

News Briefs

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1. Rampaging elephants force Myanmar villagers into tree-top refuges

Agence France-Presse - 16.1.2016

Pushed from their forest home by encroaching farm land, wild elephants are driving fearful villagers in a Myanmar township to seek refuge in tree houses while the animals storm their rice paddies looking for food. The elephants have trampled crops, destroyed homes and even, villagers say, killed people in their path – forcing families in Kyat Chuang to build new shelters made of wood and bamboo on higher ground.

Spurred by the loss of their forest habitats, the elephants, and villagers they have been terrorising, are some of the casualties of Myanmar's alarming rate of deforestation. The country lost almost 20% of its forest cover between 1990 and 2010. Myanmar's population of wild Asian elephants is thought to be one of the largest in the region.

But the endangered species is increasingly threatened by habitat loss, a thirst for ivory, and traffickers who smuggle the animals into Thailand for the tourist industry.

2. Rare Cambodian elephant footage raises survival hopes

Agence France-Presse - 15.1.2016

Rare footage of an elephant herd roaming through Cambodia's biggest forest sanctuary signals the success of a 14-year conservation programme and raises hopes for the endangered species' survival. The camera trap footage, taken in the spectacular and remote Cardamom Mountains, shows 12 elephants, including young, grazing and lumbering through the forest.

“That several young are here indicates that the elephants are reproducing, which we think is a good sign that their environment is stable and they are not under stress,” said David Emmett, CI senior vice president. Emmett said the footage was the first time so many elephants had been captured on film in the Cardamoms, which is home to about one third of Cambodia's endangered and rare species.

The Cambodian government established the Central Cardamom Protected Forest in 2002, covering roughly 400,000 hectares of pristine land in the remote southwest of the country. The conservation efforts in the Cardamoms have been regarded as a success.

There are believed to only be about 200-250 elephants in the Cardamoms, with another population of similar size in eastern Cambodia. However these are still some of the largest remaining wild populations for the endangered Asian elephant.

3. Sri Lanka destroys illegal elephant tusks

The New York Times - 26.1.2016

A group of saffron-robed monks chanted as officials crushed more than 300 elephant tusks in a seaside ceremony on Tuesday, as the new government of President Maithripala Sirisena sought to differentiate itself from its predecessor by sending a powerful message of intolerance for elephant poaching.

Sri Lanka is the first South Asian nation to publicly destroy ivory obtained through elephant poaching and the 16th country in the world to destroy confiscated elephant tusks so that they cannot be traded in the black market.

The crushed ivory weighed 1.5 tons, far less than some caches that have been destroyed. But the action was significant because Sri Lanka is a transit hub for trading in illegal ivory, which is popular in Asia as a symbol of prosperity and for use in Buddhist religious ceremonies.

The ceremonial crushing of the 359 tusks began with two minutes of silence. After the ceremony, the crushed ivory was transported to a factory in Puttalam, a district in the island's northwest, for incineration. DNA testing found that the tusks had originated in Tanzania, and the stockpile was valued at \$2.6 million.

The tusks were confiscated by Sri Lankan customs officials in May 2012, en route to Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates, from Kenya. Some of the world's leading wildlife advocates attended the event, held at Galle Face Green, a large seaside park in Colombo, the Sri Lankan capital. Sri Lanka has been a party to Cites since 1979.

4. Cellphone alert shield against elephant attacks (India)

Times of India - 20.1.2016

A simple cellphone-based warning system can reduce loss of lives and crops in human-elephant conflicts zones like those in Sindhudurg and Kolhapur districts. Wildlife scientist Ananda Kumar described the work done by his Nature Conservation Foundation in devising solutions to end human-elephant conflicts through a simple crowd-sourcing based information system that gives alerts of exact location of elephant sightings to its subscribers.

The system, developed by Kumar and his team after extensive research on elephant behaviour and patterns, has managed to bring down annual fatalities to one, against the average of three deaths prior to launching the system in the tea and coffee plantations of Valparai plateau. We worked on ways that allow both to live with each other. There are no problem animals, but problem locations. During our research, we spotted a pattern in the fatal cases - of the 42 people who died in direct conflict with elephants

between 2002 and 2015, 37 did not know there are elephants near them and bumped into them accidentally. Besides, 72% of all conflicts happened on the roads and late in the evenings or at night.

5. Teenager killed taking selfies with elephant (India)

Gulf News - 23.1.2016

A teenager in Bihar lost his life while taking selfies with a bull elephant. The incident took place at Pandubbi village in Araria district, an eastern Bihar district bordering Nepal.

Reports said a large crowd of villagers had gathered at the village on Thursday after being informed that a wild elephant had sneaked into a maize field from Nepal. While villagers armed with traditional weapons tried to put a security ring around the field from afar to stop the tusker moving forward, Mithun Paswan, 15, along with two friends went close to the tusker in a bid to take selfies with it.

Seeing the youth furiously clicking with their mobile cameras, the elephant chased them. While his friends fled, Paswan stayed for a while trying to get better snaps and got caught by the elephant who wrapped him in its trunk. Witnesses said soon after catching the teenager, the tusker hit the boy hard on the ground several times, leaving him badly wounded. He was instantly rushed to a local primary health centre, but doctors declared him dead on arrival.

The local district administration has granted a compensation of Rs 20,000 (Dh 1085) to the victim's family and has also rushed a team of forest department officials to trap the tusker which still remains at large.

6. Unemployed, Myanmar's elephants grow antsy, and heavier

The New York Times - 30.1.2016

Dragging giant tree trunks up and down the steep hillsides of sweltering jungles is a tough job. But there is something worse, say owners

of Myanmar's logging elephants: having no job at all. Shrinking forests and a law enacted three years ago that prohibits the export of raw timber have saddled Myanmar with an elephant unemployment crisis. Hundreds of elephants have been thrown out of work, and many are not handling it well.

Elephants hold an almost mystical place in Myanmar, home to the world's largest captive elephant population. For hundreds of years, they helped extract precious teak and hardwoods from jungles that even modern machinery still cannot penetrate. Now the future of the 5500 or so wrinkled pachyderms in captivity is a major preoccupation for the government officials who oversee them.

Myanmar's leading elephant expert, Daw Khyne U Mar, estimates that there are now 2500 jobless elephants, many of them here in the jungles of eastern Myanmar, about 2.5 hours from the Thai border. That number would put the elephant unemployment rate at around 40%, compared with about 4% for Myanmar's people.

7. Wild elephant wanders onto Chinese tourist road, damages dozen cars

CRIenglish.com - 12.2.2016

A wild Asian elephant wandered onto a crowded tourist road in southwest China's Yunnan Province and damaged more than a dozen parked cars. The elephant, named "Zhusunya", left the Yexianggu (Wild Elephant Valley) scenic area in Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture and walked onto a major road around 4 p.m. Friday.

During its 20 minutes stay on the road, the elephant playfully ran into and trampled tourists' cars, damaging or denting 15 parked cars. Zhusunya then disappeared into the scenic area looking for food. Local policemen and scenic spot staff warned people away from the site and closed nearby roads to ensure safety and traffic after the elephant strayed onto the road.

Staff with the scenic area said wild elephants have been active since the prefecture entered its

dry season. During the week-long Spring Festival holiday, tourists have seen wild elephants wandering in the area everyday. Zhusunya, a female elephant, is in heat and has had an erratic temperament recently, staff said. The scenic spot has reserved special passageways for elephant on nearby roads and arranged park staff to protect the passages. Staff said it is a rare occurrence for an elephant to deviate from the elephant trails and enter the main road.

8. Elephant tail hair sold as good luck charm to tourists in Vietnam

Tuoi Tre News - 17.2.2016

Several employees and mahouts of a tourist area in the Central Highlands province of Dak Lak have been cutting the hair off elephants' tails in order to sell it as lucky charms. It is a common situation at Buon Don Tourism Area in Dak Lak, as visitors have been offered the tail hair by several staffers. An investigation by Tuoi Tre (Youth) newspaper on February 12 and 13 revealed that many tourists were solicited by tour guides during their rides on the animals. As soon as the deal was made, the guides would ask the mahouts to cut hair from the elephants and sell it to the buyers as lucky charms.

Several souvenir stores at the facility were also selling black strings, about 20 cm in length and 2 mm in diameter, purported to be elephant tail hair, with one location even offering a whole tail for buyers to select hair from. "This tail was cut off from a dead elephant, so I can assure you that the product is real. After buying the hair, you can ask your jeweler to add it to your gold or silver rings to make them good luck charms," one of the shopkeepers said in promoting his goods. Those who questioned the authenticity of the hair opted to contact their tour guides and quickly received their response.

The mahouts were then asked to bring the elephants toward to the tourists so they picked their preferred hair as well as preparing a large nail clipper to remove the hair from the elephants once the buyers had made their decision. Over ten strings of hair were cut off from one elephant,

whose lengths were between 10 and 15 cm, and within five to ten minutes sold for VND 300,000 (US\$13.41). About ten elephants are raised in the tourist area to serve as pleasure rides for visitors, and whose tail hair is all removed, according to the Tuoi Tre reporters. Two men are seen cutting the hair off an elephant's tail.

In response to the Tuoi Tre findings, the director said that he would carry out an inspection on his employees. "Our policy is to prohibit employees from selling the elephant hair. Several individuals have decided to do it to earn some extra money," Chinh explained.

The hair of elephants' tails is believed to be a good luck charm, especially in romantic relationships, following a legend that forms part of the culture of Vietnam's Central Highlands.

9. Sumatran elephant found with leg severed by rope

The Asian Age - 19.2.2016

A Sumatran elephant calf lies stricken in the jungle in Indonesia as conservationists fight to remove a rope tightly wound around its leg that almost caused the critically endangered animal to lose a limb. The youngster was spotted with another calf and their mother in a wildlife sanctuary in Bengkalis, Riau province, with their legs entangled in ropes that are believed to have come from traps set by locals, according to the Indonesian Mahout Association.

The calf lies on its side in the mud, as a rescuer holds an intravenous drip that is attached to the creature, during the operation to remove the tightly wound cord. His leg was saved but the other two elephants were not so lucky the mother lost her tail and the other calf lost a leg, according to the association, which believes the elephants were entangled for several months.

After being alerted by a group of trekkers who posted pictures on social media, local conservationists tracked down the elephants and carefully removed the ropes from their legs and treated their wounds. The operation took

a week due to a lack of decent equipment and ended Friday, with all the ropes removed and the pachyderms left in the wild, according to mahout association chairman Nazaruddin.

10. Meet the people determined to save the elephants of Laos

The Telegraph - 20.2.2016

The elephant urinated in a fire-hose gush and his mahout cheered. 'See?' he said in Lao, pointing at the torrent of water darkening the red-earth road. 'It's clear!' The relief was infectious. Walking behind the elephant, Anabel Lopez, a 28-year-old conservation biologist from Madrid, grinned and gave a thumbs up. For three days, Lopez explained, the elephant had been producing red urine and the worry was that he was peeing blood – possibly the sign of a life-threatening illness.

'On the other hand,' she said, 'we put the elephant in the forest and he ate green papaya, which makes elephants pee red. We hoped it was that but we weren't sure.' Now their minds had been put at rest and the mood lightened. 'It's nice to become obsessed together and happy together,' said Lopez as we swung down the red road, part of a caravan of 12 elephants and their 60-plus human followers travelling hundreds of miles across the forested hills of landlocked Laos.

The jungle that surrounded us forms the dense green heart of Indo-China. A thousand years ago it was said to be inhabited by a million elephants, and in the 14th century this trope of plenty became the name of the first Lao kingdom: Lan Xang, Land of a Million Elephants. The idea of the elephant remains integral to the Lao people's sense of national identity: a triple-headed white elephant featured on the flag of the modern Kingdom of Laos (which ended when the Communists established the Lao People's Democratic Republic in 1975); and tourist handicrafts sold in the night markets of Luang Prabang and the capital city, Vientiane, are covered in elephant motifs.

Ninety per cent of captive elephants work in logging (thereby destroying the very habitat

they need to survive), while the rest give rides in tourist camps. Birth rates of both wild and domesticated populations have plummeted in recent decades. 'The situation in Laos is critical, not sustainable,' Lopez told me as we walked in the wake of our shambling giants. 'If we don't change things, the elephants will disappear.' Hence the Elephant Caravan, a call to action backed by regional, national and international agencies, which trumpeted through the jungles of Laos for six weeks in late 2015.

11. Road project will split jumbos, say experts (Malaysia)

The Star - 2.3.2016

Isolated Bornean elephant populations in the east coast Lower Kinabatangan will be further fragmented should a road and a bridge be built there, said a wildlife researcher. Director of Danau Girang field centre in Lower Kinabatangan Dr Benoit Goosens said the proposed project would split elephant herds in Sukau with those in Lokan and Tangkulap. Elephants, he said, would not move under a bridge or a major trunk road as evident from the construction of a bridge across the Sungai Segama in the 1980s. That bridge, he said, effectively isolated elephant populations between Batu Putih and Abai.

"Elephants will not go under the bridge due to the noise and vibration caused by passing trucks and cars and it's dangerous for them when crossing roads," said Dr Goosens, whose centre works with the Sabah Wildlife Department. State Tourism, Culture and Environment Minister Datuk Masidi Manjun had said on Monday that the Public Works Department was working out an alternative plan for the proposed bridge near Kampung Sukau. The state Cabinet, he said, had discussed the issue of the proposed bridge following concerns over wildlife conservation in Lot 3 of the Kinabatangan Wildlife Sanctuary.

Conservationists have said that the project would also create repercussions on the movements of elephants in the area where a reforestation programme under Project Relief is being carried out jointly by Nestle and Sime Darby Foundation.

12. 20 tuskers infected with tuberculosis (Nepal)

The Himalayan Times - 26.2.2016

As many as 20 elephants in national parks and wildlife reserves across the country are said to be suffering from tuberculosis. Doctor Kamal Gaire, a veterinarian at the Chitwan National Park, said of the total 220 elephants across the country, 20 are under medication for tuberculosis. The government started providing treatment to the tuskers after TB was first detected in elephants in 2005. "Though there is no record on how many elephants have died of tuberculosis, as many as six elephants died after they were found suffering from the disease," said Gaire.

According to him, the disease was detected in around 23 per cent of the total elephants across the country then. The elephants were put on medication as part of tuberculosis alleviation project, which was launched with financial assistance from Elephant Care International. "As there is no vaccination for the disease, the disease is growing among tuskers," said Gaire. The tuskers detected with the disease are given medicines for over a year. Chief conservation officer at Chitwan National Park, Ram Chandra Kandel, said elephants contracting the disease were kept under close surveillance. The disease attacks weak and old elephants, he said.

13. Alarm over elephant inbreeding (Borneo)

The Star Online - 25.2.2016

Poor connectivity between Sabah's forests may put the future of its Bornean elephant population in jeopardy. Experts believe that the state's 2,500 Bornean elephants were at risk of inbreeding in fragmented areas of its jungles as they are unable to meet elephants from other parts to mate and strengthen their gene pool. This was the main conclusion of a paper published online yesterday in the scientific journal *Biological Conservation* by a team of scientists.

Over the years, the clearing of land for development and the opening up of plantations have left

many forests fragmented, making it difficult for wildlife to roam without coming in conflict with humans. The study said inbreeding could occur in the future among the elephants in forested areas of Lower Kinabatangan, Upper Kinabatangan and Central Sabah if these areas are not connected.

Dr. Goosens, the lead author of the study said their teams spent several months collecting dung samples from all elephant ranges in Sabah and then analysing their DNA to provide an insight into their genetic diversity and determine the degree of population fragmentation and isolation of the existing herds.

14. Clear evidence of rise in elephant poaching (India)

Business Standard - 3.3.2016

There has been an increase in the poaching of elephants in the last few years, a wildlife body today claimed while asking people to not use products made out of the endangered species. On the occasion of World Wildlife Day, the theme of which this year is 'The Future of Elephants is in Our Hands', TRAFFIC India also said that some of the illegal ivory entering the markets could be from privately owned or "captive" elephants, which is also illegal.

"The current poaching hotspots are the similar to what they were about two decades ago, in the elephant-rich habitat of Western Ghats, spanning the states of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, as well as in Odisha and Assam. There is clear evidence of increase in poaching of elephants in the last few years," said Shekhar Kumar Niraj, Head of TRAFFIC India. The wildlife body said the endangered pachyderms are facing the threat of extinction in the wild in many countries, including India, with poaching for illegal trade being one of the "major drivers of its decline".

"Today, on the occasion of World Wildlife Day, we released a poster urging people to pledge never to use any parts made of elephants," the wildlife body said. It said the Asian elephant was once widely distributed across the country, including in states like Punjab and Gujarat. Currently, they

are found only in 14 states, in four fragmented populations, in south, north, central and north-east India. The elephant has been accorded the highest possible protection under the Indian wildlife law through its listing under Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, of India.

15. Malaysia's wild elephants need help

Clean Malaysia - 5.3.2016

A disturbing phenomenon has puzzled and alarmed conservationists: Wee little elephant calves are frequently found wandering abandoned and alone, without their mothers and herds. Over the past three years a total of 15 abandoned calves have been discovered near villages on the fringes of Sabah's forests or inside palm oil plantations. Every single one of the calves was too young to be able to fend for itself.

To make matters worse, the number of orphaned little jumbos has been increasing steadily, according to wildlife officials in the state. In 2013, two baby elephants needed to be rescued. The following year the number rose to three. Then last year officials in Sabah had to save a record eight infant pachyderms. And that was hardly the end of it. This February alone, Sabah's Wildlife Department needed to rescue another two baby elephants.

"I am extremely concerned about what is happening to our elephants in the wild," said William Baya, director of the Sabah Wildlife Department's Wildlife Rescue Unit. "For the past three years we have rescued 15 baby elephants, all below one year old." We should all be concerned – and not just because we care about orphaned infants. An estimated 2500 endemic Bornean pygmy elephants remain, and albeit that population may seem sufficient, it isn't. That's because Malaysia's pygmy elephants are facing a dangerous genetic bottleneck with the gene pool of the animals having shrunk at an alarming rate. This exposes wild elephants to increased risks of inbreeding and the attendant health problems.

The reason: habitat loss and forest fragmentation. As the various herds of the animals are becoming

disconnected from one another through fragmentation of their natural habitats, the chances of individuals to meet and mate with elephants from other herds are significantly reduced. That places the long-term genetic viability of this entire subspecies at risk in Sabah, according to a newly published paper. Intensive forest clearing for land development and palm oil plantations, the article explains, has driven elephant populations into dwindling habitats in Lower Kinabatangan, Upper Kinabatangan and Central Sabah, while cutting herds further off from each other. If these forested areas become entirely disconnected, their resident elephant herds will be at even greater risk of inbreeding.

16. Survey to determine elephant population (Bhutan)

Kuensel - 10.3.2016

Asian elephants, the wild giants people revere and forebode as well have long been misery for the farmers south of the country. Yet we do not know how many of them are there in the wild. Pinning down on number is essential, not only for the formulation of conservation policies, but also to help farmers protect their crops from the marauding quadrupeds.

Good news is the Department of Parks and Services launched first nationwide elephant survey on March 3 at Singye in Sarpang to mark World Wildlife Day. While International Union for Conservation of Nature estimates that there are about 200-500 elephants in Bhutan, the country lacks its precise population figure. Thus, the survey will help determine the population of elephants in Bhutan.

Park manager of the Royal Manas National Park (RMNP), Tenzin Wangchuk said as of there is no authentic figure on elephant population in Bhutan. "The main objective of the survey is to determine elephant population in Bhutan," Tenzin Wangchuk said. Forestry officials will survey the southern belt from Samtse in the southwest to Jomotsangkha in the southeast, through the protected areas such as RMNP, Phibsoo and Jomotsangkha Wildlife Sanctuaries.

17. Endangered elephant sent back to forest in southern Vietnam

Thanh Nien News - 5.4.2016

Forest rangers in the southern province of Dong Nai on Tuesday managed to bring a straying elephant back to the forest after finding it near local homes. The male adult elephant belongs to the endangered Asian elephant species. In Vietnam it has a 'critically endangered' status. "He has recently shown up around the area for a week now," an officer of the local nature conservation zone told VnExpress. "He is very friendly to humans... He's never destroyed anything." The elephant was transported during the night to minimize human contacts and released to the wild.

18. Plastic waste turns fatal for wild elephants (India)

The New Indian Express - 20.3.2016

The plastic waste littered in forest areas by tourists is taking a toll on the health of wild elephants in the State, with jumbos ingesting the non-biodegradable waste along with food. If the recent incidents are any indication, the 'plastic-free tourism' campaign conducted by various agencies over the past few years, is yet to yield the desired results.

In the latest such case, Forest Department officials recovered 50 plastic carry bags, cigarette lighter and polythene cover of packed food items from the digestive tract of an elephant that was found dead in the Kuttampuzha Range, under the Malayattoor Forest Division, recently. "The 50-year-old female elephant died of constipation, which was caused by accumulation of the plastic items in its intestine," said Kuttampuzha Forest Range officer T S Mathew, adding that the elephant was suspected to have fed on plastic waste dumped by tourists visiting the fringe areas of forest.

Veterinary experts said eating plastic waste would cause fatal damage to the body of wild animals as the waste materials block their digestive tract,

causing death due to constipation. "With the tourist inflow increasing considerably in recent years, the Forest Department has been keeping a tab on the tourists and penalising those who litter waste in forest areas. "There are provisions in the Wildlife Protection Act to charge case against such violators," said officials, adding that more stringent measures were needed to tackle the menace.

19. Thirsty elephants looking for new water sources (Thailand)

The Sunday Nation - 3.4.2016

A herd of wild elephants from Kaeng Krachan National Park has been spotted looking for water at Pa La Oo forest in Prachuap Khiri Khan's Hua Hin district, in the wake of a severe drought in the area. A helicopter survey on the park's inner forest area three days earlier had found all the creeks dried up, while small water sources in Pa La Oo and the nearby Pa Deng forest were drastically lower.

Despite the authority's operation the following day to re-fill water sources in the national park with 100,000 litres of water, between 20 and 40 elephants from the park's inner area have been seeking water at Pa La Oo and Pa Deng every evening. This prompted park chief Kamon Nuanyai to instruct officials to monitor the herd in a bid to prevent them straying into nearby farmlands, while soldiers from the 9th Infantry Division have been refilling park water sources.

20. Elephant herd rejects baby rescued in central Vietnam

Thanh Nien News - 13.4.2016

Conservationists in the Central Highlands province of Dak Lak are continuing to try and reintroduce a baby elephant they rescued from a well back to its herd despite several failed attempts. Pham Van Lang, deputy director of the Dak Lak Elephant Conservation Center, told Zing News that the two-month old calf remains at the center as they were seeking more advice from experts and higher authorities.

On March 28 the male baby was rescued after it fell into a five-meter deep well, possibly while looking for water. Local officials believe it belongs to a herd of more than 10 elephants that were heading for a nearby lake for water. "The center's staff feed him 1.5 liters of milk every two hours. At night he only sleeps if they caressed him," Lang said. Once the staff followed the herd and left the calf in its vicinity, but animals did not take him in.

Recently a group including some foreign conservationists attempted to reintroduce him to the herd but his mother still rejected him. "Maybe his mother rejected him because he carries odors because of contact with humans," Lang said. The baby belongs to one of the last few remaining herds in Dak Lak, which is home to the largest wild elephant population in Vietnam with about 60 individuals. The number of wild elephants in Vietnam has fallen from 2,000 in the 1980s to less than 100 now, mostly due to poaching and habitat loss.

21. Heat stroke kills elephant calf at Ghatshila Forest (India)

The Avenue Mail - 21.4.2016

The searing heat wave prevalent in Kolhan division took claimed the life of an elephant on Thursday. Heat stroke killed an elephant calf at the Ghatshila forest range. Carcass of the one-and-a-half-month old calf (male) was found near a hillock inside the Chekam jungle in Ghatshila forest range. Ghatshila range officer Sushil Verma said that after examination of calf they concluded that the elephant calf died of heat stroke. They found no external injury. It seems that the calf was part of a herd, which left him behind after the death. The victim was an elephant calf which died due to heat stroke. It's extremely hot in the Ghatshila forest range.

22. Lightning kills tusked (Sri Lanka)

Agence France Presse - 9.5.2016

Four elephants, including two calves, were killed by lightning in northern Sri Lanka in one of the

worst wildlife tragedies to hit the country in years, officials said Sunday. A female elephant, aged about 25 years, and two of her calves, aged 10 months and two years, and an eight-year-old female were found dead Sunday just outside the Wilpattu wildlife sanctuary, an official said. "Villagers from neighbouring areas alerted the authorities and we carried out autopsies," wildlife surgeon Chandana Jayasinghe said.

23. Wild elephant kills 1, injures 1 in Yunnan (China)

China.org.cn - 7.6.2016

A wild Asian elephant killed a villager and injured another in southwest China's Yunnan Province, local authorities said Tuesday. Li Yunshan, a resident of Tuanjie Village, Pu'er City, was attacked by a wild Asian elephant while picking up mushrooms in a mountain forest alongside his wife Lin Youzhi, Li's son Li Shaoyi reported to the local government at around 2 p.m. Monday. The senior Li was killed instantly, while Lin suffered injuries to her face.

The site of the accident has been cordoned off, and authorities have warned local residents to stay alert. Wild Asian elephants are under state protection in China, with about 300 living mainly in Yunnan Province. Enhanced protection for wild animals has seen the mammals' number rise in recent years, but cases of clashes with humans have also increased, according to the local government. Last month, wild Asian elephants killed two villagers in Yunnan's Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture.

24. Jumbos on rampage at Morawewa Hospital (Sri Lanka)

Daily News - 15.6.2016

A herd of wild elephants raided the Morawewa Hospital in the wee hours on June 13 and caused heavy damages to its door and windows. Hospital MoH Dr. G. Paul Roshan in a complaint to Morawewa Police, said 11 windows and three doors were broken by the marauding elephants before the animals retreated.

A police team deployed by OIC Chief Inspector H.P.N. Kulatunga rushed to the hospital and took steps to remove valuable medical equipment, electrical items and drugs found in the rooms with damaged windows and doors to a safer place. Police also reported the incident to the wildlife office in Trincomalee. Morawewa Police are investigating.

25. Only 150 Sumatran elephants remain in Jambi (Indonesia)

Antara News - 15.4.2016

The population of wild Sumatran elephants in Jambi has plunged to only 150, according to a survey of the Jambi Natural Resources Conservation Office (BKSDA). The population might further decrease due to the rampant poaching of elephants for ivory in Jambi, Syahimin, the Jambi BKSDA chief, stated here, Thursday. The average life expectancy of Sumatran elephants is some 60 years.

Since 2013, seven elephant poaching cases have come to light, but only one case was successfully solved, and the poachers were detained. One elephant was recently found dead with its ivory missing in Tebo District, Jambi Province. In connection with the case, two people were arrested, while three others are still at large.

26. Nepal fence to keep elephants away may escalate into political row

Hindustan Times - 13.6.2016

A battery-operated fence erected by Nepal along the border to keep elephants from India away is set to snowball into a controversy with the West Bengal government writing to the Centre to raise the issue with the neighbouring country. Nepal erected the 18-km-long energised fence near the bank of Mechi river that divides the two countries with aid from international funding agencies six months ago.

West Bengal forest minister Binay Krishna Barman, who held a high-level meeting with state forest officials in Sukna in Darjeeling on

Saturday, raised objection over the fence along the international border by Nepal. Barman said the fencing blocks the natural movement of the elephants. "The state government has already written a letter to the Centre to take up the matter with the Nepal government," Barman said.

Every year hundreds of elephants migrate from the forests of Assam and West Bengal into Nepal through the Indo-Nepal border and destroy crops in the villages on both sides. The animals follow a traditional corridor to reach places like Bahundangi in eastern Nepal under Jhapa district after crossing forests of Sukna and Panighata in Darjeeling district of West Bengal.

"The elephants' corridor along the Indo-Nepal border has existed for thousands of years. If the movement of the elephants is blocked, it will create a disastrous effect in places like Kolabari and other basties under Kolabari beat of Panighata range," Bose told HT. He added that in the past 15 years, at least 20 elephants have died inside Nepal and more than 50 people have been killed on both the sides of the international border by elephants.

27. Jumbo reaches Teesta shore after 7 hrs (India)

Times of India - 17.6.2016

An elephant, which was half way through crossing the Teesta at Gajoldoba in Jalpaiguri, got stranded in the river as the water level suddenly swelled on Thursday. After being stuck for more than seven hours, the makhna could finally wade its way to the shore and then went inside a nearby forest. The rest of the herd – believed to have come out of the Kathambari forest – had managed to reach the other side into the Saraswatipur forest tract before the water rose.

"The makhna was the last one crossing the river and it got stranded near the Teesta Barrage owing to the rising water," said Bidhan Roy, a resident of the area. Some foresters suspected that the elephants was not only stuck owing to the swelling river but a possible quick sand at the spot could have also made its movement

impossible. The forest department spoke to the Teesta Barrage authorities and convinced them to open three lock gates, situated nearby, to help the water recede. The opening of the lock gates did help decrease the water level but initially, it did not seem to help much owing to the continuous flow of water from the upstream.

28. Drones to track jumbos in S Bengal (India)

Times of India - 30.6.2016

The Forest Department is leaving no stone unturned to check man-elephant conflict in south Bengal. It has now decided to make the best use of technology. An unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) that was procured for the Sunderbans will be sent to Bankura on an immediate basis to track elephants' movement. Confirming the development, chief wildlife warden Pradeep Vyas said: "The drone will be sent to Bankura soon. We are in the process of procuring another drone. At times, we identify the problem elephants, but can't track them by foot inside the forest. Here the drones will come handy."

The Forest Department has also brought five trained 'kunki' elephants from north Bengal to capture two jumbos, which were earlier declared 'rogue' by the department. Vyas said once the foresters get to know the location of the couple of jumbos with the help of the drone, the trained elephants will be pressed into service.

So, how will the drone function? The gadget, fitted with a GPS device and high-resolution camera, can stay in the air for almost 45 minutes each time. "A trial run was earlier held in the Sunderbans. Patrolling staff on the field will get the signals and access images relayed to them through the drone's receptor. Once in use, this will save time as far as wildlife management is concerned," a forester said.

State agency Webel Technology has procured the gadget on behalf of the forest department. An official said that the drone costs approximately Rs 2 lakh and its range is 4-5 km. Vyas said the state would procure four to five more such gadgets for north Bengal too.