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SAROJ BAIZU

like him. Gyanendra kept away from this protest, travelling instead to attend the installation of a statue of Prithvi Narayan Shah (pictured) in Jhapa organised by Rajendra Lingden of the RPP.

Lingden and former journalist Rabintra Mishra also of the RPP believe Nepal needs a strong symbol of national unity embodied by a king.

Meanwhile, Gyanendra manages his social media presence to appeal to young Nepalis. Even in Communist strongholds like Bhaktapur, he has drawn large flag-waving crowds.

"I strongly believe in preserving the institution of the monarchy because the country's future might be jeopardised without it," the RPP's Mishra told us.

Although past public opinion polls have shown that a majority of Nepalis would want Nepal to be a Hindu state, it is not clear if there is similar support for the restoration of monarchy because of the persona of Gyanendra and his son, Paras.

Into this mix, add geopolitics. While India's foreign policy architects may not necessarily want Nepal's monarchy back, the BJP (with an eye on elections next year) may not be averse to erasing 'secular' from Nepal's Constitution.

Gyanendra has been visiting India often, and on his last trip had a meeting with Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, who is also the high priest of the Gorkhath monastic order linked to the kingdom of Gorkha, the seat of the Shah dynasty.

Perhaps the person most responsible for Nepal becoming a republic is Gyanendra himself. Historians have noted that before 2008, Gyanendra was presented with various proposals under India's 'twin pillar' policy to retain a 'cultural monarchy' or under a 'baby king' formula.

Rabintra Mishra concedes: "His refusal to accept those options undeniably led to the end of the monarchy, influencing the current trajectory of our nation. But the former king is someone who has love, passion and aspiration for his country and its people, he is not hungry for power and money."

One of the foremost proponents of secular republic in 2008 was Maoist ideologue and one-time Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai. He is increasingly worried that the political trends in India will affect Nepal, and wrote on X this week: "The return to a Hindu monarchy will plunge Nepal into a quagmire of counter-revolutionary instability which will also impact India." 🇳🇵

LONG LEAVE THE KING

■ Alisha Sijapati

Fifteen years after a post-conflict Constituent Assembly abolished Nepal's monarchy, growing public discontent with the successive governments is fuelling a drive to restore the country's Hindu monarchy.

The assembly voted on 28 May 2008 to turn Nepal into a federal,

democratic and secular republic. King Gyanendra held a chaotic press conference at Narayanhiti Palace and drove off to his residence, where he has remained a private citizen ever since.

It was Nepal's own 'velvet revolution'-- the country went from monarchy to republic without the king being hounded into exile or executed. And Gyanendra, till recently, has not made any overt political statement.

But coinciding with the rise of the Hindu-right in BJP-ruled India, the ex-king has been attending large pro-monarchy rallies by the RPP possibly thinking that the time is now ripe to sit on the Serpent Throne for his third time.

Journalist Kiran Nepal attended Gyanendra's last press conference at the palace in 2008, and remembers how the palace guards abandoned their posts, allowing those present to rowdily sit on the royal chair to take photos.

"The chaos after the king left the room was a striking illustration of what was to come, and I remember

thinking: is this our future under republicanism?" Nepal recalls.

Indeed, although there have been 13 governments since the abolition of the monarchy, most political faces are the same: Pushpa Kamal Dahal is Prime Minister for the third time, his coalition partner Sher Bahadur Deuba has been premier five times, the opposition UML's K P Oli has also led the country three times.

Most Nepalis say there is little to show for the country becoming a federal, secular republic. War crimes and blatant corruption go unpunished, the president pardons a murderer serving a life sentence. Nepalis have one of the lowest per capita incomes in Asia, and nearly half of all Nepalis in the 20-45 age group are working abroad, yet the government does not want to give them the right to vote.

A pro-monarchy demo last week in Kathmandu was organised by a bank defaulter who rallied others

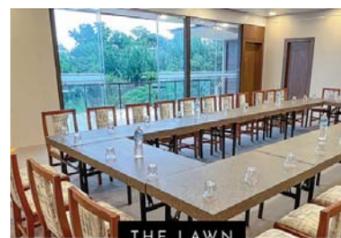
Stemming Asia's democratic decay
EDITORIAL
PAGE 2



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Asia's democratic decay

With China, and now India, seeing setbacks in civil liberties, democracy in the Asia-Pacific was already not in good shape. Now, a new global survey shows that democracy has declined even further.

The Global State of Democracy 2023: The New Checks and Balances by the Stockholm-based thinktank International IDEA says the most worrying trend in the world is of democratic backsliding and the erosion of constitutional freedoms.

"Asia democracies, and aspiring democratisers in the more authoritarian states, still face challenges in revitalising institutions and in preventing further democratic decline," said Seema Shah, Head of International IDEA's Democracy Assessment Unit, during the Asia-Pacific launch of the 2023 report in Bangkok on 23 November.

The report says that the freedom of press score for the region is now at 2001 levels. Most countries remain below the global average for representation, rule of law and human rights.

Aside from entrenched authoritarian regimes like Laos, China and Vietnam, there have been steep declines in democracy indices in Burma and Afghanistan due to conflict and state collapse. However, even countries with higher democracy rankings like Australia, Philippines, South Korea, Sri Lanka, India and Taiwan saw significant declines in press freedom.

The report singles out Malaysia, Maldives, Nepal and Thailand as making progress in democratic participation with high turnout in recent elections.

The report does not rank countries by just regime type or one value for quality of democracy, but relies on IDEA's Democracy Tracker to monitor categories of democratic performance: public participation, representative government, respect for human rights and rule of law.

Indeed, while democracy is notoriously difficult to quantify and rank, the categories do a better job in monitoring change. For example, representation is an aggregate measure of the credibility of the electoral process, and how free, fair and inclusive they are, and gives an idea of the quality of democracy.

A high participation score indicates citizen involvement in exercising democracy during and between elections. Rule of law rankings are indicators of judicial independence and human rights indices measure respect for civil liberties.

The report gives Nepal higher marks in political participation in 2022, with the country ranked 69th out of 173 states — up four points compared to the previous year, and among the better performers from Asian countries. For comparison, India ranks 83rd, and it has fallen 17 points from its 2017 score.

Even so, rising up the country rankings does not necessarily mean Nepal did better in the past year — it could just mean that other countries in the region faced larger declines in democracy indicators.

On representation, too, Nepal is 61st, up 18 points since 2017. On human rights, Nepal is

ranked 71st, and climbed 3 three points from the previous year. However, for rule of law Nepal is 94th among countries, having fallen 21 points since 2017.

The IDEA report notes that Nepal has seen a five-year decline in effective Parliament, which was dissolved by Prime Minister K P Oli due to a power struggle in 2021 and reinstated by the Supreme Court. 'Political coalitions have continued to be unstable since the November 2022 elections ... and the primary political opposition appeared more interested in replacing the governing coalition partners than providing parliamentary oversight,' the report's summary for Nepal concludes.

The survey has taken note of the erosion of civil liberties and press freedom in neighbouring India, where opposition party leaders have been harassed in the courts and the media. Amnesty International was forced to close its office in 2020 after its accounts were frozen, and offices of the BBC and other media outlets were raided.

In India, Nepal and other countries the report cites 'countervailing institutions' defending against democratic decay by checking concentration of executive power through the court system, civil society activism and the media.

But the example of Nepal and other politically unstable countries shows that an over-reliance on the court system can

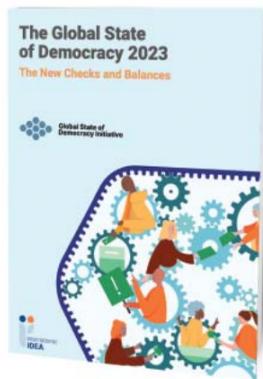
undermine or even destabilise the executive or legislature. Anti-corruption bureaus can be misused for political witch-hunts.

In the Pacific and South Asia, global and regional geopolitical rivalries also exert external pressure on democracies. Countries like Nepal that had to traditionally balance off two giant neighbours (India, China) now also have to factor in the United States. Debt repayment and development assistance are often used as carrots and sticks by world powers to influence domestic politics.

The only way developing countries like Nepal can deal with this would be by improving governance, raising living standards and stanching public discontent.

Moontae Jeong in Bangkok

Most countries in the region suffered reversals in freedom, new global survey states.



The Global State of Democracy 2023
International IDEA
Stockholm 2023
www.idea.int

ONLINE PACKAGES



TALES OF TRAVAILS

The Uranw people are a unique indigenous community living in southeast Nepal. Numbering just over 40,000 individuals, they are marginalised but their culture and language continues to flourish. Spoken Uranw is Nepal's only Dravidian language, they worship nature and build no temples. In this podcast, Sewa Bhattarai discusses their songs, folklore, and mythology, which tell stories of their tenacious survival in the face of modernity. Story: page 9.



OLD PHONES REINCARNATED

Nepali company SabKo Phone seeks to kickstart a movement in sustainability in the country by repairing and refurbishing old mobile phones, giving them a second chance. Watch the video online and follow our YouTube channel for more original multimedia content.

BIPIN JOSHI

Had our government taken proper initiative, perhaps Hamas would have released our Bipin during the hostage exchange ('Hamas releases Thais, but where is Bipin?', nepalitimes.com). But our government is way too busy with its own self interests to take the necessary diplomatic steps to make that possible.

Pradeep Bhandari

■ This situation reflects the weak diplomacy of those who rule Nepal.

Narayan Koirala

TOURIST FEE

There should be no fees ('Call to scrap Upper Mustang tourist fee', page 6-7). Tourists spend lots of money during their trips, which goes to a government that is doing nothing, while the people are doing everything.

Florin

■ I took a trip to Lo Manthang last year. It was a memorable time.

Arne Walderhaug

KALI

Dogs have more humanity and empathy than humans at times ('Hachiko reincarnated in Nepal', Anita Bhetwal, #1187). They are wonderful animals.

Mark O'Donnell

TIKTOK BAN

The government is right to ban Tiktok, it should have been regulated properly ('Talking about Tiktok', #1187). People can misuse anything if there are no regulations.

Incurcio

TENJEN SHERPA

Heroic stories aside, there should be investigations into mountaineering accidents ('Tenjen Sherpa, a tribute', Bhadra Shrama, nepalitimes.com). In recent years, people have pointed out the absence of regulations in the climbing business, and the fact that climbers are ill-prepared, underpaid, and uninsured. Did Tenjen have to die so early? Rest in peace.

Etienne Loyon

Times.com WHAT'S TRENDING



Learning from Jajarkot

by Sushil Gyewali

As soon as the reconstruction work after the 2015 earthquake was complete, disaster preparedness went on the back burner. And so, when the Jajarkot earthquake struck on 4 November, Nepal was unprepared again. We have another chance to be prepared for the next big disaster. Details online.



Most reached and shared on Facebook

Sky is the limit for Nepali chef

by Sanjay Lama Tamang

Many Nepalis have succeeded across the Gulf through honest hard work despite not having formal education or language skills. Unforgettable profile of Sanjay Lama Tamang, who worked his way up from a kitchen help in Bahrain to a chef specialising in French and Italian cuisine.



Most popular on Twitter

Hamas releases Thais. But Bipin?

by Nepali Times

Israel and Hamas are in an ongoing prisoner exchange during their temporary ceasefire, but Nepali student Bipin Joshi, abducted on 7 October, has not been among the foreign hostages released. Nepal's government has been in discussion with Israel, Qatar, and the ICRC to facilitate Joshi's release. Follow us online for the latest updates.



Most commented

Street politics

by Shristi Karki

Last week, two opposing political groups — one a pro-monarchy outfit capitalising on the financial struggles of Nepalis and the main opposition party — took to the streets of Kathmandu in a brewing struggle between pluralism and populism. Join the discussion online.



Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Pokhara's lesser-known lake is at risk of ecological and livelihood impacts from motorboats introduced by local businessmen of the Begnas Lake Boat Traders Committee. Begnas going the way of Phewa:



Hem Sagar Baral @WorshipNature

Begnas and other lakes will certainly lose their biodiversity value if motorboats continue. Lake development and introduction of such activities are very detrimental in the long run. We need to understand the ecological sensitivity to save what is left



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

"Far away from Nepal, I could breathe easy for the first time in my life." Foreign employment gives survivors of domestic violence an escape route to independence and dignity.



Neha Choudhary @neachoudhary

An often unexplored aspect of driver of migration, especially for women, has been the violence they face at home. Going for foreign employment thus becomes not merely an economic decision but the means for literally survival.

1,000 WORDS



RADHIKA KANDEL / RSS

CHUCKING IT: UML Chair K P Oli not strictly following bowling procedure while inaugurating the T-20 Cricket Tournament named after him at the Pokhara sports stadium on 23 November.

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Migration of women

In a story published as far back as 2003, Nepali Times pointed to overzealous anti-trafficking interception work as setting back the new-found mobility and empowerment of Nepali women. The ban on women working abroad was in response to the reports of abuse of Nepali girls and women.

In another case of how the government never learns from its mistakes, it imposed another blanket ban on women's migration to West Asia following cases of exploitation and abuse among Nepali maids in the Gulf. Women are still migrating but are forced to take informal channels, further jeopardising themselves in the process.

Excerpts from the report published 20 years ago this week in issue #171 21-27 November 2003:

Criminal networks have widened: women and girls are not only being trafficked from villages but from the capital. They are taken to Mumbai, the Gulf states and South-east Asia, besides servicing the domestic market.

Two separate issues are often confused when it comes to trafficking. It does not refer only to exploitation through sex work, but any form of labour exploitation, and occurs

Fighting trafficking without trespassing



indigenously as well as across national borders. The flow of migration, exacerbated by the Maoist conflict, means that it is very hard for potential rescuers to spot women who are being trafficked for exploitation as opposed to migrating of their own free will.

The issue of rights and interception is one that has created a divide in the NGO community.

Many claim that a majority of women who are prevented from crossing the border into India are not being trafficked for exploitation, and that their interception is therefore an illegal violation of their right to migrate. Renu Raj Bhandari, a former Human Rights Rapporteur, is concerned that interception programs may also have a negative impact on how women view migration. "I am really concerned that the right to mobility for women, which took years to establish, is now being taken away in the name of welfare. Women are being forced to migrate clandestinely," she says.

For archived material of Nepali Times of the past 20 years, site search: nepalitimes.com



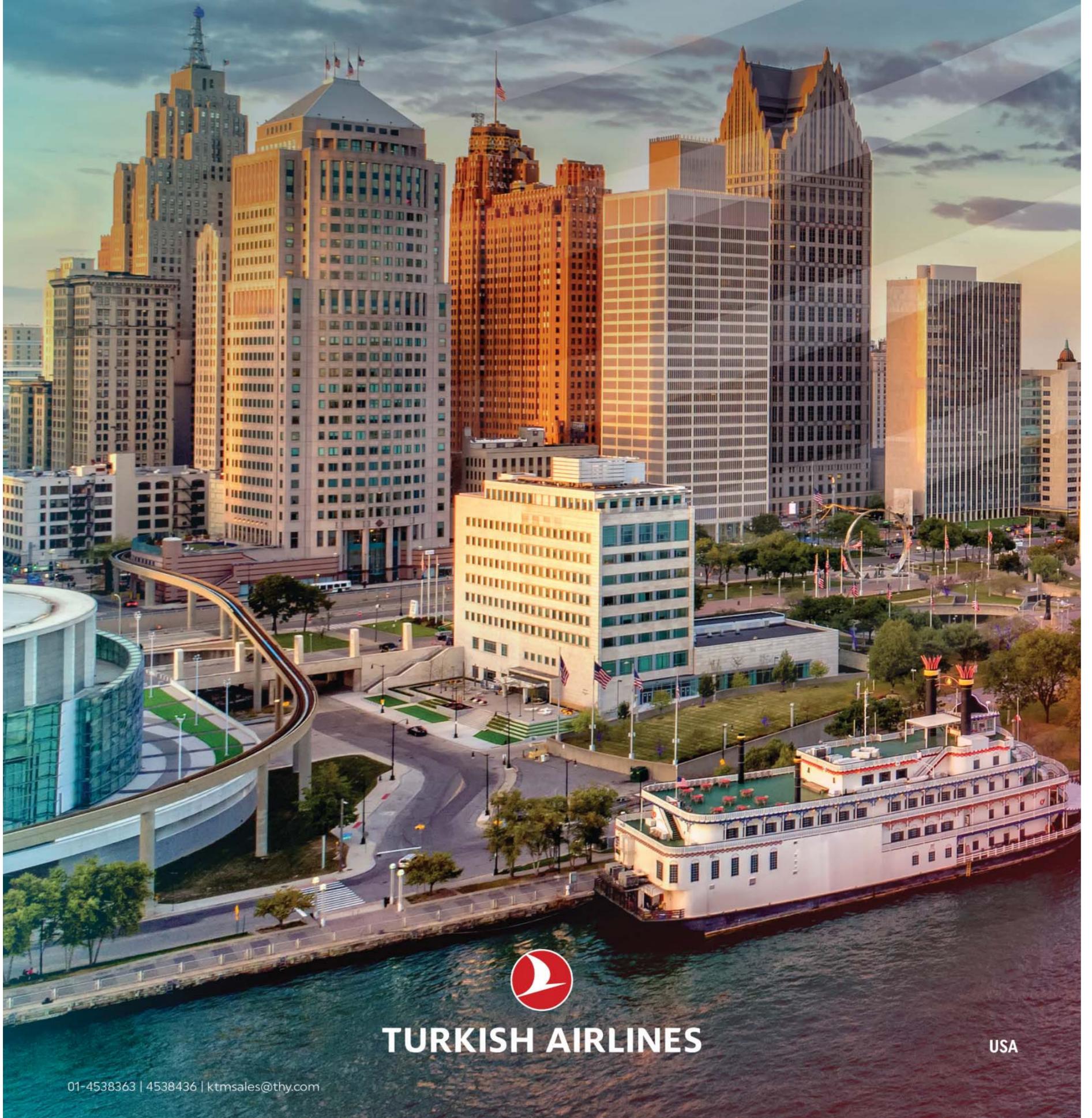
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60 YEARS OF HELVETAS IN NEPAL

Regula Rytz, President of the Swiss aid group Helvetas was in Nepal 21-27 November to inspect projects in the country. She is a former president of Green Party of Switzerland. Excerpts of a conversation with Nepali Times:



GOPEN RAI

You met with Prime Minister Dahal, what did you talk about?

Regula Rytz: The prime minister was very well informed about the work Helvetas has been doing in Nepal for more than 60 years with the trail bridge project, safer migration and rural development. We are a development agency based in Switzerland, and we have a very special relationship with Nepal because it is the place where our organisation started in 1956.

The prime minister also appreciated that we worked in rural areas and took a community based approach with technical assistance to all the federal state building process because Switzerland is also a federal state, so we have a lot of experience about this. Nepal made an incredible headway in the past years to get into federal democracy.

The majority of our work is paid by the Swiss government. So this is

not only a very special relationship between Helvetas and the Nepal government, but also between Swiss and Nepal governments. Nepal is one of the strongest programs Switzerland has all over the world. We also have projects funded by the European Union and other donors. But it is important that in every project, we work with all three levels of the Nepali government.

You have just returned from Kosi Province. Impressions?

I know Nepal a little bit because my husband lived here as a child, also it's not my first visit to Nepal. I became President of the Board of Directors of Helvetas one and a half year ago, and Nepal is the second country I am visiting. I wanted to have more insight in our team working together with municipalities, district level and

also with the experts and the organisations on the national level here. And I was very impressed.

I first came to Nepal in 2000, during the conflict. And it was a really difficult time for everyone here. I came next in 2007, during the middle of the peace building process. And I returned in 2017, after the promulgation of the Constitution. Now, six years later, I see this really amazing progress Nepal is making towards inclusive democracy on three state levels. A lot of challenges still remain on the economic, social and political level. But I have a lot of admiration and respect for everything Nepal has achieved in these years.

In Kosi Province projects designed by SDC and HELVETAS with all levels of government have an important impact on livelihood improvement. Our three strong strategic points for development

cooperation is to ensure basic rights, create new perspectives, skills, jobs, income, but also good governance on all the levels.

For instance, Swiss engineers started building trail bridges 60 years ago, but now Nepal government is taking over. And Nepali engineers and organisations will transfer the knowledge and capacity to another southern country, Ethiopia. It is a model, this is how development cooperation should work.

How have Helvetas priorities in Nepal changed since 1956?

We started with cheese factories, Swiss experts coming here saw that there were basic needs like trail bridges across rivers. Then there were water, forestry and agriculture projects. Today the work is quite different. It is more technical advice for different levels of the state. There are new priorities and projects but the values remain the same: reduce poverty, enforce human rights, participation of women and underprivileged groups. We also mix it with projects like skills training, enforcing human rights and integration.

How does Helvetas specifically address women's rights and inclusion in Nepal?

An inclusive society needs the participation of all members. With the experience, they can play their roles in society, economy and politics confidently.

At a trail bridge program in Kosi, for example, the chair of the user committee there was a woman. She decided how the bridge would be built and ensured transparency in finances. A man there said that when women take leadership everything is managed properly, there is transparency, and it is really democratic.

We have three interconnected approaches. One is the project implementation with and through a local partner. Second is technical assistance to the government and third is policy advocacy, making the structural impact.

The beauty of the Swiss program is that wherever we engage, we do it for a longer term period. This allows us to work directly with the government and bring systemic change.

An example is the safer migration project in which we could have just done a quick project, providing information to the potential migrants giving them the skills. But we work with the government to come up with the right policies, the right framework, so that victims can get compensation and justice.

We also have the disadvantaged group strategy where we empower women, the youth are engaged so that the harmful social norms and practices related to child marriage, polygamy and alcoholism, are addressed. And we link these efforts with the government system. This is where you really require evidence-based policy advocacy, so that citizens can ultimately hold the government accountable.

We could see the result in Kosi Province where school children were getting career guidance. The girls confidently told us they wanted to be engineers, lawyers, bank directors. The teachers told us that normally they would say nurse or work in a hotel, but access to career guidance opened other perspectives.

What are the next steps for Helvetas in Nepal?

We will strengthen climate action from the agriculture and ecological point of view. One idea is to work to reduce forest waste which is a wildfire hazard. But if we turn it into bio-pellets, they can slowly replace coal in brick factories because they have larger energy.

We will continue working on safer migration, and on returnees. We will continue defending workers' rights and continue in skills development.

We are also investing in urban development. The rural areas will remain a priority for us, but there's also urban poverty.

NMB BANK एनएमबि बैंक

Turkish AJet Air

AnadolJet has now rebranded itself as AJet Air Transportation Inc., a wholly-owned subsidiary of Turkish Airlines starting March 2024 from its Sabiha Gökçen and Ankara Esenboğa hubs. Focusing on



sustainability, AJET plans eco-friendly operations and aims to enter the low cost market by simplifying services and adopting an economy class setup with cost-effective fares making air travel accessible to the broader public. Turkish Airlines Chair Ahmet Bolat, expressed pride in AJET's establishment and outlined plans to launch its operations by March 2024. The company will operate from Istanbul.

Samsung AI

Samsung Galaxy is set to elevate mobile technology with its AI capabilities, emphasising openness and universal intelligence. Galaxy AI offers a comprehensive mobile AI experience, combining on-device AI from Samsung with cloud-based AI through strategic collaborations. A standout feature is the AI Live Translate Call, integrated into the native call feature, providing real-time audio and text translations during calls without the need for third-party apps. Scheduled for release early next year, Galaxy AI aims to break down social barriers, making communication more accessible and productive.

Axiata exit

Axiata Group, the parent company of Ncell is withdrawing from Nepal, citing declines in revenue. Axiata will be selling its assets in Ncell after acquiring them seven years ago from the Swedish firm, Telia Sonera. "The outlook in Nepal is increasingly challenging, thus the Board has decided to exit Nepal and accordingly reclassify Ncell as asset held for sale," reads the Axiata press statement.

Ncell winners

Ncell Axiata honored winners of the Ncell Short Film Competition themed 'Bhai Tika'. Held before Tihar, the ceremony took place at Ncell ICON in Lainchaur. Sajil Basnet and Team won the First Prize of Rs 100,000. The First Runner-up, Santosh Shakya and Team received Rs



75,000, while the Second Runner-up, Prayatna Thapa and Team, won Rs 50,000. Jabbor Kayumov, CEO and Managing Director of Ncell, emphasised the importance of storytelling in addressing societal issues.

Global IME branch

Global IME Bank has inaugurated a new branch in Patan Bazar, Ward 6 of Patan Municipality, Baitadi District.



Mayor Gauri Singh Rawal inaugurated the branch which brings the total branch number nationwide for Global IME to 351.



Aloft awarded

Aloft Kathmandu Thamel won Best General Manager for Vikram Singh, and Leading Business Hotel at the 18th Hospitality India Travel Awards. Leading Business Hotel award acknowledges the property's tailored facilities for business travelers. Singh expressed his elation, and said Aloft would continue to deliver unparalleled experiences from Kathmandu's tourist hub.

Nabil's milestone

Nabil Bank marked the two-year anniversary of its Nabil School of Social Entrepreneurship (Nabil SSE), a CSR initiative. Altogether 335 candidates have enrolled into Nabil SSE program, among which 52 enterprises have been established creating 869 jobs across the country. The initiative offers two programs, the Fellowship Program and the Certificate Course, empowering individuals to contribute meaningfully through social entrepreneurship.



AWON Bazaar

AWON (Active Women of Nepal) is hosting a Christmas market at Soaltee Hotel on 2 December. The event will be inaugurated by Jane Krill Thompson, wife of the



American Ambassador and will feature over a hundred stalls showcasing various products, including local goods, fashion wear, travel items, and offerings from startups.

Sipradi honored

Sipradi Trading was honored during the sixth Social Security Day recently. Acknowledging five years since the initiation of the contribution-based social security fund, the company stood out among employers in the



wholesale and retail sector for fiscal year 2023/24 due to its significant number of contributors. During the event, Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal handed over the certificate to CEO Rajanbabu Shrestha.

Improving internet governance in Nepal

'The digital world is one of divides.'

In September 2024, world leaders will gather to forge a new consensus on bridging the digital divide to deliver a better present and safeguard our future. The United Nations has proposed a Global Digital Compact to be signed at that Summit to connect 2.7



COMMENT

Sumana Shrestha

billion more people, and develop principles and standards for data protection and privacy, sharpen accountability for malicious acts online and convene stakeholders to align AI technology.

The signing of the UN Global Digital Compact is on the horizon. What will Nepal's role be? Where are we with our own research, planning and preparation? Who will represent Nepal in negotiations, and what are our objectives? Are we forming alliances with countries facing similar challenges to address the downsides of generative AI, or are we demanding the presence of content moderation teams on the ground from large tech platforms?

In October, I attended the UN Internet Governance Forum (IGF) in Kyoto (pictured), and the experience made it clear that every country needs to be ready for the digital age. Nations and the international community must therefore team up and do their part to succeed in the fast-changing digital world.

In one of our Parliament committee meetings, members proposed ideas aimed at curbing the spread of fake news, including a suggestion to require individuals with more than 10,000 social media followers to register their accounts. While the intent behind these proposals is to combat disinformation, it could have a potential impact on free speech and dissenting voices.

Recently, the Nepal government banned TikTok following the Cabinet's social media directives. The misinformation/disinformation campaign requires effective management, but resorting to platform shutdowns is an extreme measure. This decision raises



concerns as it encroaches upon the fundamental right of freedom of expression. Shutting down platforms without a proper legal basis can be perceived as an authoritarian move, undermining the principles of open dialogue and democratic governance.

Additionally, a recent pivotal development is the breaking up of the old Information Technology Bill, which was originally abandoned due to controversial social media governance provisions. This bill is now being segmented into a Cyber Security Bill, a Social Media Bill, and a Software Technology Bill.

In 2013, a Master Plan on Information and Communication Technology in Education was formulated and launched with the technical support of UNESCO but was never implemented. Now, we

have moved on to ICT Masterplan 2 prompting a question if our approach to Nepal's digitisation is on the right track.

Furthermore, there is a pressing need to establish clear standards for the plethora of software procured across various ministries and government levels. Specifically, we must inquire whether contracts for entities like the passport office or national ID issuance include hardware component costs within the Annual Maintenance Contract, while separately addressing the maintenance and depreciation of physical assets.

During our examination of the digitisation process, we were made aware of cabinet-approved Digital Framework Nepal, but the document is collecting dust in a drawer. Soon after, we organised IT Bill Hackathon with software

companies in Kathmandu to further identify problems within our system. One of the key lessons was the opaqueness of the legal language to the tech community, and their challenges to exist within legal frameworks that are complex to navigate and lack adequate support for their growth.

If we take a step back, we will find that digital literacy among Nepalis varies greatly. While some are proficient, many lack basic skills like creating strong passwords, accepting cookies, and using public Wi-Fi safely. Open-source software adoption is limited, illustrated by the Election Commission website's reliance on proprietary software. Efforts for digital literacy and inclusion lack coordination, with uncertainty about roles and stakeholders. A more unified approach is needed to enhance digital literacy and inclusion in Nepal.

In Kyoto I learned how different countries are adopting unique strategies for digitisation and software development. For example, even in a technologically advanced nation like France, approximately 80% of data analysis required for decision-making can be effectively executed using MS Excel. This raises the pertinent question of whether our incessant drive for procurement leaves us overlooking the potential for adaptation and localisation from the Digital Public Goods library, a valuable resource that often goes untapped.

Nepal can immediately establish government teams to engage with the public and encourage new ideas and for organisations to participate. It should create a platform for knowledge-sharing on technology, both within Nepal and globally.

It is crucial to transition from closed-loop systems to open-source solutions, making source code accessible and transparent. This way, codes developed with taxpayers' money can be reviewed by the public, fostering accountability.

During various IGF panels featuring parliamentarians and researchers, the consensus was clear: the digital age necessitates robust data policies. A vital component of this is comprehensive data legislation. Such an act must establish clear guidelines regarding the collection, storage, and usage

of data, encompassing healthcare, consumer, and individual national identification such as citizenship, passport, PAN, or national ID.

This Data Act would apply to government agencies, non-governmental agencies, and private companies operating in Nepal, serving as the foundation for the country's national and international data-sharing policies while fostering competitive marketplaces to support SMEs.

Nepal needs to look into best practices across the world, and we should invest our efforts in researching them. Moreover, we need to make sure that the research is well-communicated to the legislators and lawmakers, otherwise we risk repeating what we did with the TikTok ban where the Home Ministry conducted a study but lawmakers had no clue.

Once we are ready at the national level, we need to think globally. The Global Digital Compact is as fundamental as agreeing on human rights issues. But we must be clear about how we will put these international agreements into action at home.

One question that emerged prominently in the IGF was the significance of realistic implementation plans. It is at this stage that many developing countries encounter roadblocks, owing to resource constraints and capacity limitations. For a practical digitisation plan, we need clear goals, resources, and choices we are willing to make. We must focus on what works for our specific challenges, instead of getting carried away with big ideas.

Planning on a national level is just the beginning, we also need help from the international community to set our goals and standards. Nepal must train a big tech workforce that is skilled in different digital areas like cybersecurity, software, data management, and more. We should work together to boost our talent and connect them with the world.

As we approach the signing of this compact, we must unite and brainstorm on how to make these aspirations a reality. Together, we can pave the way for a brighter digital future for Nepal. 🇳🇵

Sumana Shrestha, MP, is a member of the Education, Health and Information Technology parliamentary committee. She is with the Rastriya Swatantra Party.

WEATHERCOAT
LONG LIFE
EXTERIOR EMULSION WITH PU & SILICON

**घाम-पानी छेतछ,
१० वर्ष टिक्छ**

चर्को घामबाट बचाउँछ

मुसलचारे वर्षाबाट जोगाउँछ

१० वर्ष वारेन्टी

Hibernating students of the Himalaya

Children from Mustang move down to the warmer climate of Pokhara during the harsh winter of the trans-Himalaya

■ **Durga Rana Magar** in Pokhara

Distance learning has a different meaning in Mustang, the arid and cold plateau on Nepal's border with China. It means that every November, students, teachers, admin staff pack everything up and move

down to Pokhara.

It is just too cold to study in the unheated classrooms when howling winter wind can send the mercury plummeting down to -20°C . Hundreds of students and teachers used to do the 10 day trek to Pokhara, but these days they can just pack everything in a pickup for the 12 hour journey down the Kali Gandaki River.



KUNDA DIXIT

In Chosar, Geeling, Lo Manthang, schools are already padlocked and sometimes the parents have moved down with their children as well for the winter hibernation.

Since 2004, the Nepal government has been supporting schools in high Himalayan regions to conduct 'mobile schools' so that students and teachers get

funds to move entire classrooms to lower altitudes in winter.

The federal government now provides each school with Rs350,000 for their moves, and if that is not enough local rural municipalities also chip in.

Pemba Lhamo is a Grade 10 student of Ditya Deep Secondary School in Chosar in Upper Mustang and has just arrived in



Call to scrap Upper Mustang tourist fee

Premium permit fees are keeping tourists away from the trans-Himalayan district, impacting on the local economy

When Nepal opened up for trekking and mountaineering, it restricted foreigners from travelling to trans-Himalayan districts like Mustang and Dolpo because of the cultural sensitivity and limited ecological carrying capacity of the land.

Later in 1992, they were opened up, but unlike other trekking areas visitors had to pay the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP)

\$500 for 10 days and an additional \$50 per day for any extra duration.

Since then, Nepal has become a federal republic and there is now a highway connecting Pokhara to Jomsom and Lo Manthang right up to the Chinese border, and locals say it does not make sense to charge such high fees anymore, saying it is impacting on the local economy.

"The permit fee for the restricted areas is too high and we would get a lot more tourists

and raise local incomes if it was revoked," argues Tashi Norbu Gurung, the elected chair of Lo Manthang Rural Municipality. "This is severely affecting our livelihoods and businesses."

With support from local residents, hoteliers and village councils, Gurung along with the chairs of adjoining rural municipalities recently submitted a petition to Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, Home Minister



WINTER SEMESTER: Students in Grade 4 of the Ditya Deep School in Chosar just before it moved down to Pokhara in winter (left). A student from Ditya Deep in a classroom in Pokhara last week (right).

View of Mt Nilgiri looking south from Tsarang in Upper Mustang.

Pokhara. His mother has also accompanied him, and she is trying to earn some money on the side by starting a small souvenir shop for tourists by the Lakeside.

"I'm enjoying the sun here and Pokhara is much more fun, and because my mom is here I don't miss my village as much," says Pemba, who wants to be a doctor when he grows up and is a scholarship student at his school.

But his classmates Kusang Angmo, Yangji Dolka, Pema Sangmo, Nanki Lhamo, Yangden Sangmo all miss the clean air, clear blue sky and the mountains of home.

The annual school hibernation from Mustang takes place from November to March. When the temperature starts climbing again in spring, the students travel back to Mustang and continue their classes.

Pokhara is less than 1,000m above sea level and has a sub-tropical climate with the daytime temperature staying in the mid-20s even in winter. This is a far cry from Upper Mustang where wind gusts and sub-



DURGA RANA MAGAR

zero temperatures make the wind chill factor unbearable.

There are now 611 students from 16 schools from Upper Mustang in Pokhara, and most have their own arrangements with local private schools, while some have constructed their own buildings in Pokhara.

Rahmat Dhuniya from Kapilvastu is the principal of Ditya Deep in Chosar. Like many of the teachers in government schools in Mustang, he is from the plains and this makes

it doubly difficult for him to adjust to the thin air, and winter in the mountains.

"I grew up in the Tarai so it was hard for me at first, but then it wasn't any easier for the locals either in winter," says Dhuniya.

Ditya Deep is now constructing its own building in Pokhara. But until it is completed, it coordinates with Bhawani Kalika School in Bijaypur to run classes in two shifts: 5:30-9:30AM for Grades 1-7 and 10AM-4PM for Grades 8, 9 and 10.

Pal Ewam Namgyal Monastic School in Mustang, which has 126 students, is also running classes from nursery to high school in Pokhara's Bhakunde. Students have enrolled here to become nuns and monks, and have classes on Buddhism in addition to core courses.

Because it is a monastic school, students enrolled here are from all over the country. Hira Khadka, 15, is from Rukum and studies in Grade 4. "I like Pokhara, it is much warmer than Mustang," she says. "The view of Phewa Lake from my classroom window is great too."

Chhayang Lhamo Gurung, 17, from Upper Mustang is a Grade 9 student. She says: "The school here in Pokhara has more facilities and is more convenient than the one in Upper Mustang. I like it better here."

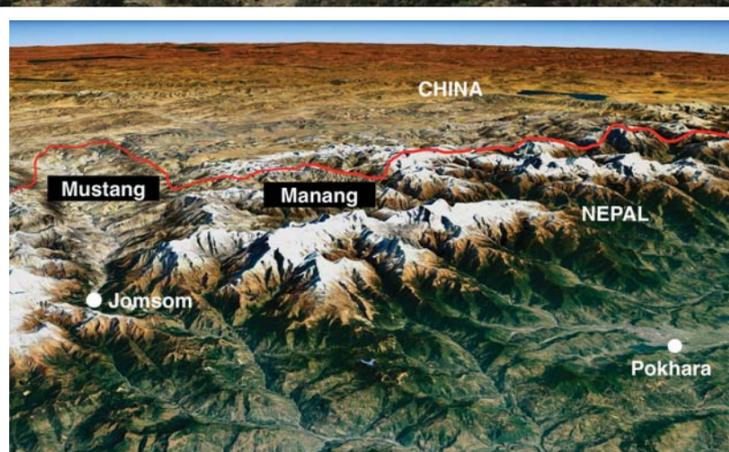
Deepa Gurung Thapa Magar who teaches Nepali at Pal Ewam Namgyal finds it difficult to adapt to the harsh environment of Upper Mustang when the school moves back up in the summer.

"I'm from Pokhara so it is difficult for me up there in the cold weather. But I brave it anyway because it is an adventure on its own," adds Magar.

This temporary migration from the mountains to the Valley below and vice versa is not easy for the students and teachers alike but they are making the best of the circumstances to try and continue their education amidst many challenges in Nepal's education system. 🇳🇵

 nepalitimes.com

More photos and video clip online



KUNDA DIXIT

Narayan Kaji Shrestha, Chief Minister of Gandaki Province Surendra Pandey and Minister of Forest and Environment Birendra Kumar Mahato to remove Upper Mustang from the list of restricted areas.

Most of the fees go to ACAP, and local municipalities complain that they do not really benefit from the extra charges on tourists.

Says Rinjin Gurung of the Waragung Muktikshetra Rural Municipality: "Because these are at present restricted areas, tourists cannot easily access them, and this has affected us all negatively."

Of the total 71,707 tourists

who visited Mustang in 2022/23, only 3,388 visited Upper Mustang, paying the ACAP premium fee. Trekking traffic to the region has been climbing to nearly pre-Covid levels. The number of Nepali visitors to the region has also grown exponentially, with most travelling by motorcycle or jeep from Pokhara.

"It is important that we set up fees and create a system that is appropriate for tourists of all classes and economic status," says Bikal Sherchan, member of the Gandaki Provincial Assembly.

Indeed, there is fear that opening up Upper Mustang to mass tourism can lead to some of the negative effects seen in other parts of Nepal with unregulated building, high costs, theft of antiquities and an impact on the region's fragile ecology.

Upper Mustang in Nepal's trans-Himalaya is a major tourist attraction with arid and desolate mountain landscapes, ancient Tibetan culture with monasteries and chortens and places of historical importance. In fact, in a

lot of ways Mustang is geologically, culturally and linguistically closer to Tibet than Nepal.

Many visitors to Mustang are also Hindu and Buddhist pilgrims who come to worship at the Muktinath shrine. Trekkers often traverse the Thorung La pass from Manang to Mustang, for which they do not have to pay the extra ACAP fee. New high-end hotels have now come up in Jomsom, Lo Manthang and along the trail in between. Some of the investors in these hotels feel lifting the premium fee will increase the footfall in Upper Mustang. 🇳🇵

Adapted from RSS



DINESH SHRESTHA

EVENTS

**Board Game night**

Join Hostel Nextdoor's game night every Thursday to play board games including Carcassonne, Keyflower, Citadel, Scrabble, Monopoly, as well as other games including Jenga and Uno.

Thursdays, 5:30pm-9:30pm, Hostel Nextdoor, Kupondole

Christmas Bazaar

Stop by Active Women of Nepal's Christmas Bazaar that aims to aid underprivileged women and children across Nepal.

2 December, 9am to 6pm, The Soaltee, Thahachal

**Dance exhibition**

The Contemporary Dance performance and Exhibition by Argentina-based artist Constanza Bitthoff opens soon. Call for more details.

8 December, 5pm, Gallery MCUBE, Mitra Road, Chakupat, 9851170110

Artudio master class

Artudio's three-month long Fundamentals of Visual Arts Master Class is open to participants aged 15 and above, ranging from novice to professional artists. Details at www.artudio.net

7 December onwards, Fee: Rs7,500/month, Artudio, Swayambhu, 9823490390/9843385200

**Weekend hike**

Be one with nature and join Hike for Nepal's Kavre-Nagi Danda hike this weekend. Get additional information on Hike for Nepal's Facebook Page.

9 December, 6:40am onwards, Rs800, Bhirkutimandap

DINING

**Wunjala Moskva**

Although Russian and Newari dishes being served together might sound peculiar to some, those who have tried it know that it works surprisingly well. Try the Russian Piroshki and the Newari Nyakhuna Wunjala Moskva, and get some new dining experience.

Naxal (01) 4415236

MUSIC

ASM live

London Pub's latest installment of Friday on Stage this week will see groove rock band ASM take the stage.

1 December, 8pm onwards, London PUB, Darbar Marg

**Vineet Singh**

Playback singer Vineet Singh makes a stop to perform for Nepali audiences. Get tickets online at Aventoz.

2 December, 8pm onwards, Club Platinum, Darbar Marg

**Music for Medicine**

Dr Suman Thapa and The Blue Fret return with Music for Medicine, a fundraiser supporting Nepali students dedicated to healthcare for the benefit of patients in need.

8 December, 7pm onwards, Ticket: Pre-booking Rs800/door Rs1000, Moksh, Jhamsikhel

**Samsaara**

Get free shots at Watering Hole for an evening during the pub's Queen of the Night Wednesdays. Food and drinks will be accompanied by live music from Cambodia-based Nepali band Samsaara.

Wednesdays, Watering Hole, Naxal

Bollywood Night

Check out the much-awaited Bollywood Night, a fundraising event and make lasting memories while contributing to the community.

1 December, Waterfront by KGH, Pokhara

**Ventures Café**

Stop by for the best fusion menu and local favourites, and enjoy the breezy outdoor seating. A venue fit for beer connoisseurs.

Thirbam Sadak, Baluwatar, 9851228014

Imago Dei

Imago Dei's menu includes comfort foods, specialty course meals, and authentic British bakes including the signature Imago cheesecake.

Do Cha Marg, Pani Pokhari, 9803064809

GETAWAY

**Hotel Country Villa**

From the top of Nagarkot Hill, the hotel provides spectacular views of sunrise and sunset. A natural and relaxing retreat for those wishing to escape the pandemonium of the city.

Nagarkot (01) 6680127

Grand Norling

Take a trip to the outskirts of Kathmandu to the scenic nature of Gokarna. A stay at the Grand Norling, with its spacious bedrooms, eclectic huts, golf course and garden, will leave one feeling rejuvenated.

Gokarna, 9801121560

**Buddha Maya Garden Resort**

Wake up to the sounds of birds in the mornings and relax in the beautiful garden.

A major bonus: the Maya Devi Temple is within walking distance from the hotel.

Lumbini, 9801033114

Balthali Village Resort

A simple and cosy retreat just beyond Kathmandu Valley, Balthali Village Resort is ideal for anyone seeking to getaway but not too far away from the city.

Panauti, Kavre, 9851087772

**Temple Tree**

It will be difficult to leave once visitors get to Temple Tree Resort and Spa, which offers a peaceful haven complete with a massage parlour and sauna.

Gaurighat, Pokhara (61) 4658199

Over Easy

Enjoy fluffy pancakes, refreshing smoothie bowls and healthy Buddha Bowls in the minimalistic setting of this all-day breakfast place.

Bansbari, 9841587695

**Hankook Sarang**

Taste the best of Korea and discover the taste of expertly prepared dishes. Also try various Banchan (Korean side-dishes) with Korean BBQ.

Ghana Pokhari Marg (01) 4421711

WEEKEND WEATHER



FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
22° 9°	22° 8°	23° 8°	22° 8°	22° 7°

Colder, drier

The minimum temperature in Kathmandu Valley's outskirts is going to drop to 8-9°C in the coming days, with the urban heat bubble adding 3 degrees inside the Ring Road. This also means particulates trapped in the inversion layer near the surface at night and mornings. So restrict physical outdoor exercise to afternoons when the westerly breeze will drive away the pollution. Otherwise, looking sunny with things warming up in the early afternoons.

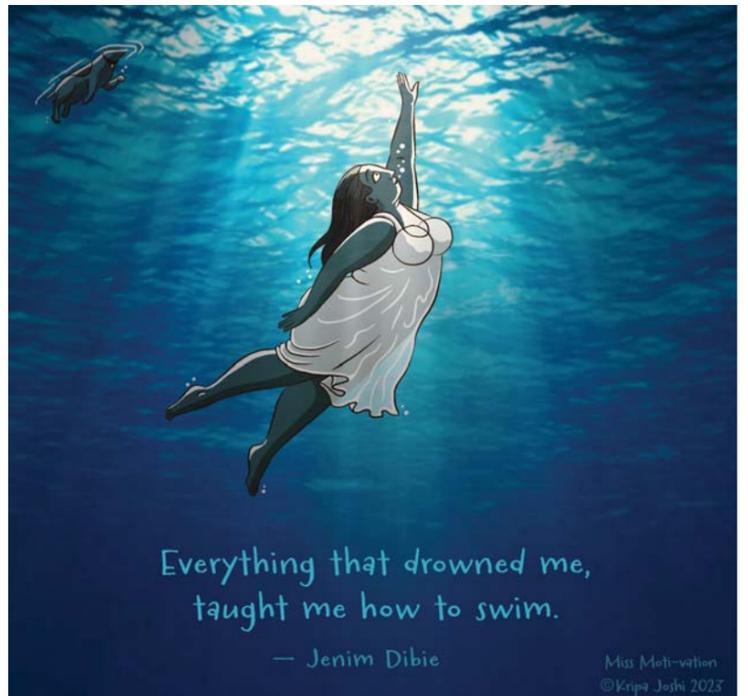
OUR PICK

In A Murder at the End of the World, the new ongoing psychological thriller series created by Brit Marling, amateur Gen Z sleuth Darby Hart is invited by a reclusive billionaire to a retreat at an isolated location. But when one of the guests is found dead, the tech-savvy aspiring detective must use all her skills to determine if it was a murder-- all the while trying to save the other guests and herself from becoming the killer's next target. The limited series Emma Corrigan, Harris Dickinson Clive Owens and creator Brit Marling herself.



MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



गर्मी मौसममा संक्रामक रोगबाट बचाउ र बचाऔं

- गर्मी मौसममा मलेरिया, कालाजार, डेंगी, हैजालगायतका विभिन्न संक्रामक रोगहरू फैलिन सक्छन् ।
- संक्रामक रोग फैलाउने झिँगा, लामखुट्टे, भुसुना आदिको नियन्त्रण गरौं ।
- संक्रामक रोगबाट बच्न शुद्ध र उमालेको पानी पिऔं ।
- बासी तथा सडेगलेका खाना नखाऔं ।
- घरभित्र र वरपरको सरसफाइमा ध्यान दिऔं ।



नेपाल सरकार
विज्ञापन बोर्ड

The Subcontinent's original people live on in Nepal

Tracing the origin and influence of Nepal's Uranw people who speak the country's only Dravidian language

They are nature worshippers and do not have temples. They divide their clans by totems named after animals, plants, or flowers, none of which they harm. They are the Uranw aboriginal people of southeast Nepal and theirs is the only Dravidian language in the country.

The Uranw now number just



ON THE MARGINS
Sewa Bhattarai

40,000, and most are landless. Though living on the margins of mainstream Nepali society, their unique culture and language is not just surviving, but thriving.

Their tenacious existence in the face of modernity is a consistent feature of their millennia old folklore and mythology in the Subcontinent. So is their sense of loss of land, status, and privilege.

The Origin story

*Girl: You are going to chop the branches of the Karam tree
You are running inside crabs' holes
Boy: You are going to collect the Kakado flower
You are travelling inside crabs' holes*

Sung during an important process of the Karam Puja, this is the origin story of the Uranw who believe they were born from crab holes. Their supreme being is Dharmesh who created the world, the earth, water, land, animals, plants, and all living beings.

One day, Pachho, the goddess of nature, said to Dharmesh, let us go to the earth and take a look. They came upon a place called Sirasita Nale, which is believed to be the Saraswati River on the banks of which the Indus Valley civilisation once flourished.

Dharmesh spotted two crabs inside a hole, a brother and sister. Dharmesh brought them out, and taught them how to live in harmony with nature. The two created and multiplied, and the Uranw are descended from them. The myth links the Uranw to the Indus Valley, a Dravidian civilisation.

"It is accepted that the Uranw ruled in Rohtasgadh of Bihar until the sixth century. Then the Mughals came and finally prevailed," explains Bechan Uranw of the Uranw Adivasi Pratisthan.

In their book *Oraon of Nepal* Janak Rai and Bechan Uranw write that neighbouring kingdoms envied the prosperity of the Uranw nation. They found a vulnerability: the festival to commemorate ancestors during which the men would be inebriated on rice beer.

'Uranw men and women kept long hair back then. So, it was hard to tell men and women apart,' the authors write. 'But the women gathered and routed the invaders. The Uranw fighters led by their princesses Singi Dae and Kaile Dae defeated the Mughals twice.'

The Mughal commanders could not believe that they were defeated by women, and brought in reinforcements and killed everyone with long hair: men and women. Today, Singi Dae and Kaili Dae are worshipped as clan deities.

Until the 16th century, the Uranw had a prosperous and powerful kingdom with a king named Uraongan Thakur. After



BECHAN URANW



the Mogul defeat, they scattered to Bengal, Assam, and some followed the Kosi River upstream into Nepal, where they have been living since the beginning of the 1700s.

The Unranw were immune from malaria and could live in the Tarai jungles, and had a free run of the place. The Shah kings needed the Uranw not just to clear the forest and make the Tarai habitable and fertile, but also to support them.

From the Rana regime through to the reign of King Mahendra, hunting brought the Uranw close to the royalty, and also gave them high status, including exemption from the state land tax.

The Uranw were also awarded a medal in 1956 on King Mahendra's birthday, and a postage stamp (pictured) was issued in 1976 depicting them dancing with the caption 'Jhangad Nach'.

But hunting and foraging based lifestyle was slowly vanishing across the Tarai, to be replaced by farming. The Uranw did not own the land, so could not prosper.

Bechan Uranw and Janak Rai write in their book that settlers from the hills who had access to political power began to appropriate Uranw land through trickery, manipulation or

force, relegating the Uranw to be sharecroppers in their own land.

Lack of education was a factor in the Uranw not having land titles. "In the past, the Uranw did not want to educate their children. What is the point of education, people asked," Bechan explains.

The fate of the Uranw is similar to many of Nepal's indigenous communities that lived in the malaria-infested Tarai before outside settlers arrived, and have now been relegated to the margins.

In her Master's thesis, Bina Bhattarai writes that landlessness has driven most Uranw to become day labourers pulling rickshaws or rearing livestock.

Adaptation to the dominant community changed Uranw culture, on the one hand acculturating them to new things, and on the other hand, marginalising them.

Sundi Mundi is an important part of the Tihar festival for the Uranw of Nepal, and they share their festival songs with the Mundas. While some of them are in the Dravidian tongue of Kudukh, many of them are in Sadri, an Indo-European language.

The Kudukh is the northernmost of the Dravidian languages, and differs from how they are spoken in



southern India. Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam have long, documented histories, with Tamil considered India's second oldest language. Their well-developed script and rich literature rival any ancient language in the world.

But the Kudukh of the Uranw does not even have a script, let alone written literature or documented history.

In areas dominated by Indo-European languages, most Uranws began speaking whatever language community they lived close to – those in Bengal speaking Bengali, those in Assam taking up Assamese, and those in Nepal speaking Nepali. To communicate between and among these languages, they relied on Sadri.

"Living with dominant communities naturally impacts language as well, and many of our songs are in Sadri language, or close to Hindi. Constant migration meant that we had to learn other languages along the way," says Sangeeta Uranw (pictured, above), a theatre artist.

Sadri is close to Bhojpuri and has become the language of the Uranw too. In losing the influence of their language, the Kudukh speakers have also lost the name of their language, and are called Dhangad or Jhangad, as in the 1976 Nepali postage stamp.

"Dhangad or Jhangad means a servant who works in rice fields. In Nepal, the name was associated with people who cleared forests (jhadi). It is a disrespectful term given to us by outsiders, so we do not use it," says Bechan. "Even the name Uranw was given by other communities, but it means 'man', so we have accepted it. But we continue to call ourselves Kudukh."

Today, the Uranw are striving to improve their lot through education, identity groups like the Uranw Adivasi Janjati Pratisthan, and national and international alliances. In *Oraon of Nepal*, Janak Rai and Bechan Uranw document another story full of their sense of

loss. It also portrays their dreams of a revival of all that they had.

The Karam Puja is a major festival of the Uranw community that venerates nature and human connections without any deity, idol, or temple.

As with most agrarian communities, the festival is linked to the agricultural cycle and the Karam Puja follows the planting of rice. The Karam tree (*Nauclea parvifolia*) is central to the festival. Community members plant seeds which will sprout, and on the day of festival branches of the marked Karam tree are brought together with crab flowers. They store them all on the roof of a community leader called Neg.

On the evening of the puja, the community members all go to an open ground with offerings of food. "When everyone walks to the same place with lamps in hand, the whole village shines," says Sangeeta Uranw.

The Karam branch is brought down from the Neg's house and installed in the middle. It is worshipped with all the offerings, and the people then proceed to sing and dance around the branch through the night.

"The Karam Puja contains the Uranw philosophy that work and worship (karma and dharma) must go together," says Bechan Uranw.

The men line up in one row and the women line up in another and dance in sync, changing steps every few minutes to the note of a whistle. Many of these dance steps have found their way into Nepali films, some of them becoming iconic 'folk dance' moves.

Men and women of all ages, and relationships participate enthusiastically, and the dance goes on all night, and all next day.

"It's so much fun, you don't get tired," says Sangeeta Uranw. "People come from different villages, boys and girls are smiling at each other and flirting, and maybe your crush is there too, dancing in the group."

The morning after, one group takes the Karam branch and goes from house to house, where people give them food and other offerings they may have. The rest of the people continue to dance until evening. Finally, the Karam branches are let afloat in a nearby river, ending the festival. 🇳🇵

Sewa Bhattarai's series, On The Margins, focuses on folk music, folklore, and mythology of Nepal's marginalised communities.



The Malaysia-Nepal migrant scam nexus



SDR
STAR DOMAIN RESOURCES SDN. BHD.

Date : 1 SEPTEMBER 2022

MARVELOUS EMPLOYMENT NEPAL PVT. LTD.
NEW BANESHWOR, KATHMANDU, NEPAL
LICENCE NUMBER: 065/051/052

Dear Sir,

RE: DEMAND LETTER FOR RECRUITMENT OF WORKERS FROM NEPAL

Based on the Ministry of Human Resources Approval Reference **KSM/100/2022/004440** Dated 29 August 2022, we hereby appoint your company to recruit 100 workers for employment with our company and liaise with relevant authorities concerning recruitment.

Our recruitment terms and conditions are as follows:

- Number of workers : 100 Workers
- Sector : SERVICES
- Job Description : Cleaning
- Age : 18 - 45 years old
- Contract Period : 2 years
- Wages

Basic monthly wage	: RM 1,500 month (RM57.69/day x 26 days)
a. Allowances	: RMmonth
b. Overtime (OT)	: RMmonth
(Normal day)	: RM1500/ 26 days / 8 hours x 1.5 x 52hours =
RM 562.50)	
(Rest day)	: RM/ 26 days / 8 hours x 2.0 xhours = RM.....)
(Public Holidays)	: RM/ 26 days / 8 hours x 3.0 xhours = RM.....)
Total minimum monthly income	: RM 2062.50/ month
- Working days : 6 days per week
- Working hours : 8 hours per day or 48 hours per week

STAR DOMAIN RESOURCES SDN. BHD. (978538-U)
SO-11-06, MENARA 1, KL ECO CITY, NO.3, JALANA BANGSAR, 59200
KUALA LUMPUR

KEWENANGAN SURUHAN MANUSIA
MINISTRY OF HUMAN RESOURCES
BLOK D3 & D4, KOMPLEKS D
PERSIARAN SULTAN SALAHUDDIN ABDUL AZIZ SHAH
PRESINT 1, 62000 PUTRAJAYA
WILAYAH PERSEKUTUAN PUTRAJAYA

Tel 03-886 9009
Faks 03-886 9009
Laman web www.mohr.gov.my

Rujukan Kami : KSM/100/2022/004440
Tarikh : 29 Ogos 2022

STAR DOMAIN RESOURCES SDN. BHD. 978538-U
BLOK D-3 & D4, LEVEL 11, MENARA ULCANG EMAS
NO. 85, JALAN LOKE YEW

KELULUSAN BERSYARAT PENGAJIAN PEKERJA ASING

Dengan ini disahkan majikan / syarikat seperti diatas telah diluluskan kuota pekerja asing seperti berikut :

This is to certify that the signature
of the Secretary of the Ministry of Human Resources is valid and correct.

Nombor Pendaftaran Majikan : 978538-U
Nama Syarikat : STAR DOMAIN RESOURCES SDN.BHD
Nombor Kuota : KSM/FM/MS/1785000096
Jenis Kuota : NORMAL
Sektor : PERKHIDMATAN
Sub-Sektor : PERKHIDMATAN DAN PEMBERSIHAN
Warganegara : NEGERA-NEGERA SUMBER
Tarikh Kelulusan Kuota : 29 JULAI 2022
Jumlah Kuota Lulus : 980
Tarikh Kuatkuasa : 29 Ogos 2022 SEHINGGA 28 FEBRUARI 2024
Bayaran Levi : RM 1,813,000.00 serai dengan peraturan yang berkaitan.

Mahathir Mohd Yasin
Consular Officer
Consular Division
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Putrajaya Malaysia

12 DEC 2022

(2) Pihak majikan / syarikat dikehendaki mengemukakan permohonan kepada Bahagian Pekerja Asing Ibu Pejabat Jabatan Imigrasi Malaysia (JIM) / Pejabat Imigrasi Negeri secara dalam talian melalui Sistem Foreign Workers (FWCMS) bagi urusan kemasukan pekerja asing.

(3) Tempoh kelulusan kuota yang diberikan adalah selama 18 bulan sahaja dari tarikh surat ini ke tarikh kuaransi tanpa paratijuan. Sebarang kuota yang tidak digunakan dalam tempoh 18 bulan akan terbitai serta merta dan majikan / syarikat dibenarkan untuk membuat tuntutan semula bayaran level di Bahagian Pekerja Asing Ibu Pejabat Jabatan Imigrasi Malaysia (JIM) / Pejabat Imigrasi Negeri.

(4) Majikan / syarikat dan pekerja asing adalah tertakluk kepada dasar dan syarat semasa pengajian pekerja asing di Lampiran A. Sekiranya majikan / syarikat didapati tidak mematuhi dasar dan syarat semasa pengajian pekerja asing, Kementerian Dalam Negeri (KDN) dan Jabatan Imigrasi Malaysia (JIM) berhak menyenarai hitam majikan / syarikat, membatalkan Pas Lawatan Kerja Semanara (PLKS) pekerja asing dan mengahang majikan/ syarikat daripada mengemukakan permohonan kuota atau pelanjutan pas pekerja asing.

Sekian, terima kasih.

"WAWASAN KEMAKMURAN BERSAMA 2030"

"Pembudayaan Norma Baharu dalam Dunia Pekerjaan
Sejagat"
"BERKHIDMAT UNTUK NEGARA"

Saya yang menjalankan amanah,
AINUL RADZIAH BINTI ZAMHURI
Pusukan Petugas Pekerja Asing
Kementerian Sumber Manusia

SALINAN DIKUJI SAH
NORSUZILATI BINTI MOHAMMAD
Pencatat Bilik
Bahagian Pengurusan Pekerja Asing
Kementerian Sumber Manusia

Ramu Sapkota and S Vinothaa in Kuala Lumpur

Rinji Rai, 47, had been in the labour recruitment business for two decades, connecting Nepali workers with employment overseas.

His Marvelous Employment Nepal agency in Kathmandu had partnered with Rose Overseas in Kuala Lumpur to recruit and send 64 workers, who found themselves jobless when they got to Malaysia.

On 7 April, there was commotion at the workers' dormitory in the town of Nilai on the southern outskirts of Kuala Lumpur. They had seen a man hanging in the lavatory.

He was Rinji Rai, and had flown in from Kathmandu only three days earlier to resolve the issue of his stranded Nepali recruits.

Malaysian police ruled out foul play, but Rai's widow Indrasuwa Rai and the Nepal Association of Foreign Employment Agencies believe his death is suspicious and want it investigated.

Rai's death has once more exposed a nexus between labour suppliers in Malaysia and recruiters in Nepal who charge desperate workers exorbitant fees to find them jobs which either do not exist, is not the employment they were promised, or in which the pay is much less than in the contract.

"There is a gang of people who sell demand quotas by showing big dreams to Nepali recruiters like Rinji," said Sujit Kumar Shrestha, former general secretary of the Nepal Association of Foreign Employment Agencies. "Rinji lost his life to them."

Rai's wife Indrasuwa is now left

to raise three children, and believes her husband was murdered. She has photographs and videos of him hanging in the toilet, and says it was staged to look like a suicide.

"It clearly shows that it was not suicide but a murder, possibly by a criminal group," said Indrasuwa, who has appealed to Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal's office.

She says her husband had paid Rs3 million to a Malaysian named 'Ms Yeoh' to secure visas for his recruits, but she allegedly absconded with the cash. Rinji's Malaysia-based brother Sobit Rai tried phoning Yeoh many times, but she refused to take the call.

They finally got to Malaysia, but were left stranded by their Malaysian counterparts. Indrasuwa recalls her husband having a heated phone conversation two months before his death with Malaysian agents and Kuala Lumpur-based Nepali recruiters Shankar Acharya and Mahendra Jang Shah to clear up the issue.

Her brother Dipak confirmed that Rinji had been getting threats from agents, who asked him to fly to Malaysia to settle the matter.

"Just listening to that audio conversation provides clues to the intention of the caller," Dipak said.

Second Secretary Prem Thapa at the Nepal Embassy in Kuala Lumpur says the mission has taken up the matter with Malaysian Police who have said there is no sign of foul play. "The police are taking the case to court, and it will be decided there," he added.

Nepali employers blame the embassy for certifying the recruitment company Star Domain (which brought Rinji Rai to Malaysia) and allowing it to get workers from Nepal even when it was known that it had been

cheating workers before.

In 2021, when the ambassador post was vacant in Kuala Lumpur, the Labour Counsellor Dipak Dhakal had, despite pressure, rejected Star Domain's recruitment application.

After Dhakal returned to Kathmandu in December 2022, the new ambassador Dilli Raj Poudel arrived and certified the recruitment application from Star Domain for 450 workers. The first batch of 300 Nepali workers who reached Malaysia earlier this year were stranded and jobless.

The dorm in Nilai housed stranded Nepali and Bangladeshi workers hoping to be rescued. But Rinji's death proved to them that the labour mafia would go to any lengths to protect their scam.

Malaysian Labour Department officials and consular officers from the Nepal Embassy do not seem to have any answers.

One Nepali worker who had been stranded for three months told Malaysiakini in June: "They just told us to be patient and everything will be all right. The agents in Nepal told us the same thing."

Two months before Rinji Rai's death, a Nepali worker brought in by the labour syndicate died at the dorm, the cause not disclosed.

When migrant workers arrive to find that there are no employers and no jobs, it is a warning that recruiters are scamming them by pocketing their fees.

To obtain Malaysian labour quotas, employers here must prove to the government that they have a legitimate business and a need for the number of workers requested.

However, hundreds of workers are recruited under quotas obtained by using fake documents. Some of these fake permits are also traded,

allowing Malaysian companies to sell the quotas, or rent out trafficked workers.

Just one syndicate involved a group of six companies which obtained quotas to recruit a total of 1,625 migrant workers for Malaysia's services sector, many in cleaning, in 2022. But the companies had collectively applied for 4,000 workers.

In Nepal and Bangladesh, recruitment agents were told cleaners were needed for resorts in Genting Highlands. The prospect of working at the resort town meant many workers paid recruitment agents large sums to get the jobs.

One Nepali worker, Tilak, had once worked in a garment factory in Malaysia and applied to return, hearing that the job would be in Genting Highlands.

"Since I had lived in Malaysia for some time, I knew that work was good at Genting Highlands. We came to Malaysia with that hope," he said.

The first batch of demand letters was sent to Bangladesh and Nepal in August 2022 and workers started arriving from January 2023.

As they processed the workers who arrived, the workers bought warmer clothes for the mountains, but they never got anywhere near Genting Highlands.

Malaysiakini's investigation found that the company Star Domain Resources secured quotas to import 980 workers in 2022 by showing that it had already secured contracts for cleaning services, worth millions of ringgit. However, checks found that the actual contracts do not exist.

Among them was a three-year contract worth RM2.85 million with Monash University Sunway Campus Malaysia Sdn Bhd. When

contacted, Monash said it had no such contract with Star Domain.

Old names

The syndicate also obtained IRB stamping for supposed contracts with fictitious companies, using the older names of companies, false addresses and false company registration numbers.

One company, Zouk Spa, did not exist at the address stated on the contract, and when contacted, its director Ow Kok Soon denied engaging Star Domain for a cleaning deal worth RM7.42 million.

The scam is so blatant that the perpetrators did not even try to hide what they were doing, like a RM2.27 million contract with OSK Trustees Bhd. A fictitious company registration number 00000-X was submitted, while OSK Trustees Bhd was bought over by RHB Trustees Bhd in 2013.

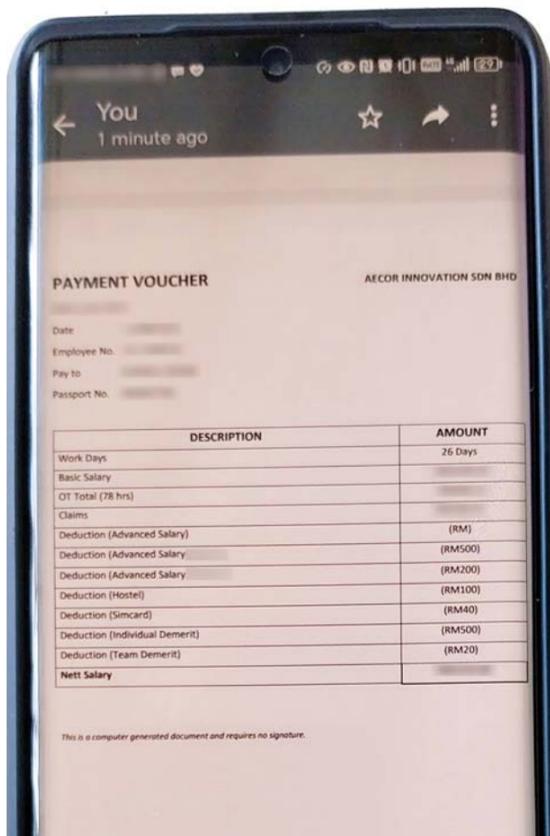
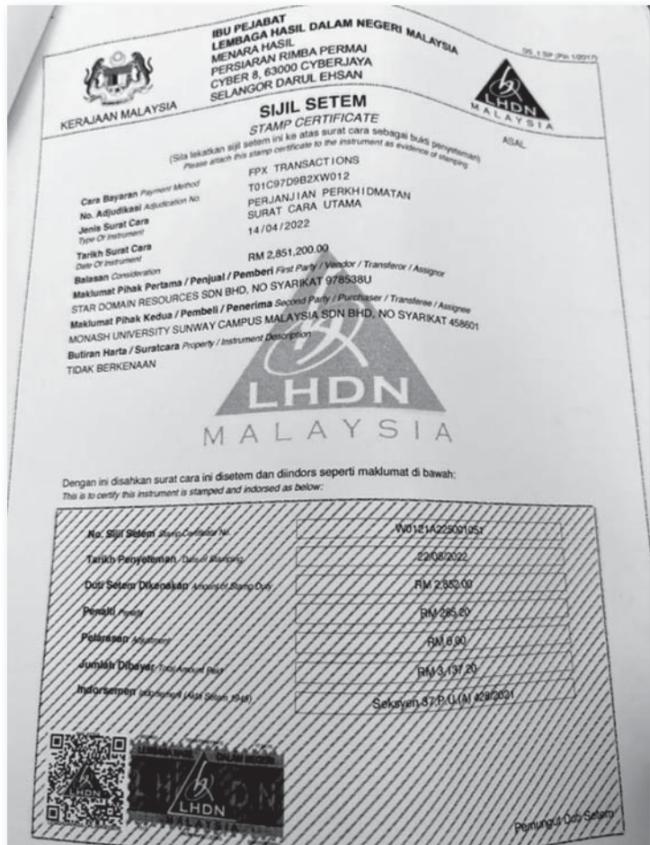
One of the companies, Maju Transport & Express Sdn Bhd, said to have contracted Star Domain Resources for cleaning services, said it had terminated the agreement.

Malaysian employers awarded quotas can reportedly sell them for as much as RM10,000 per head to brokers who sell them on to recruitment agents.

When a quota application is put in, the word is put out among agents, triggering a bidding war to secure the quotas even before the application is approved.

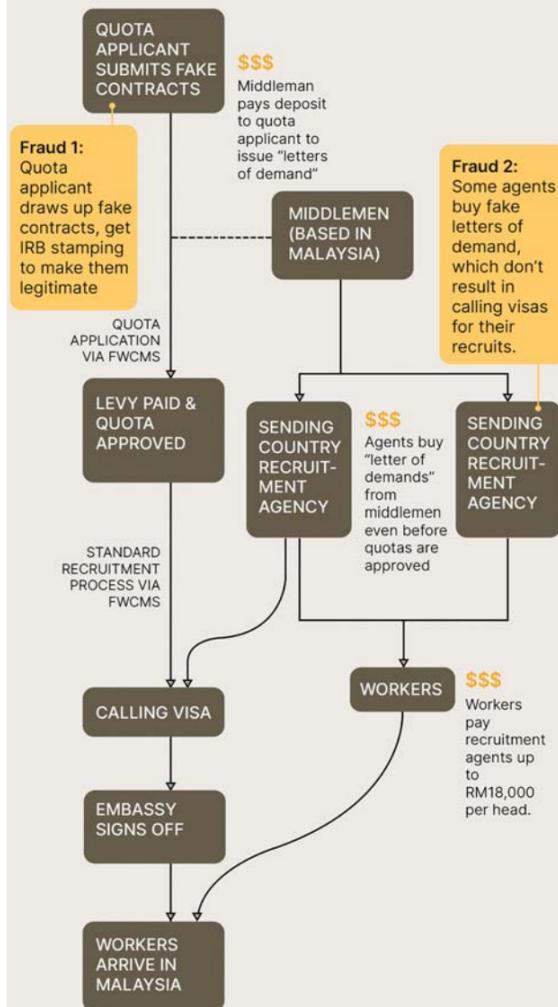
Brokers are said to pay deposits to the quota applicant for 'demand letters' which are then sold to recruitment agents in sending countries like Nepal and Bangladesh, even before the quota is approved.

Star Domain was awarded a quota of 980 workers but is



How the migrant worker import pathway is exploited

Quotas are applied using fake contracts, and even before the application is approved, they are bought and sold at multiple levels.



Source: Malaysiakini interviews with whistleblower and industry insiders and review of leaked documentation from allegedly fraudulent companies.

Note: FWCMS refers to the government's Foreign Worker Central Management System which manages all migrant worker quota applications.

malaysiakini

alleged to have sold demand letters for more than 3,000 workers to recruitment agents in sending countries, according to documents sighted by Malaysiakini.

To convince the recruitment agents that the demand was real, the syndicate held job interviews with the prospective workers via Zoom, ordered cleaning services uniforms for them, and used a bespoke worker management IT system which the agents uploaded information into.

But insiders told Malaysiakini the agents and migrant workers were not the only ones duped.

The company's Malaysian staff who conducted the interviews with migrant workers also were not aware that it was a con.

Kicking the cost down to the worker

Agents in sending countries usually pay a fee to the middle persons, which they later recoup from the workers who pay a recruitment fee via brokers to secure the jobs in Malaysia.

To afford this, workers in Nepal take multiple high-interest loans, believing they could recoup that from the non-existent high-paying positions promised to them.

If the agency agrees to buy the quota from an employer at RM10,000 per worker, the rate they charge workers will be twice that amount, plus an additional RM3,000 to compensate agents in the villages, industry sources told Malaysiakini.

The original quota bearers, however, receive a one-off payment from the brokers, often in a duffle bag full of cash. When the workers arrive, they become cash cows to be rented out to other companies.

Quota prices can also change

according to country of origin as Bangladesh agents are able to extort more from their nationals, it is learnt.

Workers told Malaysiakini they are required to pay in cash and do not get receipts as proof of payment. If they raise questions, agents threaten to return their money and not arrange their passage. Convinced of promises of potential high earnings in Malaysia, many desperate workers comply.

Labour outsourcing was outlawed in 2018, making it illegal for recruiting agencies to hire migrant workers under their name and deploy them to work elsewhere. The construction sector is exempted from this rule, but those found guilty of outsourcing in other sectors face hefty fines and, or imprisonment.

In recent years, however, cleaning services offer a loophole, making it the preferred camouflage for traffickers supplying workers.

Employers providing cleaning contracts are allowed to station their workers at a client's premises as their cleaning staff for a contracted period.

But when they are at the client's premises, they may also be tasked to do other jobs, like waiting tables or kitchen duties or joining the assembly line at factories. This means once the workers are in Malaysia, they can be supplied to other companies without technically breaking the law.

From late January to March, 166 workers arrived on a quota awarded to Aecor Innovation, one of the six companies in the syndicate. There were no jobs for them.

Twenty lucky ones were put to

TRANSBORDER ROT:

(left to right, above) Rinji Rai, a Nepali labour recruiter who was found hanging in a dorm in Malaysia in April under suspicious circumstances.

Most Nepalis were lured to Malaysia with promises of service sector jobs in Genting Highlands.

Nepali workers lodging a complaint at the Putrajaya Labour Tribunal.

Nepali and Bangladeshi workers gather to protest being stranded by recruiters at their dorm in Nilai.

Nepali workers distribute onions for their daily meals.

(Below, left to right) Contract paper with Star Domain, documents with stamps of the Malaysian Internal Revenue Department and payment vouchers.

Workflow of the scam (right).

work as cleaners in February. The others started work in June. Just as things started to look up, in July, they stopped receiving their salary. They got nothing until September.

Even when they were paid, there were major deductions from their salaries for things like lodging, phone SIM cards and 'advances' - against labour regulations and their employment contract.

Their contract promised free lodging but the workers were charged RM100 each and crammed into a room of 10.

Their payslips did now show social security payments (Socso) were made, but that deductions were done for 'demerits'.

"The slightest mistake is a demerit. I took my phone out of my pocket to look at the time, the supervisor took a photo and RM200 is demerited from my salary," said one Bangladeshi worker.

Workers' wages were also deducted for "assistance" they received, when they were stranded and jobless, following the Human

Resources Ministry's interventions.

Apart from the RM500 advance they got in September, the workers were hungry and on the verge of tears for having to ask families to send them money just to survive.

The workers stopped work en masse at the end of September, even in the face of alleged threats from Aecor Innovation that their work visas would be cancelled and they would be sent home immediately, they told Malaysiakini.

On 2 October, the workers lodged a police report against Aecor for alleging non-payment of wages and threats by the employer toward those who inquired about their months-overdue wages.

The workers claimed that the employer had even threatened to cancel their work visas and have them arrested and detained.

They also submitted a complaint to the Putrajaya Labour Department, pleading to be rescued from "hostage life", seeking intervention to secure a new employer and demanding their back wages and

reimbursement of recruitment fees of 450,000 to 500,000 Bangladeshi Taka (RM19,00 to RM21,000).

Despite their collective action, they remained anxious because being sent home before they could raise enough funds to repay their debts could have consequences as dire as death.

"If I have to return now, I will either murder my family and kill myself or be killed by those from whom I have borrowed," said one worker. "The only choice I have is how I will die."

Malaysiakini sent questions to all the Malaysian companies mentioned in this report, seeking a response. None have replied at the time of publication.

The Immigration Department and Labour Department had also not responded to Malaysiakini's queries till press time.

Names of some workers have been changed.

This article was a joint reportage by Malaysiakini and the Centre for Investigative Journalism, Nepal.



Ex-soldier dives into business and politics

Diving champion, hotelier, politician, climate activist and grandfather, Captain Poon is back on Poon Hill

■ Aisha MacDougall in Kaski

Nepali soldiers in the British or Indian armies are renowned for their valour on the battlefield, but Dam Bahadur Pun's claim to fame is being a gold-medalist springboard diver.

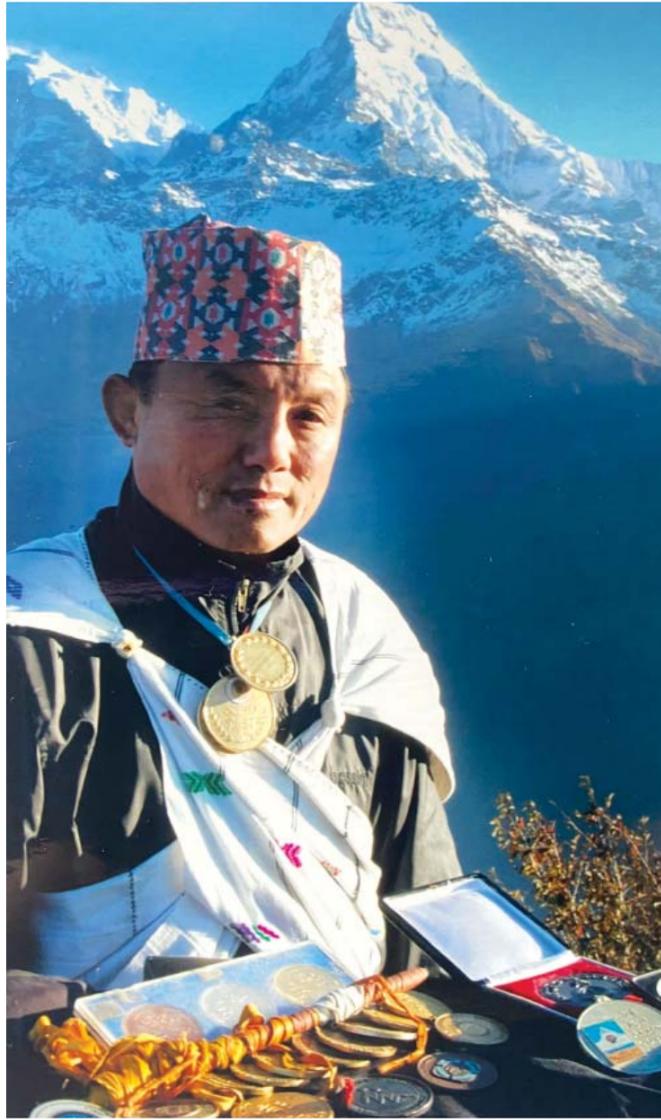
For a Nepali soldier from the highlands of a landlocked country, it was unusual for Pun to take to swimming. But he took to diving like a fish to water.

As a young cadet taking compulsory swimming lessons at the Indian Military Academy (IMA) in Dehradun, he became an expert and passionate diver.

Now retired at 65, 'Captain Poon' is an ex-soldier from the Indian Army's Gorkha unit, a grandfather, a politician, a climate activist and owner of The Sunny Hotel Teahouse in Ghorepani. Born in Khilang where most young men aspired to be in the military, he travelled to India at age 14.

Later, as a recruit in the engineering regiment at the IMA, he was required to swim. Despite never having swum before, Pun not only mastered freestyle but also excelled in diving. Talent spotters from the Indian national swimming team took notice, and he won his first medal at the Indian National Diving Championships in Jaipur.

For the next five years, Pun won one tournament after another, collecting an impressive number of gold medals (right). He even participated in the 11th Commonwealth Games in



Canada in 1978 as part of the Indian team, being the only known Nepali to have ever done so. He came 11th in the diving event.

"I still remember being incredibly nervous at the Commonwealth Games, despite having competed in many tournaments," recalls Pun. "But my pride and my guts urged me on."

In 1982, he participated in the Asian Games in Delhi, and improved his ranking to 5th, becoming the Indian national record holder in diving. He went on to take part in the diving event at the 1986 Asian Games in Seoul.

Pun became the national coach for the Indian Swimming Federation and a Senior Coach in the Indian Army. He finally returned to his native Nepal on retirement, and opened his lodge in the scenic trekking hub of Ghorepani.

"We started small but over time we put in continuous effort to expand the hotel, our business grew and so did the local economy," says Pun, who is called 'Captain Poon' because his hotel is located just below Poon Hill. The entire area started attracting more tourists and prospered after he established The Sunny Hotel Teahouse here, becoming a local hero in the process.

Before the advent of mobile phones, Pun helped the isolated hilltop with connectivity by building a telecommunication mast so locals could get phone signals without having to trek for hours to make calls. During the insurgency, Pun mediated between the Royal

Nepal Army and the Maoists to ensure that the NTC tower on the mountaintop would not be harmed in fighting.

After the 2006 Comprehensive Peace Accord, he got into politics, and was elected chair of Annapurna Rural Municipality in the 2017 election. Throughout his five-year tenure, he did not take his salary, donating it instead to women's charities and schools in the area.

Captain Poon has now set his sights on national politics. If elected, he wants to create a new trekking route to Dhaulagiri Base Camp, avoiding new motorable roads through unexplored villages, thus generating local jobs and lifting livelihoods.

Pun is also a committed environmental activist and feels concerned about the impact of the climate crisis on the Himalaya. "The limitations of on-going conservation efforts are readily apparent, and that is very worrying," he says. "We need immediate action to protect and conserve Nepal's vulnerable landscape."

Despite forays into the military, sports, business and politics, Captain Poon has no plans to slow down and is always on the lookout for the next adventure. One thing that would take him full circle would be to get back to diving.

Says Pun: "I want to build a diving school in Pokhara one day. The sport has great potential here, and we can raise a generation of talented Nepali divers." 🇳🇵

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