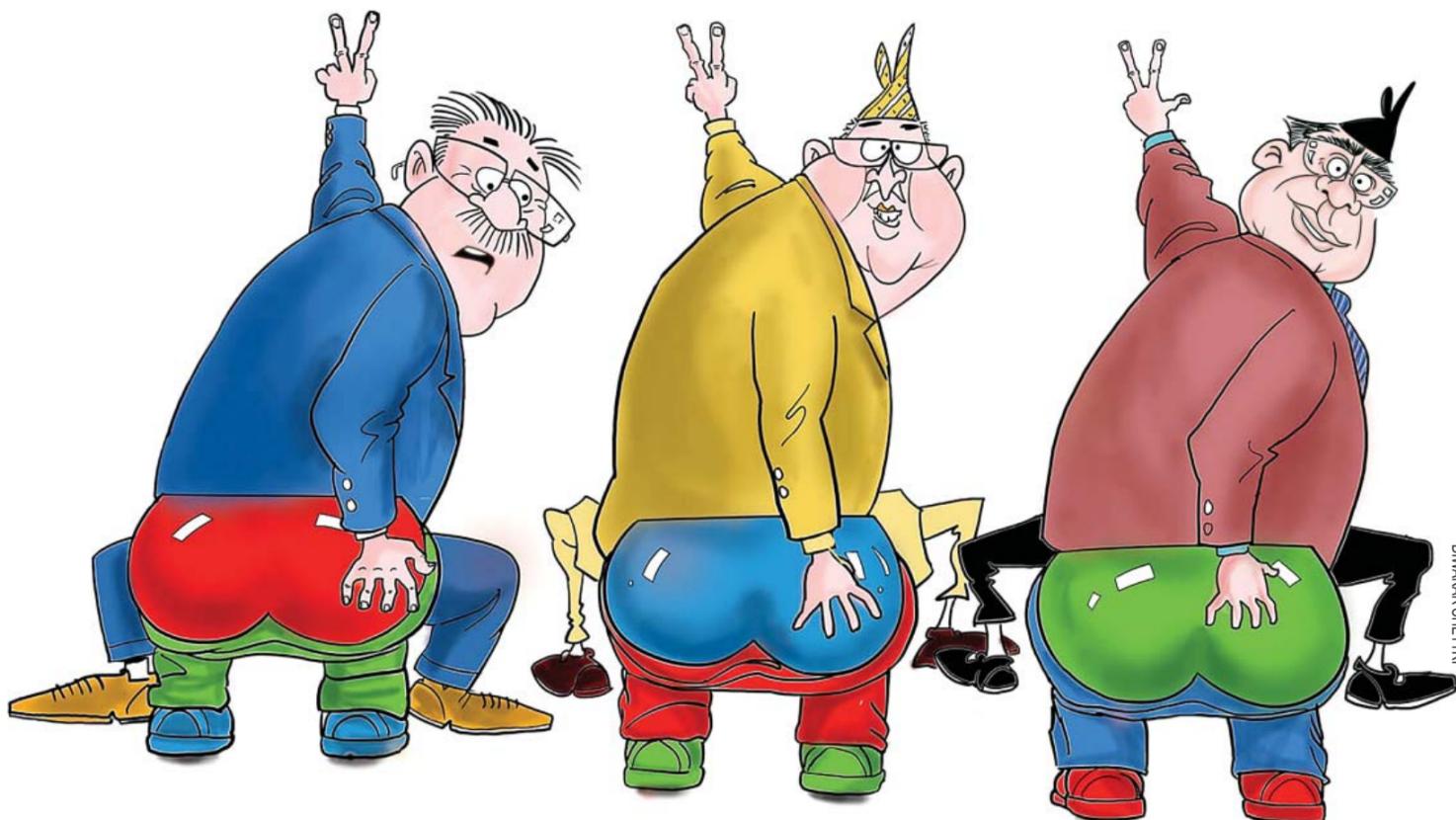


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## DEUBA + OLI - DAHAL DAHAL + DEUBA - OLI OLI + DAHAL - DEUBA

■ Shristi Karki

The Maoist-Centre and the UML have teamed up three times since 2017, the last time just four months ago. The Maoists and the Nepali Congress (NC) also got hitched three times.

But this is the first time in seven years that an NC-UML coalition is being tired out.

It was Pushpa Kamal Dahal of the Maoists who, despite being the leader of a much smaller party by a long margin, used his swing vote to take turns hitching up with Sher Bahadur Deuba (NC) and K P Oli (UML) to be PM. Now, Deuba and Oli have jilted Dahal.

Together, the NC and UML have a majority in Parliament to form a new government, but Prime Minister Dahal is refusing to go, saying he will only do so after a confidence vote within a month.

It is foregone conclusion that Oli will be prime minister for the fourth time, and (if he respects his

pre-nup) hand over to Deuba who will be PM the sixth time.

"The Prime Minister seems to have been taken aback by how suddenly these developments happened," says political analyst Hari Sharma, "seeking a confidence vote is a more dignified way for him to go."

The NC and the UML say they had to get together to amend the 2015 Constitution to scrap proportional representation, saying it led to frequent coalition changes and instability.

But Sharma adds, "These two parties have come together as a matter of convenience, not principle. Constitutional amendment is only a political cover to justify the alliance."

Amendments need a two-thirds majority in both Houses. While the NC and UML have the numbers in the Lower House through support from smaller parties, a two-thirds in the National Assembly is not possible without support from the Maoist Centre or Unified Socialists.

Oli and Deuba tried to give an ideological veneer to their secretive midnight pact, but it was a joint power grab to offset investigations into scandals both their top leaders are implicated in: the NC in the fake refugee scam, and the UML in a land grab of a tea estate in Jhapa.

The NC is wresting the all-important Home Ministry from the RSP's Rabi Lamichhane who had been investigating both scams. Lamichhane himself is being probed for misappropriating funds from co-operatives.

The UML is to get nine ministries, including Finance. Oli had been unhappy with what he called a "Maoist budget" saying there had been no consultation with coalition partners. The two parties also carved up provincial governments with three each, except Madhes Province.

There is also a geopolitical dimension to all this with China openly backing unity among Communist parties, while India and the West want to thwart a UML-Maoist Communist government.

On Wednesday, UML ministers resigned en masse, after the party had urged Prime Minister Dahal to clear the way for a new government.

Some say an alliance of the two biggest mainstream parties will mean stability. Indeed, despite being the first

and second largest parties, the NC and UML have been mostly playing supporting roles in alliances with the much smaller Maoist-Centre.

Deuba and Oli were increasingly spooked lately by Lamichhane's corruption probes in which the money trail reportedly went to the top echelons of the NC and UML.

Nepal's cyberphere is bristling with speculation that investigations to both scandals will now be sidelined. Kathmandu's populist mayor Balen Shah added fuel to the fire with a telling social media post of Deuba and Oli holding tea cups.

The mainstream leadership is concerned about the rise of populist parties and the public outrage on social media about their greed and opportunism.

Meanwhile, the RSP is in firefighting mode. It suspended General Secretary Mukul Dhakal for a scathing internal report critical of Lamichhane for putting political ambition above party interest.

The losers this week appear to be Dahal and the Maoists, Lamichhane and the RSP and Madhav Nepal of the Unified Socialists.

However, in the public's eye, all three mainstream parties are the real loser, and citizens do not have much faith in the new NC-UML alliance improving their living conditions. 🇳🇵



दौरा सुरुवाल

PAGE 6-7



20<sup>th</sup>

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Terraced amphitheatre of paddy in Bhaktapur in May 2022 and destroyed by new housing in May 2023.



## Pouring concrete on rice fields

Kathmandu Valley, once known for its bumper harvests of rice, has seen declining production because urban expansion has devoured once-fertile fields.

There are still some terraces on the outskirts of the city for paddy, but even these are threatened by new settlements (above). The same is true of Pokhara Valley, where Pokhrelis, Jetha Buda and other types of indigenous rice are threatened.

The middle of Asar is ideal for rice planting, and 29 June was supposed to be National Paddy Plantation Day. It is a festival not just for transplanting paddy seedlings on water-logged fields, but also for jubilation and merrymaking.

This year, there was not much to celebrate on Paddy Planting Day. Only 10% of farms across Nepal had completed transplantation, half as much as in an average year.

The monsoon has been starting weeks later than its usual arrival in Nepal in mid-June, which many experts blame on climate breakdown. This year, the rains actually arrived a week early in the aftermath of Cyclone Remal, and unleashed floods and landslides in eastern Nepal in mid-June, while the western half of the country was enduring a prolonged drought.

But the rains fizzled out, and when the monsoon did arrive in Kathmandu Valley on 27 June, it was too little too late. Kathmandu Valley usually receives 250mm of rain in June, this year the figure was only 155mm, though the first 5 days of July have been wet.

The chronic lack of subsidised fertiliser during the planting season due to an inefficient government procurement and delivery mechanism also meant that many farmers were not ready to transplant paddy even if the rains came.

The Tarai is Nepal's rice basket, producing most of its paddy. The plains cover 15% of Nepal's area, but 53% of the population lives there. Here too, settlements along highways and major intersections are eating into rice fields.

Till last week, rice planting had started in only 3% of the area of Madhes Province because of delayed rains and prolonged heatwave. The province produces a quarter of Nepal's rice in a normal year.

The western Tarai has been particularly badly hit by a heatwave that lasted into June. Rainfed farms have not planted rice on fields desiccated by the heat, and irrigation tubewells have gone dry because of a falling water table due to over-extraction.

### ONLINE PACKAGES



दौरा सुरवाल

Considered national dress for men until 2011, दौरा सुरवाल is back in fashion. Most senior politicians and bureaucrats wear it with a grey Western-style jacket and black topi to work. For the public, the dress is a go-to fit for marriages and social gatherings. Learn about the evolution of Nepal's official dress. Story on page 6-7, watch video on our YouTube channel.



CLIMATE CHANGE HITS HIMALAYAN RICE

Across Nepal, erratic monsoons due to the climate crisis has meant that farmers are unable to plant paddy on time, and native rice breeds are disappearing. In Kaski, locals have set up a community seed bank to preserve seeds of local rice varieties. Watch this video on Nepali Times' YouTube channel, and subscribe for more multimedia content.

### RUSSIAN ARMY RECRUITERS

This story of Nepalis in the Russian Army is really sad and heartbreaking ('Recruiters of Nepalis into Russian Army identified', Bhadra Sharma, Page 10-11).

Akku Chowdhury

■ This is really tragic. Like the usual stories one sees in Middle East migration but on a bigger scale ('Nepalis dying in someone else's war', Sagar Budhathoki, #1216). This is happening because of debt, deception, tricksters, and a big gulf between expectations and reality.

Fraser Sugden

■ Each story is so heartbreaking. Wonder what goes on in these traffickers' conscience when selling someone's life away. How do you feed your children with the money you gained by making another child hungry?

Noriwal

### RICE FIELDS

Urban expansion won't just destroy the rice fields, it will cause increased flooding ('Pouring concrete on rice fields', editorial, page 2).

Christine MacDonald

■ They have destroyed millennia-old canals that irrigated the paddy terraces and destroyed the terraces as well. In comparison, paddy terraces in the Philippines are preserved as world heritage. We don't know the meaning of development and have unleashed destruction.

Lal Bahadur

### ECONOMIC SHIFT

Remittance isn't widening the rich-poor gap ('Nepal economy shifts away from farming', Ramesh Kumar, #1218). It's the credit policy doing that.

Nischäl

■ The economy is not shifting fast enough. Nepal is one of the most laggard nations due to its lousy leaders, lousier government and bureaucracy and cynical Nepali culture that incentivises non-performance, leg pulling and getting rich at any cost.

Forester

### Times.com WHAT'S TRENDING

#### Pouring concrete on rice fields

Nepali Times  
Kathmandu Valley, once known for its bumper rice harvests, has seen declining production because urban expansion has devoured once fertile paddy fields. There are still some terraces on the outskirts of the city, but even these are threatened by new settlements. (See editorial, left).

**f** Most reached and shared on Facebook

#### A long way to Europe

by Bhrikuti Rai  
Its labour shortage has made Europe an increasingly popular 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. An investigation from Sarajevo on nepalitimes.com

**X** Most popular on X



#### Economy shifts away from farming

by Ramesh Kumar  
Nepal's economy has been transformed in recent decades during which new professions, businesses and enterprises have flourished. But as the service sector has grown, the role of agriculture in Nepal's economy has diminished. Join the discussion online.

**66** Most commented

#### Nepal government changes again

by Nepali Times  
At the stroke of the midnight hour on Monday, Nepal's government was changing for the third time in a year. Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal is set to be out of the job after his coalition partner the UML joined hands with the Nepali Congress to form a new government. Join the discussion online. For latest update, see page 1 and follow us online.

**🔥** Most visited online page

### QUOTES

**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
Human civilisations have collapsed because they ran out of water due to poor planning and preparedness. It can happen again unless we restore ponds, lakes and rivers. Reviving traditional knowledge about water will also conserve underground water.

**M.E. Smaeker @Mesmaeker**  
Cold hard science can also tell you a lot about groundwater flow etc...

**Hem Sagar Baral @WorshipNature**  
Do not build houses, factories or other infrastructures in wetland areas as that means problems to humans. Do not encroach. Save wetlands, save humanity!

### 1,000 WORDS



PRADEEP RAJ ONTA / RSS

**BACK TO SQUARE ONE:** Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal with his main coalition partner K P Oli of the UML at Baluwatar on Monday morning a few hours after the latter joined hands with the opposition Nepali Congress (NC) to form a new government. Dahal has said he will not step down and will face a confidence vote in the House within a month.

### 20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

#### Here comes the rain

The annual National Paddy Plantation Day on 29 June is not so much a celebration as it used to be. The rains are late due to the climate crisis, and rice fields are being over-run by urban expansion. But these are not new problems, the trend was apparent 20 years ago as this report shows.

Excerpts of the article published on issue #203 2-8 July 2004:

Traditionally 29 June is the date on which rice transplantation should happen. The land is prepared, water diverted to turn it into a muddy pond, the paddy seedlings are ready. While those in the hills and Tarai use bulls and buffaloes to plough, the Jyapu people of the Valley till every inch of the land by themselves. Seedlings are planted one at a time in a backbreaking process.

They work from early morning to late in the evening, tending to the shoots until the monsoon begins. Had the



Here comes rain  
Kathmandu farmers battle a late monsoon. Their sowing begins a week later than usual.

monsoon arrived on time, the plants would be more than a foot tall by now and most of the weeds taken out.

Rice is not an easy crop to grow, it takes more than slipping seedlings into the mud. It needs so much water that only the monsoon can provide it. But when the rains are late as they are now, the farmers get worried. Already, frog weddings are taking place, and women are dancing, dressed as men. The weather gods are not amused.

The Met Office was no help, it talked vaguely about 'isolated rain in parts of the kingdom'. Weak rains will resume this weekend, but its full force is not expected

for another week.

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



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# Giving credit where it is due

How I learnt the many meanings of the English word 'due' and 'self-service'

Back in July 2007, while living in Kathmandu I had most of my evening meals at Angan's Tripureswar outlet, since at the time I had no clue how to cook a proper meal.

The most I could manage was to make tea, haluwa, and chauchau, which I did not care much for during my pregnancy. But since I



**ANGREZI**  
Anbika Giri

had a huge appetite, every evening I would be at my table at Angan for a South Indian thali and sweets, and even pack some dhokla for later at night.

On my first visit to Angan, I sat down and patiently waited for someone to take my order. Five minutes later, I was still waiting. I called a waiter over, and said, "Menu दिनु न."

"यहाँ त प्रीपेड सेल्फ-सर्विस हो," he replied in an offhand manner, telling me to order at the counter, pay and get a receipt.

Thanks to Nepal Telecom, I understood what a 'pre-paid' service was. But I had no concept of a 'self-service' restaurant with waiters. Looking around, I noticed everyone was getting their own food and refilling water glasses themselves.

I grasped the concept of self-service, but I was not all that thrilled about it. If I went to a restaurant, I preferred to be served at the table no matter where I was. It was probably the only time I was not excited to learn something new in English, and I regretted choosing that outlet. But it was already 7PM and I was starving, and did not have the energy to search for another place to eat since I was new to the area then.

I lazily made my way to the counter, I placed my order, paid,



and returned to my seat. I had sworn to myself that I would not set foot in this place again, but for today, I let it slide. My hunger was unbearable, causing me to constantly glance towards the counter, anxiously checking my receipt number.

To distract myself, I started playing snake games on my tiny Nokia 1100 phone. I was completely engrossed in the game, oblivious to the fact that someone had already placed a glass of water on my table. When another customer's number was called, I finally looked up and noticed the water before me.

To my pleasant surprise, a gentleman approached my table with a tray of food. A wave of happiness washed over me. "If you need more water or anything else, feel free to order from here," the man kindly informed me.

I was truly impressed by how well they treated me that day. They

were always checking in to see if I required anything, if the food was too spicy, or if I needed a refill of water. I completely forgot about the negative impression I had of the place just 20 minutes earlier.

That July, 17 years ago, I practically dined at Angan every evening. I would take a seat and a waiter would promptly come to take my order. They always offered me water as soon as I sat down, and never failed to bring an extra sweet treat. It felt like I was eating in the comfort of my own home. One rainy day, they even gave me an umbrella to go home.

In early August, my landlady offered to cook for me as well. I gladly accepted and paid her for meals four times on the weekends and twice during the weekdays. Due to the rainy season, she was concerned about my safety and did not want me slipping and getting hurt. I appreciated her gesture and stopped going to Angan. I am

not sure who owned Angan or managed the Tripureswar outlet in 2007, but I am still thankful to them to introduce a newcomer to Kathmandu about the concept of 'self-service'.

It may be late, considering my daughter is now nearly 17 years old, but I still have a soft spot for the outlet and want to give gratitude where it is due. Oh, and 'due' is a word the versatility of which I discovered at about the same time.

I was sad and frustrated. More sad than frustrated, more nervous than sad. And scared. It had been 42 weeks, and there was still no sign of labour pain. The doctor had given the all-clear just two days earlier, but the absence of any sign of labour was puzzling.

I was at a computer shop in Jhamsikhel to fix my laptop. The technician was trying to figure out what the problem was. I was distracted, and could not relax.

Even though it was September, I was sweating.

Looking at me, a friendly middle-aged foreign-looking man at the shop asked in English, "May I ask when you're due?"

I was as big as an elephant, and he was not much smaller. I noticed he had squeezed himself into the corner of the sofa to make room for me. His kindness touched me, but I did not understand his question especially the word 'due'. I smiled faintly, indicating I was not interested in responding.

Not only was he kind, but intelligent too. He figured out this was a language issue, and cleverly combined sign language with words, pointing towards my belly, asking, "When is the baby coming out?"

"I don't know," I said in fright.

I noticed his eyes widen behind his glasses, but before he could interrogate me further, the technician told me to come back later in the day for my laptop. I hurriedly exited the store.

Once outside, I headed to a cyber cafe and googled the word 'due'. I was surprised to see that a simple three letter English word had so many meanings:

1. *Adjective:* Expected at or planned for at a certain time. "The baby's due in August"
2. Of the proper quality or extent. "driving without due care and attention"
3. *Noun:* one's right, what is owed to one. "He thought it was his due."
4. An obligatory payment, a fee. "He had paid trade union dues for years."
5. *Adverb* (with reference to a point of the compass) exactly; directly. "We'll head due south again on the same road."

Looking back now, I chuckle at my attempts to learn English in such baffling situations in Nepal. More in the next episode. 🇳🇵

Anbika Giri is a novelist and author of children's books in Nepali. Angrezi is her monthly column in Nepali Times about learning English in Nepal. For earlier instalments of Angrezi, go online.

## NMB BANK एनएमबि बैंक

### Sustainable Turkish

For the third consecutive year, Turkish Airlines has been named Most Sustainable Flag Carrier Airline by World Finance magazine. Turkish runs a carbon offset platform



called CO2mission, and uses Sustainable Aviation Fuel and environmentally friendly in-flight products. Since 2008, the airline has conducted over 100 optimisation projects to reduce its carbon footprint.



### Sipradi-Yatri

Sipradi, the official distributor of Tata vehicles in Nepal is collaborating to manufacture Yatri electric motorcycles. Yatri designed Nepal's first electric motorcycles, the P-0 and P-1 the prices of which start at Rs565,000.



### Mahindra XUV400 EV

Agni Group has launched the Mahindra XUV400 EV with a 39.4kWh battery, regenerative braking and a range of 375km. It comes in two-tone colourways and the base model starts at Rs5,250,000.

### IME classes

Global IME Bank held financial literacy programs at 233 offices across Nepal with 35,000 farmers, migrant workers, youth, and women attending. Saving, loans, remittances, investment, insurance, financial fraud, and digital banking were covered.

### Kaiyi EV

Laxmi Group has opened bookings for the Chinese brand Kaiyi X3 Pro EV, which has a range of 401km and charges in 5-7 hours. It has a 10.25-inch touchscreen, a skyroof, and wireless charging pads. The model starts at Rs4,696,000 and can be test-driven at Kaiyi's Bhatbhateni showroom.

### Ncell trees

Ncell, the National Youth Society and the FAO launched a week-long program to plant 7,700 trees for National Tree Planting Day 2081. The One Youth, One Plant campaign kicked off at Bidur, 40km northwest of Kathmandu, and will be held in all 77 districts. Ncell has also deployed rapid



response teams to resolve network interruptions caused by the monsoon. The teams have already been working through rainstorms, blocked roads and fallen poles to restore more than 70% of 116 impacted towers in Kosi, Madhes, and Gandaki.

### Esevenstar is here

Seven Star International Travels and Tours has launched esevenstar.com, an online ticketing portal where customers can buy tickets for any airlines and get 24/7 support. The platform accepts domestic and international cards and digital wallets for payment.



### Honda Camp

Syakar Trading is running a 'Monsoon Service Camp' at its Dhobihat showroom until 5 July where customers can get free car servicing and scanning with discounts for spare parts, labour costs, lubricants, denting painting, and AC refills.

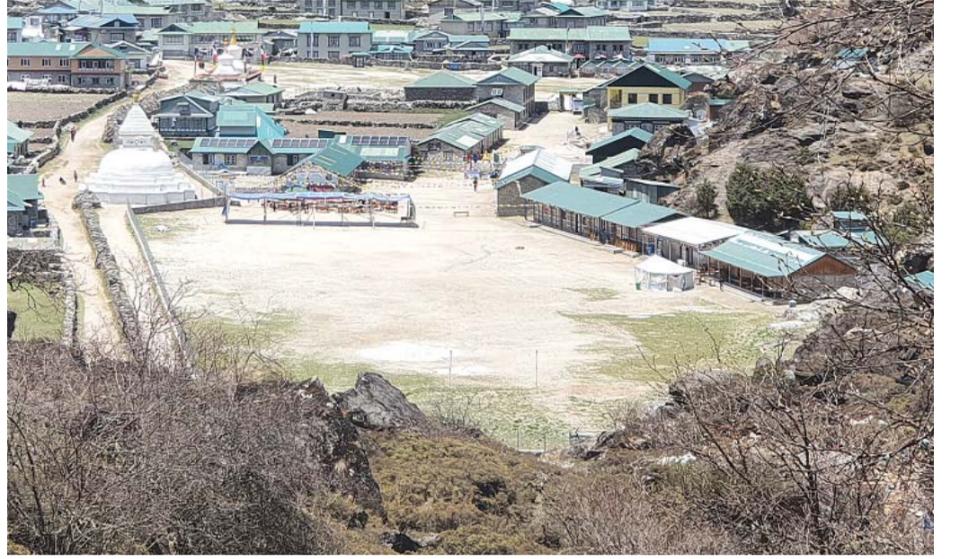
### New NYEF Prez

The Nepalese Young Entrepreneur Forum concluded its 6th Annual General Meeting. Abhimanyu Golchha, executive director of the Golchha group, was elected the new president replacing Prarthana Sakha.



### Luxury E-Van

Shasheela Motors is importing 22-seater luxury electric vans with AC, a 123kW battery and with a range of 300km, which it says is suitable for long trips. Bookings are open for release in Dasain.



# Hillary school attains Himalayan heights

Khumjung Secondary School established by Edmund Hillary sees a 100% SEE pass rate

■ Lisa Choegyol

Khumjung Secondary School became the top-performing school in Solukhumbu district last week in the 2024 Secondary Education Examination (SEE), achieving a 100% pass rate with exceptionally high personal scores.

Khumjung's 27 students, comprising 15 girls and 12 boys, had two pupils scoring A+, 12 scoring A, 11 scoring B+, and two scoring a B. Khamso Wongdu Sherpa's A+ score of 3.9 Grade Point Average (GPA) was the highest for a boy in the district.

Much credit for the results have gone to former Headmaster Ngawang Dorjee Rai, and the new incumbent, Kancha Nuru Sherpa and his team. Solukhumbu topped the 14 districts of Kosi Province with a pass rate of 87%. Nationwide, 47.86% of students who took the SEE in 2024 passed the examinations.

Unlike other community schools, students of Khumbu Pasang Lhamu Rural Municipality take the exams in English.

"We are very proud of our exemplary Quality Educational Programme, which is supported by the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade," said Alexander Hillary, grandson of Edmund Hillary, who runs Himalayan Trust in New Zealand that supports the school. "We aspire for the best, we listen to what is needed, we discuss with local leaders, and we rigorously monitor



and evaluate in order to get the best results."

It would have been the great grandfathers of today's high-achieving Khumjung students who long ago answered Edmund Hillary's request of what he could do to help the Sherpas. Their answer was: "Our children have eyes but they cannot see. We would like you to open their eyes by building a school in our village."

Last year during the Everest 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations, pupils of Khumjung Secondary School took time out from their study schedule to welcome local dignitaries. Thronging their sprawling school compound were descendants of Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay, who together first scaled the world's highest mountain in 1953. Also attending was former New Zealand prime minister, former head of UNDP and patron of Himalayan Trust, Helen Clark.

"I am so impressed by the wonderful results in national examinations by Solukhumbu students," Clark said this week. "I am pleased that the Himalayan Trust has long supported schools in the region so that young people can develop to their full potential."

The Khumjung School started as a two-room 'schoolhouse in the clouds' -- the very first classroom in the Khumbu Edmund Hillary built with his own hands, with family and friends in 1961. Reimagined as a New Zealand-designed Visitor Centre, the modest tin building's colourful displays feature the legacy of the Sherpas and the history of Mt Everest.

The Himalayan Trust supports 108 schools in five rural municipalities of Solukhumbu with resources and equipment, training and salary support for teachers and scholarships for students to pursue higher studies.

**TO SIR WITH LOVE:** The aluminium building of the Khumjung School hand-built in 1961 by Sir Edmund Hillary and his relatives and friends (above, left) and the school today (right). A classroom at the Khumjung School today.

Pasang Dawa Sherpa, Chair of Himalayan Trust Nepal, says: "We are delighted that Sir Ed's humble beginnings have reached such impressive heights. Our schools can easily match the standard of Kathmandu-based schools with their overall achievements."

In Chaurikharka below Lukla, the Mahendra Jyoti Secondary School came second after Khumjung. Of their 52 pupils, 12 passed with an A grade, 36 with B+, and four with B.

Deputy Mayor Tashi Lhamu Sherpa says: "We are so pleased with these overall results. High standards of education give our people options for their future."

With the support of the New Zealand-based EduTech Nepal, 43 computer labs have been set up in Solukhumbu schools, integrating technology with teaching and learning. Says founder Mike Chisholm: "The EduTech mission is to transform education with technology. We are thrilled with the recent SEE results, particularly the encouraging marks for ICT and computer courses."

The Himalayan Trust is the Nepali NGO that implements these projects, navigating within the national school system. Although aware of its limitations, flaws and curriculum controversies, the

accomplishments of Solukhumbu students are being recognised whilst hoping for reform and future improvements.

Besides the ones in Khumjung and Chaurikharka, Himalayan Trust has built 42 schools in Solukhumbu including in Kharikhola, Nunthala, Junbesi, Loding, Bhakanje, and Thame. It has also supported the establishment of Solukhumbu Multiple Campus, says CEO Mingma Norbu Sherpa.

Nepal's first female warden conservation officer Sushma Rana Magar manages Sagarmatha National Park from her headquarters above Namche, and says: "I hope pupils will study conservation, I would love to see more Sherpas becoming wardens and district forest officers in future."

It is a very different world today, and education has given Sherpas options and confidence to lead in many fields beyond mountaineering and trekking. Graduates have excelled as teachers, nurses, doctors, dentists, physiotherapists, hoteliers, engineers, scientists, singers, and professors. They serve as ministers, ambassadors, honorary consuls and political leaders. Sherpas own airlines, operate helicopters and fly jets.

Says Edmund Hillary's son Peter: "My father's vision was to deliver a strong education program to the Everest region of Nepal and secure a brighter future for as many children and young people as possible. I think he would be immensely pleased with these results, as are we." 🇳🇵

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# दौरा सुरुवाल

## The evolution of Nepal's official dress

■ Pinki Sris Rana

For the decades that he was an underground guerrilla commander, and even when he took his oath of office after being elected prime minister in 2008 and 2016, Pushpa Kamal Dahal never wore Nepal's official dress.

But that changed in 2022, during his third swearing in. He came in a दौरा सुरुवाल and black Bhadgaunle topi, an attire that Dahal himself described as a symbol of Nepal's feudal past and a national identity foisted on the country's ethnic minorities.

Since then, he has pointedly refused to wear anything else during official events, and even when he attended Indian prime Minister Narendra Modi's own third oath-taking as prime minister last month.

Considered national attire for men until 2011, the dress was removed from its title along with gunyo cholo for women by another Maoist Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai in 2012, saying Nepal was too ethnically diverse to have a national uniform.

But the दौरा सुरुवाल is back. Most senior politicians and bureaucrats wear it with a grey Western-style jacket and black topi to work, even though it is neither suited for the heat of the Tarai nor the freezing cold of the high Himalaya. For the public, the dress is a go-to fit for marriages and social gatherings.

No one really knows when the dress originated, or why it looks the way it does. Most agree it originated during the Malla era in Kathmandu Valley. Others say it is geopolitically fitting that Nepal's national dress has suruwal bottoms that resemble Jodhpur



riding pantaloons from India, and the दौरा सुरुवाल is similar to bhot shirts worn in Tibet. The western jacket and waistcoat were added during the Rana era.

"Examining sculptures and rare photographs of the Malla era show that the present day दौरा सुरुवाल has its roots in dresses worn at that time," explains historian Tri Ratna Manandhar. "There are photographs of Newa merchants in Bhot (Tibet) wearing similar clothing during the reign of Pratap Malla."

In bronze sculptures at the National Museum in Chhauni, Malla kings are also seen to be wearing dresses that look like the दौरा सुरुवाल. The only difference seems to be that the kilt-like skirts that the दौरा evolved into were longer then. The kings also wore the pagadi headgear similar to what Rajput royalty in India wore.

"It was during the Rana regime that the dress became official," Manandhar continues. "When King Surendra died and his grandson Prithvi Bir Bikram (father of King Tribhuvan) ascended the throne in 1881, the official invitation had an order to wear jama (similar to दौरा सुरुवाल), suruwal and pagadi."

The famous photo of a garlanded King Tribhuvan (pictured, left) emerging from a plane after his exile in 1950 is the exact version of the present day दौरा सुरुवाल. History professor at Tribhuvan University Purushottam Lochan Shrestha says culture is constantly evolving, and the dress has changed accordingly.

"The officialisation of the dress took place during Tribhuvan's reign and ministers started wearing the दौरा सुरुवाल," says Manandhar.

Although the दौरा सुरुवाल was worn by ordinary people in Kathmandu Valley, it also became the official attire of the ruling class with the western-style waistcoat, jacket and belt added.

King Mahendra's slogan 'Ek Raja, Ek Desh, Ek Bhasa, Ek Bhes' (One King, One Nation, One Language, One Dress) became the rallying cry for symbols of Nepali nationhood during the Panchayat.

Daura suruwal with waist coat (called 'istakot' in Nepali) also became semi-official in summer, but today is mostly the uniform of restaurant servers. When it is hot, some officials are even seen in half-sleeve दौरा सुरुवाल (also called labeda).

"Back then, everyone in Kathmandu would wear दौरा सुरुवाल with istakot and black topi," recalls Hera Bahadur Shakya of the Rastriya Daura Suruwal Tailors shop, which has been stitching the dress for the past 70 years. Most people made one दौरा सुरुवाल and two or three suruwal to last them the whole year.

The attire has evolved with modernity. The second inner suruwal has been mostly abandoned, the pants have elastic waistbands instead of strings, pockets have been added, and some even have flaps with zippers.

"The choice for fabric has also changed," says Moon Prajapati of Namuna College of Fashion Technology. "Traditional suruwal were loose fitted and roomier around the waist so it would be easier to work in the fields. But



### Coat

The coat is the outer layer of the दौरा सुरुवाल today and was once indicative of the economic class of the wearer.

The British gifted Jung Bahadur Rana a tweed coat during his 1850 visit to London, and it is believed that is when some nobility started wearing coats on top of their दौरा सुरुवाल.



### Daura

The full-sleeved upper part of the garb that stops above the knee is called दौरा सुरुवाल, or labeda. It appears to be similar to tunics worn in Tibet and Central Asia.

The double layer in दौरा सुरुवाल made it a preferred winter garment. Today, the दौरा सुरुवाल is also made half-sleeved and the readymade दौरा सुरुवाल now have cuffs and comes with pockets.

today they are tighter."

The दौरा सुरुवाल today is worn mostly by state officials, or during marriage and other festival rituals, and by Nepalis who want to make a national statement (see boxes overleaf).

These needs have kept some tailoring shops open, even though many others have closed, either because the skills have died with their dressmakers, or the lack of demand. ❏

## The Nepali Babu Fit

King Mahendra wanted the दौरा सुरुवाल to be a symbol of Nepali nationhood, but it was the song 'Ma hu Nepali Babu, Made in Nepal' of the movie Nepali Babu that celebrated the dress as something that should be proudly worn.

But while the dress retains some of these sentiments, many find it is an obsolete vestige of an outdated past, and does not reflect Nepal's ethnic and cultural diversity.





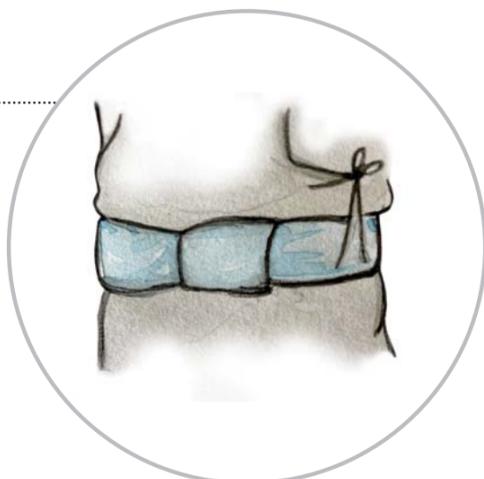
## Topi

A Bhadgaule or Dhaka cap is the headgear which some think represents Himalayan peaks. Even those who do not wear daura suruwal will wear the topi with their suit and tie as a symbol of Nepali identity. There is a day in a year (1 January) that has been designated Topi Day.



## Istakot

Since early daura suruwal did not have pockets, some traders added western-style sleeveless waistcoats. The istakot (as Nepalis pronounced waistcoat) was layered on the top of daura but this practice has almost vanished except for restaurant servers. Wearing it solely as a top by women has become a fashion statement globally, including here in Nepal.



## Patuka

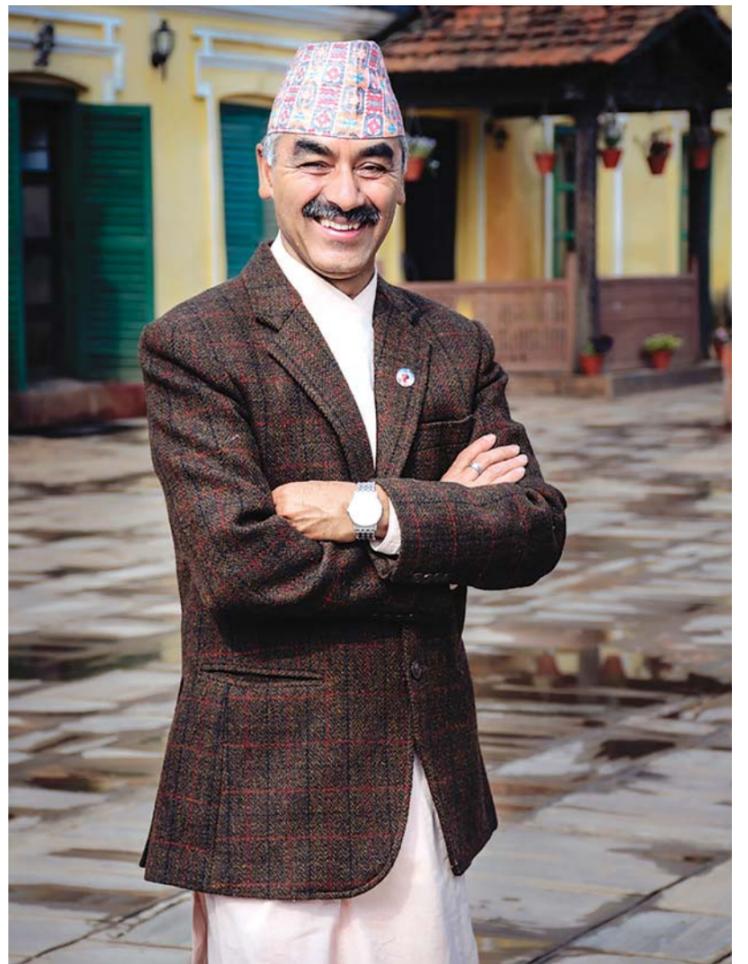
This is a piece of long cloth worn around the waist. It was once a unisex piece that helped brace the back during heavy work, or to carry a khukri. These days patuka has become a women-only item, although some males wear them during festivals or marriage ceremonies.

The patuka is now mostly replaced by leather belts. While the ruling class always wore belts as an accessory to this dress, the trend seems to be spreading — and not just ordinary belts but broader versions used by Muslims during Hajj pilgrimages.



## Suruwal

The matching lower part of the garb is a simple trouser loosely fitted on the hips and thighs and tighter towards the calves and ankles. It is similar to Jodhpur riding pants or breeches. The pants can be tightened around the waist by pulling cotton strings, but the modern version is not so loose and an elastic band and a zipper is opted for.



THE EXPLORE NEPAL

## Bharat Basnet

Tourism Entrepreneur

You won't catch tourism entrepreneur Bharat Basnet not wearing a daura suruwal. At social gatherings, at home or work, and even during visits abroad, he proudly dons his trademark attire.

Born in Khotang, Basnet grew up wearing kamiz suruwal which is still his regular preferred home wear. But as he got older and expanded his businesses, he grew fond of daura suruwal.

"In the tourism industry, we talk a lot about preserving our culture but we wear western clothes," says Basnet, 66. "So, after a while, I got

tired of the hypocrisy."

A staunch fan of Prithvi Narayan Shah's legacy, Basnet's shift to daura suruwal was a strategic move. Nepal's founding king wrote the Divyopadesh as advice for his young kingdom which highlighted the importance of self-reliance.

Basnet's daura suruwal are all made of handwoven Nepali fabric, even the jacket. Basnet feels the dress is the most practical and comfortable day-to-day wear. He says, "For me the daura suruwal reflects who we are as Nepalis, and makes us truer to ourselves."



NEPALI TIMES ARCHIVE

## Bhusan Dahal

Media Personality

Although a more occasional wearer of daura suruwal, Dahal considers the dress "fantastically comfortable wear". He began wearing the national dress in his early twenties when he started working at Nepal Television.

Except for formal events, the dress was not a compulsion back then, but Dahal preferred the attire.

"Whenever there's an invitation that requires formal clothing then I tend to go in a daura suruwal in a sober colour," says the 57-year-

old Dahal, who now hosts the Bravo Delta Show on YouTube.

Sometimes he wears a suit, but finding a matching shirt, tie, and pocket square is a hassle. In the case of daura suruwal, if it is pressed and hanged, it is wear-and-go.

Dahal says the dress gives him an identity, it is recognisable and unique. For the complete look, Dahal prefers a Nepali printed dhaka topi, which he wears even with the kamiz suruwal.

He says, "I have developed a fetish for the topi."

## EVENTS

**The Lost-Wax Technique**

Take part in a one-day workshop to learn the art of moulding and creating. Anil Shakya, Suman Shakya and Sunny Shakya will instruct participants.

13-14 July, 1pm-4pm, Registration fee: Rs1,500, KGH Dream Garden, Thamel

**Shabdhamala**

This fundraiser will take attendees on an emotional journey through storytelling, poetry and music.

6 July, 5pm onwards, Ticket: Rs300, EDN Sanepa, Lalitpur

**Rule Breaker Boyz**

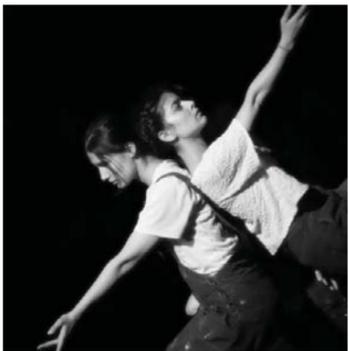
Have a hilarious evening this Saturday as comedic duo Alan Jung thapa and Aashish Ghimire take the stage.

6 July, 6pm onwards, Ticket: Rs500- Rs1,000, Beers and Cheers, Jhamsikhel

**Unfolding The City**

The exhibition Unfolding The City is a collage of diversity that looks at daily rituals of coexistence, curiously questioning traditional knowledge and accepting Kathmandu for what it is.

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

**MAD Fest 2024**

Mandala Alumni Drama Festival is a three-day festival that will showcase six dramas developed and performed by students of Mandala Theatre.

5-7 July, 12pm-8pm, Ticket: Rs300 (for single play); Rs1,500 (for all play), Mandala Theatre, Thapagaun

## DINING

**Mechung**

Taste the best of Tibet at Mechung. The authentic sha phaley, thukpa and gyuma are can't-misses.

Boudha (01) 4577759

## MUSIC

**Monsoon Musical Night**

This rainy season, stay indoors and listen to soothing music with close friends and family at Ai-la Lounge. An after party is also scheduled.

5 July, 6pm- 2am, Ai-la Lounge, Kumaripati

**Ace IBS Fiesta**

Spend this Saturday with melodies from artists including Swoopna Suman, Mellow Indices, and Sushant Ra Raga.

6 July, 11am onwards, Ticket: Rs350, Hotel Annapurna, Darbar Marg

**Rockheads**

Catch Rockheads live this Friday evening. Take friends along to make the musical evening more memorable.

5 July, Club Platinum, Thamel, 9703260768

**Sound Bath Sessions**

Join in for a spiritual practice of focusing on the experience of sound, music and vibrations to heal your body and soul from the everyday madness.

6 July, 6pm-7:30pm, Fee: Rs1,800, Calm Sutra Studio, Maharajganj

**Upendra Rai and Friends**

Get ready to groove to the punchy beats that folk-fusion artists Upendra Rai and Friends bring to the stage.

5 July, 8pm onwards, Beers and Cheers, Jhamsikhel

**Bhojan Griha**

Experience Nepali cuisine prepared from local organic sources like never before at Bhojan Griha, where the dining experience is elevated by the live folk dance.

Dillibazar, 9841682735

**Casa Mexicana**

Enjoy a taste of Mexico with an assortment of tacos, quesadillas and tres leches cakes. From vegetarian to meat options, anyone can try the authentic Mexican dishes.

Gairidhara and Patan, 9840542082

## About Town

## GETAWAYS

**Hotel Annapurna View**

Situated at 1,600m atop Sarangkot, this boutique hotel offers breathtaking views of the snow-capped mountains and Phewa Lake. Catch a panoramic scene of the Annapurnas.

Sarangkot, Pokhara (061) 506000

**Mountain Glory**

This expansive luxury resort is the place to be for anyone looking for great views and time away from busy schedules.

Dovilla, Pokhara, 9802859011

**Kasara Resort**

Immerse in the lush greenery in the heart of Chitwan's National Park. With activities for everyone—from cycling to wildlife viewing—Kasara Resort is the ideal getaway for families.

Patihani, Chitwan National Park, Chitwan, 9801249337

**End of the Universe**

In this quaint sanctuary located in scenic Nagarkot, settle into one of the rustic cabins, eat local cuisine and check out the local sights.

Mahankal Mandir, Nagarkot (01)6680109

**The Inn Patan**

What was once a traditional brick and timber Newari house has been transformed into a beautiful heritage hotel. Experience the vibrant history of Patan Darbar Square during a stay here.

Patan (01) 5447834

**Kairos Cafe**

With a customizable breakfast, variety of juicy burgers and an assortment of Italian, Spanish and English cuisine, Kairos Cafe is a must for foodies.

Jawalakhel, 9813493902

**Cafe Hessed**

Cafe Hessed serves the best cupcakes and doughnuts. There is also Korean on the menu: the cafe's gimbab is an absolute must-have.

Pulchowk (01) 5430933

## WEEKEND WEATHER

**Mature monsoon**

After that initial hiccup, the monsoon is making up for lost time and will make its presence felt with copious showers, overcast skies and overflowing rivers. The rain will be particularly heavy over the weekend, when we will see between 40-50mm of rain every day in Kathmandu Valley. Some of it could fall in brief spells, which means the drainage system will not be able to cope – especially because we have constricted the rivers, built walls and roads. Travellers should factor in landslides, blocked roads, and delayed flights. This monsoon pulse should last about a week.

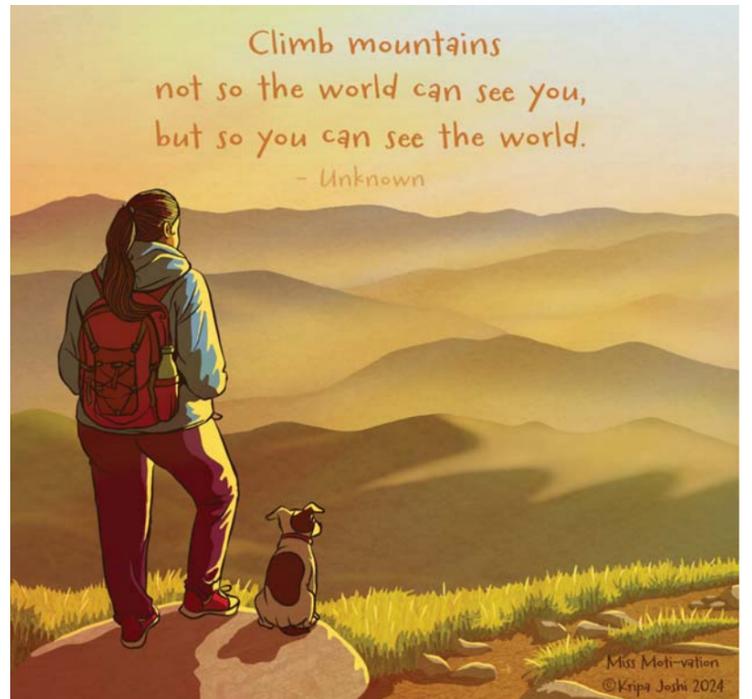


## OUR PICK

Seven-year-old Jeong Ji-an is raised by her uncle Jeong Jin-man after the death of her parents. More than a decade later, Jin-man dies unexpectedly as well, immediately after which his niece becomes the target of a dangerous group that seeks to eliminate her. As bodies pile up around her, Ji-an must use the survival skills taught to her by her uncle while trying to figure out the mysterious business that she has inherited from him. The 2024 South Korean series A Shop for Killers, based on a novel by Kang Ji-young, stars Lee Dong-wook and Kim Hye-jun.

## 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

# Feeling at home nowhere and everywhere

Ranjan Adiga's stories are about fellow Nepalis as they struggle for identity in their new lives

■ Vishad Raj Onta

Ranjan Adiga's debut short story collection, *Leech and Other Stories*, is a bold and honest exploration of a wide variety of modern experiences of Nepalis home and abroad.

A million Nepalis leave the country every year, mostly for work or study, and about 90,000 stay abroad. The stories in this slim volume revolve around characters who have migrated and are dealing with issues of identity in their adopted homes.

Four of the stories involve Nepalis in America navigating success, divorce, cash jobs in Indian restaurants, diversity committee politics, and the Broncos.

America is where Adiga is based, teaching creative writing and English at Westminster College in Utah. After contributing for this newspaper in 2010, and a brief internship at The Kathmandu Post, he spent some well-paying years in advertising in Kathmandu and Bahrain.

Fascinated by fiction, he did an MFA in creative writing before completing a PhD at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Observing Nepalis struggling with identity and acclimatising to American culture gave the fiction writer in Adiga plenty of plot material to work on.

Adiga is often mistaken for Aravind Adiga, author of the Booker-prize winning 2008 book, *The White Tiger*, that was made into a Netflix movie starring Priyanka Chopra.

"When you introduce yourself



in Nepal, it's never just your first name. If I just say 'Ranjan,' the next question is automatically 'Ranjan ke?' Adiga told us during a recent visit to the Nepali Times newsroom. "People are often intrigued, and some harbour preconceptions about who I am."

And if it is not being mistaken for Aravind, it is to be taken for an Indian. But Ranjan's pedigree is even more exotic: his grandfather was a high priest of Pashupati in Kathmandu, whose predecessors were brought from Karnataka in south India for the past 300 years. Both his parents are Nepali.

Like many people who straddle multiple cultures, Adiga does not feel completely accepted anywhere. In fact, the uprootedness of being

at home everywhere and nowhere helps Ranjan Adiga in his writing, and that is also reflected in many of the characters in his stories.

They too feel alienated in new cultures with different values and changing requirements for getting by: whether a Madhesi in Kathmandu, a newly-Christian Dalit woman, or a homocurious Uncle.

One of the ten stories is titled *Leech*, and seems to be inspired by the experience of author and former American Peace Corps volunteer Broughton Coburn, whom Nepali Times profiled in 2006.

Says Adiga: "A lot of my characters feel like parasites in the system, often finding themselves choosing between morality or survival."

Indeed, most protagonists in Adiga's stories are morally ambiguous. They steal, lie, cheat and drink, and then confess their sins.

"Most of my stories reveal themselves to me as I write. It's a process of discovery, of observing what the characters do next and how they interact," Adiga explains, adding that he had the plot outlined completely for just one story.

That story, titled *Student Visa*, is about Sanjay, a Nepali teen on whom his parents have placed great expectations: he will go to America and ultimately bring Mom and Dad

along too. Sanjay completely bombs the interview but lies to his parents that he got the visa.

The author is also interested in how Nepalis deal with relationship norms abroad.

The story titled *A Short Visit* has a strong plot about Nirmal who works in tech and has a fancy house and a Tesla. His Baba, a reformed alcoholic, is visiting him alone.

Father and son bond over alcohol as a poignant, vulnerable story unfolds. But Baba is not supposed to drink at all, and when Nirmal's sister Binita is livid when she finds out.

Binita lives in Nepal with a stable joint family and children, Nirmal is rich and divorced in Denver. Both know but do not say that Binita made the bigger sacrifice.

"I wrote that story quickly in three weeks as a replacement," Adiga explains. "Usually it takes me several months on each one."

Adiga's stories are observant, uncomfortable and true. Like when he writes about Nirmal still texting his ex-wife and liking each other's photos on Instagram. Or when he writes: 'Baba looked like someone's driver at a wedding in Nepal, cowering in a corner, scrounging on leftovers.'

In 'A Haircut and a Massage' a middle-aged man named Krishna is in a sad marriage and starts exploring his sexuality. When his wife sends him out to buy veggies, he starts heading to seductive barber Iqbal's salon for full body massages.

Most of Adiga's stories feature

strong, pragmatic female characters who are in charge, with weaker male counterparts who feel stuck in life.

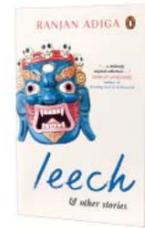
Adiga writes boldly about issues we usually skirt around. 'High Heels' looks at a Dalit woman who converts to Christianity and works at a bank, doing better than if she did what her caste identity dictated. Prosletysation may have its problems, but at least the church treats her as an equal.

Adiga admits that one of his inspirations is fellow Nepali writer in America, Samrat Upadhyay (The Guru of Love, Arresting God in Kathmandu, Mad Country) who is also a Kathmandu St Xavierite.

The short, clipped sentences, sparse prose and simple plot lines are indeed vintage Samrat. And like Subcontinental authors who write in English, Adiga also grapples with making vernacular dialogue sound authentic.

The stories in the book are set in places where the author lives and works, so naturally the reader may wonder how autobiographical they are.

Ranjan Adiga leaves us guessing. 🇳🇵



*Leech & Other Stories*  
by Ranjan Adiga  
India Penguin, 2024  
256 Pages  
Rs650  
ISBN: 9780143463382

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#### PERPETRATORS AND VICTIMS:

Mohan Oli and Raj Oli (left) have been identified by escapees from the Ukraine front as two of the recruiters who tricked Nepalis into paying huge sums to join the Russian Army. Raj Oli is based in Moscow and married to a Russian police woman.

Khagendra Khatri (right) from Rolpa bribed his Russian commander on the frontlines to escape to Moscow and back to Nepal.

Babu Kaji Pradhan (next right), brother of Ram Kumar Pradhan who joined the Russian Army, and has since been killed.

Tirtha Raj Pandey (far right) refused to sign his military contract in Moscow and was allowed to return to Nepal by Indian agents.

Deepa Singh Shahi, wife of Nabin Shahi (below, right) of Jajarkot who was killed in action in Ukraine last year with his Russian Army ID.

# Recruiters of Nepalis into Russian Army identified

Despite that, known traffickers have absconded or have been let off because of political connections

■ Bhadra Sharma

**M**ohan Oli and his brother Raj (above) have been identified as two of the recruiters who lured fellow Nepalis to be conscripted into the Russian Army by promising them huge salaries and citizenship in exchange for exorbitant fees.

This investigation traced some of the traffickers with information from Nepalis who deserted the Russian Army to return to Nepal.

One of the ex-soldiers who returned is Khagendra Khatri from Rolpa who was recruited by Mohan Oli and his accomplice Nim Bahadur Kunwar (alias Sushant) just after he had graduated in agriculture from a college in Dang.

Unable to find a job to pay back loans his father had taken for his education, Khatri began to prepare to migrate for work in Korea.

Khatri's neighbours were two men from Salyan: Sushant and Mohan Oli. Along with their accomplice Ganesh Neupane, they convinced Khatri that Korea was not worth the hassle and money and joining the Russian Army was a much better option with a monthly salary of Rs300,000 and Russian citizenship after a year.

Sushant and Mohan had sent another Nepali, Abhishek Buda of Rolpa, to the Russian Army previously and got him to also persuade Khatri. Abhishek, who had not yet been sent to the frontline at the time, enthusiastically encouraged Khatri to join as well.

The recruiters also convinced Khatri's relative Dal Bahadur Oli of Rolpa to also go to Russia, and the two paid Mohan Oli Rs300,000 each, and deposited Rs400,000 each in Sushant's bank account.

Their visas arrived surprisingly rapidly within ten days, indicating collusion with the Russian authorities. On 15 October last year, Khatri and Dal Bahadur met five other recruits at Kathmandu airport before their flight.

When they boarded their flight to Moscow in Dubai, the number of Nepalis had swelled to 52. Blissfully unaware of the intensity of the war, the Nepalis were in high spirits during the journey.

In Moscow, a Russian agent whisked all the Nepalis off to a military recruitment centre. But Khatri was held back for two more days, as the agent wanted him to pay up an additional Rs50,000. Once he did, he joined the rest at the recruitment centre, where there were another 150 Nepali conscripts.

Khatri was to join the 'Group Seven Battalion' and had to sign a contract written in Russian. He used Google Translate and found out that the recruits would not be paid Rs10 million in case of death or injury as he had been promised back in Nepal.

Khatri and his group were then taken to a training centre which was a day away by bus. But instead of receiving training for six months they were sent after two weeks of weapons and drone training to the trenches on the Ukrainian front.

Khatri had joined a WhatsApp chatroom of the Group Seven Battalion, and started seeing gruesome videos of Nepalis killed and wounded in battle.

He bribed his commander with 17,000 rubles (Rs26,000) saying he had to go back to Nepal to attend to a sick relative, and snuck out of the barracks on 29 October with his relative Dal Bahadur.

They walked through the forest under the cover of darkness and eventually got a cab driver to take them to Moscow, 14 hours away. To his surprise, the cabbie did not want to be paid.

In any case, Khatri had run out of money by that time, but got in touch with folks back home to book him a flight back to Nepal.

On 2 November, just two weeks after leaving Kathmandu he was back. He tracked down his recruiter Sushant (Nim Bahadur Kunwar)

in Nepalganj pretending that he would send friends to Russia.

Khatri then demanded his money back, but the cheque Sushant wrote him bounced. The recruiter then fled and could not be contacted. He filed a human trafficking and banking offence complaint at the Nepal Police Anti-Human Trafficking Bureau. He has not heard back from them.

Khatri is heavily in debt, and wants his Rs700,000 back so he can try going to another country. Dal Bahadur, has gone to Himachal in India to find work.

Meanwhile, the family of Tara Gharti of Salyan, one of the five Nepalis Khatri and Dal Bahadur met at Kathmandu airport the day they flew to Dubai, were informed that he had been killed in action on the frontlines in Ukraine.

Abhishek Buda, who initially encouraged Khatri to join the Russian Army from Moscow has also been killed.

Statements from a dozen other Nepalis who deserted and returned from Russia reveal an international network of human traffickers who extort thousands of Nepalis and other nationals to send unemployed youth to join the Russian Army.

All of the Nepali recruits said they paid traffickers between Rs700,000 to Rs1 million to go to Russia. From their testimonies, it is clear the Russians use the Nepalis as human shields and they only have a 5% chance of survival on the Ukrainian frontlines.

Because there is no bilateral military agreement between Nepal and Russia, the wounded are not entitled to compensation, and the families of those killed are unable to arrange for the bodies to be brought home.

Some 100 Nepalis have managed to desert like Khagendra Khatri, and again paid traffickers to bring them back home. Hundreds of others are out of touch.

but Suraj Thapa was not there.

"After that one conversation, he vanished from WhatsApp," says Babu Kaji.

Tirtha Raj Pandey was also a Nepal Army veteran, and had been a bodyguard for former Education Minister Devendra Paudel before retiring. He had been living in Surkhet, and had come to Kathmandu last May after hearing word about a job opening up in the Dubai Royal Guard.

Tirtha Raj was approached by a man named Kuber Karki from Dhading at Burger House in Gongabu. Kuber told him joining the Russian Army paid more than Dubai Royal Guard and promised a salary of Rs300,000 and eventual Russian citizenship.

Desperate, Tirtha Raj borrowed Rs650,000 to pay Kuber's accomplice: the same Raj Oli, the brother of Mohan Oli who recruited Khagendra Khatri. He flew from Kathmandu via Dubai on 30 September last year, and there at Moscow airport to pick him up was a Russian agent who identified himself as Alex.

When he reached the military training facility on 3 October, Tirtha Raj was handed a 22-page contract in Russian, which when he translated had none of the terms Raj Oli in Nepal had mentioned.

He says there were also Indian agents at the Moscow training centre, and when they saw Tirtha Raj hesitate, they warned him in Hindi that he faced a 15 year jail sentence if he refused to sign.

"I told them I would rather go to jail than sign the agreement," Tirtha Raj recalls telling the Indians. "Maybe they were worried I would convince the other recruits, so they let me go."

Tirtha Raj paid another trafficker Rs400,000 to get him back to Nepal. In Kathmandu, he confronted Raj Oli who promised to return him some of the fee, but he too disappeared.

So far, 49 Nepalis in the Russian Army have been confirmed killed in action in Ukraine, and 41 others are probably also dead as per information from fellow-Nepali soldiers, but there is no official verification yet.

The Campaign to Save the Lives of Nepali Citizens has so far collected details of 991 Nepali mercenaries in the Russian Army. Of these, 127 injured in action are being treated in hospitals in Russia while 272 have been out of contact with their families for the past eight months. The Nepal Embassy has made travel documents for 110 Nepalis who escaped the war zone so they could return.





Returnees paint a gruesome picture of life in the trenches under constant attack from Ukrainian drones and artillery. But the Nepalis were also constantly beaten by Russian soldiers, many of whom are prisoners convicted of murder, rape, or armed robbery. The convicts have their sentences waived, and if they survive can return home as war heroes.

The recruitment of Nepali citizens into a foreign military other than the Indian and British Armies, or for security duty in Singapore, Oman and Brunei is illegal. India has actually stopped recruitment of Nepali nationals into its army.

After the Russian invasion of Ukraine two and a half years ago, President Vladimir Putin opened the way for foreign nationals to join the Russian Army and announced an attractive salary, Russian citizenship, passport and residential facilities, among others. This lured many Nepalis, including those studying in Russia and some already working as security guards in Dubai or Doha.

During training, Russian officers encouraged them to post videos on TikTok of them in smart uniforms, posing with assault rifles, smiling and having a great time. From testimonies of returnees, it is

clear the TikTok videos were more effective in convincing them to join the Russian Army.

"After leaving the Nepal Army, my husband was working as a cook in Dubai. There, he came in contact with a recruiter and ended up in Russia," says Deepa Singh Shahi, wife of Nabin Shahi of Jajarkot, one of the Nepalis killed in Ukraine (pictured above).

Krishna Bahadur Shahi of Dailekh has returned to Nepal with shrapnel wounds all over his body. Surgeons removed four bullets from his left arm and two from his right thigh. He escaped the Russian Army at a huge cost, economically,

physically and mentally.

"I paid Rs800,000 for the jobs and another 1.1 million to come back home," says Krishna Bahadur, a former Nepal Army soldier. He was attracted to take up the job after watching a TikTok video of neighbours from his village who at a Russian Army training centre.

Nepal's Foreign Minister Narayan Kaji Shrestha spoke in March with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov asking him to stop recruitment of Nepali mercenaries, to send others back, compensate the dead and wounded, and send bodies home.

The Foreign Ministry's Amrit Bahadur Rai says Lavrov raised the issue of modalities for implementation. "But there has been no progress since then," he admitted. The government has not apprehended the human traffickers involved even though they have been identified.

"Several recruiters have fled abroad, the authorities are not even interested in prosecuting those who are here," says Kritu Bhandari of the Campaign to Save the Lives of Nepali Citizens.

Bhandari collected the names of 61 traffickers involved in recruiting Nepalis into the Russian Army and submitted them with evidence to

Home Minister Rabi Lamichhane on 5 April. The police did arrest 22 labour recruiters, travel agents and some ex-servicemen. Some were told to refund the money, but most have since been released.

Twelve recruiters, including the owner of an educational consultancy, were arrested in December on charges of trafficking. Among them were Hari BK, a Nepali Army retiree, and two others, Sujata Dahal and Ishwar Adhikari.

A case was filed against four of them in the Kathmandu District Court but they were acquitted for lack of evidence. Bhandari believes they had political connections.

Superintendent of Police Gautam Mishra, Director of the Human Trafficking Investigation Bureau of Nepal Police, says his agency is actively pursuing traffickers.

He calimed: "We are on their tail, and will see results in a few days." 🇳🇵

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Watch online video of Nepali POW serving in the Russian Army being questioned by the Ukrainian Army.

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