local cable without setup box, and 33% are hooked up to

Nepal's only direct to home (DTH) company. The remaining 32% use local setup boxes, illegal Indian DTH as well as digital tv providers. This scenario is expected to change with the government's new policy for cable companies to digitise tv sources.

Survey lead and analysis:  
**Madhu Acharya,**  
**Bhumiraj Chapagain**  
Statistics and methodology:  
**Balkrishna Khadka**  
[www.sharecast.org.np](http://www.sharecast.org.np)



## How the survey was done

Interviews were conducted with 4,145 respondents in 38 sample districts over seven provinces in January-February 2018.

There is an error margin of 1.52% at 95%. The 77 districts were sample frame stratified by Provinces. The primary sampling unit was the district, with 198 sample wards selected from the 38 districts. Sample households (21) were selected using random walk methods.

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# Rest of the news

A lot of important things happened in the past year that did not make it to the news pages because they were crowded out by even more important things like the state visit to India by PM Oli and the state visit to Nepal by Her Excellency Sophia from Saudi Arabia. As a newspaper of record, it behooves the Ass to list below some news items from BS 2074 that did not see the light day and fell between the crackpots:

## Nepal No Longer Landlocked

NEW DELHI -- Thanks to timely intervention by Prime Minister Oli, Nepal is now no longer landlocked, reliable sources said. The prime ministers of India and Nepal agreed that the shoreline of the Bay of Bengal will be extended to Biratnagar so that Nepal's merchant marine can sail the seven seas proudly flying the national double triangle flag.

Experts said their work would be greatly assisted by sea level rise caused by global warming. "If Nepal cannot go to the ocean, we will bring the ocean to Nepal," said the expert on condition of complete animosity.

## Crooks Released

NAKKHU -- Nepal's most notorious mafia dons, smugglers and extortionists have been released from jail by the new Communistified government and are now moving around freely in broad daylight hours.

Said a grumblement minister (whose name we forget, but we can get back to you if you insist on knowing his identity): "We promised stability and prosperity, and we have fulfilled

that by emptying our jails and letting the crooks loose. It should inspire confidence in investors that this administration has a decisive, can-do attitude towards law and order."

## The Golden Handshake

NEW DELHI -- Nepal-India relations reached new heights during the recent state visit by Nepal's Shree 3 Khadga Sumshere who was accorded a guard of honour, state banquet, a 24-gun salute and a quick stop at a roadside pan pasal on his way to the airport.

But the highlight of the visit was the now iconic 23-second handshake between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Nepal's Roving Ambassador, Photobomber Extraordinaire and Plenipotentiary Dr Risi Hamala.



"If there is one indication that Nepal-India ties have now been restored to their age-old bonhomie it is this handshake. It said it all," noted a member of the entourage who witnessed the handclasp at close quarters. "We can now be sure Nepal's sovereignty is in safe hands."



The Ass

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