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GOING PLACES TOGETHER

NATURALLY NEPAL

Across the world, human societies are suffering a growing nature deficit. The march of consumerism and economic globalisation has come at an enormous cost to the local and global environment. Much of the change is irreversible on a civilisational timescale: rivers destroyed by dams, landscapes mutilated, a cascade of extinctions and climate collapse.

Nature is valueless, it cannot have a price tag. Our culture and religion regards nature as sacred. Nature matters to us because of its emotional value, and the health benefits of being amidst it cannot be measured in dollars and cents.



KUNDA DIXIT

But modern economics puts a monetary value to nature. It can be bought and sold without factoring in its intrinsic value. We are not required to calculate the cost of its destruction when evaluating its worth. An Environmental Impact Assessment of a project tries to calculate the impact to nature of infrastructure or development projects. There are attempts to post a cash value to ‘natural capital’ and ‘ecosystem services’, but these are narrow attempts to measure something immeasurable and priceless.

The crisis of the anthropocene is rooted in governments, businesses and sections of the public regarding nature as free and limitless. This is why native forests have been logged until there is nothing left, smoke and emissions are pumped into the air and filled with toxins, river beds are mined, and the earth is warming because we are burning all this fossil carbon.

This issue of *Nepali Times* carries a Special Package on nature conservation in the Tarai national parks. The results of the tiger

The crisis of the anthropocene is rooted in governments, businesses and sections of the public regarding nature as free and limitless.

census this year showed the encouraging result that Nepal was the first country to attain the target of doubling its tiger population four years ahead of schedule. The number of tigers has jumped from 200 four years ago to 235, with most of the increase in Bardia National Park.

Tigers had nearly disappeared in Bardia after the Nepal Army was pulled out of anti-poaching duty during the conflict. But numbers there have soared from 18 ten years ago to 87 today. This is a phenomenal achievement.

The reason tigers are important is because they are at the top of the food chain and protecting them protects everything else in the ecosystem. But as our stories on *page 14-15* indicate, predator-prey imbalance can throw nature off kilter.

The problem in Bardia is that while the tiger population has increased, there has been a serious decline in prey density and this presents a danger to the new tigers. Predators then venture outside the park to attack livestock, thus weakening the villagers’ support for nature conservation.

Nepal’s tiger range spans the open border with India, which means wildlife moves freely back and forth. The resurgence of tiger numbers in nature reserves on both sides of the border have increased the problem of human-wildlife conflict as well as attracted cross border poachers.

The success of tiger conservation was achieved through India-Nepal cooperation, and the new challenges must also be addressed jointly. Grass palatable to deer species are not so common because of the water table going down because of the flow of the Karnali River being diverted by boulder mining upstream. This has benefited trees, but not grass.

Climate change has also made monsoon rains erratic. Large herbivores used to trample on the tall grass and allow deer to get to the tender shoots underneath, but Bardia’s once thriving populations of *arna*, *gaur* and *nilgai* have disappeared. Tiger numbers can be increased further

if there is enough of the right type of grass. Tigers need prey, prey need grasslands, grass needs moisture, but humans have tampered with the water. The web of life links everything in an ecosystem together, and we need to understand this for nature conservation.

Nature has intrinsic value, even though governments may try to give it economic value. For Nepal, nature must be valued also because biodiversity represents our national identity and our sense of self-worth. Nature should not just be protected in national parks. Our urban deserts need to be rewilded as well.

ONLINE PACKAGES



JUNGLE OUT THERE

Take a trip to Bardia National Park which has become a hub for research to ensure that deer have enough grass so tigers have enough prey. Travel across the border to India to see how the two countries cooperate in conservation. *Story: page 14-15*



SARUS ON SCREEN

Ecological artist and activist Lillian Ball was so inspired after meeting a Buddhist monk in Nepal that she decided to make a film on the wetlands of Lumbini. Go online for the documentary, *Sanctuary*, which is also being screened in Yantra House in Kathmandu. *Story: page 6*

BANKING CRISIS

The writer has carefully chosen to avoid some details (‘Banks biting off more than they can chew?’, Suman Joshi, #935). We know how bank owners financed capital increment, and how the regulator made a mockery of itself by dramatically deviating from the core objective of induced mergers and acquisitions. A vital question is whether or not loan quality has remained positively correlated with the increase in loan volume. Trends worldwide show that effects of rapid expansion in credit flow will be more visible in bank books in the long term. The root of the problem is greed and the dog eat dog culture rampant in the financial services industry.

Siddhartha Mainali

RESPONSIBLE GOVERNANCE

Thank you for your continued advocacy of responsible government (‘Reckless Fecklessness’, Editorial, #935).

Wilda Campbell

POLIO

Thank you for the story of polio and its eradication in Nepal. (‘Polio hunt’, Sonia Awale, #935). However, you missed mentioning the enormous contribution made by Rotary International and its Global Polio Eradication Initiative. Rotary is also supporting a surveillance program in Nepal.

Maheswor Bhakta Shrestha

KATHMANDU’S SCRIPT

Thanks to the municipalities of the Kathmandu Valley for using Ranjana script in their signboards and letterheads, and helping to make Ranjana better known (‘The script of the scriptures’, Sewa Bhattarai, #935).

Kamal Ratna Tuladhar

WORK IN NEPAL

Nice article, showing that Nepalis do not have the necessary work ethics or dignity of labour when inside the country (‘Success in Nepal means not having to work’, Anil Chitrakar, #934).

Krishna Sharma

■ Good read. I want to highlight this sentence: ‘Families and communities need to respect those who refuse to go abroad and seek work within Nepal.’

Madhu Sudhan Subedi

WHAT’S TRENDING

Kathmandu’s Ranjana Renaissance

by *Monika Deupala*
Rediscovering the beautiful letters of the ancient and sacred Ranjana script. Go online to watch a video about workshops teaching Ranjana calligraphy, along with the full story on how these letters travelled to Tibet and beyond.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Going to great heights to prevent altitude sickness

by *Peter Hackett*
This piece about how the Nepal Himalaya has been the backbone of modern mountain medicine was the most popular on twitter. Link to other stories on the evolution of travel maladies at altitude.

Most popular on Twitter

A house in Budanilkantha

by *Lisa Choegyal*
Lisa Choegyal recalls the struggle to build her house in Budanilkantha 24 years ago, and how it has stood the test of time. Go to nepalitimes.com for more pictures.

Most visited online page

Banks biting off more than they can chew?

by *Suman Joshi*
Having once again entered the dark tunnel of scarcity of loanable funds, what can banks do to repair the situation? Read an ex-banker’s take and join the discussion.

Most commented

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
118 days after Nirmala Panta’s rape and murder, the culprits are still at large. But her family is increasingly concerned that they are losing not just one but two persons to this tragedy.
@sewa_ditee reports from their sit-in protest at Kanchanpur.

स्वामिमान @manche_nepali
The #Nepal government is rumoured to be protecting the culprits. Why is the world silent? This will embolden other rapists @cnni @BBCWorld @amnesty

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
“There is a sense that destination countries hire migrant workers for charity, making sending countries feel humiliated. We want to change this misguided notion” - Labour Minister Gokarna Bista

pigreen@pigreen1
It is overwhelmingly the private sector that recruits Nepalis, and their aim is to maximise profit, so low wages are commonplace.

Nepali Times@nepalitimes
#WorldToiletDay2018
As Nepal inches closer to 100% household toilet target, the next challenge is to make latrines hygienic & manage waste. Read about new future toilet designs that convert excreta into energy.

KHORUNGA@GuraginMohan
Water is a crucial component of sanitation. People in a vast majority of hilly areas in Nepal face scarcity of water to even cook food and for their cattle. Without solving this problem, toilets cannot serve their purpose no matter how widely accessible



10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Nepali Times issue #426 of 21-28 November 2008 carried a column by Debi Sunar, the mother of Maina Sunar, 14, who was raped and killed at the Panchkhal barracks of the Royal Nepal Army. She lamented that neither the Army nor the Maoists were prepared to tell her the truth. Her quest for justice for Maina remains unfulfilled to this day. Excerpt:

‘I had thought that I would get justice when the Maoists came to power. But now I see that they are too busy with their own vested interests. No Maoist leader or cadre has ever spoken to me after they got into government. I don’t understand how they could just forget about the victims of the conflict so soon.

Not just the Maoists, many human rights activists and journalists have also taken advantage of my tragedy. They take hours and hours of footage of me and then they sell my suffering. The army also promised compensation, but I didn’t go to the Kavre district office because my struggle was not for money.

I wanted to take the guilty to court to have them tried and then awarded damages.



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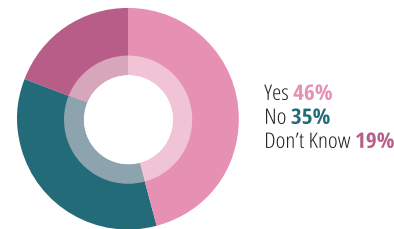
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Weekly Internet Poll #936

Q. Should the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) be dismantled?

Total votes: 75



Weekly Internet Poll #937
To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Do you see the presence of the government?



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Mustering the energy to save

Every watt of electricity saved is twice the power generated

Before going to bed, our grandmothers always soaked lentils and beans in water overnight to save energy. The next morning, they put the soaked beans in the sun to pre-heat the water, then wrapped it all up in a clean white cloth and boiled it one pot. The product was tasty, but more importantly, the process saved energy.



½ FULL
Anil Chitrakar

Today, we change light bulbs to LED, get 'five star' energy efficient refrigerators, use rice cookers and induction stoves. All this also has a lot to do with saving energy, just like our grandmothers.

At a recent event organised by the Town Development Fund (TDF) for local government leaders to help them plan electricity usage, conduct energy audits and look at financing options for local energy efficiency, it became clear that a watt saved was not a watt generated. It was two watts generated.

The reason energy saved is twice generated is the escalating costs of power projects, leakage, pilferage, system losses, over capacity of equipment, wastage, negligence, use of sub-standard equipment – all at the demand end.

Local governments have to pay for street lights, water and sewage

pumping stations, buildings and offices, space heating and canteens, garbage collection and other vehicles. The bills add up quickly. With elected leadership in 753 local governments, energy saved will not just mean more energy for others but can also help meet more pressing needs.

Some may argue that this is not on top of our priority list. In reality, given the escalating costs and the fact that many Nepalis depend on regular electricity supply, it would be the right thing to do.

The TDF is proposing an award for the most energy efficient local government. Only 3% percent of our energy needs comes from electricity, 10% from petroleum and the bulk from biomass (*see page 8*). But no one has forgotten the Indian blockade and how it was used as a geopolitical bargaining chip. We can all do our part by conducting simple energy audits at home and our place of work to find where the leakages, wastage and inefficiencies are, and then invest in minimising them. The payback period for investment in energy efficiency is very quick.

Markets can and do change people's behaviour. During difficult times like prolonged road strikes and natural disasters, every home looks for efficient ways to cook, light up, heat and pump. Experience tells us that shifting rooms to the



BIKRAM RAI

north facing side of the house in summer and moving to the south in winter can mean a difference of 10° Celsius in indoor temperature. The challenge is to scale these ideas across a municipality or the whole country.

Land acquisition for building large hydropower projects cost money and time, building transmission lines is a complicated and expensive process. Add to this the cost of pilferage and leakage and it is clear that energy saved means energy generated multiplied by two.

Indeed, if we continue on the path we are on, this ratio could actually increase over time. This year, the Nepal Electricity Authority celebrated Tihar with lights and no power outage, but few knew it was because of electricity imports from India. This makes us more and more dependent geopolitically on our neighbour.

Over the past decades we have seen the emergence of companies that implement solar and biogas programs. The time is now right for companies that wish to do energy efficiency projects.

Oh, by the way. When was the last time you cleaned the windows to let more sunlight in, or whitewashed the darker walls of the house or office to enable a lower watt light bulb? Every watt counts.

Anil Chitrakar is President of *Siddharthinc*

A villa in Thamel



MONIKA DEUPALA

New high rise hotels are sprouting like mushrooms all over Kathmandu, and particularly the tourist hub of Thamel is seeing a boom in new hotels, shopping centers and restaurants.

But every now and then, a new place emerges in this already-crowded neighbourhood to cater to the needs of trekkers and travelers who shun the glitzy new hotels belonging to international chains. One such is a renovated 100-year old neo-classical building called Thamel Villa.

The new boutique hotel, located in the heart of the bustling Thamel, has a lot of history behind it. This was the house Ganesh Man Singh, the pro-democracy fighter of the 1960 and 1990 movements, was born in and lived whenever he was not languishing in prison.

It was originally built by Bahadur Shumsher Rana, one of the sons of the Prime Minister Juddha Shumsher, and was later bought by Singh's mother Sanunani Shrestha Singh, in 1953.

Unlike many old properties which are reconstructed from top to bottom, Thamel

Villa remains true to the original ambience, shunning concrete and fancy accoutrements, and staying true to its Rana era aesthetics inside out.

"After the 2015 earthquake, many Rana structures were destroyed or torn down. It is my mission to preserve history along with the old houses, and I took Thamel Villa under



my wing," says owner Tripple P Gurung, who also manages property in Manang and Jomsom.

The restoration has been unobtrusive, and shows clever design elements. Thamel Villa is a two-storeyed house with eight different styled rooms. There are single rooms with ensuite bathroom and spacious beds, others feature balconies and kitchenette. Indeed, Thamel Villa can serve as a cosy apartment hotel.

The interior décor harks back to the Rana era blended with Newari elements like clay pots, wooden furniture and minimalist furniture. The hotel is an elegant amalgam of sophisticated taste and local heritage.

Gurung has perfected the art of turning old homes in comfortable inns for travelers to Nepal. He has revived the historic Om's Home in Jomsom and the iconic Red House Lodge in Kagbeni, upgraded the facilities while keeping the tradition and culture alive.

Before turning into a hotel entrepreneur six years ago, Tripple was an airline pilot in Nepal and India, but left to do things he really liked to do. Being involved in managing the family business at Hotel Marshyangdi from age of 19, Gurung has found his real calling in life.

"Nepal is blessed with cultural heritage and stunning nature. There is great potential of tourism here, but it should have a purpose and be sustainable, and I am passionate about preserving the culture," says Gurung, whose is trying to get hold of an L-shaped courtyard in Bhaktapur to turn it into another boutique hotel.

Thamel Villa is getting great reviews on Trip Advisor, and has been boosted by the recent visit of Nadiya Hussain, the winner of sixth series of BBC's *The Great British Bake Off*.

Sikuma Rai

Thamel Villa
Chaksibari, Thamel
\$80-160, (01) 4224051

prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

New JICA Chief



Yokohama Centre. He has experience in JICA's India and Bhutan offices.

Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has Yumiko Asakuma as its new Chief Representative for the Nepal Office, taking over Jun Sakuma. Asakuma was the Director General in JICA's

Festive fares

Turkish Airlines has introduced exclusive one-way and return fares for passengers flying from Kathmandu to selected



destinations in Europe, Africa and Turkey to celebrate Christmas and New Year. The promo is valid till January 2019 and fares starts from Rs31,000 (excluding taxes). Contact: (01) 4438363/ 4438436

Perfumes in Doha

Qatar Duty Free and Parfums Christian Dior have launched a Dior Les Parfums Podium at Hamad International Airport,



which invites customers to experience an immersive and multisensorial visit to Dior's Grasse gardens and its full fragrance catalogue through a 360° screen. The podium is also equipped with wrapping stations, and consultation opportunities with beauty advisors.

Smart banking

Bank of Kathmandu is offering a flat 10% discount on NTC, Ncell mobile top-ups done from its mobile banking app, BOK Smart, for limited time. The app is available for both Android and iPhone users and can be used to check account, get transaction alert, transact balance between more than 40 banks and many other services.

Powerful DG

Mahindra Powerol announced its entry into the higher kVA diesel generators (DG) with the launch of its all new range of 250kVA and 320kVA DGs powered by Mahindra mPower series engines, along with 5kVA compact & portable genset. The new range of 9.3litre engine is known for heavy duty performance and fuel efficiency.

prabhu BANK

Why does the credit crisis keep repeating itself?

Bankers met at a Himalmedia Roundtable last week to discuss the recurring credit crunch

Nepal's cyclical credit crunch has re-emerged yet again, putting the economy in the doldrums and portending that the country is not likely to achieve its target of 8% growth this fiscal year.

Banks are not lending any more, bankers are avoiding big loan seekers and new infrastructure projects are not taking off. Hydropower investor Gyanendra Lal Pradhan says: "Almost all banks

have shut the door on borrowers."

Commercial banks have already lent Rs157 billion in the first quarter of the current fiscal year, and they do not have any more loanable funds. One of the major reasons behind the current liquidity squeeze is the government's failure to spend its development budget.

When Nepal got a strong and stable government after years of

war and political instability, banks had hoped that development budget would now be mobilised more efficiently and they would not face a crunch in the middle of a fiscal year.

However, even the strongest government ever with a technocrat Finance Minister has failed to fix the problem of spending the bulk of capex only towards the end of a fiscal period. This has resulted in

the scarcity of loanable deposits for the third year in a row, turning it into a chronic banking crisis.

The government has collected Rs303 billion in revenue so far this year, but only Rs245 billion has been spent. And the largest chunk of expenditure is for recurrent expenses, which does not help ease the credit crisis. Almost Rs58 billion remains unspent in the state exchequer.

But experts say the government's inability to mobilise development budget is not the only major reason behind the recurring credit crunch. At a Himalmedia Roundtable last week, bankers blamed the government for not spending its development budget efficiently. But they also admitted that there are other factors at play. Excerpts:



Ashoke SJB Rana
CEO, Himalayan Bank

The political transition may have ended, but the banking sector is still in transition. Banks have been forced to increase their paid-up capitals, and take stricter and even impractical measures to collect customer details to help the government combat money laundering. This has hampered deposits at a time when there is a huge demand for credit. And imports have surged like never before, further compounding the crisis. It has become the new normal to lend up to 78% of loanable deposits within the first quarter of a fiscal year. This is scary.



Govinda Gurung
CEO, Civil Bank

We now have political stability, and the scope of investment is rapidly expanding. So there is a greater demand for loans. But we have the same old mechanism of spending capital expenditure. The government is collecting more than Rs1 billion in revenue every year, but is not spending its development budget. Also, new monetary policies allow borrowers to pay back loans in US dollars within 180 days — up from 120 days last year. As value of US currency increases, borrowers tend to wait until the last day to pay back. It has also aggravated the crisis.



Bhuwan Dahal
CEO, Sanima Bank

Commercial banks have not been able to manage their assets and liabilities effectively because Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) has not properly followed the guidelines of the Basel III framework, which requires financial regulators to put different credit-deposit ratio rates on different types of deposits. For example, if we have long-term deposits, we should be allowed to lend more. But we have a universal credit-deposit ratio of 80% for all kinds of deposit.



Ashok Sherchan
CEO, Prabhu Bank

The informal economy is huge and the largest chunk of money spent in last year's elections did not come to the banking system. Almost 90% of remittance withdrawn from banks does not return to the banking system. So we need to inject money circulating in the informal economy. For this, the NRB should review the cap on cash transactions. If it is increased to Rs3 million from the current cap of just Rs1 million, more money will flow into the banking system. Efficient mobilisation of capex alone will not fix the problem.



Kiran Kumar Shrestha
CEO, Rastriya Banijya Bank

As a government-owned bank, we are not facing a crisis like commercial banks. But we are also affected. Only 40% Nepalis have access to banks. A majority of people, especially in villages, are not being served by the banking sector. Rural people tend to deposit money for longer periods than urban people, so banks must branch out into villages to increase their deposits. The government has made it mandatory to open branches in all municipalities and village councils, but administrative areas of some village councils are so large that we must open branches in each ward.

ALL PHOTOS: MONIKA DEUPALA

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Lumbini's unholy mess

The struggle to save the Buddha's birthplace from human greed and bad planning

Om Astha Rai

The Buddha was born under a tree, got enlightenment under a tree, and passed away under a tree. So, when Japanese architect Kenzō Tange drew up a master plan to develop Lumbini in 1978, he left 60% of the project area as a primeval jungle that has been more or less intact since the Buddha was born here.

But the nativity site is now turning into a Buddhist Disneyland, with huge concrete structures popping up everywhere as countries in the region vie to build more majestic shrines. There are already 32 monasteries and temples within the core area of Lumbini, and 58 hotels outside it. Several Buddhist countries and institutes are pressing the Nepal government for permission to build more concrete structures within the core area.

Last year, over 1.5 million pilgrims and tourists visited Lumbini from all over the world, a 20% increase from the previous year. This year, the number is expected to exceed the 2017 figures.

And after the new Bhairawa airport (named Gautam Buddha International Airport) is ready by end 2019, the number is expected to shoot up even more, and reach 3.5 million by 2025, and 10 million by 2050. How will Lumbini's spiritual and



OMASTHARAI

environment importance survive this onslaught?

The government and local businesses see the rapidly growing number of pilgrims and tourists as a bonanza, but for those trying to preserve Lumbini's tranquility, nature and the essential philosophy of Buddhism, it is already becoming a difficult task.

A case in point is the attempt to save Lumbini's forests, wetlands and precious species like the Sarus cranes that live there. The tallest flying bird in the world has a deep meaning for Buddhists because of the belief that the Buddha himself saved a crane that had been wounded by an arrow shot by his cousin.

Sarus cranes have lived in the fields around Lumbini since the time Buddha was young. Though

BUDDHIST DISNEYLAND: Lumbini is fast turning into a Buddhist theme park with concrete structures popping up everywhere (above).

A proposal to build luxury hotels in the last remaining wetlands of Lumbini have threatened Sarus cranes (right), which have a deep meaning for Buddhists.

crane numbers are dwindling, they still nest in the area today along with many other wildlife species.

The previous executive committee of Lumbini Development Trust (LDT) had given a green light to build four luxury hotels and a five-star meditation centre inside a 256-acre Sarus crane sanctuary, threatening the majestic low-flying birds that have lived here for nearly three millennia.



INTERNATIONAL CRANE FOUNDATION

When Venerable Metteyya, a 32-year-old Buddhist monk committed to protecting Sarus cranes, was appointed to head the LDT in 2017, he threw out the hotel proposal that would have destroyed

the cranes' wetland habitat. But he says the threat to the wetlands of Lumbini, the habitat of Sarus cranes and other species, is still there.

Metteyya was ousted from the LDT after KP Oli became Prime Minister for the simple reason that he was appointed by the previous government, but he fought his way back into office by filing a petition at the Supreme Court. He says he will not allow any business group to destroy the crane sanctuary as long as he is in office.

"The Sarus cranes will remain under threat unless the government realises that Lumbini is not just for humans but for all species," the monk told us.

Metteyya has introduced a phased Lumbini Conservation Project to preserve greenery and sanctity of the Buddha's birthplace. In the first phase, the Sarus sanctuary will be developed into a nature centre in collaboration with International Crane Foundation. George Archibald of the Foundation visited Lumbini this week, and he is mentoring the project. (See interview overleaf)

In the second phase, the area envisioned by Kenzō Tange as a lush and green jungle will be restored as Lumbini Ban (forest) and the third phase will start cleaning up industries and making Lumbini pollution-free.

Says Metteyya: "We have an obligation to preserve Lumbini's wetlands, trees, Sarus and greenery for the next generations, and this is possible only if everyone joins or supports our efforts." 🇳🇵

Shooting Sarus

New documentary profiles the attempt to protect the sacred cranes of Lumbini

New York-based ecological artist and activist Lillian Ball is not a film-maker. But her activism to protect the world's wetlands through images brought her to Nepal and Lumbini

After meeting a young Buddhist monk in Nepal, she was inspired to make a film on the wetlands of Lumbini, which have been a home to Sarus cranes since the time of the Buddha. *Sanctuary*, her debut documentary, is not a high-end film, but a well-meaning attempt to highlight the threats from developers and save the sacred Sarus cranes.

Shot with an iPhone and a point-and-shoot camera, *Sanctuary* also uses stills and



CRANING ITS NECK: A still from the new documentary *Sanctuary* showing a caged crane at a monastery in Lumbini.

clips to show us what the Nepal government does not want us to see: Lumbini turning into a Buddhist theme park, and human greed destroying the last remaining habitat of the cranes.

Ball, a faithful Buddhist, first went to

Lumbini after joining a Dutch charity helping people affected by the 2015 earthquake. She met Venerable Metteyya (pictured overleaf), the 32-year-old monk working to protect wetlands and Sarus cranes in Lumbini.

Metteyya narrated the ages-old fable of

the Buddha saving a wounded Sarus crane so eloquently that she just took out her iPhone, and started taking a video of him talking. He walked her around wetlands, and she shot him explaining correlation between Buddhism and nature.

Metteyya, now Vice Chair of Lumbini Development Trust (LDT), features prominently in the 30-minute film which opens with a text that says bluntly: 'Overdevelopment threatens the Sarus cranes in Lumbini...', adding how proposals to build luxury hotels and a five-star meditation centre in the crane sanctuary can wipe out a fabled bird species from the Buddha's birthplace.

After the film's premiere at the Tibetan house in New York in November, Ball told *Tricycle*, a Buddhist magazine: "I'd like to make a second part (of my film) to show what's going to happen with Venerable Metteyya now, both in this position and in the other things he's still doing." 🇳🇵

The documentary 'Sanctuary' will be screened at Yantra House, Kathmandu on 6 December, 5:30-7PM.

 nepalitimes.com

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That westerly front on Thursday breezed through pretty quickly without the expected precipitation. Some of the cloud cover will linger, bringing down the maximum temperature to below 20 this weekend for the first time this season. There may be some isolated snow flurries in higher elevations, but in the Tarai and the mid-mountains valleys it will be smog.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
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Cranes, nature and godliness

George Archibald is Co-founder of the International Crane Foundation and was in Kathmandu for the consecration of the crane sanctuary in Lumbini. He spoke to *Nepali Times* this week. Excerpts:

Nepali Times: What explains your fascination with cranes? How did it begin?
Geroge Archibald: When I was eight in Stillwater, Nova Scotia, I heard a radio broadcast on Canadian Broadcasting Corporation about the nesting grounds of whooping cranes. It was about a male and female crane that had flown 2,700 miles from Texas to their breeding ground in Canada. Since then I have been trying to find out everything about cranes. Eventually, at Cornell University, I did my

doctorate on the evolutionary relationships of cranes. I found out that very little was known about cranes around the world, and that if somebody did not do something, we would lose many of the crane species.
What is it about cranes that makes them so charismatic?
Cranes are the tallest birds, they pair for life, they dance to develop pair bonds and they have calls that carry for miles. There is nothing a crane does that is not graceful. They are important in so many cultures as symbols of long life, and so are wonderful brand ambassadors for conservation programs for wetlands and for grasslands. They migrate across continents, and show how we all share in the global environment.

What is the significance of the Sarus crane to Buddhism, and why is the Lumbini wetland important?
Lord Buddha's cousin is said to have shot a Sarus, and he was very moved when its

mate tried to help the dying crane. The scene changed his life by inspiring him to seek a better way. The Sarus should be revered by all Buddhists. Lumbini provides wetlands in which Sarus can nest and rear their young.

Worldwide, what is the status of cranes, especially of the migratory ones?
There are 15 species of cranes, 11 of which are threatened, including the Sarus. The extremely rare migratory cranes have been strictly protected and are slowly increasing, but wetland habitats for them are still limited. Hunting of cranes in Central Asia has destroyed the population of Siberian cranes that wintered in Iran. After the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, there was shooting of cranes, and the last birds were seen there in 2003. Siberian cranes are now gone from the flyways that took them to Iran and India. But we have a beautiful flock of 4,000 that winters in China but they are now critically endangered because the single lake where they winter is threatened by a dam. The battle

goes on – in certain areas it is eliminating hunting, in others it is preserving habitat and in some places, it is both.

How important is the Himalayan ecosystem for the protection of migratory and resident crane populations?
The Himalayan ecosystem is on the migration route in autumn of thousands of Demoiselle and Eurasian cranes. In Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh of India, high altitude wetlands provide winter habitat for the endangered black-necked cranes. It is possible there are one or two pairs of black-necked cranes breeding in wetlands beside lakes in Sikkim.

The Indo-Gangetic plains are some of the most densely-populated regions of the world, and is suffering water-stress. How do we balance human needs with the need to protect endangered wildlife?
Sarus cranes and a plethora of other aquatic birds often breed on agricultural fields in regions where the Hindu faith is practiced. Large water birds and humans live in harmony in areas where Hindu values and traditional agricultural practices survive. In regions where industrial agriculture is practiced, biodiversity decreases.

Why a crane sanctuary in Lumbini?
The Lumbini crane sanctuary is a small area which provides an opportunity for pilgrims to learn about what pure nature is and how it can be protected. The Sarus is the ambassador of that message.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER:
George Archibald with Venerable Metteyya, the 32-year-old monk who is trying to save Lumbini's sacred Sarus cranes.



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No smoke without fire

Replace household biomass with renewable energy for a greener, healthier Nepal

In all the debate about Nepal's increasing fuel imports from India and the country's growing carbon footprint, what gets lost is that nearly 80% of the energy consumed in the country is from burning biomass, a fancy name for firewood, agriculture residue and dried cattle dung.

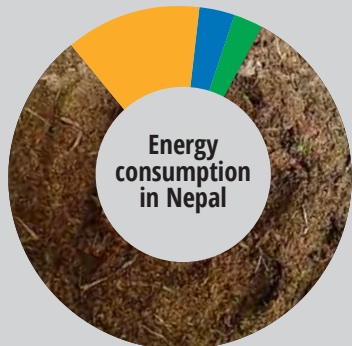


CLIMATE FOR CHANGE
Ajaya Dixit

The use of petroleum products is a distant second at 12.5%, while electricity and renewable sources like solar power account for about 3.4% and 2.5% of the total energy used.

This energy mix reflects an utter lack of focus and wrong-headed priorities in Nepal's energy planning. Nepali households, tea shops, hotels, schools, even the mess for Army and Police predominantly rely on biomass for cooking. This is not only inefficient because of the low energy conversion rates, but also because of the hazards of the smoke to public health, the environment and the local climate.

This is not to say that imported petroleum products are any better. But the dominance of biomass in our energy sources should make us seriously consider ways to minimise the negative side-effects of the reliance on biomass and to transit to cleaner sources of energy for cooking.



Biomass: **80%**
Petroleum products: **12.5%**
Electricity: **3.4%**
Solar power: **2.5%**

Nepal's rural homes are typically built without chimneys and are poorly ventilated. A lot of the smoke, including minute particulates, stay indoors. Since women and children are exposed for longer periods, they suffer the most from acute respiratory infections. Long-term exposure to indoor air pollution causes cataract, bronchitis, tuberculosis, and cancer, and indoor pollution is the main reason for stunting in children. The WHO estimates that over 7,500 Nepali women and children die every year due to indoor smoke-induced illness.

Incomplete biomass burning also contributes to the emission of soot particles in the air adding to smoke from brick kilns, forest fires, open garbage burning, and diesel vehicles and generators. Called black carbon, these particles are blown up to the mountains and when deposited on the snow and ice, accelerate melting. The rise in average global temperature and emission of soot particles, if unmitigated, will further alter water flow dynamics, threatening the livelihoods of millions in the

region.

Since the early 1980s, attempts were made in Nepal to reduce indoor smoke with the promotion of improved cooking stoves. According to the Nepal Biomass Strategy 2017, about 1.3 million Nepali households use improved stoves and 365,000 have biogas plants. However, there is a worrying trend towards imported LPG for cooking.

In 2016, Nepal imported 566,400kL of LPG, which was almost eight times higher than the amount imported in 2000. In developing countries, the increased use of propane fuel by households is an indicator of higher income. LPG reduces hazards of smoke and conserves forests, but this exponential growth adds to our fuel import bill.

Nepal needs to be careful about alternatives to biomass in the country's next phase of economic development. Poor implementation of public policies has contributed to the inability to replace biomass and imported petroleum products with clean fuel sources like hydroelectricity, particularly for household cooking.

Efforts to replace biomass with cleaner energy sources must be reinvigorated – it can be a low hanging fruit in Nepal's decarbonised economic development pathway. A more holistic energy policy is required, one that provides universal energy access, green jobs, improved health, gender and social equity, lowering the petroleum import bill and mitigating black carbon emission.

As a starting point, the Energy, Forest and Environment Ministries, WECS and the Alternate Energy Promotion Centre in consultation with the private sector and donor agencies must collectively establish a baseline of Nepal's current energy use. They must also consider measuring sources of emissions according to international protocols so a low-carbon development strategy can be designed.

Elected rural and urban municipal, provincial and national governments, as well as community groups need to work together in linking biomass replacement efforts with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals so that it resonates with scenarios outlined in IPCC's latest Special Report 1.5.

Learning from the past, new strategies to replace biomass usage must consider the household's geographic and social milieu, income, individual preferences, behaviour, technology, availability and affordability of fuel types. This requires bringing together unique business and development models that can be sustained through funds with varying costs of capital such as public, pricing, overseas development assistance, multilateral loans, as well as philanthropic outlays.

A biomass energy transition strategy should build on learning from Nepal's experience with promoting improved stoves and open defecation free districts with robust monitoring and evaluation through community engagement.

Ajaya Dixit is Executive Director of Kathmandu based ISET-Nepal. His monthly column *Climate for Change* deals with the impact of global warming in Nepal.



1983

More trekkers, more trees

After **35** years, environmentalist sees much positive change on the Everest Trail

Adam Stern
in Khumbu

The sound of yak steps on cobble stone streets and their jingling bells in Namche Bazar were familiar sounds. What was less familiar 35 years later was the constant clatter of helicopters overhead. This contrast between old and new was an ever-present theme during a recent trip to the Khumbu — a return journey to the region after my first visit in 1983.

There are many more trekkers, and new hotels to accommodate them. The Everest Base Camp trek remains the main attraction with guides and porters carrying gear for primarily European and American visitors. I had come here in 1983 to study the overuse of firewood, and the resulting deforestation. I lived with a Sherpa family that ran a small trekking lodge in Namche, and firewood was their main source of energy for cooking and heating. Without proper chimneys, smoke filled the living spaces and exposed residents, especially children, to respiratory problems.

The chief warden of the Sagarmatha National Park then was Mingma Norbu Sherpa, one of Nepal's Conservation Heroes who died in 2006 in the helicopter crash in Ghunsa. He took the

leadership to protect the forests, and Brot Coburn, a UNESCO consultant, helped build the first micro-hydroelectric plant below Namche that provided electricity for lighting and some cooking 16 hours a day.

The favourable energy shift towards forest protection and electricity picked up momentum from the late 1990s with the introduction of metal stoves that used yak dung for heating. At the same time, LPG cylinders started appearing for home cooking. Local hydro capacity was expanded for more sustained use in lighting and electrical appliances.

Thirty-five years later, there has been dramatic re-growth of

forests. Areas above Namche that were virtually barren in 1983 now have a tall pine forests. Trails from Namche to Phortse and Thame have robust stands of diverse tree species. Firewood use is much reduced due to the high cost of local labour to collect it, and because propane is a cheaper fuel source. Reductions in livestock herding and the success of community forestry have helped revive ecosystems.

In the early 1980s, communication to and from the Khumbu relied on runners transmitting messages by foot, a single telephone line at the police station in Namche, and a postal drop at the Khunde clinic. Today everyone has a cell phone. Porters

Peak Trekking



1983



2018

WHAT'S COOKING: Smokeless yak dung stoves are used for heating in most trekking lodges today. Russian Mi-17 helicopters fly in LPG cylinders to Syangboche from Phapla.



ALL PHOTOS: ADAM STERN

carrying incredibly heavy loads chat with friends and family. Trekking lodges advertise WiFi service with more emphasis than their hotel rooms.

At the monastery in Thame, a young monk in a maroon chuba and matching down jacket showed me hand lettered 600-year old books with ancient Tibetan calligraphy. He interrupted our conversation to take a call on his smartphone.

One troubling trend is the increasing reliance on long mule trains to transport supplies. Travelling in trains of 20 or more, they stir up dust on the trail and leave an overpowering stench of waste. Locals are discussing a proposal to build a cargo cable car

from Lukla to Namche.

The Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee is removing garbage and human waste from Mt Everest. Base Camp is supposed to be cleaner, and recycling bins are common along the trails. Yet, there is still extensive litter because packaging waste is accumulating faster than it can be disposed of.

Meanwhile, Nepal is racing to develop its hydroelectric capacity, and one consequence could be that rivers flowing from the Sagarmatha National Park could be dammed. This World Heritage Site deserves permanent protection.

How residents, local and national authorities manage the Khumbu's environmental and energy resources amid pressures of growing tourism and hydro development will determine if the region can have a sustainable future. 🇳🇵



Adam Stern is an American environmentalist based in California.

THEN AND NOW: The denuded slope above Namche Bazar in 1983, and the new pine forest (above).

Fuelwood in Namche 35 years ago, and yak dung drying in Phortse today. (below and right).

A Sherpa lodge in 1983 burned firewood in smokey clay stoves, the walls are blackened and a propane canister is turned into a kerosene lamp. Gas stoves have replaced the mud chulo today. (below).



u. Both have contributed to lessening the pressure on forests.

EVENTS



KTM trail race/walk

Walk or race in a trail of 15k or 7k, 2k for children, around Suryabinayak to pump up the juices for Christmas.
1 December, 8am onwards, Suryabinak, Bhaktapur, Rs750-1,000, kmttrailraceseries.com/calendar/

Food and livelihood security

Jocelyn A. Powelson, a student researcher of environmental studies, speaks on current situation for food and livelihood security in Humla and Bajura, identifies the main challenges locals face, and explores opportunities and solutions for it.
30 November, 3pm, Fulbright Commission Auditorium, Gyaneshwor, (01) 4444779

Bird watching

Enjoy birding at Sundarijal with Bird Conservation Nepal, led by Jaya N Bhandari.
1 December, 7am, Sundarijal Buspark, 9851167412

A Christmas affair

Karma Coffee is back with their traditional mulled wine session, accompanied by soothing live music with Prasanna Shah and a cookie baking session for kids by Tenzing Yangchean Tamang.
30 November, 3-7:30pm, Karma Coffee Nepal, Jhamsikhel, 9841884962, Register or baking session: birgit@madeinnepal.com



Sound of Existence

A solo exhibition by artist Manish Lal Shrestha at the Dalai-La Art Space fostering contemporary Nepalese art and artists.
30 November-8 December, Dalai-La Boutique Hotel, Thamel, (01) 4701436

Kimff

More than 70 films from 31 countries will be screened back-to-back, in the presence of filmmakers, film enthusiasts, critics, scholars, journalists, artists and mountaineers. Kimff will include discussion forums, guest lectures, exhibitions of books and photos and installation art projects. Visit their website for schedule.
7-11 December, Rastriya Sabha Griha (City Hall) and Nepal Tourism Board, (01) 4440635, www.kimff.org

#spirou4rights

A special issue of the Journal SPIROU and exhibition “#spirou4rights”, on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
4-31 December, 9am-5pm onwards, Alliance Française Kathmandu, Pulchok, (01) 5009221



Gross Indecency

Recounting the 1895 three famous trials that ended with Oscar Wilde's two-year imprisonment for “gross indecency”, One World Theatre turns this modern script into a high quality court room drama using the witty, elaborate English from the 19th century.
30 November-9 December, 5:30pm onwards (also at 2:30pm on Saturdays), Baber Mahal Revisited, (01) 4248747

Night market

Join in for art, great company, food, relaxation by the fire, and a unique variety of masterly handcrafted items of great quality—clothes, kids' toys, pet clothing, paintings, games and more.
30 November, 4-8pm, NexUs Culture Nepal, Maitri Marg, Patan, (01) 5522393

The Wayward Daughter

Independent researcher Amina Singh and political columnist CK Lal will be speaking about the book *The Wayward Daughter: A Kathmandu Story* by Shradha Ghale at the launch.
1 December, 3-5pm, Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka, (01) 5536974

MUSIC



Navneet Aditya Waiba

Enjoy a folk musical night by Waiba, the daughter of singer Late Hira Devi Waiba from Siliguri and buy Christmas gifts at the night market managed by The Local Project Nepal and the new addition to the Evoke Community, General Store.
30 November, 6-10pm, Evoke Café & Bistro, Jhamsikhel, Rs200, 9851111051

Kta Haru

The funky and fun band Kta Haru performing their songs from the album *Galat Nirnaya* and more, with Diwas B. Shrestha and Poster Kidd. Only original music here!
30 November, 6-10pm, Moksh, Jhamsikhel, Rs200, (01) 5528362

Kristina Allen

Born in Thimpu, Allen has been singing and playing the guitar and composing songs from the age of 8. She is here in Kathmandu for a gig.
30 November, 8pm onwards, Base Camp: Outdoor Lifestyle, Jhamsikhel, Rs300, 9841226397



Bartika Eam Rai

The young Nepali singer who gained popularity with her song *Bimbaakash* in the YouTube is touring around the world, and is here in Kathmandu for a gig.
5 December, 5pm onwards, Tangelwood, Naxal, Rs1,000 (pre-sale), Rs1,500 (door), 9851163483

Sound of Revolution

Love Juice will be performing traditional and famous music from countries like Norway, Peru, Brazil, Japan, Korea and many others along with their originals.
30 November, 7-10pm, Electric Pagoda Bar/Café, Thamel, (01) 4700123

OUR PICK



Opens in Kathmandu on 29 November

This South Indian movie starring the superstar Rajnikanth is hyped for being the most expensive Indian movie ever. Directed by Shankar, it stars Amy Jackson as the female lead and Akshay Kumar in the role of Pakshi Raj, a mutant who turns into a huge bird. He threatens to destroy the world through cellphones, because cellphones supposedly kill birds. Rajnikanth comes to the rescue of humans, reprising his role as the robot Chitti. Since South Indian movies are currently quite popular, audiences here await its release as well.

DINING



The Diplomat

Experiencing luxurious culinary delights at the hotel's Indian and Continental restaurant, without compromising on comfort. Vegetarians have vouched for their Spinach and ricotta cannelloni.
Hotel Ambassador, Lazimpat, (01) 4410432

Bricks Café

A multi cuisine restaurant in the heart of Kathmandu offering flavourful dishes in a pleasant surrounding.
Kupondole, (01) 5521756

Muse Restobar

A multi cuisine restaurant and bar with sophisticated wooden interior, providing a complete family environment.
Uttardhoka, Lazimpat, (01) 4445533



Happy Singh Da Dhaba

Enjoy the Ultimate Desi Dhaba experience with a rich variety of local delicacies cooked to perfection.
23 November- 7 December, 6:30-10:45pm, Rs1,950 (++) per person), Rs1,100 (++) for child below 12 years), Sundeck, Garden Terrace, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, Tahachal, (01) 4273999

Lhakpa's Chulo

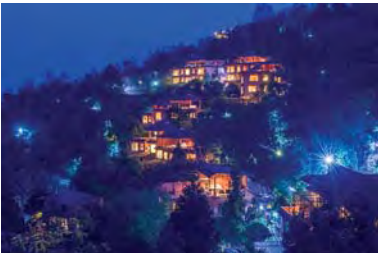
Nepali dal bhat, Newari khaja, Swiss Rösti, Italian Risotto and Thai green curry. Lakpa's Chulo has a variety of cuisines to offer. Garlic chili prawn at this cosy restaurant is to die for.
Jhamsikhel, (01) 5542986



Hyatt Regency Kathmandu

Enjoy the special taste of Sicily with food course ranging from antipasti, soups, pastas, mains to sweets. Delectable highlights include Pollo Alla Miele, Filetto Di Salmone, Calamari fritti, Pepperoncino pollo, Cannoli, roasted pista topping with snow sugar.
23 November-14 December, 6-10pm, Rox Restaurant, Bouddha, (01) 5171234

GETAWAY



Dwarika's Resort

A holistic retreat, drawing on ancient Himalayan knowledge and philosophy of care for nature and for oneself, set in magnificent natural surroundings.
Dhulikhel, (11) 490612

Retreat at Damaar

A retreat for contemplators and creators in an undisturbed sanctuary to enrich and enlighten your inner self.
Bethanchowk, Kavre, 9851052442



Peacock Guest House

Housed in a World Heritage Site, 3-storied Newari-style building provides splendid views of the Dattatreya Square and the Bhimsenthana temple.
Bhaktapur, (01) 6611829

Borderlands Eco Resort

Enveloped in the natural Himalayan splendor, the resort is located a mere three hours north of Kathmandu. A quick getaway to wild nature—celebrate the the weekend for eco-adventures.
Borderlands Eco Adventure Resort, Sindhupalchok, (01) 4381425, 9801025111

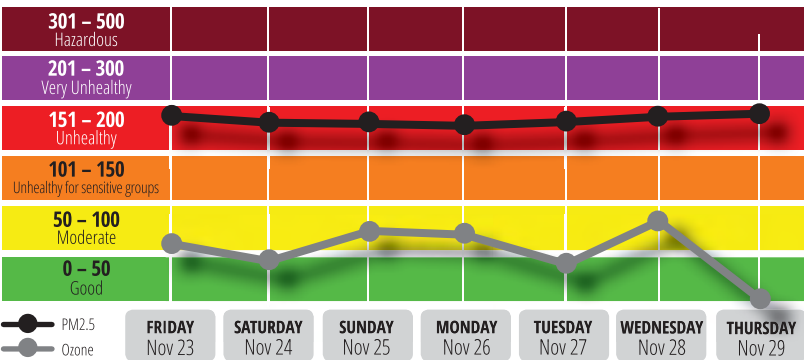


When the Chocolate Runs Out

Internationally renowned teacher of Buddhism Venerable Robina Courtin will lead the weekend at an exclusive retreat on the edge of the Shivapuri National Park. Don't miss this amazing opportunity to investigate core Buddhist principles and to look within in a safe and supportive retreat environment.
7-9 December, 4pm onwards, Chandra Ban Retreat, Budanilkantha, \$195-250, 9808296590, www.fpmt-hbmc.org

AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 23 - 29 November



Previous winters, there used to be a peak (8-12 am) pollution hour. This week's data shows that AQI remains in the red 'Unhealthy' band all 24 hours. And winter is not even here in full force yet. This is now going to be the pattern throughout winter, due to high concentration of PM2.5 in the air caused by vehicular emission being trapped on the Valley floor due to inversion. AQI is hovering at just below 200 all the time. Expect a spike over the weekend as the cloud cover prevents the smog from being burnt off. Ozone levels fluctuate, but are also not safe. Follow live AQI measurements on www.nepalitimes.com, or go to: <https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>

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जिम्मेवार र सहकार्य सहित
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नेपाल सरकार
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सूचना तथा प्रसारण विभाग

Justice delayed and denied

Quest for truth and justice in daughter's murder has driven Nirmala's father to insanity

Nepal was shocked by the rape and murder of Nirmala Panta in Kanchanpur on 26 July, but with the crime unsolved and the perpetrators still at large, the news has begun to fade from the headlines.



ENGENDERED
Sewa Bhattarai

However, Nirmala's parents had been taking part in a sit-in outside the Kanchanpur District Headquarters here in Mahendranagar. Two weeks into the protest, Nirmala's father Yagya Raj Panta started showing signs that the strain was taking its toll on his mental health.

On Saturday morning, Yagya Raj was showing increasingly erratic behaviour and the family decided to take him to Kathmandu for treatment. His wife Durga Devi Panta and other relatives got him up to Dhangadi airport, but he was too aggressive and could not be pacified to board the plane.

"His behaviour became quite aggressive, he started abusing people and vandalising the place. The airline refused to let him board," said Sharada Chand, one of the human rights activists in the protest. Chand was hurt herself when Yagya Raj started acting violent at the airport. Durga Devi and some relatives then took him to Kathmandu by road.

On the morning of 24 November, Yagya Raj Panta was jumping at noises, shooing away visitors, and looked very agitated. He was aggressive towards strangers, pointing at bags and asking if there were bombs in them, claiming there was a conspiracy to murder him. Activists tried to pacify him, and when Durga Devi Panta poured her husband some water from a thermos flask he thanked her like she was a stranger, shook hands with her and asked people around him to take a photo.

Exactly 117 days after his daughter was raped and murdered, it was clear that Yagya Raj Panta had lost his mind. He not only tried to take off his clothes, but also beat and scratched people who came near him. Some of them needed to have their hands bandaged. The videos people took of him went viral on social media.

Nirmala Panta went missing on July 26, and her body was found thrown in a sugarcane field near her



BIKRAM RAI

home. The inability of the Police and the Home Ministry to resolve the issue, their attempt to destroy evidence, frame an innocent person with the crime and what looked to many like a case of the Police trying to protect the criminals, has outraged her family and human rights activists. They said the mental strain was too much to bear for Yagya Raj Panta, and he snapped.

The deceased Nirmala's family members are increasingly concerned that they are losing not just one but two persons to this tragedy. Yagya Raj's sister Bhagirathi Bhatta says she has lost hope for her brother: "My niece is already dead and gone, but my brother is alive. And I doubt we will still have him if this stress continues."

She has also been spending the cold nights at the sit-in in an open tent across the road from the District Headquarter

LONG FIGHT: Justice for Nirmala posters line the District Headquarter Office of Kanchanpur, where Nirmala's mother Durga Devi Panta (*right*) appeared more harried last week after her husband's deteriorating mental health.

building. There are some pillows, mattresses, blankets, and an electric line from which to charge mobiles and heat up water in kettles, and not much else. Photos of the deceased Nirmala line the ceiling, walls and surroundings.

"Ever since this protest started, he has not been himself. He sees photos of his daughter everywhere, a lot of people come and say many things, it was just too much for him to bear," says Bhatta, whose brother no longer recognises her.

Yagya Raj's wife Durga Devi looked harried not just from



the struggle for justice for her daughter's unsolved rape and murder, but now by her husband's deteriorating mental health.

"I don't think we will ever get justice," Durga Devi told us last week, "If the government wanted to give us justice, it would not have destroyed the evidence. I had lost hope right then. But now, this long protest for justice is taking our remaining health and sanity as

well." Yagya Raj and Durga Devi are now in Kathmandu, but the protest vigil in Mahendranagar continues, and people from all over the country (including Hisila Yami and Govinda KC) have come to show solidarity. The media coverage and sustained protests have led to accusations that it is politically motivated rather being a campaign for justice.

Home Minister Ram Bahadur Thapa said recently: "Hundreds of women were raped before Nirmala and continue to be, but they do not attract so much notice. We solve 95% of those cases. The media coverage is politically motivated." Actually, only 44% of rape cases last year resulted in convictions.

Here in Mahendranagar, it is clear that outrage is driving the protests more than politics. Yagya Raj's second wife Laxmi Panta is at the sit-in at the District Headquarters, and says: "My husband wants justice. Now that he is not here, I cannot just pack up the tent and leave."

With justice a distant dream, others have chosen to focus on more immediate concerns like Yagya Raj's mental health and Durga Devi's peace of mind. Activists helped take them to Kathmandu for treatment, and the group #rageagainstrape is attempting to shield them from the media glare.

Durga Devi is also worried about her two other daughters. The elder one is 15 and preparing for her SEE exams. She has had to divide her time between taking care of her daughters and joining the vigil in the day. Adding to the grief and bereavement of losing Nirmala is the burden of family responsibilities.

Her life was already upside down since Nirmala's murder, but having her husband hospitalized has added to the strain. The fight for justice for Nirmala Panta has taken a heavy toll, and it looks set to derail the health and sanity of the family as well. 🇳🇵

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*Conditions apply



THE LADY: State Counsellor of Myanmar Aung San Suu Kyi addresses the inauguration of an exhibition in Kathmandu on Thursday. She is in Nepal to attend the Asia Pacific Summit.



SECURING CITIZENS: PM K P Oli unveils contribution-based Social Security Scheme for workers amidst an event at Nepal Academy in Kamaladi on Tuesday. The scheme will cover medical treatment, maternity, accident, disability security, dependent family and old age security.



ON CAMERA: US Ambassador Randy Berry meets with co-chair of Communist Party of Nepal Pushpa Kamal Dahal in Kathmandu on Tuesday. The two talked about economic growth and strengthening inclusive democracy in Nepal.



ALL OUR CHILDREN: Norwegian Ambassador Lasse Bjørn Johannessen signs an agreement with UNICEF country Representative Tomoo Hozumi in Kathmandu on Wednesday to provide \$3 million for inclusive education of children with disabilities and functional limitations.



TOP AGENTS: Cathay Dragon honours 2017's top performing passengers and cargo agents in Nepal during an event at the Dwarika's Hotel in Kathmandu on Monday.

Amrita Acharia in charity drive

Game of Thrones actress Amrita Acharia has joined the online appeal for funds for the charity ChoraChori that has rescued 147 trafficked and displaced Nepali children from slavery and abuse in India. The 31-year-old Nepali-Ukrainian actress is based in Norway and acted in HBO's *Game of Thrones*, UK tv series *The Good Karma Hospital*, the Norwegian tv series *Acquitted* and in the forthcoming animation *The Missing Link*.

Says Acharia: "My father was educated, and he made sure we were educated and taught self-respect. When we moved away from Nepal, it was that education that gave us stability and the chance to follow our dreams. I love it that ChoraChori works on empowering young girls after these experiences, and gives them tools rather than just rescuing and dumping them in an orphanage".

Acharia was born in Kathmandu but her family moved to England when she was seven and after spending some years in the Ukraine, attended High School in Norway where her father is an obstetrician. She is now looking forward to going back to Nepal after 16 years to visit ChoraChori's facilities in Thaukel.

Most of the rescued children are boys whom ChoraChori has reunited with their families who had not heard from the boys in years and had come to believe them to be dead. Most of the children had left home in search of work before

being trafficked, apprehended by the Indian authorities and later rescued and brought back to Nepal.

Some of the children were runaways from domestic abuse whom ChoraChori funds through vocational training and into good employment. ChoraChori last

year rescued Nepali girls from a notorious children's home in Muzaffarpur where at least 34 residents were gang raped by care home officials and outsiders. These girls are currently supported at ChoraChori's child trauma management centre alongside a growing number of domestic child rape victims.

"We've only just begun" says ChoraChori Founder Lt Col (retd.) Philip Holmes. "We know that there are still scores of Nepali children trapped in Indian institutions and the Muzaffarpur case has brought into sharp focus just how dangerous these centres are for children."

With Brexit, ChoraChori is feeling the effects of a financial squeeze in the UK charitable sector. Which is why it is launching 'The Big Give' online Christmas appeal. For one week, only from noon GMT on Tuesday 27 November, all online donations are automatically being doubled in value in the charity's main annual fundraising drive.

Says Holmes: "The truth is that some of the rescued children are so young that they even lack the vocabulary to describe what has been done to them. That is heart-breaking, but I have been encouraged and inspired by how ChoraChori-Nepal has risen to the challenge."

To see Amrita's video appeal and donate to ChoraChori through The Big Give, visit www.chorachori.org



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Shekhar Golchha in *Kantipur*,
27 November

क्रान्तिपुर

The contribution-based social security scheme announced by the government this week is an important step towards delivering social justice, and it is expected to protect people employed in the private sector.

Under the new scheme, private companies will no longer need to pay for provident fund and gratuity of their employees. Instead, they will have to deposit 31% of basic salary of each employee -- 20% from the employer and 11% from the worker -- into a government-owned social security fund. Private sector employees will get their pension and other facilities from this fund.



The employers will now have to pay 1.67% more than what they have been paying for provident fund and gratuity of their employees.

But us employers are not unhappy. Our only concern is an adjustment of the government-

fixed basic salary of employees. About 550,000 people are currently employed by businesses, and they will all be covered by the scheme in its first phase. But will the mechanism for the social security fund be able to serve such a huge number of clients, and won't government now

have more liability? When the informal sector is also brought under this scheme, the number of beneficiaries and their deposits will increase 10 fold. Can the government afford this outlay?

The money deposited into the social security fund will keep

growing. Where and how will the government invest this money? As of now, the employees' provident fund and gratuity are controlled by not just government agencies, but also the employers. Employees cannot withdraw their money without a letter from the employers. Under the new scheme, employers need not keep records of provident fund and gratuity. The money will be controlled by the government.

The government will now be solely responsible for social security of private sector employees. The employers are just responsible for adding the 20% of basic salary.

What if the government loses the data of employees registered in the social security fund? How will the employees recover their money? The government now has a legal structure for social security, but it should not waste time in developing an administrative and technical structure to implement this scheme.

Shekhar Golchha is Vice Chair of Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI)



On the newspaper: "You still don't see the government?" - Oli
Drunken man: I see it!

नागरिक

Robin Sayami in *Nagarik*, 28 November



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The number of tigers in Nepal will soon double, but what will they eat?

Kunda Dixit
in Bardia

To increase tiger numbers, you need prey. Prey need grass. Grass needs water. The tiger may be at the top of the food chain, but its fate is linked to the deer population which in turn depends on the abundance of grass, and which in turn hinges on the availability of water.

Nowhere else in Nepal today are these intricate linkages within an ecosystem as stark as in Bardia National Park, which has seen the population of its tigers increase dramatically from 18 in 2009 to nearly 87 today.

With Chitwan National Park nearly saturated with tigers, it is largely because of Bardia’s success that Nepal is set to become the first tiger range country in the world to exceed the target of doubling its population of big cats by 2022.

But, there are clouds on the horizon. An adult male tiger needs a vast territory of 100sq km to roam in, while a female needs about 20 sq km. And each individual needs to make at least one kill of a deer-sized animal a week.

But the prey density in Bardia has declined sharply from 93 to 77 per sq km just in the last five years. This is due to an increasing tiger



CUB SCOUTING: A tigress with cubs in Bardia National Park where they have bred so fast the number of big cats has risen from 18 to 87 in ten years. But prey density has gone down because of the insufficient grasslands.

Nature without borders

India and Nepal can cooperate in crossborder conservation

Sewa Bhattarai
in Valmiki Tiger Reserve

Parsa National Park has 18 adult tigers today, up from seven in 2013. In Chitwan, tiger numbers have increased from 91 to 93. In Banke National Park it went up from 4 to 21, and from 50 to 87 in Bardiya National Park.

Across the border in India, there have been similar increases. Here in the Valmiki Tiger Reserve, the number of big cats has gone up, but the exact count will be known after an ongoing Indian tiger census is completed. There has been a similar increase in Katarniyaghat Wildlife Reserve bordering Nepal. However, greater tiger populations along the India-Nepal border have increased the threat of cross-border poaching and human-wildlife conflict.

“Our conservation efforts will succeed only if we see Chitwan, Parsa and Valmiki Tiger Reserve not as separate territories but as a complex,” says Ajay Sinha, Range Officer of the Valmiki Tiger Reserve in Bihar. “We are collaborating with Nepal to ensure that we provide animals what they need, and do not duplicate efforts. We communicate almost on a daily basis, bypassing bureaucratic procedures that would take months.”



Both India and Nepal are now getting communities on both sides of the border involved in conservation. The two governments, with the help of World Wildlife Fund (WWF), have installed solar-electric fences to stop animals from entering villages, distributed biogas and LPG gas to reduce use of firewood, promoted livestock management to reduce encroachment into forests, and formed Rapid Rescue Teams (RRT) and Community-Based Anti-Poaching Units (CBAPU).

Last year, when several rhinos from Chitwan were swept into India by a flood, residents of Binwaliya village in Bihar rescued some and returned them to Nepal. Recalls one of the villagers, Sanjay Kumar: “The rhino was in the field, and we called the Forest Department which tranquilised it and sent it back. Previously, if we saw wild animals in our villages, we would try to shoo it away, injure it, or even kill it.”

Since Nepal committed to doubling its tiger numbers, it began habitat management, protection, and community engagement, many of which have to be implemented side by side with India. Along the border in Chitwan and Parsa alongside India’s Valmiki Tiger Reserve in India, there are Nepal Army guard



WWF



population, forest encroachment on former grasslands, the abundance of tall grass species which deter deer, as well as a falling ground water table due to global warming.

All this adds up to the tigers not getting enough prey. Tigers then venture outside the park to eat livestock, intensifying human-wildlife conflict and endangering conservation efforts.

Today, Bardia National Park is at the forefront of research into restoring the predator-prey balance. Shyam Thapa of the Nepal Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC) is studying a dozen especially designed research plots to find ways to encourage the growth of the kind of tender green shoots that the five species of deer in Bardia like to graze on.

“There are no longer as many wild elephants, and no more *gaur* (wild ox), *arna* (wild buffalo) and *nilgai* (large antelope) that used to trample on the tall grass so the deer could feed,” Thapa explains. “The deer do not like the tall grass or the forest undergrowth because they need a field of vision to look out for predators.”

Before and after satellite

imagery of Bardia clearly show the grassland being overrun by spreading forest cover. Drought caused by climate change, as well as the reduced flow of water in the Geruwa channel of the Karnali River because of boulder mining and the Bheri-Babai diversion upstream have lowered the water table and reduced grass cover inside the park. A lower water table favours the growth of trees, not grass.

“We are trying to see what are the factors that will make the kind of grass that the deer like to eat grow back, because this will increase the number of deer which will in turn allow the park to support a larger tiger population,” says botanist Laxmi Raj Joshi at the NTNC.

Like Chitwan, Bardia used to be opened for a few weeks every winter to allow villagers to collect thatch grass inside the Park. This further reduced grass cover, disturbed wildlife and caused wild fires. Since most farmers now have tin roofs or cement houses, there is no longer a need to open the park for thatch collection.

The Park has dug wells and installed solar-powered pumps to ensure that the favourite

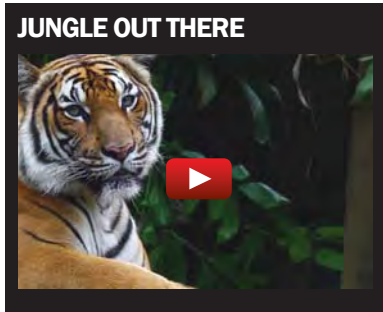
watering holes of the animals do not go dry. There are also plans to translocate *arna*, *gaur* and *nilgai* from other nature reserves to restore the original habitat and add larger prey for tigers.

With these measures, conservationists believe that Bardia and the adjacent Banke National Parks can accommodate another 100 tigers.

But for now, as tiger numbers increase and prey density declines, tigers are venturing outside the park to prey on livestock. Wild elephants also often raid crops and trample houses outside the park, increasing tension between the Park and people.

In order to reduce conflict between villagers and wildlife, Bardia National Park is experimenting with more effective electrical fences that can stop bull elephants and tigers (*see box*).

“The idea is to reduce human-wildlife conflict,” says Cas de Stopelaar of the Himalayan Tiger Foundation based in The Netherlands, which is supporting the research on fencing and grasslands. “The tiger is an umbrella species, if you protect the tiger you protect everything. The idea is to increase the food for the tiger by increasing the food for its prey.”



Take a trip to Bardia National Park which has become a hub for research to ensure that deer have enough grass so tigers have enough prey. Travel across the border to India to see how the two countries cooperate in conservation.

nepalitimes.com

No fence-sitting on conservation

The grainy night-time webcam video shows a tusker approaching an electrical fence designed to keep wildlife from raiding crops outside the Bardia National Park. There is a small spark as the elephant gets a shock on its trunk, and retreats. In another clip, the same elephant returns, and knowing that the wire is live, uses his tusk to knock down the cement pillar. Through trial and error, the smart elephant has learnt that neither



its tusk, nor the cement pole conducts electricity, and has learnt to destroy the fence without touching the wires.

In another instance not caught on camera, a bull elephant lifts a dead tree with its trunk and flings it across the electrified fence so it can come out. Humans and elephants are constantly trying to outwit each other in Bardia.

“The elephants always surprise us with how creative they are,” says Kumar Khadka of the National Nature Conservation Trust (NTNC) whose team has now come up with a prototype fence design that protects the pillar as well with electrified wire tentacles. So far, humans are winning.

Cas de Stopelaar of the Himalayan Tiger Foundation explains the importance of the fence research: “As tiger and elephants numbers increase, they will go out of the park in search of food. Human-wildlife conflict will reduce the villagers’ interest in conservation. We need enough food for wildlife inside the park, and stronger fences.”



JUNGLE LAW: Kanchhi Lama lives in Parsa near the Indian border. She has fortified her goat shed, but still fears leopard attacks (*above*). Villagers in Bhediaryi in India’s Valmiki Tiger Reserve cutting tall grass last week to attract deer to support the tiger population (*left*).

posts every 5-10 kilometers to stop cross-border poaching. All three sanctuaries have worked together to improve grasslands to attract prey for the growing number of tigers.

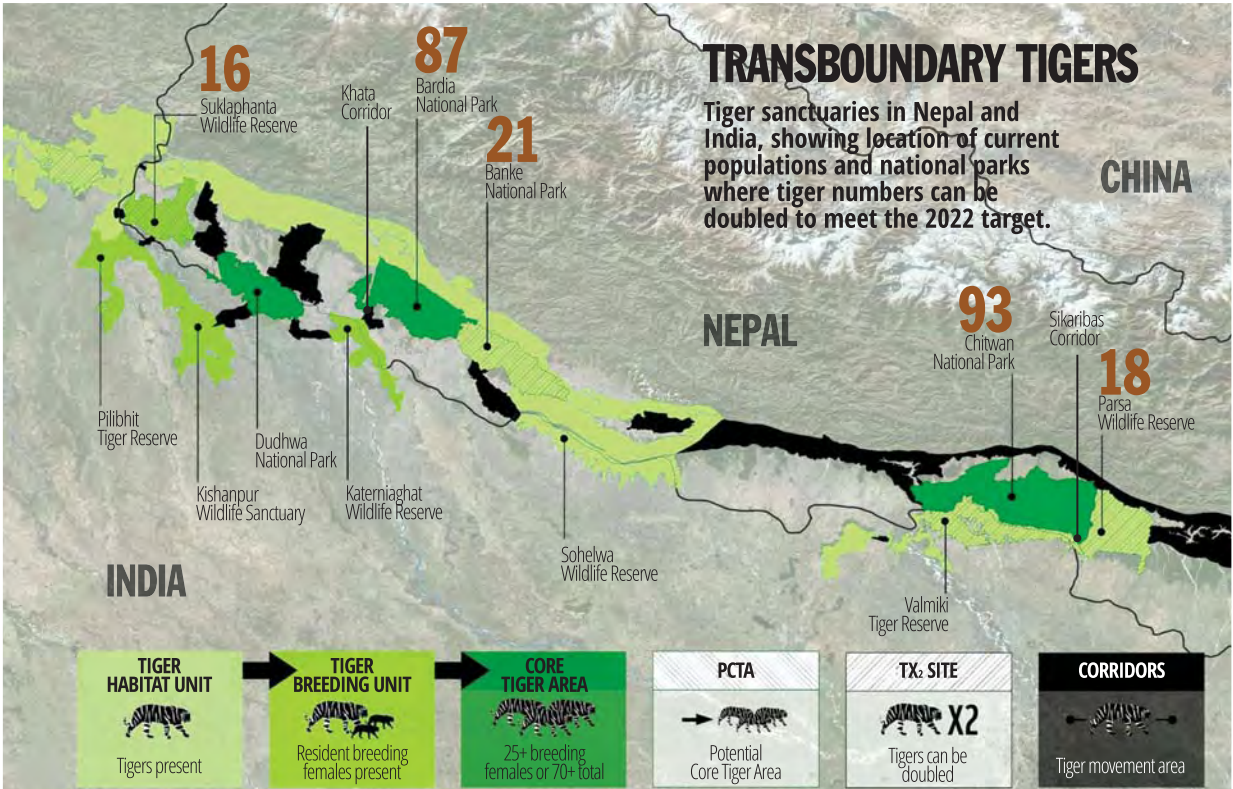
Where forests have depleted along the Nepal India border, local communities have helped rehabilitate many forest corridors. Shikaribas corridor in Parsa and Khata corridor in Bardia have been extremely important in facilitating the movement of animal and growing their numbers. “Animals need not just food, but also open space for movement, and sheltered space for cover,” explains Bharat Gotame of WWF Nepal. “Tigers can travel 300 km over two days in serach of prey, and elephants have migratory routes. So, their

habitat should not be fragmented.”

But the impact of such fragmentation is already visible in Nepal, where the East-West Highway cuts through the Banke and Bardia National Parks and Shuklaphanta Wildlife Reserve. Last year alone, Bardia National Park lost over 60 wild animals to road kill, most of them deer. The new feeder roads that run parallel to the Indian border dissects the Chitwan-Parsa-Valmiki Complex.

“We need Smart Green Infrastructure with under and overpasses so that increasing connectivity does not endanger wildlife,” says Warden Ashok Bhandari at Bardia National Park.

Haribhadra Acharya at Parsa National Park agrees, adding that since tigers are at the top of the food chain, more tigers means a healthier



LDF

eco-system. “A healthy population of tigers means that there is also a healthy population of deer and other prey, and the variety of plants that these herbivores feed on,” Acharya explains.

The success of trans-boundary conservation and the increase in wildlife has brought another, more immediate threat to the very communities that protect them. Human-wildlife conflict has increased as wild elephants, wild boar and monkeys regularly raid farms. Leopards and tigers kill livestock and even humans. Parsa National Park has attempted to

solve this problem by relocating two villages that were inside the park. However, several villages that line the Indian border and are sandwiched between forests of India and Nepal, are threatened by wildlife.

One of them is Kanchhi Lama of Subarnapur at the edge of the Parsa National Park, who has fortified her goat shed with metal nets to protect animals from leopards. But she adds: “We hear leopards growling at night, and we are scared to go out.”

In the west, the Khata Corridor provides the only link

between Bardia National Park and India’s Katarniyaghat Wildlife Reserve, and several villages have regular encounters with tigers and elephants. Bhagrayia has 70 households and is surrounded by forests on three sides, and some villagers say it is now getting too dangerous to live there, and would like to be relocated.

Laxmi Chand of Bhagrayia village survived an encounter with a leopard in her goat-shed recently, and says: “We have stopped planting crops in our fields near the forest. What is the point? Wild animals will destroy it all.”



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Animal instincts

Before Nepal became known across the world as the highest per capita consumer of instant noodles (Sponsor's announcement: "Each pack is wrapped in high grade single-use plastic that will take 10,000 years to self-destruct) we used to be renowned for the diversity of our flora, fauna and fanatics.

From political invertebrates in our Animal ex-Kingdom, to the business carnivores that populate the Tarai Arc Landscape, Nepal's fauna is no longer on the endangered list. But that is not to say that we can be complacent, we have to be vigilant and be able to recognise a Greater Himalayan Red-vented Tit when we see one. We should be equally at home in the Singha Darbar Lion Sanctuary and Bagh Darbar Tiger Reserve. Below is a useful guide for wildlife enthusiasts that can be cut out for easy reference:

Grey Langur(*Bandar seri bhagawan*): Handsome and clever, solitary and without scruples, spends much time foraging for juicy contracts. Believes in give and take, but mostly take. Habit: marks the perimeter of his domain by spitting red pan juice along the corridors of power.

Himalayan Red Panda(*Haplorhina nepalensis* *rossi*): Shy and reclusive, resides on the jungle canopy with occasional forays to the undergrowth to dig for hidden wealth. Once thought to be nearly extinct, but has made a dramatic comeback lately. Range: Everywhere, but nowhere.

Wild Boar(*Sus ad nauseum*): Endemic inside the Ringworm Road. Has special powers to knock people unconscious at 10 paces. Habits: such a wild bore, he himself falls asleep while giving speeches at book launches.

Barking Deer(*Cervidae politicus*): Garrulous, with loud hooting call to magnify its stature. Mobile and mischievous, commonly found addressing large gatherings. Diet: Voracious appetite, can even gobble hard cash.

Lesser Eurasian Red Herring(*Pisces maobadinsis*): Hunts at night, scavenging bottom-feeder with strong jaws, has an extreme fringe that is famed for its whooping, blood-curdling cry of "Big Plop! Big Plop!". Habitat: Semi-underground, surfaces briefly during bands.

Sloth bear(*Ursidae soporificus*): Indolent and sluggish, sleeps during the day with head on desk at Singha Darbar, emitting distinctive snore. Approach with care, can be vicious if disturbed. Diet: Copious amounts of tea between naps.

Wild ass(*Equus heehaw*): Presents to be asinine, but is asstute. Prone to writing utter nonsense in a weekly column.

The Ass



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