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ASHIM SHAKYA

Migration Nation

This special year-end migration edition of Nepali Times contains the 49th and 50th episodes of Diaspora Diaries, the series on the struggles and successes of Nepalis working abroad. Also inside: an exposé on Nepali IT workers held captive in illicit call centres in Burma, and an update on the 7 Nepalis

fighting for the Russian Army killed in action on the Ukraine front. More than 15% of Nepal's population (mostly men in the 20-40 age group) are abroad, and besides propping up the national economy with cash they remit, migration now affects almost all Nepali families in both positive and negative ways. 🇳🇵

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Nepalis flee Burma PAGE 4-5

7 KIA, 4 POW PAGE 9

A Nepali on the move PAGE 10

Work is work PAGE 10-11

DESTINATION

After more than a decade of expression through traditional and digital artforms, Ashim Shakya experimented with AI for the first time and created this graphic he titled गन्तव्य (Destination). Part of the image was generated through AI and manually stitched carefully to form this symbolic work (above) that conveys the state of the country and intergenerational outmigration, forcing us to think about the nation's future in 2024 and beyond.

Shakya's other digital art manipulates and grafts images, blending photography to highlight loss of heritage, the climate crisis, environmental ruin and urbanisation. He says: "With this image, I was trying to convey the positive side of AI assistance to form this expressive artwork."



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50 Diaspora Diaries

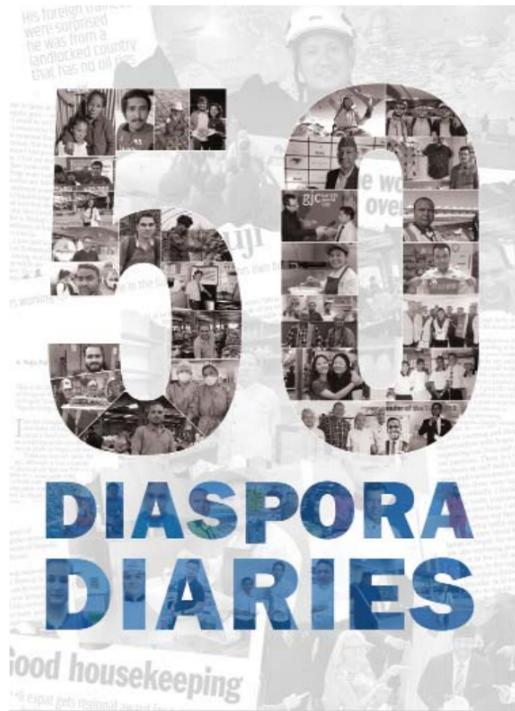
The Diaspora Diaries series in Nepali Times was produced jointly with Migration Lab. It started with a simple mission: to bring out the human side of migration, and how it touches the lives of Nepalis in both positive and negative ways.

On International Migrants Day 18 December, we marked the 50th episode in the series which contains profiles of Nepalis on the move.

The physical act of moving is more prominent in our public narrative, for example at Kathmandu airport. But it is really about the desire of migrants and their families for better lives, to move away from the cycle of poverty they are born into.

Migration offers a possibility to change their circumstances, and of their children. It did not matter where the workers in these stories are headed, as long as it offered a possibility for a better future. Many had not even heard of the countries they were going to, like Kuwait or UAE.

Migration is often in the family. A Kuwait-based son of a Saudi returnee said, "When my father turned 50, I decided it was time to bring him back from Saudi Arabia."



His father was a gardener, his son a security guard in Kuwait. It took intergenerational migration to break the family out of intergenerational poverty.

Migrants in this series have struggled and worked hard to be promoted to managerial positions. A Burger King employee studied restaurant manuals like a textbook before rising to become a manager.

For workers without the educational or language skills who dropped out of schools or learnt English, the awards and promotions they received helped break out of self-limiting beliefs that are common in a foreign land.

All this also had positive spillover effects for fellow migrants. Nepalis are increasingly occupying positions traditionally reserved for other nationalities, especially in hospitality.

But not everyone is better off because of foreign employment, as we know far too well. Abuse is rampant. People continue to pay to work and in many cases do not get paid in full for their work. Diaspora Diaries also captures stories of dreams interrupted and of foreign employment not just being another life's reality that failed them, but made them worse off.

A domestic worker rescued from Lebanon said, "The thought that I had nothing to show for 12 years of work eats me up every waking moment of every day." More recently, students caught in the Hamas attack in Israel are still mourning the loss of their friends who died in front of their eyes, and still looking and waiting for their friend Bipin Joshi, taken hostage.

For many workers, who came back without much savings have the hope that the returns of their investment will come through their children's secure future, or lives of parents extended who are healthier.

Overseas work is also about nostalgia for simpler times. The thrill of rushing to the mailman or supervisors who came to

camp with sacks of letters are their favorite memories.

"My father and I got closer through our letters," one migrant said, while a mother said she heard her son's voice for the first time after two years on the phone. A worker recalls, "We ran out of coins before we ran out of words to say."

Diaspora Diaries are also stories of firsts. Of the 70 year old mother who went to visit her two sons in the UAE, the first time she had left the country or got on a plane. And first time feeling the searing heat: "The hot blast enveloped me when the airport door slid open in Dubai", or "the overpowering heat on the tarmac in Riyadh".

Foreign employment is also about missed milestones all too common in transnational families. Neither of two brothers who lost their mother could be in Nepal for her last rites.

An Israel-based mother who managed to educate and send her sons to Canada and the US asks: "How do you weigh that against not knowing what it is like to watch your children grow up?"

For others, the tradeoff meant being able to save their relatives' lives. One worker could afford cancer treatment for his wife, while another used up all his earnings for his sister's medical treatment and asks, "What more could a brother ask for?"

Nepali migrants helped the rapid transformation of the Gulf. They remember the vast expanses of sand when they first arrived, and

On International Migrants Day, we marked 50 profiles of Nepali overseas migrant workers in our series Diaspora Diaries.

left cities with high rises and hosts of international events.

Migrants recount how poems and letters have been written at labour camps, construction sites, guard booths.

Workers are employed in places where free expression is suppressed. One worker who returned prematurely after a failed migration experience inspired us to start this series with his first Diary. He says, "They want the quiet ones."

Workers also say the Nepal government itself is suppressing their voices by not letting overseas workers vote: "Our notes count but our votes don't."

The temporariness of "temporary labour migration" is also blurred when workers stay on for decades. One Nepali who worked in Dubai for 30 years writes, "I used to be sad leaving Nepal after a vacation, but later started feeling like I was coming home when I landed in Dubai. I cannot pinpoint when that switch happened."

Eventually, though, many do come back. In the series we feature stories of returnees who have started businesses in Nepal. Foreign employment had a role through social and financial remittances. The Diaspora Diary of a Malaysia returnee who runs a garment factory has been translated into 7 languages.

Others share that their skills were wasted back home and they struggle to find a footing, especially after being away for so long. A camel herder who knows everything camel, finds no use for his skills in Nepal.

Migrant workers shared their stories without thinking they had anything interesting to share. As one noted, "I do not think my story is that remarkable. I am a simple Nepali who worked hard and made sacrifices."

But that is precisely why these are such powerful stories.

All 50 stories are in an e-book that is available online. The profiles can also be read by entering 'Diaspora Diaries' on site search in www.nepalitimes.com

Go to our YouTube Channel to watch a video summary of the series produced by Nepali Times and Migration Lab.

ONLINE PACKAGES



Chinese organised crime groups are luring Nepalis with jobs in call centres in Burma which are involved in internet financial fraud and online scams. Escaped workers say they were physically tortured and handcuffed. Read the story on page 4-5 and watch the video of testimonies on our YouTube channel.



Diaspora Diaries started with a mission to bring out the human side of migration, and how it touches nearly all Nepali families in both positive and negative ways. Nepali Times and Migration Lab chronicle their journeys of struggle and success. Watch the video and subscribe to our YouTube channel for more original content. Also, read the latest in the series on page 10-11.

DIASPORA DIARIES

If you just go to the weekly Le Sherpa farmers market, you will find stalls full of stories like Sundar Bikram Sangali's ('No work is big or small, work is work', Sundar Bikram Sangali, page 10-11). Farmers are growing fine products out of their fields to sell at premium prices. Why isn't anyone in power supporting them?

Jigs Gaton

20 YEARS AGO

The primary problem in Nepal relates to external affairs, while the secondary problem is internal ('Divide and Ruin', 20 Years Ago This Week, #1190). This suggests that the current leaders lack the necessary expertise in handling external affairs effectively.

Okil Ghale

NEPALI HISTORY

Mukam Ranamaidan is a fascinating first-hand commentary and analysis from those involved in the Anglo-Nepal war ('Letters from the Western Front', Alisha Sijapati, #1190).

David Seddon

YEAR OF SCANDALS

I bet 2023 was a year of scandal, but then which year wasn't? ('The Year of Scandals', Shristi Karki, #1190)? Mark my words, many more skeletons will tumble out of the closet in 2024.

Anil Shrestha

MATERNAL HEALTH

I personally loved this detailed reporting about Nepal's misoprostol program and encourage everyone to read this story ('Remove barriers to life-saving drug to prevent maternal deaths', Marty Logan, #1190).

Tanka Dahal

FEMALE ELECTRIC WORKER

Dhak Kumari Poudel is a star maintaining transmission towers (High wire act, Anita Bhetwal, nepalitimes.com).

Renate Schwarz

NEW UNIVERSITY

Thanks for bringing these stories of hope to the fore ('University for a new Nepal', Kunda Dixit, #1190). Much needed today to inspire positivity.

Pukar Malla

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING

Kathmandu before 1934

by Susan Harris
The Joseph Gaye collection at the British Library contains 91 glass negatives, five cellulose negatives and 32 albumen prints, primarily of the Kathmandu Valley before the Great Earthquake of 1934, providing a unique insight of a time when few foreigners were allowed into Nepal. All photos on the website.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Life-saving drug prevents maternal deaths

by Marty Logan
Nepal's ambitious misoprostol program launched in the mid-2000 to protect women who give birth at home has faced opposition, resistance, neglect and shortages. Read this investigative report online and join the discussion.

Most popular on X



Go Gokyo

by Alisha MacDougall
As the winter off-season begins, the pristine beauty of the Gokyo trek is even more apparent because of the absence of crowds. But there is also an absence of ice and snow. Visit nepalitimes.com for exclusive photo feature.

Most commented

Letters from the Western Front

by Alisha Sijapati
While the English account of the Anglo-Nepal war is well-documented, Nepalis have so far largely relied on oral history. In Mukam Ranamaidan, author Mohan Mainali has unearthed unpublished letters written more than 200 years ago, shedding light on the war. Full review online.

Most visited online page

QUOTES

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Just as the winter off-season begins, the pristine beauty of the Gokyo trek is even more apparent because of the absence of crowds. But there is also another absence: of ice and snow. An exclusive photo feature by Alisha MacDougall:

Nepal Economic Forum @NEFNepal
A beautiful read with the majestic views of Gokyo, with lines drawn in interest with climate change. #NEF2023 #climate #Nepal @NepaliTimes @HFF_2023_24

Sharyn Perry @SharynPerry
Heading there in March 2024.

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
After it took TikTok by storm last year as a selfie spot, The Cliff in Kushma has become a go-to destination for adventure sports. Behind The Cliff | @SoniaAwale

Sujeev Shakya @sujeevshakya
Great example of not having the government needing to do things, even if they just don't create impediments, private sector would flourish. Great story @SoniaAwale

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RATNA SHRESTHA / RSS

GREAT MINDS:
Kathmandu Mayor Balen Shah addresses the 29th Metropolitan Day on 15 December at Tudikhel while Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal looks on.



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TURKISH AIRLINES

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BURMA DAYS: The Gurkha Defence Force is made up of Burmese-Nepalis fighting the Burmese military.



Johnny Adhikary, a Burmese of Nepali descent has never visited Nepal, but is helping Nepalis who have fled to Thailand.

many fled Burma and in 1995 even opened a liaison office for the imprisoned Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy in Kathmandu.

Suu Kyi herself wrote a book about Nepal and has close connections to a Buddhist monastery in Kathmandu.

Thousands of other Burmese Nepalis who fled to Thailand in 1964 and they and their descendants have been there ever since. The Burmese military has historically supported China for geopolitical reasons, and the two countries share a 1,300km border. Chiang Mai's own location close to the Burma border makes it a strategically important listening post, which is why the Americans, British, Chinese and Indians all have consulates here.

Mae Sot is the Thai town on the border, with Myawaddy on the Burmese side. Beyond is the war zone, and also where Nepali-origin Burmese and 'cyber slaves' are trapped. The Nepal Embassy in Bangkok may need to open a liaison office in Mae Sot but suffers from a lack of resources and personnel.

It is not just in Burma that Nepali IT personnel are held captive by the Chinese mafia, there are reports of them also in call centres in Laos and Cambodia. Six of them have been rescued from Cambodia and one from Laos, but others remain.

The Nepali diaspora is now spread so far and wide that wherever there is a conflict in the world, be it Russia, Ukraine or Israel, there are Nepalis caught up in it. Nepal's government and foreign ministry must keep a better record of where its nationals are, and in case they are in war zones, must have contingency plans for their rescue in an emergency.

In the case of Burma, it is not just Nepali call centre workers who need to be rescued, but Nepal also needs to support the democratic aspirations of Burmese people and those of Nepali origin. 🇳🇵

Chandra Kishore is a Birganj-based commentator who writes this monthly column Borderlines for Nepali Times. @kishore_chandra

Burmese of Nepali descent flee to Thailand

Trapped Nepali workers and Burmese Nepalis escape the junta to Thailand, but many remain behind

It is when travelling beyond our borders that we Nepalis realise how much we take for granted the political and media freedoms we enjoy here. A recent trip to northern Thailand offered an opportunity to hear from Burmese exiles about their country's tragic descent into conflict.



BORDERLINES
Chandra Kishore

Johnny Adhikary is a Nepali-Burmese social activist who has been helping fellow Burmese of Nepali origin as well as Nepali tech workers trapped inside Burma.

Adhikary has never been to Nepal, the land of his ancestors. He is among 300,000 Burmese Nepalis, and is in self-exile because of suppression by the military junta which staged a coup in 2021.

In the past month, the Burmese Army has been losing ground to ethno-separatists, having to retreat from the only two checkpoints on the Burma-China border.

Adhikary has also been involved in the rescue of Nepali 'cyber slaves' who were trafficked by Chinese organised crime groups

luring them with high-paying IT jobs. The Chinese owned call centres in Burma are involved in internet financial fraud and online scams, and are known to physically torture workers and hold them captive without pay (box).

After a crackdown in China, the mafia moved to Burma, Laos and Cambodia, recruiting workers from Malaysia, Thailand, India and Nepal. The Nepal Embassy in Bangkok says 25 Nepalis have so far been rescued. This week it rescued two more Nepali IT workers who had fled to Thailand.

The Burmese of Nepali ancestry, on the other hand, have been living in the country since the first wave arrived here during British rule. Others are descendants of Gurkha soldiers in the British Army who stayed behind after fighting the Japanese at the end of World War II.

Most Burmese Nepali have preserved their language and culture, however the younger generation has assimilated into mainstream Burmese society. Some Nepali families returned to Nepal in phases over the past decades, including when people of Indian origin were driven out.

Thailand has been the country of refuge for both Burmese pro-democracy fighters, dissidents,

journalists and Burmese-Nepalis.

Unlike the Nepal-India open border, the Thai-Burma frontier is heavily monitored by the Burmese military and it is not easy to cross over. "We left Nepal, and now Burma. Does this mean we have also lost our right to be citizens?" asked one Nepali Burmese in Chiangmai. "We are stateless refugees, which is our country?"

Although the Nepali-speaking population in Burma has largely kept out of politics, it is affected by the pro-democracy movement as well as the crackdown by the junta. They have formed the Gurkha Defence Force to fight the government.

One Nepali-speaking descendant of a Gurkha soldier who is a commander in the force was visiting Chiang Mai clandestinely, and told me: "We are fighting with fellow Burmese for democracy and end to military rule, we hope this is the last time we will have to take up arms."

Like other Nepali-Burmese, he wants the land of his ancestors to galvanise international support for the pro-democracy cause in Burma. He says Kathmandu could help by providing travel documents for Nepali-origin exiles in Thailand. Nepali soldiers in the British

Army were instrumental in the defeat of the Japanese in the Burma front in 1943-44. In fact, the Japanese were so impressed with the bravery of the Gurkhas that they even recruited some Nepali Burmese into their own military to fight against the British, and in effect against fellow-Nepalis.

Nepal and Burma have a shared history of democratic struggle. Burma's freedom fighter and first leader Gen Aung San and Nepal's first elected prime minister B P Koirala both fought for freedom in their countries the 1950s and 60s. Aung San designated the mountainous Kachin State as the homeland for Nepali Burmese.

But after Gen Ne Win seized power in 1962, more than 200,000 Nepali-speakers were evicted and settled down in Mizoram, Nagaland in India and in Nepal. The Nepali refugees from Burma were mostly settled along the Tarai by King Mahendra, who had a strategic campaign for the transmigration of mountain people to the plains bordering India. Many Tarai town have neighbourhoods that are still called 'Burma Tole'.

Although the Burmese refer to Nepalis as Gurkhas, not all families are descendants of soldiers. After the 1988 uprising,

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Turkish to Osaka

Turkish Airlines recently started flights between Istanbul and Osaka. Its Boeing 787-9 aircraft fly the route Mondays, Tuesdays, Fridays, and Sundays. Turkish Airlines Chair Ahmet Bolat expressed enthusiasm about this latest addition to the carrier's global network.



Best in Europe

The BYD Dolphin has been voted Best Buy Car of Europe 2024 by AUTOBEST. The car was tested at Teesdorf circuit in Austria where it beat three other finalists to secure the award. It was recognised for a spacious interior, compact design, safety features, and innovative Blade Battery technology.

Aristocratic peg

Nepal Distilleries recently introduced Aristocrat, a 40UP premium liquor brand. Inspired by Scottish brewing methods, this drink combines Nepali grain spirit and Scottish malt to create a light golden libation with subtle vanilla and oak notes.

NMB airport ATM

NMB Bank has deployed new ATMs at Kathmandu and Pokhara airports as part of its nationwide expansion. The bank provides services through 201 branches, 166 ATMs and 12 extension counters.



Korea support

The Government of the Republic of Korea has pledged a contribution of \$300,000 to support earthquake relief efforts in West Nepal. The funds will be channeled through the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Korean Ambassador Taeyoung Park, stated that the pledge to help the earthquake's most vulnerable victims is consistent with Korea's long-standing connection with Nepal. The two countries will mark the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations in 2024.

British Council

The British Council has announced the winners of the 2023 IELTS Prize, an annual competition aiding test-takers with grants of up to £5,000 (Rs840,000)



towards their university tuition fees in English-speaking institutions worldwide. Riju Adhikari won the grand prize of £5,000, Ujwal Bhetwal got the second prize worth £2,000 and Rishika received £1,000.



Soaltee Christmas

The Soaltee Kathmandu held its Sustainable Christmas tree lighting ceremony on 15 December, symbolising a commitment to eco-friendly practices and a plastic-free celebration. Guests included corporate houses, embassies, travel sector, in-house guests and management staff of the Hotel.



Ncell Telemedicine

Ncell's Telemedicine and Health Informatics Programme, in collaboration with Dhulikhel Hospital, has been replicated in other hospitals and health centers by the Bagmati Province Government. Launched in 2019, the initiative has impacted over 80,000 individuals across 15,000 households, providing accessible healthcare services to communities in Sindhupalchok, Solukhumbu, Nuwakot and Kavre.

“Please rescue us”

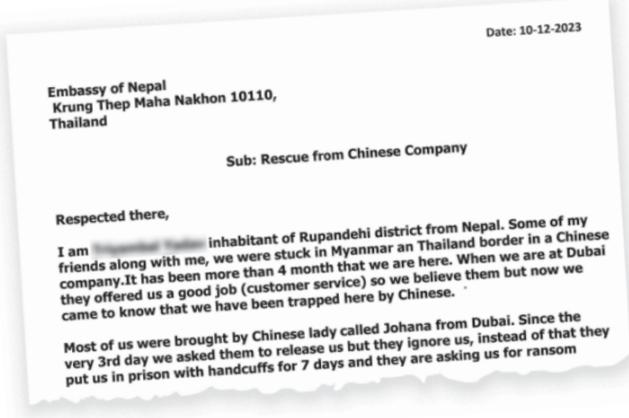
A Nepali from Rupendehi has written a letter to the Nepal Embassy in Bangkok asking that he and 11 other Nepalis be rescued from the Thai-Burma border where they are held captive for the past four months by a Chinese call centre.

Most of the Nepalis were recruited in Dubai by a Chinese woman identified as Ms Johana and promised a customer service job in an IT company. However, they were beaten and made to work without pay in an internet scam.

‘We asked to be released but they ignore us, instead they put us in prison and handcuffed us for 7 days and they are asking us for ransom money to release us,’ says the letter signed by a Nepali whose name we are not disclosing for his safety. “if it goes on like this we will take our life one day.”

The letter also accuses Chinese organised criminals of applying electric shocks. The letter includes names of other Nepalis from Lamjung, Kathmandu, Makwanpur, Jhapa, Arghakhanchi.

Two Nepali call centre workers (pictured right) who managed to escape by paying \$10,000 each ransom money to the Chinese are in Chiang Mai, and the Nepal Embassy is trying to fly them to Kathmandu this week.



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The Karjahi Movement

Long forgotten stories of the Tharu women of Dang who fought for, and won, land rights 44 years ago

■ Nisha Rai in Dang



Premkali Chaudhary



Sitakumari Chaudhary



Ashma Chaudhary



Keula Chaudhary



The mustard fields along the road were in riotous golden bloom as we sped past on a motorcycle to the village of Karjahi in Dang district. It was a crisp autumn afternoon six years ago, and I was riding pillion behind Laudhan Chaudhary with the wind in my face.

I was researching the history of feminism in Nepal for the Feminist Memory Project of Nepal Picture Library when I first came across the Karjahi Movement, a struggle for land rights led by Tharu women of this valley in the Inner Tarai of western Nepal.

Laudhan had driven all the way down to Ghorahi to pick me up, and we finally pulled up in the densely-packed Tharu settlement of Karjahi. A 15-year-old girl was bathing at a public tap. She was completely at ease with herself in a thin, water-soaked petticoat tied around her waist, her hands folded over her breasts.

Nearby, a group of teenage boys were boisterously playing cards. Off to one side, a young man was engrossed in a book. He was Laudhan's eldest son, preparing for his overseer exam.

Laudhan left his bike in the yard of his small red mud plastered house with cow dung patties drying along the walls. As soon as she saw that a guest had arrived, Laudhan's wife Ashma got busy in the kitchen.

Ashma is a familiar name among the women of Karjahi. She was nearly nominated to be a member of the federal parliament in Kathmandu.

"Her name was proposed, but she wasn't nominated by the party," another woman helping in the

kitchen explained, slicing okra with a dull, patinaed chulesi.

Laudhan and Ashma had invited to their home other women involved in the Karjahi Movement for land rights to talk about their struggle back in 1980.

Patharkali

Tharu peasants in Dang were up in arms against zamindar landowners at the time. Leading the women was Patharkali Chaudhary, and there she was 44 years later, clad in a blue sari, sitting on a stool recalling the evening that a dozen policemen came to arrest her.

"I got up from my bed," she said, leaping up from her stool to demonstrate. She shouted at the police, "Get out of my way, if you are real men" and rushed into her niece Ashma's room.

The police did not dare enter, but shouted from the courtyard: "Open the door, or we're going to shoot." Patharkali and her niece were also best friends, and they refused to be intimidated. Instead, she shouted back, "Hey you government dogs, shoot this poor woman in the chest if you dare. Otherwise drop your guns now."

Patharkali picked up a heavy stick and told Ashma to set their two enormous dogs, Nangi and Uduwa, on the police. The snarling dogs ran outside, barking and chased away the police and landowners from the courtyard. Patharkali swung her stick, hitting two nearest policemen and breaking the finger of one of them who had destroyed her plough.

"It was at that time that the police gave me the nickname Indira

Gandhi because I was supposed to be as fearless as the Indian prime minister," Patharkali recalls, smiling. "Imagine how much braver I would have been if I had studied more. I would have put those thieves in their right place."

Dozens of police came to the house every day for the next week, and every time, Patharkali chased them away. She had not eaten for several days, but nothing could weaken her resolve.

However, police arrested Patharkali's brother, Thaggu Chaudhary, and she remembers going to the station in Fachakpur to visit him in jail every week. The policeman whom she had beaten, were overheard telling the others: "That's Indira Gandhi. Let her in."

Even though the police all used her nickname, Patharkali herself did not even know at the time who Indira Gandhi was.

"I would threaten to stab and kill them for breaking our plough, no wonder they gave me that name," she says. "We fought for our rights, and because we fought we got our land back."

Ashma

Patharkali's niece Ashma remembers that at first the Tharu peasants were afraid of the zamindar who owned the land they tilled.

The Tharu worked in the fields all year as sharecroppers but after giving away the harvest there was not enough to feed their families. The farmers knew the importance of land, and valued the soil that gave them sustenance.

During the Karjahi Movement,

Tharu women including Patharkali and Ashma took part in a protest march to Bijauri, 29km away from where the zamindar families lived.

Clashes between police and Tharu farmers continued for weeks in Karjahi. The police would come at night and ransack their homes, fling cooked food into the courtyard and steal the best utensils.

In one raid, police arrested Ashma's uncle Premal Chaudhary and her brother Ram Prasad Chaudhary. The next day, Ashma went to the police station in Sukuwari village and shouted, "Why did you arrest my elderly uncle who is living his last days?"

The zamindar would call policemen 'sir', but Ashma had the audacity to shout curses at them. She smiles as she recalls her boldness.

"Premal Uncle and Ramprasad Bhai were handcuffed in the police station," says Ashma, recalling how the women including Patharkali, Keula, Shanti, Shyamkala, Suskala and Lakshmi (pictured) all yelled at the policemen: "Will you let our people go or will you fight us?"

And for good measure, Ashma shouted: "Release my uncle or I will come in and kill you with my bare hands."

The next day there was mediation between the women of Karjahi with the Chief District Officer (CDO) of Dang. The police admitted to stealing household items and food from the Tharu homes. Ashma complained that he had been arrested without a warrant and beaten up. The police were finally found to have been at fault. The officers apologised and agreed to release their relatives.





Nanachi

Nanachi could tell if someone was from a Pahadi hill caste just by smelling them. Or, to be more exact, not smelling them.

“We who plough the soil and grow crops, we smell of sweat,” Nanachi explains. “Our bodies all have that odour. Those who do not work on the land do not smell. And those of us who till the soil can also shed blood for our land.”

Netralal Paudyal, a Communist leader from Dang, used to tell the farmers of the village to rise up against feudalism. This also inspired the women of Karjahi to fight injustice. But the landowners and the state apparatus were too powerful and some had started losing hope.

So, Nanachi started writing and singing songs to build solidarity and give the struggle a boost. Keula Chaudhary played the madal, Indira Chaudhary danced. They sang as they guarded the village from sentry posts for months. The song they sang was:

कहा रे उठी जागी किसान दाजु भाइ
जबसम्म रहल दि सामन्तीले दुख दिइ
उठ जनता उठ जिमिन्दार के विरोध गर्न उठ

Where did you stand up, farmer brothers,
When they started giving you pain?
Rise up, people, resist the landlords.

Nirmala, Sita Kumari, Keula

Nirmala Chaudhary still remembers the third day of Karjahi Movement when Nirmala and other women were wounded in attacks by the zamindar's supporters. Nirmala and some of her friends rushed to the nearby villages to plead for help. Nirmala was carrying her child on her back. Sakhi, Belkeshari and Nirmala called upon other women to join the defence.

In Karjahi, three or four households belonged to the zamindar. They reached one landowner's house and recovered

all the ploughs and spades that had been stolen from them, and returned home.

Nirmala went to the home of one zamindar Ran Bahadur Pachai in Khirite village, climbed up the stairs, grabbed the zamindar's shot gun, loaded the bullet and fired it. The inhabitants of the landlord's household all fled.

“We knew there was going to be a battle as the zamindar's forces regrouped,” recalls Sita Kumari Chaudhary, another protester. “We were ready, all of us women fighters. The landlords were shocked that we women were ready to resist. We had no fear at all. We were fighting for our existence.”

In the melee that followed, Keula Chaudhary wrested a rifle off the hands of a policeman who was assaulting her and hit him across the face.

Not the marrying kind

The memories of struggle from more than four decades ago are still fresh in the minds of the women of Karjahi. As they recalled incidents and anecdotes, the women would complete each other's sentences. And the alcohol helped.

Laudhan's wife Ashma brought raksi in steel cups and passed them around to the women. They downed the rice spirit in a single gulp. Then, it was Ashma's turn to continue her story.

Ashma was not interested in marrying, and everyone in the village was asking “Why are you not married yet?”

Laudhan is the son of Ashma's maternal uncle. But when the queries about marriage became too insistent and unbearable, Laudhan finally gave up and said, “All right, then, I will marry my cousin.” The uncle's son and aunt's daughter therefore became husband and wife.

Laudhan and Ashma, like all couples, sometimes have arguments. When that happens,



Ashma usually tells her husband, “You are my little brother, behave yourself and listen to me.” And that is how they settle their differences.

And unlike other couples, Ashma never had to show Laudhan special respect. “This is the secret of most marriages where women are younger and men are older,” she said.

On the other hand, Patharkali (aka Indira Gandhi) got married after her sick mother pressured her into it. But the relationship did not last. Patharkali returned to her maternal home after a year.

“I broke a policeman's arm,” Patharkali says, “do you think I would stand for an abusive husband? There was no way he could be married to a woman like me. It just wouldn't last.”

She felt like a servant in her in-law's home. And after she left her husband, Patharkali has been in control of her own destiny, a free bird. Nepali women have risen up against injustice and oppression throughout history, but their contribution is less well documented. The stories and experiences of the rebel women of Karjahi are chronicled in the book *The Public Life of Women: A Feminist Memory Project* with pictures.

The women who rose up in the Karjahi Movement do not identify themselves as feminists. They prefer the term ‘existentialist’. They say, “We are existentialists. We fought for our own existence, and the existence of our soil.”

There are women in Kathmandu who are international feminists, and one of them when asked about her work replied, “Google me.”

But the Tharu women of Dang and other women struggling anonymously every day for their rights are the real feminists of this land. They are not interested in fame or publicity, that is not why they are fighting.

Their stories are undocumented and unheard, and you cannot find them in a Google search. 🇳🇵

Nisha Rai is a journalist interested in Gender Equality & Social Inclusion, Federalism and Health & Education. She was formerly with BBC Media Action.

The Public Life of Women: A Feminist Memory Project

In English and Nepali
photo.circle Nepal Picture Library, 2023
558 pages

Rs1,200 (Nepal); INR1,500 (South Asia); \$35 (Rest of the World)
ISBN 9789937141123

ALL PHOTOS: NISHA RAI / NEPAL PICTURE LIBRARY

“I was a 25-year-old woman and the police let my uncle go because I threatened them,” says Ashma, now 69. “Later, the police were heard complaining that they had to deal with very powerful women.”

Ashma is convinced that it was their resistance that allowed the Tharu in Dang to finally get to till their own land.

“If I had to do it all over again, I would,” she says, “I'm still strong. If I have to fight again, I will fight.”

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EVENTS

**Womanhood**

Visual artist Pramila Bajracharya's works will be in display at the upcoming exhibition Womanhood at Gallery Mcube. 29 December 2023- 17 January 2024, Gallery Mcube, Patan.

Shared Horizon

The exhibition Shared Horizon will display the works of 16 Nepali and Thai artists from across different artistic genres. Until 30 December, Classic Gallery, Chakupat

**Gayatri Devi**

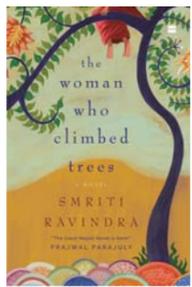
MoNA's upcoming instalment of its Let's Talk Art series will feature Gayatri Devi - A Masterpiece of Nepali Art by Uday Charan Shrestha, where he will delve into Nepali artistry. 23 December, 1pm onwards, Museum of Nepali Art, Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel

Duluwa Outdoors

In Duluwa Outdoors, Sattya Media Arts Collective showcases the journeys of seven Nepali women across the Tarai, hills, and the Himalaya. 23 December, 1-5pm, Sattya Media Arts Collective

Book launch

The Woman Who Climbed Trees by Smriti Ravindra is set to be launched in Nepal after its global success. Join the author for a book signing and a Q&A session with Muna Gurung. 27 December, 2pm, Kyampa The Social Hub



DINING

**Aloft**

With its Christmas Eve Dinner and Christmas Day Brunch, indulge in a double festive treat at Aloft Kathmandu's Nook Restaurant. Call to inquire about prices. 24-25 December, 12:30pm onwards, Aloft Kathmandu, 9801976054

MUSIC

Christmas delight

The band Pahlenlo Batti Muni will be joined by DJs for live music this Friday at Copacabana Kathmandu. 24 December, 7pm, Copacabana, Gairidhara

**Gauley Bhai**

Bangalore-based trans-traditional rock band Gauley Bhai is back in Kathmandu for a musical performance after a year. Stop by the Supper Club in Thamel to listen to the band on Christmas Eve. 24 December, 7pm, Supper Club, Thamel

**Anuprastha**

Nepali rock band Anuprastha will be live this weekend for an evening filled with music and Christmas cheer. 24 December, 7pm, Kings Lounge, Darbar Marg

**Jazz evening**

Experience an evening with Tara Lily, the versatile singer blending R&B, jazz, Indian classical, soul, and drum and bass. Limited seats available. Get tickets at Jazz Upstairs and Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory. 23 December, 7:30pm, Jazz Upstairs, Lazimpat

Nostalgia

Bajagaza, the Nepali pop sensation known for their versatile hits, will take the stage with singer-songwriter Sugam Pokharel. Join for a musical evening. 24 December, 7pm, Playboy Club, Chhaya Complex, Thamel, 9851193170

**New Orleans Café**

New Orleans Café's Christmas Dinner will showcase a special roast turkey and feature live music. Reserve a table now. 24-25 December, 6pm onwards (01) 4700736

New Year's dinner

The New Year's dinner and drinks at Soaltee Hotel will be accompanied by music from Bollywood singer Shashwat Singh. Spend the evening with family and friends. 31 December, 7 pm onwards, Rs14,999/individual and Rs26,999/couple, The Soaltee Kathmandu

GETAWAY

**Chandragiri Hills**

Chandragiri Hills' New Year package for couples includes a cable car round trip, barbecue dinner, DJ night with a New Year countdown, and breakfast on New Year's day. Chandragiri, 9802069900

Park Village Resort

Experience an urban oasis in the heart of Kathmandu. Enjoy the services at the Himalayan Wellness Centre, a one-stop centre to relax the mind and body. Budhanilkantha (01) 4370286

**Dusit Thani**

Celebrate Christmas at Dusit Thani Himalayan Resort, reveling in the Himalayan foothills. Call to get details about holiday packages. Dhulikhel, 9768437590

Mystic Mountain

Situated amid the forest of Nagarkot, Mystic Mountain features ultra-modern designs to provide hospitality and comfort to those who visit. Nagarkot, 9851277701

**Hotel Heritage**

Retreat to Hotel Heritage Bhaktapur, a Newa boutique hotel that incorporates the rich art and architecture of the ancient city of Bhaktapur. Suryabinayak, Bhaktapur (01) 6611628

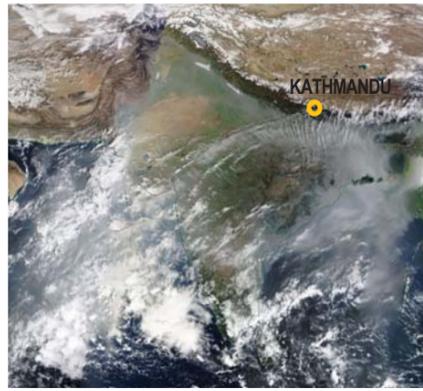
Hyatt Place

Experience Christmas Eve and Christmas at Zing - World of Flavours, which will have a festive buffet, magic show, and live band. Call for reservations and price details. 24-25 December, 9802340855

**Hyatt Regency**

Celebrate the holidays at Hyatt Regency with its Christmas Eve dinner buffet and live music, the Christmas Day special buffet, and the Christmas dinner with Italian set menu. Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, Taragon, 9801031235

WEEKEND WEATHER

**Bright and mild**

We have been really lucky this winter so far (touch wood) that prevailing winds have taken the Indo-Gangetic smog away from the Himalayan foothills. The Tarai towns have been affected, but relatively less than in previous years. We see the beginnings of fog stretches along the tributaries of the Ganga, including in Nepal. But due to higher than usual minimum temperature, the fog has been thinner in the plains. However the colder water will blanket the Trisuli and Narayani basins till midday. Expect a sunny and relatively mild weekend in Kathmandu.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
20° 8°	20° 7°	20° 6°

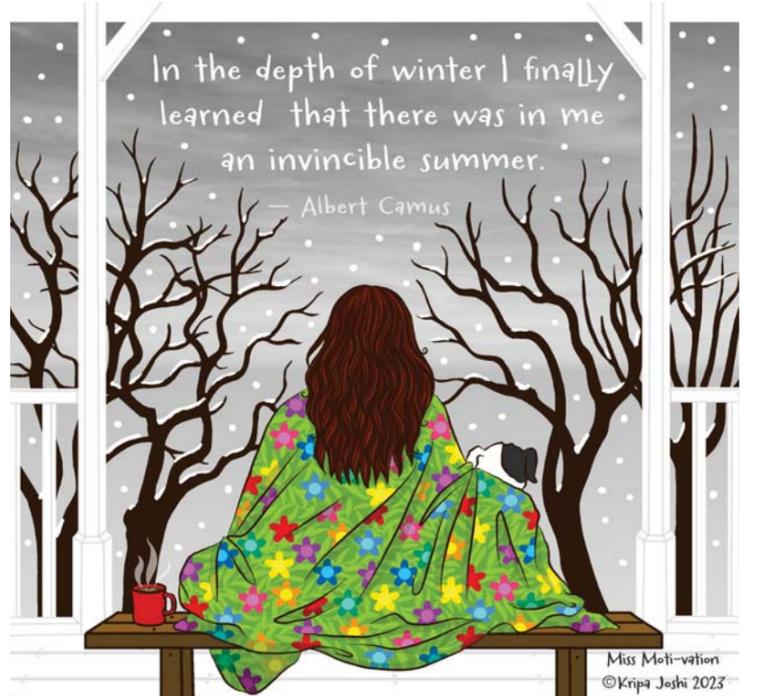
OUR PICK

Ron Howard's 2000 live-action adaptation of Dr Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas sees the shenanigans of Jim Carrey's Grinch, a misanthropic green creature who hates Christmas with a passion. As the residents of the nearby town of Whoville prepare to celebrate the holidays, the Grinch plots to sabotage their plans and ruin the holiday cheer from his dreary cave on Mount Crumpit. Narrated by Anthony Hopkins, the endlessly quotable cult classic stars Jim Carrey as the eponymous Grinch, with Taylor Momsen, Christine Baranski, Bill Irwin and Molly Shannon.



MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



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- सामाजिक सञ्जालमा अपरिचित व्यक्तिको साथी बन्ने अनुरोधलाई विश्वस्त भएर मात्र प्रतिक्रिया जनाऔं ।
- अपरिचित व्यक्तिलाई जथाभावी साथी बन्न अनुरोध नपठाऔं ।
- सामाजिक सञ्जाल तथा अन्य विद्युतीय माध्यमबाट चिठ्ठा पुरस्कार जस्ता आर्थिक प्रलोभनका प्रस्तावको भरमा नपर्ौं ।
- आफूले प्रवाह गरेका सन्देश वा सूचनाबाट समाजमा पर्नसक्ने नकारात्मक प्रभावको ख्याल गरौं ।
- आफ्नो सन्देशले कुनै व्यक्ति वा अन्य कुनै समुदायको आत्मसम्मानमा चोट नपुऱ्याऔं ।



नेपाल सरकार
विज्ञापन बोर्ड

7 KIA, 4 POW

Seven Nepalis in the Russian Army have been killed, and Ukraine has captured four

■ **Dirgha Upadhyay** in Dhangadi

The number of Nepalis in the Russian Army appears to be much higher than the 200 that Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal estimated last week, even as news came of the seventh known Nepali killed in action on the Ukraine front.

The death of Kundan Nagal was announced by the Foreign Ministry on Wednesday without providing any more details.

Last week, news reached Kathmandu of another Nepali, Bharat Shah, 36, who was killed on 20 November in Avdiivka but the family received the news only on 15 December. A fellow Nepali conscript in the Russian Army informed the family that Shah had been wounded but died when he did not receive emergency treatment in time.

Like the other estimated 700 Nepali conscripts in the Russian Army, Shah was attracted by the promise of a much higher salary and Russian citizenship. He was flown to Moscow only three months ago from Dubai along with other Nepalis who worked as security guards there.

"I had told him time and time again not to go to Russia to become a soldier because we had heard bad things," Shah's younger brother Mahendra told Nepali Times. "We had always feared the worst."

After hearing about Bharat

Shah's death, his family in Kailali district performed a cremation ritual on 17 December by the banks of the Karnali River without his body. Shah leaves behind a wife, a son, and a two-month-old daughter.

However, like the other Nepalis killed in action, there has been no information from the Russian military about Shah. Indeed, Russia has not officially acknowledged that there are foreign mercenaries in its army fighting in Ukraine.

Another young man from Kanchanpur who is also in the Russian Army in the 'Red Zone' on the Ukraine front broke military regulations to send a mobile text message to his family that fighting was fierce, it was really cold, and that there was little chance of him making it out alive.

He also said that there were 200 Nepalis just in one camp where he had been trained, and believed that there were many more deployed in Ukraine.

Soldiers on the frontlines are not allowed to use mobile phones for fear of being tracked by the Ukrainians. A few Nepalis are also fighting on the other side in the Ukrainian Army.

Four Nepali prisoners of war are also in detention by the Ukrainians, and Foreign Minister N P Saud said on Friday that he is using diplomatic channels to bring them home. Among them are Pratik Pun from Dang, Siddharth Dhakal of Kavre, and Bibek Khatri of Bardia – all captured from Bakhmut and



Zaporizhia sectors in the past three months.

Among those killed in action besides Kundan Nagal and Bharat Shah are Pritam Karki of Syangja, Raj Kumar Roka of Dolakha, Sandip Thapaliya, Rupak Karki of Kapilvastu and Ganga Raj Moktan of Ilam.

The Russian website Book of Memories published photos of the graves of Thapaliya and Karki who it said were killed on 30 June in the 'special military operation' in Bakhmut (pictured).

The Nepal government has now tried to control nationals going to Russia on tourist visas, and Foreign Secretary Sewa Lamsal met Russian Ambassador Aleksei Novikov this week to express Nepal's concern about the mercenary recruitment.

A dozen recruiters said to be involved in supplying soldiers to the Russian Army were arrested last week in Kathmandu. The Immigration Department now requires even those with Russian visas to obtain no object letters from the Consular Services Office before being allowed to travel.

However, human traffickers have moved their operations to the Gulf where they are actively recruiting Nepalis working there

as security guards. Some of the Nepalis in the Russian Army are either former Maoist guerrillas or retired from the Nepal Police or Army. Ram Chandra Khadka is from Khara in Rukum, which saw a fierce battle between the Maoist militia and the Nepal Army in 2002. Khadka himself rose to be Company Commander with the Maoists, and after the ceasefire served in Afghanistan.

Khadka, 36, was recruited by agents in October in Kathmandu and sent directly to the frontlines where he was wounded by a mortar round dropped from a Ukrainian drone in Bakhmut. He is being treated for shrapnel wounds in a Moscow hospital.

Several Nepalis have deserted the Russian Army and paid their Nepali recruiting agents in Moscow to bring them home. One of them who found his way back to Kathmandu last week said none of the Nepalis in Ukraine would probably make their way out alive. Another recruit warned fellow Nepalis in a video interview last month not to fall for the promises of traffickers.

Recruiters promise Nepalis six months of training during which they are paid Rs500,000 a month,

From left-right: Bharat Shah, Rupak Karki, Sandip Thapaliya. The graves of Karki and Thapaliya in Novo-Talitsky Ivanovo Oblast 324km northeast of Moscow with their names in Cyrillic script.

that they will fight behind Russian soldiers, and will get Russian citizenship. However, even if they are paid the Nepalis get much less than promised and are sent to the frontlines with less than a week's training where they are used as human shields to expose Ukrainian firing positions.

There have been so many Nepalis trying to desert that one Nepali prisoner of war in Ukraine said Russian units have taken away the passports of Nepali recruits and put them under surveillance in the trenches on the frontlines.

The Foreign Ministry says it is making diplomatic efforts through its embassy in Berlin to have the POWs released through the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). 🇳🇵

nepalitimes.com

Video of Nepali who escaped from Russian Army online.

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DIASPORA
DIARIES 49-50

Nepali security guard comes home from the Gulf to start a thriving business

■ Sundar Bikram Sangali

This is the 49th edition of Diaspora Diaries, a regular series in Nepali Times with stories of Nepalis living and working abroad.

When nothing worked out, I decided to go overseas. After successfully running a dance training academy in Nepal, I decided to invest in a restaurant which was the start of my downfall as an entrepreneur. It failed miserably.

It got so bad, I struggled to find bus fare to travel from my town of Banepa to Kathmandu. I had to start from scratch, and going overseas felt like the best bet.



So I went to Qatar to work as a security guard in 2005, and was chosen from among 600 applicants. My English skills helped when I was interviewed again in Qatar during which I had to compete with different nationalities and was lucky to be placed in good companies with better facilities than elsewhere.

Once the contract of my supply company was over, the employers offered to place me elsewhere. But that posting did not appeal to me, and since I had settled my loans I decided to go home.

After a few months, there was a demand for security guards again, this time at a five-star hotel in the UAE. Two of us were selected out

of 100 applicants.

There, I found it interesting how I could identify the richest people by their car brands and especially license plates. Those with one or two digits are worth a lot of money in auctions, and there were many of those in the hotels I was posted to.

I went abroad for work because of the दुख: and thankfully the

hardships did not follow me there as it does to many fellow migrant workers. I was lucky my security guard duties were indoors. Of course, there were challenges, such as difficult night shifts when guests were sometimes rowdy. Overall, I cannot complain.

But this does not mean I had सुख: abroad either, I had not

A Nepali on the move

Migrant worker returns from the Gulf, but now wants to go to Europe for the sake of his children

■ Prakash Pariyar

This is the 50th edition of Diaspora Diaries.

When I was growing up in Nuwakot, I used to see fellow villagers come back from Kathmandu wearing fancy clothes and carrying a certain swagger. They were earning good money in the garment industry, so I followed them and joined a factory in Kathmandu.

I started out as a helper, but after three months, asked the manager to let me use the sewing machine. I experimented and taught myself how to use it based on observation and guidance from others. Fortunately, it came easy for me.

The garment industry has been my entire world since then. It is all I know, and all I understand.

I spent eight years working in the factory in Nepal and became good at it. We made clothes that were exported to the Netherlands where the owner knew a fellow Nepali.

An acquaintance once suggested there was demand for garment jobs in Jordan. I am not sure if it was, as they say, लहर or रहर (fad or fervor) but in 2012 we applied. The Chinese interviewer who had come from Jordan asked interviewees to sew pockets as a test. I was selected, and a few months later flew off to Jordan. I did not even know where Jordan was.

Life overseas for us migrant workers was like going to school again. You stay in the dormitory, and show up to work every morning, looking forward to that one day off every week. Every day is the same as the previous day, a race to maximise output.

In Nepal, one worker would be responsible for the entire garment. But in Jordan we had an assembly line of 35 or so workers, all Nepalis in my case, who stitched



specific parts of the jacket, whether it was a sleeve cuff or armhole. It was faster. The jackets were sold in Japan or the US for about \$100 each, and were of good quality. Things in the factory felt systematic.

Ten months later, I fell sick. I did not want to remain in Jordan in case I became more ill or if I needed hospitalisation or surgery. Who would take care of me? I missed my family, especially my wife, so I returned to Nepal.

A few years later after the earthquake of 2015, the same employers showed up for interviews in Nepal. I was also looking for better earning opportunities so I applied again. The interviewer recognised me and

rehired me instantly. I found comfort in knowing that I already knew some of the colleagues and fellow Nepalis from my previous stint at the company.

This time, I stuck around in Jordan from 2016 right till Covid-19. I saved up Rs70,000 every month, a large part of it tied to bonuses as the basic salaries by themselves were lower. In Nepal, I struggle to save any money but it was easier there because living expenses are taken care of. So even if the salaries may not be much higher than Nepal, it is easier to save overseas.

We all have some form of skills or talent, it is money that we don't have.

That is why we go abroad. My father was a simple farmer and I did not inherit property. I started from zero, but with overseas employment, I was at least able to save some money and build a base for myself and my family.

During the pandemic, we were kept in the company accommodation without work, but we were paid our monthly salaries. We also received some assistance from the Jordan government which I appreciated.

But I decided to return to Nepal because work got slower, and with it our incomes dropped. If it had not been for Covid, I do not think I would have returned. I was doing just fine there.

I started a small company in Kathmandu that produces and sells bags. Post-Covid, a lot of shop fronts were vacant, so it was easy to get a good rental deal. My wife and I make and sell bags, which has allowed us to have a decent life. Our clients are schools and offices in the neighborhood.

I now aspire to go to Europe for work, which unfortunately has not worked out despite a few attempts. I have also lost some money in the process. Is it God's way of telling me to remain in Nepal?

My motivation to migrate is different this time. When I went to Jordan, finances were my only concern. It brought me to a position where I can confidently say I have the skills and a base to sustain myself comfortably in Nepal, even if I continue the work I am doing now.

I want to go to Europe for the sake of my children so they have better opportunities and an easier life than we did. 🇳🇵

Translated from a conversation with the author. Diaspora Diaries is a regular column in Nepali Times providing a platform for Nepalis to share their experiences of living, working, and studying abroad.

Authentic and original entries can be sent to editors@nepalitimes.com with Diaspora Diaries in the subject line.

work is work



gone overseas looking for an easy life. My happiness is my family, and that is why I decided to return home after three years despite a good job.

I resigned and was not really tempted by the promotion offers. I wanted to head home to Nepal where a friend wanted help overseeing a school. I became a Discipline In-charge and oversaw administrative functions.

While working at the school, I was also poultry farming on the side and the earnings were consistently good. This gave me the sense that there was a business

potential in raising chickens.

I was well suited for my job at the boarding school, but after hours I shed my tie and coat and would be carrying sacks of chicken feed on the bike. People in my community appreciated the fact that I had given up a good job abroad to return to Nepal. There is no big or small work, work is work.

From 500 chickens, my farm expanded to 3,500 birds. I left the job at the school, and did full-time poultry farming and the number of chickens rose to 20,000 with a good profit margin.

But then there was a bird flu

outbreak in a farm near mine with just 300 chickens, so we had to destroy 17,000 of our birds and halt business for 6 months. Thankfully, the government stepped in with compensation and that cushioned the blow a bit.

To diversify, I also started a slaughterhouse which supplies smaller shops. I then expanded to open a banquet venue which dovetailed well with the butchery and poultry farm. But right after, the Covid pandemic hit and there were other challenges to overcome.

There is still great potential in agro-business in Nepal, and if the

government extended soft loans and grants, real farmers would benefit more. Many of the smallest farmers do not benefit from government support and that is where real intervention is needed.

I look back at the time I first migrated overseas for work. Those were different times, simpler times. We had 12-hour shifts, and every Friday the supervisor would arrive in his car with stacks of letters from home. The rush of emotion when we opened the envelopes was overwhelming, and hearing from the family back home was the best feeling in the world. No other joy compares to it.

The song सन्देश आते है still makes me tear up because the lyrics perfectly describe our lives, and it evokes memories of that time. Not receiving letters made us anxious. But when we received them, we would read them with tears since the pieces of paper were touched by our family members. Those were raw, deep feelings that do not exist in today's interconnected world.

I always had a knack for writing, and used to write poems since childhood. These were simpler times and any writing I did as an adult was largely limited to my diary and in letters to my wife.

I once remember feeling low on a Saturday while at work. It was a slow day, and I was stationed at the gate. I had to let in cars and could control the barrier from the booth itself. I am not sure why I was homesick that day, and I remember writing relentlessly in my diary, which I still keep with me.

I used to also help fellow-Nepalis draft letters when they faced family problems, especially with their spouses. Prolonged separation over long distances is already difficult on relationships and words had more value in the era of letters before video calls.

But not everyone is good with words, and some of my compatriots needed help to express to their wives how much they loved them and how they were toiling in the desert heat for their futures. Some would thank me because the letters helped mend their marital relations.

When you are abroad, you make many friends. But even though over time you lose touch, the memories are special. We had autograph books, in which we wrote farewell notes to each other. I still have mine, where one of my friends Parmananda wrote to me:

'Imprisoned by time, we had to struggle to express in words the mental trauma that bubbled in the corners of our hearts. But that prolonged companionship during which we worked, laughed and cried together will just be memories, and that realisation makes me regretful. However, there is no other recourse but to bandage our broken hearts as we part our ways. We have to accept that all meetings eventually end in separation.'

Till my last breath, I will read and re-read these words and cling to feelings which are fast fading.



Diaspora Diaries started with a mission to bring out the human side of migration, and how it touches nearly all Nepali families in both positive and negative ways. Nepali Times and Migration Lab chronicle their journeys of struggle and success. Watch the video and subscribe to our YouTube channel for more original content.

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■ **Sonia Awale** in Parbat

After it took TikTok by storm last year as a selfie spot, The Cliff in Kushma has become a go-to destination for adventure sports. People from the far corners of Nepal as well as overseas come to this bridge over the Kali Gandaki gorge to bungee or swing jump.

The pedestrian suspension bridge has a span of 520m and hangs 228m above the river connecting Kushma of Parbat to Balewa of Baglung. This is supposedly the second-highest bungee jump in the world, after Macau Tower in China.

The man behind the Rs600 million enterprise, Raju Karki, is originally from Sindhupalchok and was a bungee instructor in The Last Resort at the Bhote Kosi.

Karki lost his father when he was eight, and with his mother and sister ran a local hotel. "I was an adventurous lad, and when they set up bungee near my hometown, it was just the excitement I needed," says Karki, now 40. He joined the training to become an instructor at The Last Resort, and before long became the very first batch of Nepalis to lead the team.



THE CLIFF

He had worked for seven years as an instructor at Bhote Kosi when one day some businessmen from Kushma visited The Last Resort, lobbying to turn their place into the next adventure-sporting hub in the country. Young Karki took note and filed that information in his head for future use.

Next, he lived and worked in Paris for two years where he manned the reception of the art museum Halle Saint-Pierre. But it did not take long to make up his mind to return home to set up his own business. He spent a year in France, Belgium, and Switzerland learning the ropes, as it were, about bungee jumping.

Karki had visited Kushma, and



SONIAAWALE

the gorge had always impressed him because it was wider and deeper than the Bhote Kosi. As he started planning, the first order of business was to build a suspension footbridge over Kali Gandaki.

"Our bridge was different from the typical suspension bridge because it was purpose-built for bungee jumping by adding elements like steps," he explains.

The Cliff went into operation and offers what it calls the world's highest swing jump, priced at Rs7,500, the same as the bungee. The Sky Cycle and Sky Café cost Rs3,000 and Rs2,500 each. There are also less daring variations of swings as well as

wall climbing.

"I found that Nepalis go to Bali and elsewhere seeking these thrills and thought we could do it here in Nepal in more exciting ways," adds Karki.

The Cliff spreads across 3.5 hectares with 100 staff and sees 300 visitors a day. There is also an option of furnished tents and cottages for those staying overnight.

Although it is flourishing today, the launch of The Cliff coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic and saw heavy losses in the beginning.

"The lockdowns forced us to open and close repeatedly," Karki recalls. "Even then, Kushma used to be packed with people lining up for The Cliff rides."

In fact, just this one tourism enterprise has helped lift the economy of the town, with 30% of the visitors being foreigners. It has also shown how Nepal does not lack opportunities for new tourism products that create local jobs.

The team has left the far side of The Cliff undeveloped and is planting local trees, fruits, and vegetables on the slope, supplying to its restaurant.

The business is a model for how Nepal can benefit from increasing the consumption of locally-produced electricity. The free shuttle bus to The Cliff is battery-powered.

And as far as possible, the construction material used is sourced from the locality, reducing maintenance costs.

Karki's expansion plans include a mega trolley, a fairyland, and a conference hall. He says: "The highlight would be a swimming pool 255m above the sheer drop of the Kali Gandaki River." 🇳🇵

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