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Europe is tightening its migration policy just when it needs more workers. Nepalis are using little-known Balkan countries to get there.

FAR FROM HOME: Om Pandey and wife Anita pose for a photo in front of the historic Austria & Bosna Hotel from the siege of Sarajevo 1992-96. Pandey paid a Nepali agent Rs1.3 million for himself and his wife to take them to Bosnia-Herzegovina but his job at the hotel pays much lower than promised. However, he doesn't want to go back to Nepal.



BHRIKUTI RAI



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Stepping stones to Europe

■ **Bhrikuti Rai** in Sarajevo

Europe with its labour shortage is increasingly becoming a new destination for Nepali migrant workers but much like in the Gulf and Malaysia, they are being cheated by recruiters and sent to out-of-the-way places.

Some 38,000 Nepalis officially sought employment in Europe last fiscal year, which is about 8% of the total number of labour permits issued that year—a sharp rise from just a few years ago. Many end up in eastern European countries which, until recently, used to be a country of emigrants.

“There are now Nepalis trying to go to Europe not just from Nepal but straight from the Gulf countries, where they are already employed,” says Hari Krishna Neupane from Shramik Sanjal, which advocates for migrant workers’ rights.

The member-led organisation was founded to address the issues of Nepali workers in the Gulf and Malaysia. But over the years it has been catering to a growing number of Europe aspirants, who have paid traffickers exorbitant amounts for low-paying jobs in little-known East European or Balkan countries.

“People are seduced by the idea of well-paying jobs in Europe

and securing permanent residency there, especially after seeing so many people post videos on social media about life in Europe,” adds Neupane, “They all paint a rosy picture so people are willing to take the risk and pay so much money.”

Croatia and Romania are now among the most popular European destinations for Nepali workers whose nationals are themselves migrating to wealthier western European nations. Since 2019, the number of labour permits for these two countries has soared from a couple of hundred to over 10,000 each year. But in the last two years, Croatia and Romania joined the Schengen zone, which allows document-free movement throughout the region’s 29 countries. As such, these two countries have become even more attractive to Nepali workers. But they are competing for jobs in these countries with workers from all over South Asia, as well as poorer neighbouring Balkan countries.

A lot of Nepalis who are not able to secure jobs in new Schengen countries are increasingly shifting to other states that the Nepali workers have never heard of, like Bosnia-Herzegovina, Albania, Serbia, North Macedonia. According to the Department

of Foreign Employment, over 1,500 Nepalis received labour permits for just these four countries in 2022/23. Between 2021 and 2023, 163 Nepalis received labour permits for Bosnia alone from zero in previous years.

But most prospective workers lack information about where they are going, the reality of the labour market there, and are easily tricked by recruiters with false promises.

News reports and social media are rife with stories of Nepalis who have been deceived and end up in underpaid jobs in Europe. But that does not seem to deter desperate Nepalis. This is perhaps most evident by the Nepali young men joining the Russian Army against Ukraine, lured by the promises of high salary and citizenship in Europe.

“Lack of employment opportunities in Nepal and the lure of getting residence permits in European countries are big factors in the growing migration pattern in Europe,” says Sadikshya Bhattarai, a researcher at the Centre for the Study of Labour and Mobility (CESLAM), “but most Nepalis are going for low-skilled and semi-skilled jobs, so we need to also think about how they can access social protection there through labour agreements and

correct information dissemination to Europe bound Nepalis.”

But sound policymaking requires information and evidence-based reports which are lacking in Nepal. “We keep harping on about bilateral agreements in order to effectively negotiate for Nepali workers’ rights, but we do not have enough information about these emerging markets,” adds Bhattarai, “we need to focus on carrying out studies to generate evidence, including challenges that could be unique to these corridors, that can lead to better labour agreements and policies.”

The onus should also lie in employers and labour policies in European countries which have benefited greatly because of

workers from countries like Nepal, and it is their responsibility to look out for the safety and protection of foreign workers.

Om Pandey paid a Nepali agent Rs1.3 million for himself and his wife Anita to take him to Sarajevo.

“Nothing worked out for me in Nepal, so the plan is to go wherever we can get a permanent residency,” he says. “I will do everything not to go back to Nepal again.”

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NATUREKNIT

Pre-paid Excellencies

Two days before Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal flew to New Delhi for Narendra Modi's hat-trick oath-taking this month, his coalition government abruptly recalled Shankar P Sharma, Nepal's ambassador to India.

Dahal's government on 6 June also called back ambassadors to the US and UK, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Malaysia, Spain, Portugal, Denmark, and Israel.

The fact that Nepal's ambassadors are made to play musical chairs every time there is regime change in Kathmandu is proof enough that international diplomacy is just an extension of 'bhagbanda' power sharing. The recalled ambassadors were nominees of the Nepali Congress (NC) when it was in a coalition with the Maoist Centre.

The Maoists switched partners and are now in government with the UML, so five of the eight new ambassadors are UML appointees. None of the eight are career diplomats. Since there are not enough ministerial portfolios, heads of agencies and plum posts in the bureaucracy to reward party loyalists, ambassadorships are coveted gigs. Some are even 'pre-paid ambassador' appointments auctioned to the highest bidders.

But all is not lost. One of the eight was Sushil Pyakurel, former head of the National Human Rights Commission and recipient of the 2010 Gwangju Prize for Human Rights. He refused to accept ambassadorship to South Korea from the UML quota.

In a scathing press note turning down the appointment, Pyakurel exposed the corrosive politicisation of Nepal's diplomatic service, and how it has undermined our national interest and reputation in the global arena.

Pyakurel heard of his appointment through the media, and questioned the whole selection process and criteria.

He wrote: 'I am astounded by the government's practice of not discussing the background, capability, interest and diplomatic skills of a person as well as the political, economic, and social status of the respective country before assigning them the responsibility of representing the nation.'

Pyakurel's decision set off a tsunami of criticism in Nepal's cybersphere of past and present government practice of political parties scrambling for plum embassies.

Compared to accomplished past envoys like Bhim Bahadur Pande, Bhekh Bahadur Thapa or Kedar Bhakta Mathema who had access to the highest echelons of governments of their host countries, Nepal's foreign service has been blighted by embarrassing ambassadors over the years.

Swarnim Wagle took to social media to pledge that his Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) would stop bad practices of the past. But even he seemed unsure his own party would do things differently.

Wagle wrote: 'Let's hope the ambassadors, permanent representatives or special envoys recommended by the RSP possess excellent qualifications, character and moral values reflecting the party's criteria.' Let's hope.

Ambassadors should be suitable for the countries they are appointed to, preferably speaking the language and being familiar with their governance culture. It should be reserved for those with high integrity and who can literally be Nepal's 'brand ambassadors'. Alas, ours have not been the sharpest tools in the shed.

The last time we counted, Nepal has had 28 prime ministers in 26 years. With a few notable exceptions, ambassadors appointed by a previous regime tend to be replaced with sidekicks, cronies, relatives, or business partners, usually in a foreign labour recruitment company.

In previous years, Nepal was reliant on development assistance and our ambassadors needed to be good fundraisers. Now, as the country graduates to lower-middle income status, the purpose of economic diplomacy is shifting to labour, trade, tourism, and liaising with international lending agencies.

Since remittances are the backbone of Nepal's economy and make up an equivalent of 25% of the GDP, the role of ambassadors is to explore destinations where there are higher-paying jobs, to ensure labour rights safeguards, and to help Nepalis in trouble.

Nepal's embassies abroad have promoted the country as a destination, but tourism income makes up less than 5% of Nepal's foreign currency income every year.

As our investigation shows (page 1, 10-11) Nepalis are increasingly headed to Europe where there is a labour shortage. Because Schengen is difficult to get into, Nepalis are being taken by recruiters to peripheral countries like Bosnia-Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Malta and Cyprus where working conditions and pay are less than they are promised.

Portugal, Romania and Croatia alone now have nearly 100,000 Nepali workers, yet Nepal does not have an embassy in any of these countries to protect workers in case of abuse, exploitation or fraud.

With the rise of India and China, the choice of ambassadors to these two countries are even more critical than before. Yet, we see ad hoc appointees to New Delhi and Beijing who lack stature, contacts and diplomatic skills to navigate the geopolitics of the two darbars.

Why are we not surprised by the choice of new ambassadors by this government? What can we expect when a businessman with ties to a manpower company is the Labour Minister, and a person investigated for allegedly scamming cooperatives is the Home Minister?

Sonia Awale



Nepal's foreign service has been blighted with embarrassing ambassadors. Time to undo that.

ONLINE PACKAGES



GREENING A CONCRETE JUNGLE

Vertical hydroponics is an alternative farming method best suited for urban centres like Kathmandu to maximise productivity in a limited area while also saving water. Muttha Nepal in Thecho uses this new technology to revolutionise urban agriculture. Watch the video on our YouTube channel.



TUMBLING TRI-CHANDRA

Tri-Chandra Campus, the country's oldest college was an apt symbol of neglect and apathy. Since the 2015 earthquake, the college has silently awaited restoration, which has finally started. Watch the 2021 video on Nepali Times' YouTube channel, and subscribe for more multimedia content.

NIMS PURJA

May perpetrators be punished, laws made stricter and implementations of those laws stronger ('The rise and fall of Nims Purja', Pradnya Pradhan, #1217). Victims of sexual violence, in civil war, mountaineering, in sports are waiting for justice.

Sudiksha Tuladhar

■ Another celebrity scandal in Nepal showing women are safe nowhere.

Shila Parajuli

■ Good on Nepali Times and Pradnya Pradhan for reporting on a story nobody else appears to want to touch in Kathmandu.

Anup Kaphle

■ I was sexually harassed and touched by a guide on an Everest base camp trip in 1985. He would not stop. I yelled loudly and another woman in the group came to my aid. At that time no one would believe me. I continued on the trip but had to keep my distance from the Sherpa guide and was worried he might try to enter my tent. Later, I told the trekking company and they said there was nothing they could do. I was sickened. I believe the women.

Margaret Kerr

NEPALI WATER BODIES

This is an important story, there is a real need to rehabilitate and restore 'traditional' systems and structures for water capture and storage ('Saving the waters of life', Mohan Mainali, #1217)

David Seddon

■ A massive deconstruction is needed. Urbanisation is mostly never sustainable, at least if we are talking about these young hills.

Niracar

INDIAN POLITICS

This development does open up some interesting possibilities ('Hindutva juggernaut hits a speed bump', Shreya Paudel, #1217). It is like watching a game of political Jenga: how far can the BJP push its agenda without toppling the delicate balance of their coalition? It's going to require some serious political acrobatics, that's for sure.

Karina Xettri

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING

Been there, not done that

by Vishad Raj Onta

Welshman Richard Williams, who biked west-to-east across Nepal from Datedhdura to Phidim for 29 days, has chronicled his journey in a book titled *The Road*, which is a description of his journey and guidebook for cross-country bicycling aficionados. Visit nepalitimes.com for the full story.

f Most reached and shared on Facebook

Crime against humanity

Editorial

Since the 7 October Hamas attack, the world has watched the unending horror of Israel's asymmetric and disproportionate retaliation against Palestinian civilians. The Israeli state cannot use Hamas terrorism as an excuse for its own war crimes in Gaza. Read the Editorial on our website.

X Most popular on X

The rise and fall of Nims Purja

by Pradnya Pradhan

Nims Purja had reached the peak of his climbing career when The New York Times published an exposé in May where a Finnish mountaineer and an American physician accused the mountaineer of sexual harassment. Because he identified himself so strongly as a Nepali, the mountaineer's scandal has hurt Nepal. Join the discussion online.

66 Most commented



Hindutva juggernaut hits a speed bump

by Shreya Paudel

The shift in Indian politics after the election has a message for Nepal's leaders: mixing politics with religion does not work and voters will see through it all. The political class now needs to revive its close ties with the Indian opposition. Follow us for the latest developments.

🔴 Most visited online page

QUOTES



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

More journalists, mostly Palestinians, have been killed in 8 months than during World War II. Journalists in Gaza are risking their lives to bring the humanitarian catastrophe to the world's attention. Without them, we would not know the truth. #editorial



Pranaya Rana @inkthink

Good editorial from Nepali Times.



Kul Chandra Gautam @KulCGautam

Nepal was right to recognize Israel in 1960 & Palestine in 1988. But today BP Koirala would be aghast at both Hamas terrorism & Israel's war crimes. @NepaliTimes is right that Israel can't use Hamas terrorism to justify its collective punishment against Palestinian civilians.

1,000 WORDS



AWESOME: Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal presenting an autographed guitar to the winner of Nepal Idol Karan Pariyar on Wednesday at Baluwatar.

PRADEEP RAJ ONTA / RSS

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Polluting land and air

Twenty years ago this week, we published in-depth stories about how brick kilns were causing irreversible environmental damage. Today, most of the Valley's brick kilns have relocated to the outskirts of Bhaktapur while some owners have adapted to cleaner technologies. But kilns are still the major sources of air pollution in winter in Kathmandu. Excerpts of the report published in issue #202 25 June - 1 July 2004:



kilns run mostly from December to June, and the farmer is paid the equivalent of a wheat harvest in the area being leased...

...The farmer is compensated 160kg of wheat priced at Rs11 per kg for every season his land is leased. What is not factored into the calculation is that in one year, the farmer will have lost 220cm of the irreplaceable topsoil...

...Gyan Bahadur remembers when his land gave him 480kg of paddy with just organic fertiliser. Today, the same

field produces only 180kg, and even this with lots of hard work hauling fertilisers. He has also seen his vegetable crop go down and his profit margin is now nil. It actually makes more sense to lease his land for Rs 3,500 for six months to the brick kiln owner.

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

The changing land-use pattern in the Valley is evident on the outskirts of Kathmandu and Lalitpur as more and more land is devoured by urban sprawl. The remaining arable land is increasingly turned into clay mines to supply brick kilns. Farmers are leasing land to kilns, and in the process losing the fertility of their topsoil.

The 120 brick kilns in the Valley erode the topsoil completely, and what the farmer gets back at the end of the lease is a large pit devoid of any agricultural value. Brick



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A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER 

Nepal's soft power is its heritage

Cultural preservation needs to move beyond Kathmandu Valley to hidden historical sites in the Tarai

It is fitting that Kathmandu Valley's living heritage is getting so much international exposure, and the restitution of its stolen artefacts has become a part of Nepal's national agenda.

Nowhere else in Nepal is there so much cultural heritage crammed into such a small space. Yet, there are some equally important



BORDERLINES
Chandra Kishore

archaeological and heritage areas in the Tarai and the trans-Himalayan regions of Mustang and Dolpo.

Kathmandu Valley's kingdoms had strong cultural and historical ties with the Mithila Kingdom to the south. It was that Malla-Mithila alliance that helped Kathmandu Valley avoid even worse destruction from the Tughlaq ruler of Delhi who razed the Mithila capital of Simraungad in 1326 established by the Karnatak King Nanya Deva three centuries previously.

Simraungad today is located in Bara district on the borderland between India and Nepal. The art and culture of Simraungad was enriched by Kathmandu and Tibet to the north and the Buddhist holy sites to the south. As the Moghuls arrived at the gates, King Harisingh Deva fled north to Kathmandu Valley along with his most precious possessions.

But much of his palace, its elaborate sculptures and artefacts lie scattered about and buried underground. Today, the region is an open museum. Simraungad itself stretches across a dozen ancient villages, ruins of which lie half-buried in the plains.

These relics are more than 1,000 years old, and if it was to be excavated by Nepal's Archaeology Department could have been as



PAST AND PRESENT:

One of the few relics left in Simraungad of an empire that stretched across present-day North India and Nepal.

The Janaki Temple in Janakpur lit up with gaudy lights recently (right).

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

important as Nalanda in India as a centre of learning. But at the rate of its destruction, it will soon only remain in history books.

Instead of protecting what is there, the Madhes Province government has declared Simraungad a 'Fish Zone' and helped locals construct ponds. Every dig unearths millenium-old statues, terracotta utensils, and other priceless artefacts all of which hint at aspects of the history and

culture of this lost kingdom.

Aside from the ponds, there are concrete buildings going up, their foundations cutting through what should be an archaeological site, destroying heritage that had a direct bearing on the later enrichment of the Kathmandu Valley civilisation.

While all the attention is on the stolen artefacts of the capital valley, Simraungad is suffering a second plunder of what remains of its heritage, this time by thieves



CHANDRA KISHORE

and traffickers. The attention now needs to focus on protecting the hidden past of historic sites like Simraungad, Kapilvastu, Ramgram, Tilaurakot, Kakrebihar in Surkhet and other places we may not even have heard about.

A silver lining could be that local governments may be more interested in preserving their identities than Kathmandu, and we can see some evidence of that.

In Rautahat recently, the Maulapur Municipality excavated the Pataura site to unearth a thousand-year-old Mahadev temple. Archaeologists restored it, and locals now worship at the ancient shrine. Stolen religious items have been returned to Kathmandu where they are once more consecrated and venerated, but this is possibly the first time an entire temple has been unearthed from 5 metres below to be revered once more.

It is not just temples, there are ponds, rivers, forest groves and cobblestone streets that have cultural importance that are also being preserved and restored. Just in Madhes, there are campaigns to revive the historically important Kamala, Jalad, Dudhmati, and Lakhandei rivers.

But sometimes, although local officials have the right intentions, there are wrong outcomes. The Janaki Devi Temple in Janakpur, the birthplace of Sita,

is a case in point. In a misguided effort to beautify the historical monument, thousands of holes have been drilled into its stucco facade to fix multicoloured LED lights just as efforts are afoot to include the temple in the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Making a temple look like a casino cannot preserve a living faith, nor will it help get the site into the UNESCO listing. As they say, if you want to know about a country, read its history but you want to truly understand it, visit its heritage sites.

There is a need to work across the border with archaeologists in India, since Simraungad Kingdom predates the two nation states and a large part of it lies in what is now northern Bihar. Since archaeology does not respect modern political boundaries, relying on governments is not enough.

Cultural preservation does not just need money, it needs willpower which is now being shown by local communities.

Nepal's soft power is its heritage, what unites the plains and the mountains is our shared history as exemplified by Simraungad-Kathmandu Valley and the mingling of Mithila and Malla histories. 🇳🇵

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

NMB BANK एनएमबि बैंक

Turkish Skytrax award

Turkish Airlines has been named the Best Airline in Europe by Skytrax at the 2024 World Airline Awards in London on 24 June. The carrier also won two other awards including the World's Best Business Class Catering and Best Airline in Southern Europe. "We are delighted to receive these prestigious awards from Skytrax. Being named the Best Airline in Europe and in Southern Europe, and receiving recognition for our



business class catering excellence is a testament to the hard work and dedication of our entire team. As the Turkish Airlines family, we would like to thank our valued passengers, who deemed us worthy of these wonderful awards, and the Skytrax team, who put this evaluation into practice. With Turkish hospitality in our DNA, we remain committed to delivering an unmatched travel experience to our passengers and will continue to innovate and enhance our services," said Turkish Airlines CEO Bilal Ekşi, receiving the award.

Kwality in quantity

Kwality Ice Cream has launched in Nepal and is available at outlets in Kathmandu. The company plans to expand to 200 locations across the country within the next year, responding to an increased demand for premium ice cream in the Nepali market.

Hyundai Venue rollout

Laxmi Motors, dealers of Hyundai, has started selling the Nepal-assembled Venue model. The Venue 1.2 (S) starts at Rs44,96,000. The company also launched the Hyundai Nepal's Made For Your Journey program, through which customers can finance the car at 6.99%, get a three-year warranty, and ten years of free servicing.

KISAN II by USAID

USAID has completed its KISAN II project that began in July 2017 to boost agricultural productivity and sales across Nepal. The project partnered with 177 firms to help farmers



get financing and sell harvest, leading to a production increase of 139%. USAID has now handed over knowledge and technology to the Nepal government.



Ncell-MBL

Ncell customers can now pay phone balance or buy other products through the Ncell app or website via MBL's M-Smart check out service. Additionally, Ncell retailers can deposit funds directly using the bank's Retailer app. The telecom company is also running its Sadhain ON deals on data packs.

Master's Scholarship

The Mingma Norbu Sherpa Memorial Scholarships are available for Master's programmes at Lincoln University in Christchurch, New Zealand for the Feb 2025 to Dec 2026 session. The grant is available to resident Nepalis under 35 with Bachelor's degrees looking to study topics including environmental management, climate change, food security and sustainable tourism. The scholarship includes full tuition, living allowance, insurance, round trip airfare, and visa fees. The application deadline is 31 July.

NMB Qatar

NMB cardholders can get discounts of up to 10% on Qatar Airways fares by using the promotional code QRNMB24 when buying tickets from the airlines' website. Qatar also allows students extra pieces of luggage.

IME loan

Global IME Bank has received a \$25 million loan from the OPEC Fund to increase access to financing for smaller enterprises, especially ones that are women-owned or



climate focused. Micro, small, and medium enterprises make up 95% of the businesses registered in Nepal and 45% of all jobs, but often have a hard time finding funding. The OPEC Fund and Nepal have maintained a long standing relationship on bolstering sustainability.

Samsung Galaxy

The Samsung S24 series is now available in Nepal, and the lineup of smartphones includes the Galaxy S24, the S24 Plus, and the S24 Ultra. Customers can get the Galaxy Buds FE for Rs5,000, a 67% discount on purchasing one of these models.



Nepal's economy shifts away from farming

The service sector has grown, but it has widened the rich-poor gap and is not creating jobs

■ Ramesh Kumar

From high school, Nepali students memorise that Nepal is an 'agricultural country', and that 80% of the population is engaged in farming.

While it is true that most Nepalis are still dependent on agriculture, the country's economy is shifting to services. Seven in every ten families also depend on remittance.

Agriculture now contributes less than 25% to Nepal's economy, down from 81% three decades ago. The number of Nepalis engaged in the service sector used to be only 16% at that time, and today it is 29%.

Nepal's economy has been transformed in recent decades during which new professions, businesses and enterprises have flourished. The finance, information technology (IT), hospitality, trade and other sectors have expanded.

Nepal's industrial sector contributed 8% to the economy 50 years ago, it reached a peak of 21% some decades later, but at present has declined to 12.5%.

Industry is supposed to enhance production and in the process create jobs. But Nepal's weak industrial development is one of the factors that drove 690,000 Nepalis to go abroad last year.

The lack of industrial growth has meant that Nepal depends largely on the service sector, which now makes up almost two-thirds of the economy.

"The shift to services is only a structural change, and not the transformation required for radical improvements to the economy," says economist Dilli Raj Khanal. "For there to be such a change, we need to increase our productivity in all sectors: agriculture, industry and service."

The service sector also has inherent risks. While a small number of people involved can increase production and add value to the economy, it may not create many jobs.

Moreover, because the service sector mostly involves educated, tech-savvy and business-minded people, its benefits are mostly limited to their circles, increasing socio-economic inequality.

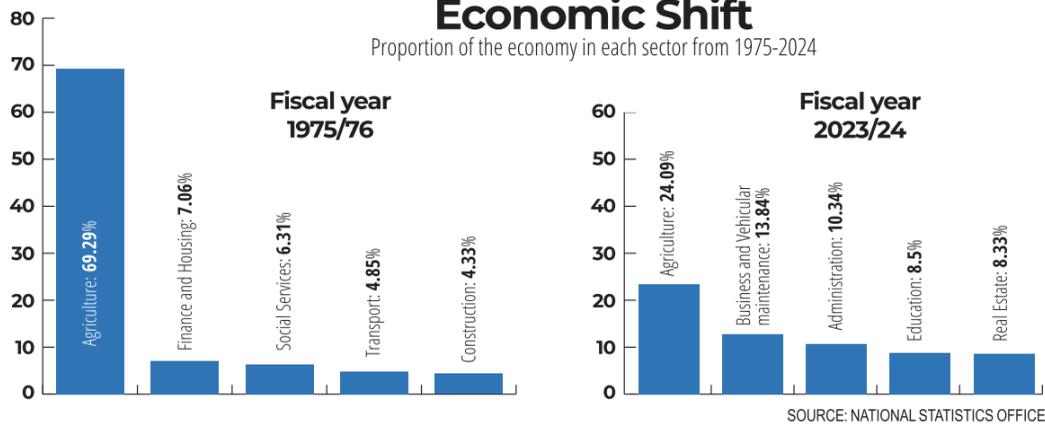
Says Khanal. "We must, thus, find ways to increase both



ABHUSHAN GAUTAM SHAKYA

Economic Shift

Proportion of the economy in each sector from 1975-2024



production and income in the agricultural sector."

In the last three decades, the agricultural sector in Nepal has only grown at the rate of 2.9% annually, while the growth rate of the service sector during the same period has been 6.3%. So while the service sector is expanding, there has been no comparative increase in agricultural production, which in turn means that the income of Nepali farmers has not increased

either. That further widens the gap between rich and poor.

A 1% growth in the agricultural sector plays an equal role in reducing poverty as a 6% growth in the service sector.

Economist Biswo Poudel at Kathmandu University says: "Farmers benefit directly from agricultural reform, but an economy boosted by the service sector does

not reach those communities."

The average annual per capita income of Nepalis is \$1,434 compared to \$824 ten years ago. But benefits have not been spread equally across communities. Those involved in the service industry have reaped the rewards. Farmers have not enjoyed similar profits.

"There is little possibility for expansion in agriculture because we can neither increase arable land

nor productivity," notes Hem Raj Regmi at the National Statistics Office.

While the banking and insurance sector contributed less than 3% to Nepal's economy 20 years ago, it now makes up 7% of the economy.

The share of the administrative sector has gone from 2% to 10% in the last two decades. But the share of the manufacturing and industry has fallen below 5% as compared to 9% two decades ago.

Economist Poudel argues that increased agricultural production can lead to further economic growth in Nepal, provided there is an expansion of irrigation and transfer of agricultural technology.

There are almost 2.27 million hectares of irrigable land in Nepal, out of which 800,000 hectares do not have irrigation. Only one-third of the over 1.4 million hectares remain irrigated year-round. The rest are rain-fed fields.

"The greatest challenge Nepal faces is to create jobs in the agriculture sector while ensuring a decent income," says Regmi. 🇳🇵

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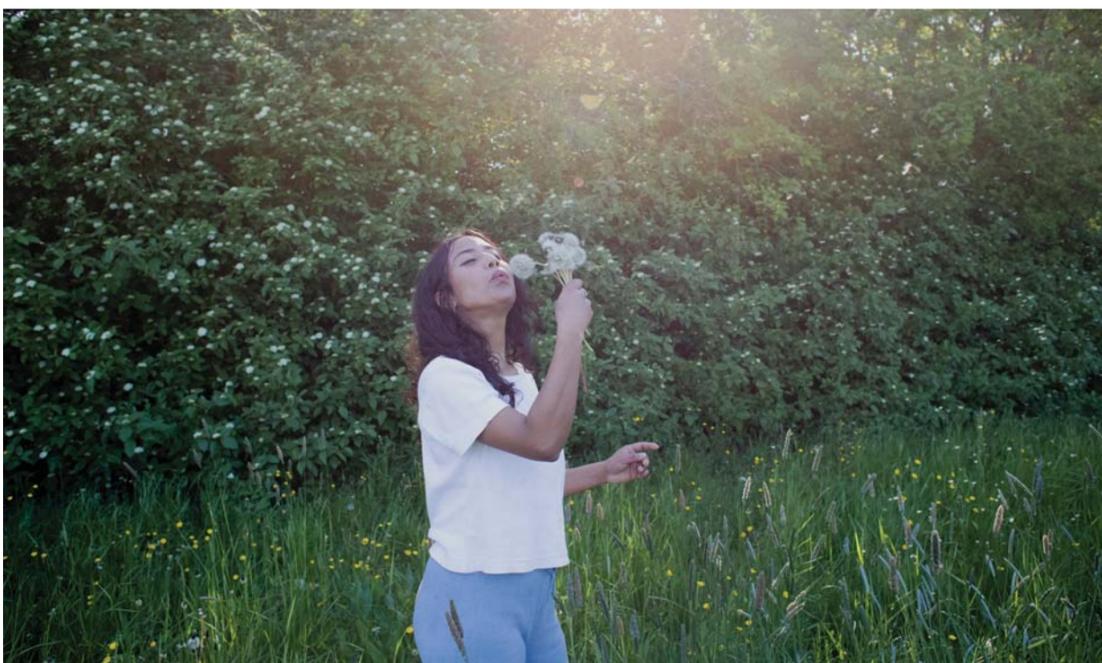
Times

28 JUNE - 4 JULY 2024 #1218

Looking For The Nepali Dream

■ Text and Photos: **Aseem Banstola** in Aarhus, Denmark

The Nepali Dream is taking many Nepalis outside the country in search of a better life. Most young people on the streets of Kathmandu, in cafés or teashops are either waiting for their flights out, or for their visas. Nearly four million Nepalis live and work abroad, most of them in India, West Asia, Australia, Malaysia, Japan, Korea, the US and across Europe. More than 6,000 are in Denmark alone. These are their dreams.



Kritika Pokhrel, 27

"I like to go for walks these days, it helps me feel alive," says Kritika, who lives in Aarhus and is on a strict deadline to finish her Master's thesis by this month. She used to be a good undergrad student in Nepal before coming to Belgium, where she finished the first year of her Master's.

She then moved to Denmark last year, but it has been hard for her in Europe. The education system

based on software and technology is much more advanced here. She could not navigate the lectures and assignments, and slowly her grades dropped.

"If I don't get settled in Denmark, I will go back to Nepal," says Kritika, and is now convinced life will be better in her own country where she once worked for a British volunteer agency as a Learning and Capacity Development Adviser.



Ruza Chauhan & Hemanta Thapa, 22

"We will fulfill our dreams together," says Ruza Chauhan, who married Hemanta last year after knowing him for five years.

Ruza's application for an Australian visa was rejected, but they found out it was easy for a married couple to move to Denmark and came here last September. Hemanta is studying Climate and Supply Engineering at VIA University Campus Horsens, and to support his studies and overhead costs, Ruza is working full time at a cleaning company.

That is still not enough to make a living, though. "I had to ask for my last semester fee from my parents," confides Hemanta, who also works part-time in the town of Vejle.

The couple is adjusting to the new country, and Ruza discontinued her studies to support her husband. They cannot both afford to be studying at the same time.

Once her husband finishes university, Ruza plans to get training in hairdressing. They are confident they can take on any challenge life throws at them. They want to stay on in Denmark before they decide on their next move.



Surya Prajapati, 35

Surya Prajapati came to Denmark eight years ago to study Structural Engineering. After the 2015 earthquake in Nepal, he worked on reconstruction of houses and the Darbar Squares of Kathmandu Valley. While with a Danish organisation in Nepal, he saw the faults in Nepal's construction sector. Surya realised that he needed to upgrade his knowledge and practice.

The streets and architecture amazed him, and he is amazed by the elements with traditional architecture. He works at Envidan, a Danish company, as a project engineer. He was born in Bhaktapur, and eventually go back and revive the heritage of his hometown. He wants to give back to the community.



Rojina Syangbo, 29

"I want to find a proper job here," says Rojina, who has been working part-time at a restaurant in Aarhus for the past six months. But this is not where she wants to end up.

After getting her Master's in Soil and Global Change from Aarhus University last year, she has been living in this western Danish town in a rented room near Den Gamle By. Rojina is working on her job application, goes to Danish language tutorial and is taking a Data Analytics class. In her late 20s, she is determined to find a job in her field so she can make her parents proud.

There is pressure from her parents to get married and settle down, so her life will be easier. But she does not want to get married, at least not yet.

Rojina believes a proper job will give her freedom and a better life, and she hopes to find that within the next six months. Stay tuned.



Prajent Shahi, 30

Prajent burned his hand while making breakfast in the morning and is in pain. He is studying Business Development at Aarhus University in Herning and has been living and working in Denmark for over two years with his wife Leena Rai. Prajent worked as a data specialist in Nepal for four years, but he did not see much of a future.

He chose Denmark as it is easier for married couples to get a dependent visa compared to Australia, a major destination for Nepalis who want to study and work abroad. Since he arrived, Shahi has worked

in restaurants, cleaning companies, catering firms, and hotels. His wife works as a chef at a Danish restaurant. Like other Nepali students here, Prajent is struggling with the cost of living and saving enough for school fees.

Prajent has to pay 54,000 Danish Kroner (\$7,800) every semester. He is concerned about his parents back in Nepal since he is the only child. "Sometimes I feel guilty about leaving them alone and not being there when they need me the most," Prajent admits. He dreams of starting an IT company in Nepal some day.



Sony Sah, 29

"It's hard to integrate into the Danish society and family life here," says Sony, who has been married to a Danish man for the past four years.

She speaks fluent Danish and is familiar with the culture and society here, but still feels left out.

Sony is studying Molecular Biology at Aarhus University but says she does not have many close friends in class. It is lonely despite having a supportive husband.

But she likes the degree of personal freedom in Denmark, which was not possible back home.

She and her husband want to go back to Nepal at some point and work in the research field. Her elderly mother is alone at home. Her husband likes Nepal and its rich culture, and is familiar with the country after having worked there.

Aashish Ghimire, 24

Aashish's rented room in the basement of a house close to the Botanical Garden in Aarhus has one bed, one table, two suitcases. It feels like a room of someone in transit.

Aashish moved to Denmark last September and is studying Economics and Business Administration at Aarhus University. As he gazes outside his window with a faraway look, he says, "I have to pay the loan that my parents took up to send me to Denmark."

For an average Nepali middle-class person, it is hard to afford education at a foreign university without borrowing money from family or a bank. Most Nepali students work as cleaners or in cafés and bars to support their studies and living.

Aashish also works in a Rema 1000 warehouse, and sometimes as a food delivery courier. It has been difficult for him to manage paying school fees, and meet living costs. After finishing his studies next summer, he hopes to get a skilled job. Aashish is convinced that his life will improve by then, "It can't be hard forever," he says.

Architecture of Aarhus fascinate
by how Danes adapt modern
nal architecture. Surya
anish consulting engineering
engineer.
aktapur and wants to
d revive the rich architectural
own. He says, "The least I can
community where I was born."

EVENTS

**Metamorphosis**

Watch on as 22 artists work on walls within Patan neighbourhoods and see how their creative ideas take shape. There will also be a performance from DJ phatcowlee.

29-30 June, Kaalo 101, Patan

Garage Sale

Enspace's sustainable shopping day will have discounts on food, drink and green goods. Join the garage sale to do your part.

29 June, 4pm-8pm, Enspace, Maharajganj

**Unfolding The City**

The exhibition Unfolding The City is a collage of diversity that looks at daily rituals of coexistence, cultural vibrancy and folklore that has travelled through the region.

Until 7 July, 11am-6pm, Takpa Gallery, Lazimpat

Kolkata meets Kathmandu

Kolkata's Kalighat Paintings are on show at Siddhartha Art Gallery. Experience a part of Bengal right here in Kathmandu.

Until 30 June, 11am-5pm (Sunday to Friday) / 12pm-5pm (Saturdays), Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal

**Bookstore Series**

Celebrate the art of storytelling with Ranjan Adiga this weekend. Adiga, author of a new short story collection titled Leech, will share his inspiration and will also hold a book-reading session.

28 June, 4:20pm, Ekta Books, Thapathali

DINING

**Chez Caroline**

Tucked away from the street noise and fumes, this is the place for authentic French and continental cuisine in the valley. Try their Profiteroles au Chocolat and Choux pastry filled with vanilla ice cream and hot chocolate sauce.

Baber Mahal Revisited (01) 4263070/ 4264187

MUSIC

Rota Jive 2024

Rota Jive is bringing together old and new innovative musicians, including Anuprastha, Prashna Chinha, Chakravayu and Satish Ghalamn. Buy tickets through Khalti.

29 June, 12am-8pm, Ticket: Rs850, Club Platinum, Darbar Marg

**Elvis Presley tribute**

The Heartbreakers will pay tribute to Elvis Presley this Friday evening. Dress up in your best Elvis outfit and spend the evening with The King's songs.

28 June, 7pm onwards, Hard Rock Cafe, Darbar Marg

**The Elements Tour**

The Elements are starting off their Nepal Tour from Kathmandu. Experience the exclusive tracks from their latest album Bharosa for the first time.

29 June, 7pm onwards, Ticket: Rs800- Rs1,200, LOD, Thamel

**Harmony for Humanity**

Participate in the charity event featuring Kutumba and local talent who will perform a diverse range of musical genres.

29 June, 3pm onwards, Jesse's International Boarding Secondary School, Satungal

Bloom Festival 2024

Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory is set to host the Bloom Festival, a three-day musical extravaganza featuring notable artists from Nepal's music scene.

27-29 June, 7pm onwards, Ticket: Rs800- Rs1,000, Moksh, Jhamsikhel

**Bluenote Coffee**

Enjoy a wide-ranging menu from Thai to Indian to Continental amid an organic atmosphere and architecture.

Lazimpat, 9818137771

Pizzahood

For delicious generously-portioned pizzas at an affordable price, Pizzahood is your place. The Pizzahood Special pie is a no-brainer.

Jhamsikhel, 9841704566

GETAWAYS

**Atithi Resort & Spa**

The Camellia Spa in Atithi Resort is one of the best in Pokhara, with lovely interiors and decor. Enjoy the variety of services ranging from Ayurvedic Massages to steam and sauna at Atithi.

Lakeside, Pokhara (061) 1456760

Soaltee Westend Premier

Located in the green plains of Nepalgunj, this expansive resort is one of Nepal's most energy efficient and eco-friendly getaways.

Bhujigaun, Nepalgunj (081) 551145

**Park Village Resort**

Beat the heat this weekend in a quiet corner of Kathmandu at Park Village Resort. Listen to the chirping of birds, and take a dip in the pool to relax your mind and body.

Budhanilkantha, 9851020727

Mount Princess Hotel

Mount Princess Hotel offers magnificent views of the surrounding valley and mountains, a peaceful retreat amidst nature to escape the city's madness.

Dhulikhel (011) 490616

**Hotel Baha**

The brick walls, wooden beams and cosy spaces of this Bhaktapur hotel reflect the cultural heritage of this old town.

Bhaktapur (01) 6616810

White Dzambala

Hidden away in a Buddha alley, White Dzambala has the best comfort Tibetan food in the area. With sweet and sour pork, shredded potato and amazing dumplings, this eatery is a must try.

Boudha, 986699999

**Baker's Den**

Is a loved one's birthday coming up, or need a just-because cake? Order from Baker's Den. Or get freshly baked doughnuts, muffins, bread, and other baked goods.

Naxal (01) 4416560

WEEKEND WEATHER

**Second wind**

The monsoon had a timely arrival and was picking up steam when it stalled last week, pushed back by very hot westerly winds from the desert that also brought a prolonged and record heatwave to most of Nepal. One monsoonal trough leapfrogged over Kathmandu to bring rain to western Nepal, keeping the Valley hot and dry. But the monsoon is now getting second wind, with showers over the weekend which are expected to intensify in the early part of next week – just in time for Rice Planting Day on 29 June. Some of this rain may come in short but heavy downpours, so look out for flooding and landslides along highways.

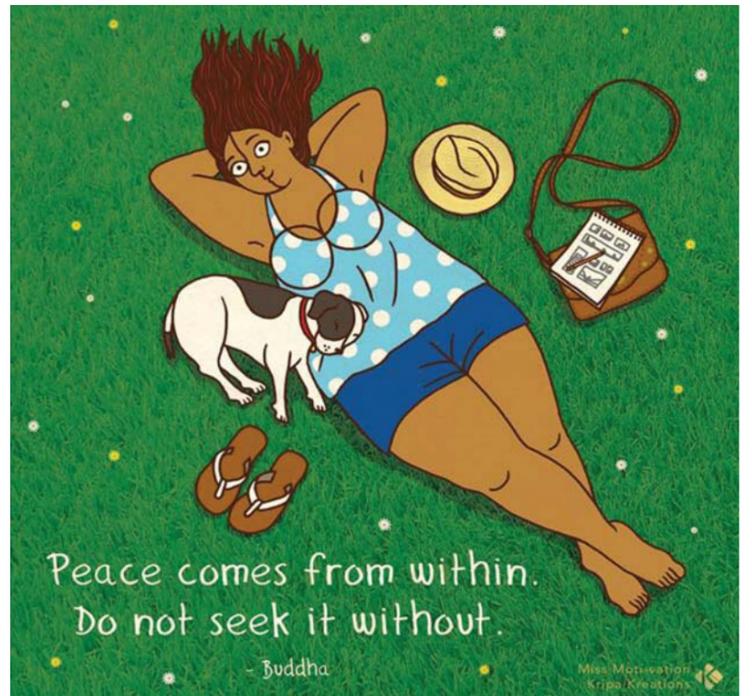
OUR PICK



Based on the 1975 novel by James Clavell, the historical fiction drama Shogun set in 17th century Japan is inspired by the friendship between Tokugawa Ieyasu, the former shogun of Japan, and English shipbuilder and navigator William Adams. Lord Yoshii Toranaga, who is one of the five regent lords appointed by the dead emperor, is fighting for his life as his enemies on the Council of Regents unite against him. When English sailor John Blackthorne ends up shipwrecked off the coast of a Japanese fishing village, things take a turn for both Toranaga and Blackthorne. Stars Hiroyuki Sanada, Cosmo Jarvis, Anna Sawai, Tadanobu Asano, Takehiro Hira, Tommy Bastow and Fumi Nikaido.

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

Hate the game, not the player

Play द सिस्टम is a funny, frustrating, and tense look at women and workplace politics

■ Vishad Onta

Theresa Rebeck's 1992 script *What We're Up Against* has been translated by Priyanka and directed by Akanchha Karki of Katha Ghera as *Play द सिस्टम*. The play shows a not uncommon experience of female employees in offices in Nepal.

Namita is a young talented architect newly hired at a prestigious firm who is exasperated by lazy colleagues who hide their incompetence behind workplace politics.

Played with panache by Ranjana Bhattarai, Namita is eager to work on projects, but her boss Sailesh (Eelum Dixit) is a scotch-swiggling manipulative control freak who does not assign her anything because he is threatened by her competence.

Namita is consigned to a converted storage room, while Pankaj (Rishikesh Basyal) has a much better location for his desk despite being even newer than Namita. Pankaj is a sloppy grifter who makes pompous, long-winded presentations and curries favour with Sailesh by keeping the whiskey flowing.

The office is involved in a big project to restore a mall in Lalitpur. Pankaj is on the project, as is Bishwas (Suraj Malla). Bishwas understands what is going on behind the scenes between fellow staffers and is concerned about a piping problem that is delaying the project.

The fifth person in the office is Chahana (Roshani Syangbo) who is not much of an architect but keeps her job by playing a ditzzy simpering damsel who seconds anything the men say.

The deadline for the mall is looming and the only person with the solution is Namita. Sick of being underestimated and overlooked, she brings a design supposedly by Pankaj to Sailesh, who initially okays it. But after finding out it was hers, he trashes it.

Sailesh is incensed at Namita's trick, and throws her out before putting Chahana on the project instead. Yet Namita is following Sailesh's advice: to get work, you must show initiative.

So Namita takes up a project Chahana has just about abandoned



PHOTOS: TUPHAN JUNG THAPA



to modify a court building. Her pitch to the team is imaginative and focused on meeting the client's demands.

Sailesh uses his status and corporate doublespeak to dominate the meeting, and bully Namita. Humiliated, she confronts Chahana who sided with Sailesh in the meeting and the two have a row.

Brilliantly acted, the scenes are a realistic portrayal of office

hierarchy with gender politics also thrown in that gets in the way of getting work done. People want credit but do not want to work for it.

The men cannot stand Namita because they all know she is a better architect. They describe her as difficult to work with and whiney. But they are fine with docile, unthreatening Chahana. However, she too is scared of the notion that she might soon have to play

sidekick to Namita.

In a final act of rebellion, Namita 'plays the system' of egos to push a flawed design through Chahana to Sailesh, letting Chahana take credit. As Sailesh presents the imperfect plan to the firm's founder, Bishwas has found out what happened and comes to Namita's office to talk, only to find her packing up, expecting to soon be fired. The two agree to talk about the piping problem over dinner.

The play ends abruptly right here, leaving us guessing what happens to Namita. Bristling with swear-words, this is a tense, angry play, but has a light-hearted tone.

The message seems to be that women can either be like Chahana, not getting in anyone's way to keep her job. They will keep her, but have to squander her talent and self respect. Maybe Chahana was once competent too, but is now too jaded and resigned to her fate.

Or, they can be like Namita. Confident and competent, and hence perceived as a threat. Many men do not like admitting that another man is better in their profession. But when it comes to women, their ego is hurt and they

seek petty ways to get their own back.

Sailesh refers to Namita as a "ball-crusher" (the word sounds pitier in Nepali). But if they looked around it would be clear why they are getting left behind: they drink too much, are easily flattered, and have too much time to backbite. They engage in many of the same behaviours that they may jeer at as feminine, such as gossip and hysteria.

One scene demonstrates this hypocrisy. Sailesh and Pankaj are drinking in Sailesh's office, a den of toxic masculinity. They make abusive remarks about Namita, but not once in the play do the two actually do any work.

Suddenly Namita invades the scene and Pankaj cowers pathetically in his chair, not meeting her eye. Namita pours herself some of the whiskey (gasp) and downs it straight before threatening to go to the founder.

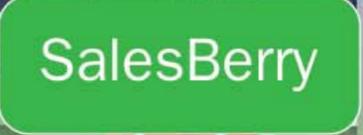
While Bishwas is smart enough to figure out what is going on, he does not have the courage to stand up to Sailesh, or ask Namita for the solution, or "do the right thing".

Rebeck's script came out in 1992, and 32 years later it still transcends time and space, and is a relatable and realistic depiction of the workplace anywhere. This is a universal, perennial issue, and the play can also be taken as a call to maturity in gender relations.

The play runs smooth as it uses one big set throughout, lighting up where the action takes place. In the centre is the presentation table and to the left and right are Chahana and Namita's offices. Overlooking everything up a staircase is Sailesh's office.

The original script is in English, and it adapts well to a sort of Nepali-English hybrid dialogue that would feel natural to the Nepali Times readership. Rebeck curses quite liberally in the original English script, but the adaptation is a bit too generously sprinkled with colloquial Nepali swear words. It certainly has shock value and brings laughs. 🇳🇵

Kausi Theater, Logan
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General tickets: Rs500
Contact: 9861078876



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6th Prize



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4th Prize



PANASONIC ELECTRIC PRESSURE COOKER

5th Prize

A long way to Europe

...but Nepal's state apathy towards migrant workers, the culture of exploitation and abuse continues



PHOTOS: BHRIKUTI RAI

■ **Bhrikuti Rai** in Sarajevo

There is a steady rise of Asians taking the back door to Europe, which needs workers, but is unwilling to open its doors too wide to migrant workers. Europe has the largest ageing population in the world, and this year its proportion of those more than age 65 overtook the number of people under 15.

This demographic decline, along with the shrinking younger workforce in European countries, who are no longer interested in taking up low-paying jobs in the services and agriculture sector, have resulted in a massive rise in

demand for cheap labour mostly from Asia and Africa.

It is also creating a political backlash. This month's EU elections saw a rise of far-right parties across Europe. Those populist parties campaigned on openly anti-immigrant and often racist platforms.

Sadikshya Bhattarai, a researcher at the Centre for the Study of Labour and Mobility (CESLAM) in Kathmandu, has been closely following these trends and says EU countries which until recently had restrictive labour policies for non-EU citizens, have also shifted them to address the labour crisis in member states.

She stresses that Nepal's

foreign labour policy, which is still focused on Gulf countries and Malaysia, now needs to prioritise the welfare of Nepalis in stopover destinations in the Balkans, and initiate government-to-government dialogue to regulate the intake of Nepali migrant labour.

Last year, Romania announced a quota of 100,000 foreign workers, a policy that's been carried over in 2024 as well — resulting in a spike in the number of workers from Nepal and many Asian countries.

Romanians are also one of the largest groups of gastarbeiters in Germany, taking up jobs in construction, housekeeping or work in slaughterhouses — the same jobs that Nepalis and other

Asian workers do in Romania for far less pay and negligible workplace safety. Romania and Croatia are the latest countries to join Schengen.

In recent years, there have been several reports documenting poor working conditions and exploitation faced by migrant workers in Europe, particularly in low-paying temporary jobs in agriculture. Recently, the death of an Indian farm worker in Italy once again put a spotlight on the plight of foreign seasonal workers. This has led to louder calls to ensure labour rights of migrant workers.

During the pandemic in 2020, the European Commission issued guidelines to guarantee the rights, health and safety of seasonal

workers. Earlier this year, Croatia said it was working on amending some of its laws governing foreign workers to ensure they have a better protection safety net, like issuing longer work permits, stricter controls on employers and greater flexibility for workers to change jobs.

For instance, the introduction of an unemployment period will give foreign workers 60 days to find a new job before losing their work permit.

Charles Autheman, who tracks labour migration around the world, says opening space in Europe's labour market has also opened doors for exploitation.

"The demand is such that an increasing number of Nepalis find



a gateway to the European market, but that integration is happening by exploiting their vulnerabilities," Autheman says. "Many are forced to live and work in precarious conditions, and they may not necessarily be receiving the same packages as local workers."

He adds that insufficient knowledge about employment standards and legal regulations will continue to make Nepali workers vulnerable to manipulation during recruitment in Nepal, and while working in Europe as well.

Last September, Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal convened a two-day meeting to discuss safe and systematic foreign employment for Nepali workers, particularly those heading to Europe.

Consultations were held in 2019 as well, and the government declared a new 'roadmap' for Nepali workers for Europe through safe and institutionalised channels. Last year, Nepal signed labour agreements with Romania and Germany.

But beyond that, there has been little progress to streamline migration on the Nepal-Europe corridor, with many migrant workers duped and cheated.

Compared to traditional labour destinations in the Middle East and Malaysia, the recruitment process for Europe can be lengthy and burdensome. So, many enter Europe through acquaintances or individual agents who might have secured contact with the prospective employer through a complex web of intermediaries. This means there are no government-approved demand letters from the hiring company that can be held accountable if things go wrong.

Prospective workers need to travel to New Delhi for visa interviews for a lot of these jobs, which adds to the cost. Meanwhile, for employers in Europe, it is difficult to get the mandatory demand verification to hire Nepali workers since Nepal has a limited number of missions in

the continent. There are currently only nine embassies in Europe of which four are currently without ambassadors after the recent recall of envoys. (Editorial, page 2)

"We want to speed up demand letter attestations to ensure that Nepalis seeking jobs in Romania and other European countries end up in decent working conditions there, and reduce the overall cost of recruitment," the former spokesperson of the Ministry of Labour and Employment Dhandu Raj Ghimire told us in Kathmandu.

He is now the director of the Department of Foreign Employment (DoEF), and is the right man in the right place. He already has to deal with numerous complaints about fraudulent European jobs.

Since last July, DoEF has received nearly 7,000 complaints of fraud, mostly about having to pay high recruitment fees to go to Europe. In 2022, the department filed fraud cases against several recruitment agencies which had duped over Rs30 million from dozens of individuals seeking employment in Europe, most of them for low skilled jobs.

"Most Nepali workers heading to Europe are going for non-skilled 3D jobs (dirty, dangerous and demeaning), which aren't vastly different from the jobs in the Middle East," said Rajeev Pokharel, the former joint secretary at the Ministry of Labour Employment and Social Security.

He added: "We need to ensure that Nepalis entering the European job market are skilled and have some proficiency in the local languages to make the most out of the opportunities there."

Portugal is another popular destination for Nepali migrants. While official data shows that only 2,000 labour permits have been issued, the number of Nepalis entering Portugal through irregular and often dangerous routes across the Balkan countries is on the rise.

According to official records in

Portugal, there are 23,441 Nepalis, the 10th biggest nationality among migrant workers in the country last year.

Portugal has been a favoured destination for many Europe-bound Nepalis because of its relatively accommodative migration policies, which offer employment to even those entering the country without a valid work visa and a path to EU citizenship. Nepalis are also attracted by a warmer climate and more easy-going employers in the service industry.

But all this might soon change because of Portugal recently tightening its wide-open door policy on migration rules. Migrant workers will now need a work contract before moving to Portugal.

Kamal Bhattarai, who runs the Lisbon-based NGO, NIALP, says Nepal must urgently push a bilateral labour agreement with Portugal and facilitate sending Nepali workers through regular channels.

Nepal does not have an embassy in Lisbon yet, although the government decided to send a full-fledged ambassador to Portugal last October.

"The fact that there has been no progress in opening an embassy shows that the government is not serious about working with the Portuguese government to address this issue," Bhattarai told us.

According to Bhattarai, there are numerous cases of fraud involving Nepalis in the Portuguese courts, and the opaque recruitment process has opportunities for middlemen and agents in both Nepal and Portugal to fleece workers.

"Portugal has such a massive labour shortage that it will always need migrant workers," said Bhattarai, "now it is up to Nepal to decide whether it wants its citizens to find jobs here through cumbersome and expensive routes or make things easier for them."

With additional reporting by Jonas Seufert. This report was made possible with support from journalismfund.eu

"Nothing worked out for me in Nepal"

Om Pandey left Nepal in 2010 to work in a plastic factory in Dubai for six years, and saved enough to start a business back home in Nepal full of optimism and hope. But his ventures did not do well, and the Covid lockdown made things worse.

So he paid Rs750,000 to a recruiter to take him to Croatia, but he was dumped in Dubai instead, where he was stranded for more than three months.

Last year, another agent promised him a housekeeping job in a fancy hotel in Bosnia-Herzegovina, a country he had never heard of before. But that did not matter to Pandey, he just wanted out.

He paid the Nepali agent a total of Rs1.3 million for himself and his wife Anita, and flew to the former Yugoslavian nation.

When they reached Sarajevo last September, the job and working conditions were not the €700 a month he was promised, but €450 and with no overtime.

"We trusted the agent who sent us here," Pandey told us, on a park bench just meters away from the hotel where he works in Sarajevo, "Once you leave Nepal, all the promises of a well-paying job and the flexibility we were told that

we'd have in changing jobs here really mean nothing."

Pandey is disillusioned by all the "big talk" about labour migration back home and abroad, counting the hours until the end of his nearly 10-hour long shift. He is now used to the Bosnian stew and bread diet. But he is not sure how long he will be able to stay in this country if the salary is so low. He might have to consider taking the perilous journey across Europe to illegally get to Portugal, another popular destination for Nepalis. (See main story, left)

"We've come so far from our family and home because we thought Europe was wonderful and we save money to send back," he says, walking past families out with children in strollers at the park.

As someone soon approaching his forties, with loans to pay while also supporting his family back home, Pandey is determined to rise above his circumstances in Europe, which is the third time he has left Nepal for work abroad.

"Nothing worked out for me in Nepal, so the plan is to go wherever we can get a permanent residency in Europe," he says. "I will do everything so I don't have to go back to Nepal again."



"What to do next?"

Usha Bhujel (pictured), 38, from Ramechhap came to Bosnia-Herzegovina because she could not go to Romania. She arrived in Sarajevo on 16 June after paying Rs700,000 for a cleaner job at a beauty salon. But after she got here, she was told her job was that of a nail technician.

She had come to Sarajevo on a 30-day work visa (pictured, left). The agent Bimal Titung, who sent her here, has not responded to her pleas. Bhujel was in limbo: unable to look for another job at the risk of overstaying, and not wanting to return because she paid a fortune to get there.

"I am not able to think about what to do next, or about anything at all," she said last week, showing her Whatsapp conversation with Titung, and the online money transfers she had made, "I took all that loan to pay the agent. How will I pay it off now?"

On 22 June, the day her visa was set to expire, she finally decided to fly back to Kathmandu fearing the risk of being an illegal immigrant.



Shattering stereotypes in a hangar

Samjhana Sidale does not work as an aircraft technician to prove people wrong, but to build an identity

In Buddha Air's cavernous hangar at Kathmandu airport, where the scent of aviation fuel mixes with the hum of turboprop engines, Samjhana Sidale straddles the fuselage of an ATR-72, fixing a dorsal panel with a cordless screwdriver.

Nepal's aviation sector has more and more women pilots and ground crew, but Sidale is one of few female aircraft technicians. She defies stereotypes and navigates the male-dominated profession with unwavering determination.

Sidale's journey from the hills to hangar began in a tiny village in Sindhuli, where she was raised by a strong and resilient single mother who taught her to aim for the sky with single-minded determination.

Growing up watching her mother face endless challenges in life was not easy for the young Sidale, but it seared in her a fierce determination to do well in life and take care of her elderly mother.

"My ultimate wish," she confides, "was to see my mother happy in her old age. I am proud that I have made her proud."

Sidale has been with Buddha Air's engineering team for six years now. Her workspace is an array of tools: torque wrenches, winches, clamps and maintenance manuals.

Although fellow engineers have got used to seeing her in the hangar, Sidale still encounters raised eyebrows and curious glances when she tells them she



THE FLYING LIFE: Samjhana Sidale working on routine maintenance of an ATR-72 at the Buddha Air hangar at Kathmandu airport. She is one of few aircraft technicians in a male-dominated profession.



PHOTOS: BUDDHA AIR

maintains aeroplanes for living.

But she does not work to prove anyone wrong, or to be a token woman. She is building an identity. "Normalising women in technology shouldn't require extra effort to change mindsets," she asserts.

Sidale says she dreams of a day when women in unconventional fields will not be treated as anomalies, but as trailblazers. And with her quiet persistence, Sidale is already rewriting the script.

As dawn broke this week at Kathmandu airport, Sidale was in her beige overalls, already at her job. It is precarious work, balancing herself on the plane's fuselage.

The work demands concentration, and Sidale is focused on carrying out her part of the C-check of an ATR-72, one of 17 in the Buddha Air fleet. Aircraft maintenance involves meticulous attention to every detail, following safety protocols, teamwork, and adherence to manuals.

"I am an essential part of this team, and everyone has to strive for perfection because my work holds great value," she says.

Sidale's journey is one of transformation and empowerment that is no longer extraordinary, since Nepal's workplace is increasingly feminised as qualified men seek employment overseas.

Sidale shatters stereotypes and shows that women can excel in traditionally male-dominated fields. Her aspiration is to inspire others and prove that barriers can be broken. 🇳🇵

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