

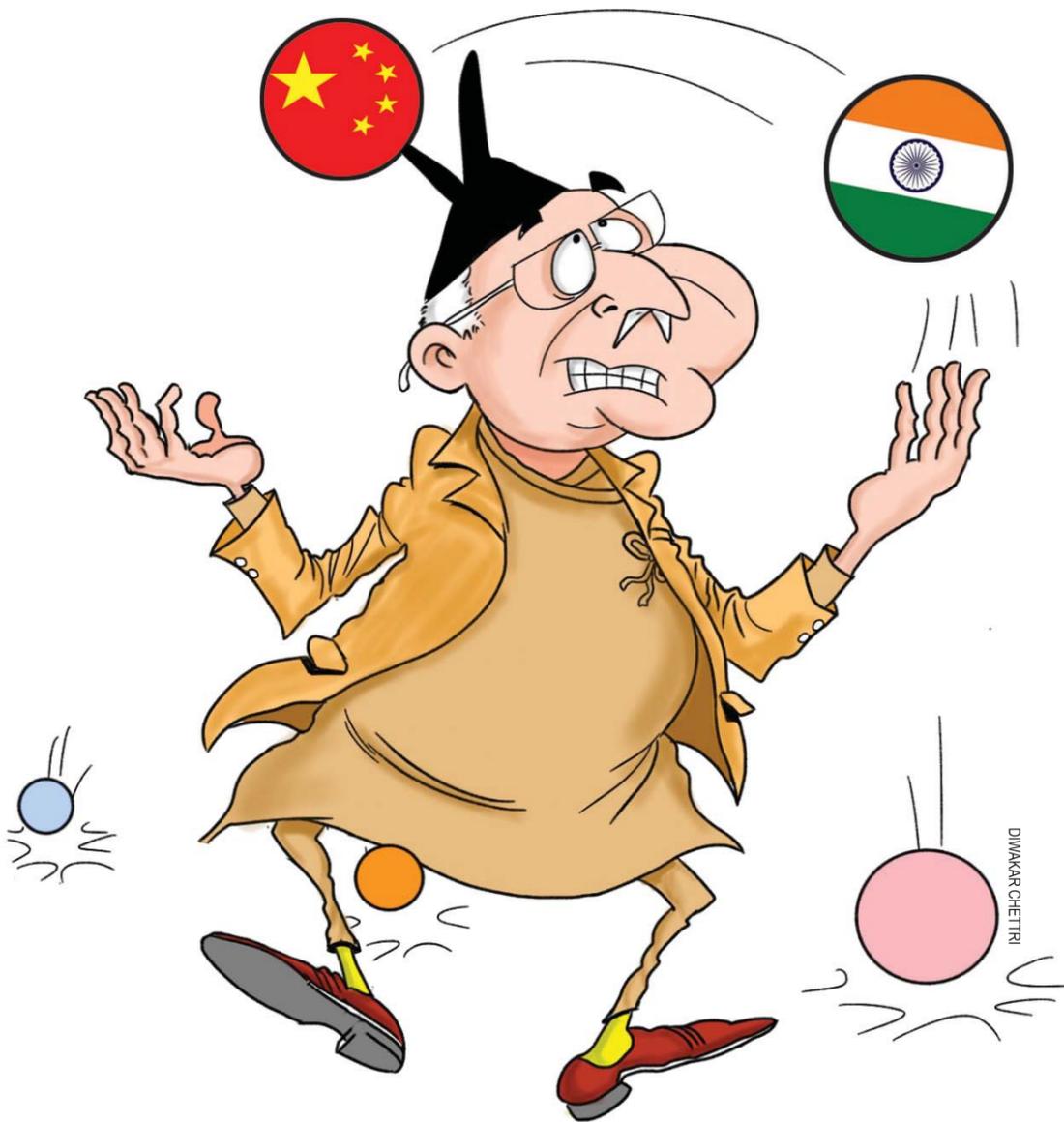


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DIMAKAR CHETTRI

Oli's oscillations

■ Shristi Karki

Prime Minister K P Oli appears to have decided that since an invitation to visit India is not forthcoming, he will go to China instead. This breaks the tradition of Nepal's prime ministers flying off to New Delhi first after assuming office.

The Indian media has labelled Oli as 'pro-China' so often that most of India seems to believe it. Having a pro-China public persona suits Oli fine since it bolsters his nationalist credentials at home, while privately he keeps his trust with Indian leaders.

"India not inviting Nepal on a state visit does not need to be made

into such a big deal. The success or failure of our common national interests do not hinge upon whether or not Nepal and India's leaders visit one another," says political commentator Indra Adhikari. "And it is unproductive to believe that Nepal's government will fall just because India has not invited Oli for a state visit."

To be sure, Oli and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi had met in New York in September at the UN General Assembly, so he has partially kept to the tradition.

Not much has been divulged about the agenda for China visit, but it is expected to include Chinese aid projects in Nepal under Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This is largely symbolic,

since it does not really matter on the ground whether Pokhara's airport is BRI since the Chinese-built facility predates the initiative.

Amidst widespread perception that Pokhara airport is a white elephant and straddled Nepal with a \$220 million Chinese Exim Bank debt, Oli could be trying to turn that loan into a grant if calling it 'BRI' is all it takes.

Pokhara airport has seen no regular international flights almost two years after it was inaugurated. India has balked at granting flights between Indian cities and Pokhara, and neither Nepal's nor China's airlines have shown much interest in connecting it to Chinese cities (page 5).

As it stands, Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri visited Kathmandu, and Foreign Minister Arzu Rana Deuba was feted in Delhi in August. India's Army Chief Upendra Dwivedi and Border Security Force head Amrit Mohan Prasad are also visiting Kathmandu in the coming days.

Foreign Minister Rana's relationship with India has been amicable, and she was received warmly by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in New York in September. Rana who is flying to Beijing in the coming weeks to prepare for Oli's visit has also been tasked with managing the visit through an unusual bipartisan mechanism made up of top leaders from the UML and Nepali Congress.

UML spokesperson Pradeep Gyawali clarified: "The bipartisan mechanism was not just made to set the groundwork for the prime minister's visit to China, but also to foster collaboration between the two parties on important domestic issues."

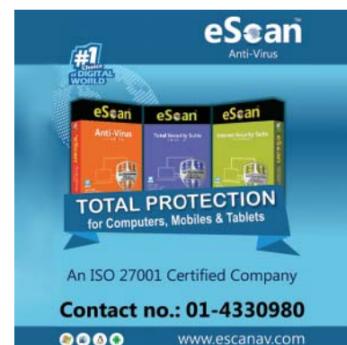
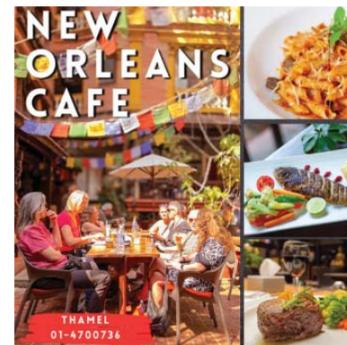
Says Adhikari: "This two-party mechanism could perhaps be the leaders trying to send a message that they are united and that their partnership will sustain as well as to assure the public that they are serious about working on their promises including amending the constitution."

While Oli and his UML comrades have tried to gloss over the absence of an invitation from India as no big deal, there have been the usual signs of bilateral friction. Just as the Indian press portrays Oli as 'pro-Chinese', the Nepali media often highlights Indian high-handedness on trade, river sharing, and refusal to allow air routes that would facilitate more flights to Pokhara and Bhairawa airports. Nepal has gone ahead and forced some international airlines to start flying Bhairawa to reduce congestion at Kathmandu airport, which is seeing taxiway upgrades till April next year.

Another irritant has been non-tariff restrictions on Nepal's exports to India like cement, textiles, and other consumer goods that use Chinese-made raw materials — just like India refuses to buy electricity from hydropower plants built by Chinese contractors, even though the power is all fed into Nepal's national grid.

Meanwhile, Maoist chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal has been campaigning at the grassroots in Kirtipur's by-elections next month. And RSP chair Rabi Lamichhane remains in custody and was brought to Bhairawa from Pokhara to be investigated in the cooperatives scam. 🇳🇵

Bad COP EDITORIAL PAGE 2



LUXURIOUS WINTER

From cozy cardigans to stylish scarves, make your winter a luxurious one with posh cashmere. Find it all at our Thamel showroom —casual wears to homemaker collection, all under one roof.

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Bad COP

It is that time of the year again, and another annual climate jamboree. Last year it was in the UAE, this year it is in another petrostate, Azerbaijan.

On the eve of the summit, the president of COP29 was exposed in a sting operation by World Witness while giving leads to a fake financier for fossil fuel projects in Azerbaijan. Like Dubai last year, this is another jumbo gathering with nearly 67,000 delegates. That is a large carbon footprint.

Even so, global climate negotiations are of critical importance, particularly to build a stronger case for Loss & Damage (L&D) and adaptation for countries like Nepal which are at the frontlines of climate breakdown.

Baku is billed as the 'Finance COP' and an agreement was signed for full operationalisation of the L&D Fund to disburse money starting next year. On 13 November, Nepal also organised a prominent event in Baku to address loss and damage in mountain areas.



RSS

COP29 is also mandated to come up with a new roadmap to mobilise \$100 billion every year to developing countries by the end in 2025, as agreed ten years ago in Paris. But much water has flowed down the Seine since then, and there is bickering between rich and poor countries on the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG). Who is going to fund the additional \$671 billion annually for loss and damage, and \$2.4 trillion a year by 2030 to meet emission targets?

The hardcore negotiations will not take place till the L&D Fund board meet in Manila next month. But there are lots of things to iron out first to garner necessary political will in Baku. Who is going to pay, how much, is it going to be part of already committed development aid or is it new money, and besides, with frequent record-breaking disasters, we may need much more than \$100 billion a year by 2030.

Nevertheless, the Nepali adviser to the LDC Chair at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Manjeet Dhakal is optimistic, and told us from Baku that this summit should build momentum to speed up the L&D Fund.

The September floods in central and eastern Nepal claimed 244 lives, and damaged more than a dozen hydropower

plants temporarily, slashing domestic generation capacity by half and caused billions of rupees in damage that will take years to recover. The Melamchi disaster in 2021, the Kagbeni flood in 2022 and Thame this year are other recent climate-induced calamities.

The World Weather Attribution concluded that rapid urbanisation and climate change were key drivers behind the September disaster. Evidence such as this will increase Nepal's case for L&D Funds even though encroachment and quarrying contributed to the destruction.

Climate impact must therefore be addressed simultaneously with urban planning, better governance, with local adaptation and mitigation plans. Nepal has to put its own house in order for its loss and damage claims to have weight at the international table.

Nepal has already exceeded one of its climate goals of increasing forest cover to 45% of area, and recently received Rs1.6 billion from the World Bank for increasing its carbon reserves between 2018-24 by expanding forest cover



in 13 Tarai districts. Nepal has also made notable progress in transitioning to clean energy by electrifying transport and cooking. However, electricity is a mere 3.5% of Nepal's energy mix, with biomass taking a 80% share.

Nepal's strategy moving forward should be to come up with a new Nationally Determined Contribution aligned with the Paris 1.5°C goal. This also corresponds with the other top priority of COP29, which is to guide

countries to submit new 1.5°C aligned NDCs next year.

Even if the L&D Fund does come through, it will be inadequate to fully make up for the harm that is sure to intensify in the coming decade. Even if we did get the money, it is doubtful given the lack of transparency and Nepal's record of poor disbursement if it will ever get to the neediest people. In other words, we are on our own.

Writing emotionally for this paper in the aftermath of the September floods, climate finance expert Rastraraj Bhandari said, "We in the climate finance sector are lost in words, actions and false promises of organisations purporting to help vulnerable countries, communities and families."

Echoing the helplessness of the survivors, he added, "I worked on projects to mobilise millions of dollars for climate action so that those most vulnerable would be safe. Yet, this weekend's floods have shown me that on the ground, absolutely nothing has changed."

Sonia Awale

COP29 in another petrostate does not offer much hope in reducing climate harm. We are on our own.

ONLINE PACKAGES



ANGRY MOUNTAINS

As most men have left rural areas for work in the cities or abroad to supplement their income, it is the women who stay behind who bear the brunt of the impact of climate change -- the drudgery of having to walk farther for water, or suffer from failed harvests. Watch the video on our YouTube channel.



INK AND SKIN

Meet Sumina Shrestha in her tattoo studio in Kathmandu as she talks about the struggle of being a female tattoo artist, and the importance of believing in oneself and never losing sight of one's goal. Watch the video on the Nepali Times' YouTube channel, and subscribe for multimedia content.

TRUMP 2024

With Donald Trump in power, it will always be difficult to predict how things will be ('Trumpet call' Shristi Karki, #1234). Only time will tell, but we must keep trying to do what is right.

Bharat Koirala

■ The irony is that while US influence in this region may be diminished, it will not stop many Nepalis seeking to emigrate to that same country in search of their dreams.

Linda R McKee

■ It is time that Nepal became more self-critical.

David Seddon

ROSI MINING

This report paints a grim picture of how the nexus between politicians and crusher owners works in Nepal and rural Nepal pays the price for Kathmandu's rampant urbanisation ('Politicians and cronies blamed for Kavre floods', Archana Darji and Shamsad Ahmad, #1234). People downstream, who are often in the bottom rung of society, are the ones who always suffer the consequences of unregulated encroachment of nature.

Pradeep Paudel

■ The reporters have done a great job investigating this, but will the culprits ever be held accountable?

Krishna Joshi

AVIATION

Surely the mountains and the swift change of weather from fine to foggy or even snow make Nepal one of the most difficult countries to fly in ('Keeping pilots flying to remote areas', Ajay Pradhan, #1234). However, today's safety equipment and advanced radar and flying aids would lessen the accident rates.

Alan Roadnight

■ Unbelievable, is no one held responsible ('Airfields without airplanes, #1234')?

Franz Budig

NEPALI TIMES #1234

That is a great many Nepali Times issues covering a great many issues ('Nepali Times #1234', Kunda Dixit, <https://nepalitimes.com>). Many congratulations.

Tony Jones

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING

Keeping pilots flying to remote areas

by Ajay Pradhan
Short Takeoff and Landing (STOL) operations continue to be a vital lifeline to isolated districts in Nepal but flying STOL aircraft has become a less preferred job option for pilots, and flight crew retention has become a challenge for airlines. Read this analysis by an airline captain on our website to find out why.

f Most reached and shared on Facebook

Politicians and Kavre floods

by Archana Darji and Shamsad Ahmad
Owners of mining and crusher companies in the Rosi Valley, which include politicians and their cronies, had been openly violating existing operating guidelines and laws even before the deadly floods last month. Visit nepalitimes.com for the investigation.

X Most popular on X

Trumpet Call

by Shristi Karki
Donald Trump's second presidential term will change the way Washington views and deals with China and India, and the impact on Nepal will be governed by how US relations with the country's two giant neighbours develop. Join the discussion online.

66 Most commented



Airfields without airplanes

by Nepali Times
Of the 49 airports in the country, 37 are STOL airfields and most of them have not seen flights for years, if not decades. Local governments are on an airfield building spree without necessary homework on feasibility. Go to website for map and other details.

🔥 Most visited online page

QUOTES

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Heaping blame on just the politicians would be unfair. The bureaucracy has become a den of thieves, and despite acts of Parliament and laws they put hurdles every step of the way for overseas Nepalis to enjoy their constitutionally-given rights.

Fraser Sugden @frasersugden
There's nothing "progressive" about NRN citizenship anyway. The exclusion of South Asian residents is inexplicable, (hint of class bias), & the reactionary preoccupation with lineage, which excludes spouses etc, makes it pointless for growing number of mixed-nationality families

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Airfields without airplanes
Of the 49 airports in Nepal, more than 25 have not been in regular use for decades, yet more are being built

ART @AmulyaSir
Waste maha- waste of taxpayers money with contractors and their corrupt masters enriched

1,000 WORDS



We have more where this came from.

ANJALI THAPA / RSS

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Taxed to death

Last week in this very space we wrote about how back in early 2000s the Maoists were imposing on trekkers a 'revolutionary tax', and how this actually became a tourist attraction.

Around the same time in Surkhet, as this story also shows, they were also forcing local businesses to pay a fee for Maoist 'visas' for travel.

Excerpts of the report published 20 years ago this week on issue #221 12-18 November 2004:

One morning earlier this month, businessmen in Surkhet were all heading out of town towards Baddichaur. They were trying to beat the Maoist deadline to register with them and fill out tax forms.

In Home Minister Purna Bahadur Khadka's hometown, traders now pay two taxes: one to the government and the other to the Maoists. Thirty km outside town in Baddichaur (which the rebels have renamed 'Himal Municipality') is the Maoist contact office for surkhet businessmen to pay their revolutionary tax, for people who need Maoist 'visas'



to travel to Jumla, Kalikot, Achham and Dailekh. Those travelling without visas have to face interrogations and are sent to labour camps to dig tunnels.

When the rebels began registering businesses in the district on 17 September, businessmen gathered at Baddichaur. The rebels had issued a notice saying no one was allowed to run a business without registering with the 'new regime'. As a result, 1,100 businessmen in Surkhet have registered, whereas only 300 businesses

have been registered with the Surkhet Association of Industry and Commerce.

Tax collection is more efficient than the government's revenue department. It is amazing what the fear of the gun can do.

Businessmen are supposed to pay their Maoist tax by the fifth of every Nepali month. There is a flat rate of Rs100 a month for every business with a monthly turnover of Rs100,000.

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



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High living below the Himalaya

New Pokhara apartments can be a second home for those fleeing Kathmandu's congestion

■ Rupa Joshi in Pokhara

As Kathmandu becomes more congested and polluted, and with remote online work becoming the norm, many professional Nepalis are planning to retire in Pokhara, or move there.

With its stunning mountain panorama, balmy winters and proximity to a profusion of wilderness areas, builders are responding to this demand with new townhouses, housing development and apartments.

One such block of flats is the 10-storey Sungava Apartment located at Phulbari above the Seti River, near the point where it flows into and under Pokhara. The imposing structure near Manipal Hospital is almost complete, and on a recent visit the site was strewn with huge boulders unearthed while digging the foundation.

The Seti brought down these boulders during a gigantic flood that geologists estimate happened 800 years ago when a chunk of Annapurna IV broke off and ploughed into the glacier below. Today, Sungava (means 'orchid') sits safely on a high terrace, 100m above the blue-green Seti and commands a view of Dhaulagiri, Annapurna South, Machapuchre, Annapurna III and IV.

The view of the Himalayan panorama from Sungava's many balconies are breathtaking when not obscured by clouds, or the haze that drifts in from across the southern border. On most days, just watching the towering pyramid of Machapuchre (Tamu name: कतारुं क्लिको) play hide and seek with the clouds is mesmerising.

Even for those with little interest in geology, Sungava is



an ideal place to contemplate the tectonic forces that pushed these peaks into the sky to be sculpted into delicate shapes by wind, snow, earthquake and avalanche over millions of years.

Sungava was designed by the husband-wife architect team of Deepak Sherchan and Jyoti Joshi of Creative Builders Collaborative (CBC), which also built Heritage Plaza, Indreni Apartment and numerous other projects in Nepal. Sungava retains CBC's trademark Newari-style masonry and here it borrows from the orange brickwork of the old town of Pokhara, integrating it with modern design elements. A few of those heritage houses are still standing in Pokhara's old quarter.

Back at the apartment, it is quiet, far away from the hubbub of Lakeside a 15 minute drive away, and in the lap of greenery. There are 52 units at Sungava and it already has a close-knit prospective community of professionals, including doctors, publishers, engineers, and businesspeople from the renewable energy and IT sectors.

Some residents say they opted for a second home in Pokhara to make it a 'base camp' to explore the Annapurnas with its many hiking trails made newly accessible with roads. With the NRN citizenship law, overseas Nepalis can now also buy the flats.

The floor plans include options for north and south-facing 3-bedroom apartments with verandas, and the facility has underground parking with EV charging, heated pool, sauna and gym. There are still some unsold apartments with panoramic views of the mountains and one can imagine oneself at the kitchen with its huge window, humming a ditty while preparing breakfast: "खाना पकाउँ हिमाल हेरेर..." 

<https://sungavaapartment.com/>



Turkish Technic

Maintenance, repair and overhaul service provider Turkish Technic signed two agreements with SunExpress Airlines to provide access to Technic's comprehensive component pool, and to overhaul landing gear for SunExpress's Boeing 737NG fleet. SunExpress Airlines is a joint venture between Turkish Airlines and Lufthansa based out of Antalya, Türkiye.

ADB climate cash

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) launched IF-CAP, a financial tool to combat climate change in Asia and the Pacific, at the COP29 conference in Azerbaijan for financial guarantees from countries, so that more capital can be loaned out to climate initiatives. Asia and the Pacific could require as much as \$431 billion per year to adapt to global warming.



Global Voices

Global Voices, an international citizen media network, is holding its Summit 6-7 December in Kathmandu with journalists, bloggers, researchers and activists from over 50 countries attending. Sessions will explore changes in media, multilingualism, and digital authoritarianism. The event is open to the public but registration is required.



Tilganga Nijgad

Tilganga Institute of Ophthalmology with The Fred Hollows Foundation has inaugurated its Nijgad Tilganga Community Eye Hospital, the first of its kind in Madhes Province. The \$2.2 million hospital can treat up to 55,000 patients annually. Over 1 million people in Nepal live with some form of vision loss while the Madhes has the second-highest prevalence of preventable blindness in the country.

100kW Ioniq

Laxmi Intercontinental has launched a 100kW Hyundai Ioniq eV with a range of 375km at Rs9.3 million. This is Rs1 million cheaper than the existing 125kW model while offering similar performance, especially for city driving.

Nabil SAFA Award

Nabil Bank received a certificate of merit for producing exceptional financial statements at the South Asian Federation of Accountants awards in Colombo.

Climate projects

Two climate projects in Nepal funded by the Global Environment Facility were launched at the COP29. The first aims to improve Nepal's ability to track, report and verify progress towards climate goals in order to demonstrate compliance with goals in the Paris Agreement. The second called 'MaWRiN' will make indigenous people in the Maru watershed resilient to climate impact with nature-based initiatives.



Foton vans

MAW Vriddhi launched the Foton Mountain EV Passenger Van and immediately sold 100 units. The 14/16 seater comes with a 53.58 kWh battery, has a 300km range, and can climb a 25% gradient.



WorldLink renovates

WorldLink has renovated a building for the Gauri Shankar Children's Home in Dolakha. The ISP repaired leaks, fixed windows and doors, and fully reconstructed toilets. It also provided mattresses, blankets and stationery to the 17 children at the home.

Yumi Sano

The Nepal Art Council is showing the art of the late Japanese artist Yumi Sano who was born in Nagata-ku Japan in 1975 and joined an NGO program that sent her to Nepal to teach art. She died in an accident in 1999 in Chitwan.

Galaxy A16 5G

Samsung Nepal has launched the Galaxy A16 5G which has triple cameras, a 6.7" 90Hz screen, and is available in Black, Light Green and Gold. Prices start at Rs28,999.



■ Vishad Raj Onta in Pokhara

The daily 10-hour curfew at Tribhuvan International Airport from 8 November that will last five months has affected tourism during Nepal's peak season, with some hotels and trekking agencies here reporting cancellations into spring next year.

The reduced hours at Nepal's main aviation gateway till 31 March means that a third of all flights have been cut. This has also caused ticket prices to surge by up to eight times of normal fares. For example a Kathmandu-Delhi ticket that used to cost Rs12,000 is now listed at Rs50,000, and even then seats are not available.

"Especially if they are here to trek, change in flight dates can cause tourists to miss their connections," says Jagan Timilsina, who runs a trail running and outdoor education business.

Pokhara is feeling the brunt as hotels report last-minute cancellations for November because of flight disorders. Some hoteliers also say although there have been some cancelled trips, most itineraries have been rescheduled.

Hari Prasad Sharma Gaire of the local chapter of the Hotel Association of Nepal says the Kathmandu airport closure should have been timed for the off-season.

He told us: "Starting construction during the peak tourist season was a mistake and will cause the tourism industry to lose a lot of business. The upgrade could have been spread out over a longer time but closed for fewer hours at night so that disruption was minimal."

Nearly a third of the 1.2 million tourists who visit Nepal annually come to Pokhara, which is also the gateway to Mustang, the Annapurna treks and pilgrimage tourism to Muktinath. Located by scenic lakes with a range of adventure sports like hot air ballooning, paragliding, canyoning, bungee and ziplines, Pokhara is also popular among diaspora Nepalis.

"Besides its own attractions, Pokhara is really the hub for central Nepal, and we have been trying



RADHIKA KANDEL / RSS

Pokhara's tourism woes

Despite huge potential, the lake city takes a hit due to cuts in flights at Kathmandu's airport



Tourist arrivals in Pokhara have slumped since the disruptions at Kathmandu airport due to upgrading work.

KRISHNA MANI BARAL / NT ARCHIVE

to get visitors to extend their stay here," says Timilsina, who started out as a trekking porter and rose up the ranks to be an expedition guide and entrepreneur.

Even without the Kathmandu airport closure affecting tourist

arrivals, Pokhara was already suffering from a decline due to many factors like the poor state of the Prithvi Highway, the shortage of luxury accommodation for high-end tourists, and the reluctance of international airlines to start

direct flights to Pokhara despite an expensive new airport that was inaugurated two years ago.

"There was a lot of initial excitement on the construction of the international airport," says Timilsina, "but it hasn't delivered

CROSS COUNTRY: Chinese athletes from Kunming arrived at Pokhara airport last week on a chartered Sichuan Airlines plane to take part in the 2024 Pokhara International Cross-Country Race. Despite occasional flights from China, Pokhara airport has not seen regular international connections since it was inaugurated two years ago.

as expected due to politics. People have invested in nearby businesses, and have faced losses." India has blocked direct flights from its cities to Pokhara because the facility was built by a Chinese company.

Although tourists and pilgrims from India hit record levels this year, the poor state of the highways and the Indian bus accident on the highway to Kathmandu in July that killed 27 pilgrims from Maharashtra state dampened arrival figures.

Gaire says, "While tourist arrivals to Pokhara are now approaching pre-Covid levels, we haven't seen the improvement we were expecting. We need a better marketing strategy. What are our embassies abroad doing?"

Indeed, Pokhara used to be a favourite destination for Chinese tourists. There was a boom in arrivals from China before Covid, especially after a popular Chinese tv serial was shot on location here. But arrivals from China have not really recovered since the pandemic because of the economic slowdown there. Promoting Pokhara airport to handle direct flights from Chengdu or Kunming could revive Chinese arrivals.

Nepal's Civil Aviation Authority (CAAN) has used the Kathmandu airport closure as an excuse to arm-twist international airlines to start flying to Bhairawa, which has barely been in operation for two years since it was inaugurated. So far, Fly Dubai, Thai AirAsia, Jazeera and Qatar are flying to Bhairawa, but most use it as a hop before flying on to Kathmandu, which does not reduce congestion at Kathmandu.

An ideal situation could have been to get Pokhara to run to full capacity while Kathmandu is partially out of action. Pokhara entrepreneurs are puzzled why the CAAN and the national government have not taken more interest in promoting Pokhara as an alternative to reduce the congestion in Kathmandu.

Nepal's football team that was flying to Dushanbe this week couldn't get tickets via Delhi, and took a domestic flight to Bhadrapur, crossed over to Bagdogra and flew on to Delhi to catch their flight to Tajikistan. 🇳🇵

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मुसलधारै वर्षाबाट जोगाउँछ

१० वर्ष वारेन्टी



DOCUMENTING THE ANTHROPOCENE

This year's Film South Asia has 47 documentaries that showcase human activities and their interconnectedness with nature



In the spotlight

Film South Asia
21 - 24 November
Yala Maya Kendra
Rs50 entry per film

Whispers by the River Shore

River encroachment results in a Bangladeshi family's fortunes being swept away. This 19-minute long documentary, directed by Samiur Rahman, sheds light on the humans living in encroached land near the river. It is a story all the more relevant to Kathmandu.

21 November 1:50 PM



Nocturnes

In a remote ecological hot spot on the India-Bhutan border, director duo Anupama Srinivasan and Anirban Dutta explore the secret world of moths. This 82-minute film takes viewers to rarely-seen places where moths gather, and urges us all to retrospect about interconnections in the natural world.

22 November 2:45 PM

When the Floods Come

Directed by Pakistani-American Nyal Mueenuddin, this documentary won a BAFTA Award for the portrayal of the intimate stories of people affected by the 2022 flood on the Indus River. Mueenuddin has prioritised human emotion, empathy and compassion. The subject is relatable for a Nepali audience, as climate change makes the region even more vulnerable to extreme weather.

22 November 10 AM



No Monastery No Village

High up in the secluded village of Halji in Humla, a Glacier Lake Outburst Flood threatens a century-old monastery and the village with a population of 500. This 28-minute documentary, directed by Nepali climate activist Tashi Lhazom, highlights the faith and resilience of the villagers' fight to preserve their way of life.

23 November 2 PM

All That Breathes

This Oscar-nominated documentary tells the story of two brothers, Nadeem and Mohammad, who have dedicated their lives to protect the black kite in New Delhi. Director Shaunak Sen looks at inter-species coexistence in an urban setting in this 94-minute movie, which will be Film South Asia's closing documentary.

24 November 6 PM



Agent of Happiness

Directed by Arun Bhattarai from Bhutan and Dorottya Zurbó from Hungary, this feature-length documentary follows a surveyor who measures happiness as per the GNH (Gross National Happiness) index in Bhutan, as he goes on a quest searching for his own happiness. This year's opening film for FSA, this 90-minute documentary will be screened on Saturday.

23 November 4:15 PM



A still from All That Breathes.



While some documentaries specifically explore the impact of the climate crisis on the region's land and people, other films highlight the interconnectedness between people and time, nature, or other people divided by borders.

"Humankind practices and leads life with the concept of othering and acting as if their lives are free from the connection

with nature. This year's lineup will help retrospect the interconnectedness," adds Verma. "But it is not all doom and gloom, the movies are also hopeful about human-nature symbiosis."

With over 2,000 submissions, FSA selected only 47. The carefully curated lineup will be screened at Yala Maya Kendra over next week. The FSA festival has, for over two decades, been a



A still from When the Floods Come.

platform that brings South Asian filmmakers and audiences together.

Producers and directors of 27 of the documentaries will be attending the festival and may explore cross-country collaboration on future film projects.

Along with the film screenings, a Director Workshop with filmmaker Kabir Khan, and panel discussions about FSA's slogan and the evolution and success of Nepali documentaries will also be taking place. The panel discussions and film screenings will happen simultaneously, so the attendees will have to plan their schedules accordingly.

Two other master classes, and a discussion on financing and editing with industry experts will also take place in collaboration with the British Council's WOW (Women of the World) festival and audio-visual production company KathaHaru.

FSA also organises Travelling Film South Asia tours, in which up to 15 of the selected films are screened around the globe, mostly at universities.

Says Pawas Manandhar of FSA: "We want to cultivate a sense of appreciation among the younger people for documentaries in the age of 30-second TikToks." 🇳🇵

■ Pinki Sris Rana

South Asians are coming together to celebrate the stories of this region at the biennial film festival, Film South Asia (FSA), which starts on 21 November. It coincides with the COP29 climate summit in Baku, Azerbaijan.

This year's four-day event showcases documentaries from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, and even one from Mongolia, although that country is in Central Asia.

This year's theme is Documentary in Anthropocene, with a lineup of films that explore human interaction with nature, especially in the context of climate breakdown.

"The climate crisis has been the major challenge in the Anthropocene era and climate crisis respects no border. With one fourth of the world population in South Asia, we as neighbours should closely look into these issues together," states FSA director Mitu Verma.

The World is Family

Born to a family of freedom fighters, director Anand Pathwardan explores his family's connection to India's Independence Movement. This 96-minute long documentary is a personal exploration and a window to India's past and the present. Pathwardan is a FSA alumnus.

24 November 3:05 PM



Hollywoodgate

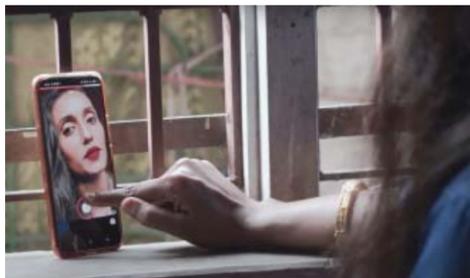
Director Ibrahim Nash'at documents the transformation as the US militia abandons operations in Afghanistan, and the Taliban occupy their bases and transform into a military regime. This movie was nominated for and has won international film awards.

23 November 6:30 PM

Hello Guyzz!

One of the student films at FSA, this 24-minute long documentary features Sumita, a social media influencer in a small town in Bengal. Sumita has an alternate identity on TikTok, and straddles identities between a mundane life as a housewife and the desired life of being a successful influencer. She also harbors hopes of maybe fulfilling her long-lost dream of becoming an actor.

21 November 12:20 PM

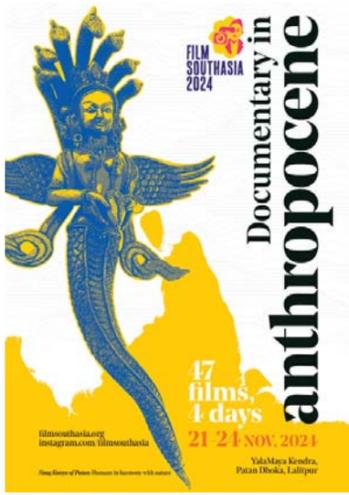


Devi

This feature-length documentary by Nepali journalist and director Subina Shrestha garnered attention internationally in Hot Docs, Doc Edge and DMZ Docs. It follows the life of Devi Khadka, a rebel warrior, mother and survivor of sexual violence during the civil war. This is the first time this 80-minute film will be shown in Nepal.

22 November 6 PM

EVENTS



Film South Asia

The 14th edition of Film South Asia is back to celebrate South Asian films. The lineup and schedule can be found on their website. Read our story on page 6-7. 21-24 November, 10am onwards, Yala Maya Kendra

Sadhana

Stop by Siddhartha Art Gallery to see the ongoing exhibition featuring solo artwork from Sundar Sinkhwal. Until 25 November, Sunday to Friday: 11am-5pm, Saturday: 12pm-5pm, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal



The Storytellers

Hear inspirational stories of artists including Amazumi, Arjun Kumar Dangol, Deepak Sundas and Minso Muskan Chauguthi, at the 58th session of The Storytellers 20 November, 5:45pm onwards, Ticket:Rs450, Moksh, Jhamsikhel

Beyond the Canvas

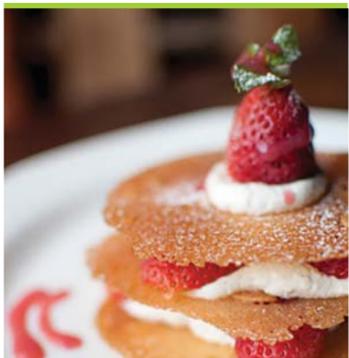
Participate in this charity event, organised by the RSTCA Foundation, that showcases paintings made by young artists. Until 16 November, 11am onwards, European Union corner building, Lazimpat



Standup show

Planning a Pokhara tour next weekend and want try new things? One option is a standup comedy show, featuring Aayush Shrestha's. 22 November, 9pm onwards, Ticket: Rs500, Mustang Pub, Pokhara

DINING



Chez Caroline

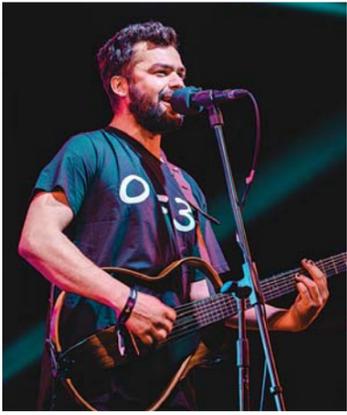
Tucked away from the street noise and fumes, this is the place to visit for authentic French and continental cuisine in Nepal. The restaurant now offers catering and takeaway services as well. Baber Mahal Revisited (01) 5363070

MUSIC



Sanskritik Saajha 2081

Join a musical evening this weekend featuring Kuma Sagar and The Khwopa band, Roj Man Maharjan, and Nisha Deshar. 15 November, 4pm onwards, Thankot



Sunflower Weekenders

Be part of this two-day musical experience that blends music, art and wellness into one festival amidst the greenery of Godavari. 15-16 November, 12pm onwards, Ticket: Rs3,000, Godavari Village Resort, Godavari



Chitwan Music Carnival

If you are planning a Chitwan trip next weekend, then this musical festival should be part of it. Artists include John & The Locals, and Purna Rai and Daju Vai Haru. 23 November, 3pm onwards, Ticket:Rs500, Campachaur, Chitwan



Live Music

Headbang the evening away with Nepali rock band Mark, who perform live this Saturday at Hard Rock Café. 16 November, 7pm onwards, Hard Rock Café, Darbar Marg



Nylgiri

With world-class cocktails inspired by Nepali heritage, serene views of the valley, and a blend of luxury and tradition, every detail heightens the senses at Nylgiri. Aloft Kathmandu, Thamel, 9801976054

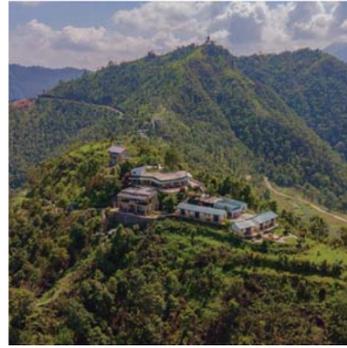
Gangnam Galbi Barbeque

At Gangnam Galbi Barbeque, enjoy grilled and stick food, a.k.a. galbi, roasted in charcoal at high heat to add tenderness, flavour and a smoky scent. Naxal (01) 4547137

GETAWAYS

Himalayan Front Hotel

Sarangkot's Himalayan Front Hotel is located atop Sarangkot, overlooking the Annapurna range and Phewa Lake, and is the ideal getaway to relax this winter. Sarangkot, Pokhara, 9801166350



Raniban Retreat

Located on a hillock of Raniban forest, this environmentally-friendly boutique hotel offers a spectacular view of the mountains. Pokhara, 9802855466



Barahi Jungle Lodge

The first eco-jungle lodge in Chitwan has a spa, boutique guest rooms, individual and two-in-one private villas, and a suite with a private swimming pool. Meghauri, Chitwan (01) 4429820



Grand Norling Hotel

Enjoy a calm and relaxing stay at the hotel, with spacious bedrooms and large balconies that have sights of the golf course, monkeys and deer herds, and not to forget, the garden. Gokarna (01) 4910193

Heranya Yala

Get a genuine feel of authentic Newari heritage during a stay right in the middle of Maha Boudha and the Hiranya monastery. Gujibahal, Patan, 9745967569

Coco Waffle Café

Craving something salty and sugary? Order freshly made waffles from the wide array available at Coco Waffle Café. Bansbari, 9813048938



Kyubi's Kitchen

For customisable bowls of noodles, platters filled to the brim with dumplings, spicy noodles, kimbap, corn dogs, da-pow and more, Kyubi's Kitchen is the place to go. Jhamsikhel, 9810298050

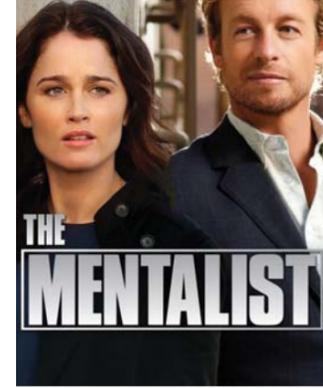
WEEKEND WEATHER



Winter is Here

Despite the urban heat island effect in Kathmandu Valley, the temperature is falling with the minimum dipping into the single digits over the weekend and the maximum into the low 20s. Partly this is due to the pollution filtering the sunshine. No major westerly system on the horizon, although there are still localised convection cells, mainly in the east. The transboundary haze is still thick, especially in the Tarai and blowing up-valley in the afternoons. The smoke and fog have combined in the Indus-Ganges plains.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
24° 10°	23° 10°	23° 10°



OUR PICK

American procedural drama series The Mentalist follows Patrick Jane, a pretend-psychic whose public mocking of one of California's most notorious serial killers— named Red John— leads to the murder of his wife and child. After the tragedy, Jane signs on as a consultant with the California Bureau of Investigation, helping Agent Teresa Lisbon and her team solve homicides, all the while working ceaselessly to uncover the identity of Red John. The series ran for seven seasons and stars Simon Baker, Robin Tunney, Tim Kang, Amanda Righetti, and Owain Yeoman.

MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI

I survived because the fire inside me burned brighter than the fire around me.
- Joshua Graham



सामाजिक सञ्जाल प्रयोगमा सचेतता अपनाऔं

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



नेपाल सरकार
विज्ञापन बोर्ड

Poetry's permanent home

Nepali literature goes international with a win at the Donald Hall Prize for Poetry in the US

■ Pinki Sris Rana

“यहाँ वाग्नर कोदाली खनिर हेछन्, शेक्सपियर हलो जो ता हुन्, टिसियन र टर्नर भेडा चर उँदा हुन्, सोक्रेटिज गुफामा घोल्लिरहेका हो लान... यहाँ कति साहित्य छ, जो लेखिएकै छैन, न लेखिनेछ.”

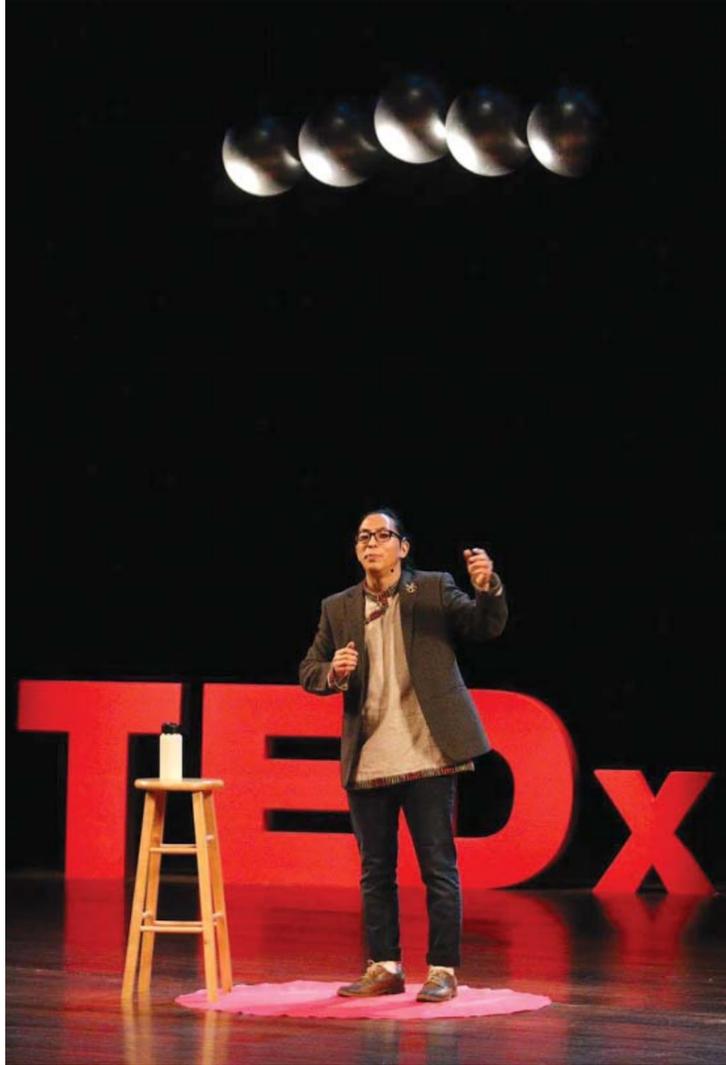
Wagners and Shakespeares could be ploughing here, Titians and Turners may be shepherds, Socrates must be in a desolate cave ... there is so much literature here that is not written and will never be written.

This excerpt from the essay के नेपाल सानो छ? (Is Nepal Small?) by poet Laxmi Prasad Devkota alludes to treasures of Nepali literature that remain hidden because most people are too busy trying to survive.

While Devkota's dialectic may still be true, Nepali writers like Samyak Shertok are taking their literature to international platforms and gaining global recognition.

Shertok was awarded the 2024 Donald Hall Prize for Poetry, and his poem collection 'No Rhododendron' is being published next year by the University of Pittsburgh Press in the Pitt Poetry Series. His poems have also appeared in top literary journals and publications in the US, such as the Iowa Review, the Kenyon Review and Best of New Poets,

'If poetry is, as has been defined, a species of magic, Samyak Shertok has conjured an elegant and



sophisticated collection that is full of hybridity in form and subject...' writes Donald Hall Prize 2024 jury member Kimiko Hahn. '... There is abiding grief and, in that, surviving to tell and retell stories. This debut collection is an absolute marvel.'

Shertok's poems immerse themselves in the idea of a mother language, of motherhood, home, ongoingness and his relationship with them, leaving behind a part of himself in each poem. The verses have a haunting grief and memories, and leave food for the soul to dwell upon.

"Poems are a permanent home that I can always return to," Shertok told us on a Zoom call.

Samyak was born Shertok Lama, the youngest child in a Tamang family from Yurung village in Sindhupalchok. 'Samyak' means the Buddha's middle path, and 'Shertok' is the Tamang word for a golden steeple. Being from an indigenous community, Shertok grew up feeling stereotyped and judged, which is why he opted for a surname that would not denote his ethnicity.

He was eight when his older brother recited a poem he had written while walking to their school, an hour across mountain paths from his home. Those flowing words first ignited his passion for poetry.

By Grade 11, Shertok was writing poems—mostly in Nepali, but some in English. He was prolific, penning short stories, essays, and gazals, and managed to impress

another US-based Nepali writer Samrat Upadhyay when he won the Writing Nepal competition organised by Lalit.

"Samyak Shertok is a poet of great nuance and emotional depth," says Upadhyay, who was judging the contest. "Even then I had been wowed by the poetry in Samyak's prose, and it's no wonder he's emerged as a poet of considerable power now."

He adds: "The Donald Hall Prize is a big deal. It boasts of many illustrious poets as its previous winners, such as Angela Ball and Reginald Shepherd. Samyak's win is a win for Nepal's all over the world."

Shertok moved to the United States to pursue psychology but he struggled to adjust to a new culture and milieu. He eventually got a MFA in poetry, but no job.

"Poetry as a career is never fully secure, there is a compulsion to financially depend on something else," says Shertok, who now teaches poetry to students at Hendrix College in Arkansas.

Even so, writing does not get any easier. And yet, after exploring different literary forms, poetry provides Shertok ample room to explore life, living and longing.

Even Shertok's spoken words, carried over from the other side of the planet on Zoom, is versified: "Each poem is a being. A poem begins with a haunting, and ends when you are able to release the haunt." ■




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SIPRADI

Quake survivors migrate for work

A year after the Jajarkot earthquake on 3 November 2023, survivors move overseas to earn and rebuild homes



DIASPORA
DIARIES 52

Excerpts from conversations in Kathmandu before Jajarkot candidates flew out to Malaysia in March 2024 under a responsible recruitment drive. This is the 52nd edition of Diaspora Diaries, a regular column about migration in Nepali Times.



Hari Prakash Chanara

Mother, I'm leaving my motherland,
With the hope to save
And build my dreams ...
Mother, your son will not forget his home
Your son will never forget, mother
Finally, I am taking steps to build a new future.

I worked as a school teacher and am the only earning member in my family. My salary was Rs15,000, but I was not paid regularly. It was difficult to find a job without political connections, and a willingness to beg powerful people. Even if you find a job, there is always the risk of losing it.

I used to go to India on and off and bring home about Rs25,000 in savings. While I did not lose family members to the

quake, our house got damaged and is inhabitable. We do not have the Rs700,000 needed for repairs. During the first winter, people lived in tents for four months and it was a struggle. Now we received the first installment for construction of a temporary house.

It is better than living in a tent which was cold and people fell sick. We coped by drinking warm water and also got support from charities. The local government has committed to supporting us with reconstruction. If not, I will fund it with my own earnings in Malaysia.

I come from western Jajarkot, where the farm does not even support us for three months in a year. Which is why we go to India or other districts in Nepal. I am not sure how this job in Malaysia will help me, I will find out once I get there.

I am prepared to face challenges to rebuild my house and take care of my family. There are people I know who have paid Rs450,000 to recruiters for similar jobs like mine in Malaysia. My friends at first did not believe that I paid nothing.



Janak Bahadur Singh

I am a farmer most of the time. There are very few jobs for us back in Jajarkot, so I usually went to India for a few months at a time.

I had returned to Jajarkot to be with my mother and wife when the earthquake struck just before midnight on 3 November 2023. We survived, but my recently-built house was damaged. They provided us with a tent, but I brought a bigger one from India in which we lived.

It will cost Rs900,000 to rebuild the house, and I need money urgently. If I have money, I can hire people even when I am away. If I had to pay recruitment fees for this job in Malaysia, I would have considered going back to India.

My main goal in migrating is to rebuild my house. If I can save, I plan to invest in a walnut and orange orchard. If someone gives me a sack of rice in aid, I want to earn the other sack on my own. That is why I am going.



Srijung BK

It was exactly 11:47 at night when the earthquake hit. I was awake because we had been celebrating a relative's birthday. That probably saved my life. Had we been sleeping, the house would have collapsed on us. We had never experienced an earthquake before, but my parents had.

My old house was completely destroyed, and neighbours stopped by to see if we were ok. The shed collapsed and killed our goats. Six members in my friend's house were killed, and I helped the Nepal Army, APF, and police teams recover their bodies.

We have been living in a tent ever since. Somehow, we survived the winter. We received support like food, utensils and tents. We are still building a temporary shelter. Now, I hope my foreign earnings will help build a permanent home for the family.

I was already planning to go abroad since I had recently got married and my responsibilities had increased. I was willing even to pay recruiters a fee for getting me a job overseas.

But now I got this opportunity to go at zero cost. If I had to pay, I would have to borrow at a 60% interest rate. This job will help me financially in the longer term: we can rebuild our house, and take care of my family without having to worry about loans.



Bhadra Bahadur Raut

I was sleeping when the earthquake shook the house. We ran out just as the walls collapsed around us. We lived in a tarp tent but could not sleep properly.

We received donations like food, clothes and blankets. The permanent reconstruction has not yet started, but we have now moved to a temporary shelter.

There is not much work in our village. My father is a contractor so I go to his site to work as a foreman. These days, I am not working. I did construction work in Qatar which allowed me to send home Rs35,000 a month but they sent me back after a year because of the 2022 World Cup. I had paid Rs250,000 for the job and it took me 13 months just to

repay the loans. I returned and went immediately to India to pick apples. Depending on how much we could carry we would earn anywhere up to INR1,500 a day.

I am going to Malaysia because the earthquake worsened my situation. With my savings, I will first build a good house for my family. I want to support my wife who is preparing for a government job, and also pay for my daughter's education.

It would, of course, help to be close to my family, but I have to leave to earn so we can hire workers to rebuild our house. The interest rate charged by loan sharks was 36-48%, but because of zero cost migration, I did not need to borrow money to get my job.

Job insecurity in security

Nepal's police and army face recruitment crisis due to youth outmigration, low salaries

■ Man Bahadur Basnet

Nearly 750,000 Nepalis went abroad for employment in the past year, and more than 100,000 left on student visas. Most of them were young Nepali men and women, and the number has been increasing every year.

As with other sections of society, Nepal's security agencies also face a recruitment crisis.

Nepal Police opened recruitment for 64 inspectors in September, and received 2,239 applications, compared to 2,718 candidates last year. Police also invited candidates for 256 assistant sub-inspectors this year for which it received 17,756 applications – down from 19,932 last year.

It is the same story in the Nepal Army, the number of applicants for

the post of Officer Cadet (Second Lieutenant) went down from 6,144 for 400 open seats in 2019 to 4,390 in 2020.

Meanwhile, applicants in the paramilitary Armed Police Force went down from 857 applications for 75 posts in 2021 to 536 applicants for 99 posts last year.

While the number of applicants appears higher than the demand, the data shows a significant decrease in applications for vacancies in Nepal's law enforcement agencies.

Security personnel are recruited on the basis of rank and age in Nepal, and the age cutoff for entry into Nepal's security agencies is typically 25 years.

Sociologist and migration expert Ganesh Gurung says that the demographic of young, physically fit Nepalis emigrating abroad in search of better opportunities has impacted recruitment into law enforcement and the military here at home. "The returns from working in Nepal's police and army are minimal, whereas overseas job opportunities are more attractive," Gurung says. "The work may be

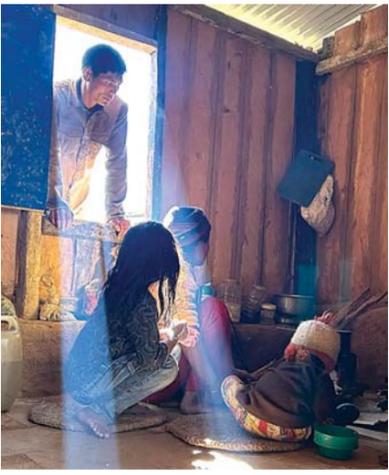


physically demanding abroad, but the pay is a lot higher."

Nepal Police spokesperson DIG Dan Bahadur Karki agrees that the physical and mental

demands of a law enforcement job is incomparable to the income that security personnel earn. "A young Nepali who works in Dubai earns enough to build a home in the

village within four years, while a Nepali with the same qualifications and physical ability in a security agency here barely makes enough to survive," says Karki. "Obviously the



Bimal Rana

If the earthquake had lasted for 12 seconds longer, I do not think we would have survived. Our house was destroyed, but we managed to get the children out. We lost grain, property, clothes but could not do much about the house. So we helped in search and rescue.

I did whatever work I could in the village and earned Rs 20,000 a month, but the income was not fixed. I have been to India and Malaysia for work before. I managed to save some money and was planning to use part of it to pay for recruitment costs. But now I have a job without paying any fees.

Even though we faced difficulties

during the earthquake, we tried not to panic. We received tents initially, and later the government supported us financially to build a temporary shelter which is where we are living now. We managed to salvage some of the food items that were covered in mud and rubble after the earthquake. The government has now promised permanent housing support.

I feel good about migrating, but also feel sad about leaving my family behind. I am also sad that my friend with whom I had traveled to Kathmandu for the job interview did not pass. We are close, and having him with me in a foreign land would have made things easier there.

Khadak Bahadur Singh

I run a utensils shop back home which is now being handled by my wife. I used to do side gigs such as collecting herbs. I have gone to collect yarsa in Dolpa in the mountains, I have carried apple crates, cut timber, carried stones during stints in India.

I have also worked in Malaysia previously for three years, and that helped with family expenses. I had paid the recruiter Rs450,000 with a high interest loan. So I could not save much. This time there is no fee.

I was sleeping at my sister's house when the quake struck. I saw cracks opening up in the walls, and tried to escape but the door was stuck. I somehow managed to push it open and ran out.

I called my family to see if they were okay and was grateful to know they were. My house did not collapse, but it was damaged. We lived in a tent.

We have received the first installment of Rs50,000 from the government for a temporary shelter. For permanent housing, I will combine government support and remittance.

For now, cash is the more urgent requirement which is why I am migrating overseas. What can we do? We are born in a country where we can dream, but not earn.

Money is the biggest support I can provide for my family right now. Remembering the song चालिस कटेछो रमाउँला, I will work hard there, as it is now my time to earn.

And because we are not paying a recruitment fee, we do not need to beg, take hefty loans, listen to threats from moneylenders, and can live in peace. That money we did not have to pay is like our earnings for reconstruction. 🇳🇵

Translated from conversations with the authors. Diaspora Diaries is a regular column in Nepali Times in collaboration with Migration Lab providing a platform to share experiences of living, working, studying abroad.



Mamilal Sharma

I work on the farm, but it does not provide enough income. The primary earner in our family is my wife, who is a teacher. I have not been able to study, but am committed to supporting my three brothers with their education. I also pay for my two children studying in Surkhet.

Getting a job is difficult for people like us who are not well-connected. I have done several stints in India, including as a packager in a plastic factory and as an apple picker. Our family can live off the farm for about eight months a year, but there are families here who are worse off.

Our house collapsed in the earthquake. We stayed in tents until the government provided support for temporary housing which we built ourselves to save money. We also had to build a separate livestock shelter. It was a bitterly cold winter, particularly for the elders and children.

I am going for foreign employment to support my family and for my children's education. I want to build a new house, even if it is small.

I can care for my family staying in Nepal, but to ensure a bright future for my children I have to migrate overseas. I was planning to go abroad for work, and had made a passport. But obtaining a loan was a challenge. I have advised my father and wife to open bank accounts so I can send them money regularly to spend and save as needed.



19 days in Russia

Nepali recruit started seeking a way to escape when he saw his name on a roster of soldiers being sent to the front lines

■ Marty Logan

Khagendra Khatri had his sights set on working in South Korea. He had even relocated from Rolpa district to Dang so he could take classes to prepare for the mandatory Korean language exam.

One day a man approached him in Tulsipur and asked if he was interested in going to work in Russia. He said he was not, but the man persisted. Six weeks later, Khatri changed his plans, and on 15 October 2023 took off for Moscow via Dubai from Kathmandu together with 52 Nepali job-seekers.

He had heard about the Russia-Ukraine war, but the recruiter had promised him a job as a cook behind the front lines. The salary would be equivalent to Rs500,000 monthly and after one year he would get Russian permanent residency. Khatri was even told he would be eligible for a US visa after that.

The Nepalis in the group spent a couple days in Moscow filling out papers. Then they were put in a bus and driven to a camp in the forest where there was a week of training, including how to use a rifle.

At that point Khatri still thought he would be cooking for the fighters.

"It was only after we were taken to a second training camp, where I saw my name suddenly pop up on a list of conscripts going to combat. And that is when it hit me that I was going to war," Khatri recalled in an interview in Kathmandu.

"After I saw my name, I started talking to an important looking soldier, using Google Translate," he continued. "I tried persuading him to take me out. He was not listening to me at the beginning, but I kept talking to him for a day and a half and he finally agreed to take seven of us Nepalis if we each paid him 17,000 rubles (\$174).

The man dropped the Nepalis off in his own vehicle some 5km out of camp at midnight. From there they started walking through the forest in the bitterly cold Russian winter.

"We did not fear that somebody would come and capture us," says Khatri. "We were more afraid of encountering wild animals — what would we do? It was also snowing, so we worried that maybe we would just perish in the cold."

The group walked for 16 hours straight, until a vehicle approached on a road, and stopped. After the men explained what had happened and where they were from, the driver agreed to drive them the seven hours to Moscow.

Learning their visas had expired, the helpful driver took them to a hostel where he knew they would be safe. He even refused to take any money for driving them all the way and helping them.

Safe in the hostel, the men contacted friends and family back in Nepal who sent them airline tickets. A day later they were already at Moscow airport, boarding their flight home.

Today, almost exactly one year later, Khatri says the experience sometimes seems unreal: "It actually feels like a story, and maybe people don't believe it. But when I was actually there, I was really afraid. One thought in the back of my mind was ... oh this is it, I'm going to die here," he says.

Khatri has started a farm in Rolpa with his family. But he is doubtful that he will make enough money to pay off the Rs1 million he owes money lenders. He is now looking for a new, safer opportunity abroad.

Asked if he's worried about being tricked again he replies, "Yes, I'm afraid of that. And I think it is normal to think that way. But then again I feel like if I only choose countries that have agreements with the Nepal government, maybe I will not be tricked again."

Khatri says he can't think of any of his peers who have done well for themselves without migrating abroad. He adds, "Most of my friends, even those who have attempted to do something in Nepal, have failed and had to finally go abroad. I do not think I have seen any of my friends actually succeed in Nepal."

Khatri along with other Nepalis was recruited by men named Mohan Oli and Nim Bahadur Kunwar (Sushant), according to a report by the Centre for Investigative Journalism Nepal. The police has a list of 61 traffickers involved in recruiting Nepalis into the Russian Army, and arrested 22 of them. Some refunded the fees, and most have been set free.

There are estimated to be a few thousand Nepalis in the Russian Army. At least 44 of them have been killed in action, while six were captured and are said to be prisoners of war in Ukraine. 🇳🇵

forces

youth prefer foreign employment."

Security agencies are now worried about the quality of inducted manpower. "There is a difference in work ethic between an applicant chosen from a competitive pool of 50 candidates versus one chosen from a pool of three candidates," explains Gurung. "Unmotivated employees hamper the overall performance of the state apparatus."

Nepal Army spokesperson Brigadier General Gaurab Kumar KC says recruitment has not been hampered by outmigration: "We have still been getting more than three times the applicants than there are open posts, so we are not yet worried."

Even so, the passing rates of aspirants have gone down for security forces after the Public Service Commission began examinations for military recruitment in 2015. In fact, the Nepal Army complained about the Commission's involvement in recruitment. Still, the number of vacant military posts tends to exceed the number of passing candidates.

Nepal Army's KC says that the military will not compromise on intake criteria even if there are fewer passing applicants. "Unqualified persons will not be admitted even if there are less-than-required passing candidates. We will re-advertise if that is the case."

But Nepal's security forces now also have to worry about retention of existing personnel. About 900 Nepal Army, 600 Nepal Police, and 300 Armed police personnel resign every year before the completion of their tenure.

In 2020, Home Minister Ram Bahadur Thapa recalled almost 1,000 police personnel who had been deployed for the security of VIPs after long-standing criticism that security forces were being misused to cater to political and bureaucratic leadership.

However, security personnel have continued to be assigned to high-ranking officials as glorified housekeepers. In December 2022, Rabi Lamichhane's Home Ministry had instructed its offices to recall unauthorised security personnel assigned to high-ranking officials,

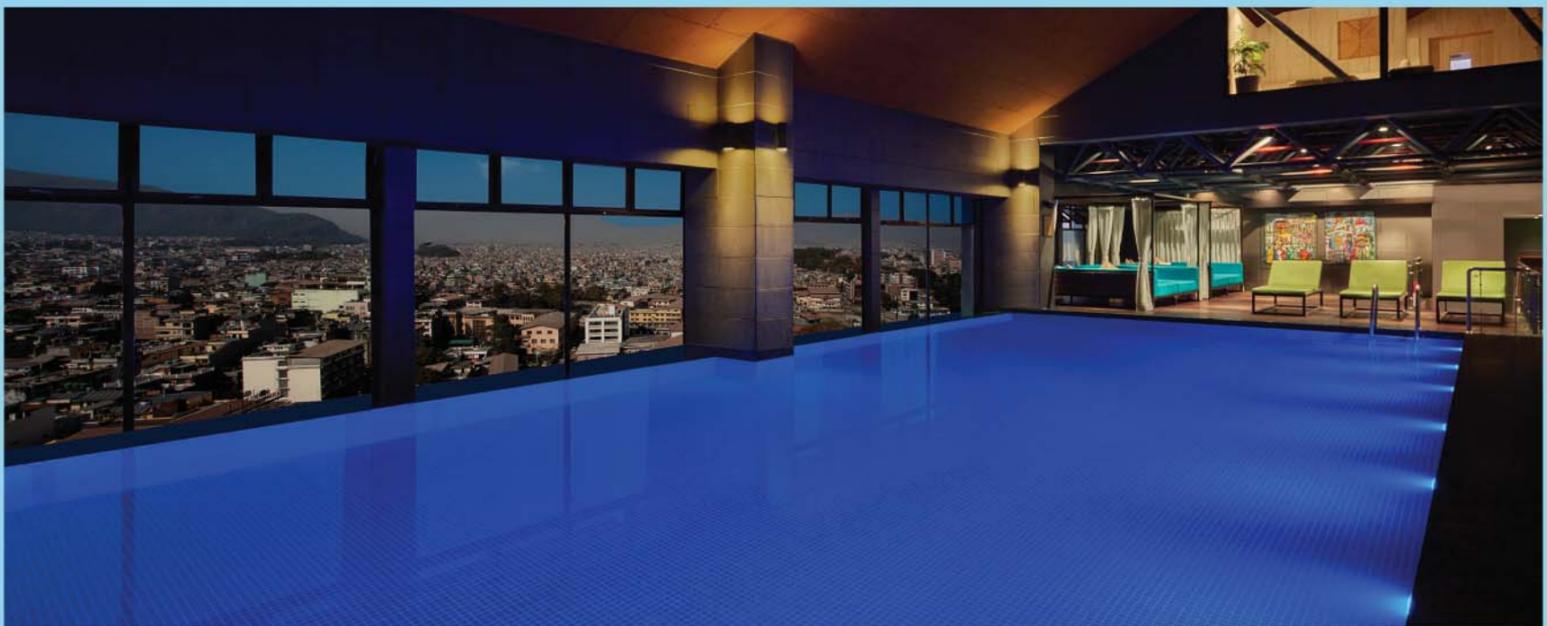
following which 500 officers from Nepal Police and Armed Police Force were withdrawn from their details.

But the Nepal Army does not have to follow such rules, and the practice of army personnel serving high-ranking active-duty and retired military personnel remains.

Conditions here are dire enough that many active duty officers in Nepal's military and police forces have chosen to leave their jobs to serve in the Russian Army to fight in the Ukraine war (see alongside).

The hierarchical culture and chain of command of politics, bureaucracy, law enforcement and military has also meant that abuse and mistreatment of subordinates is rife in Nepal's security forces.

"Feudalism is alive and well within our security institutions," says Gurung. "When soldiers and security forces who swore to protect and serve the nation are made to be at the beck and call of politicians and bureaucrats, it is easy to understand why they are disillusioned with their jobs and why they choose to quit and find jobs abroad." 🇳🇵



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