



Over the edge, again

Prime Minister Oli's brinkmanship bought himself time. But at what cost?

NePAL has been on a knife-edge in 2020 because of the pandemic, but the country's leaders are too involved in their internal power struggles to notice. This week, better sense prevailed once more at the last moment as the ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP) on Wednesday pulled back in the nick of time from tearing itself apart.

The struggle for supremacy between the two top leaders, Prime Minister K P Oli and party co-chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal, have become so nasty, rhetoric so acrimonious and the actions being taken so drastic, that it has now dragged all three arms of the state—the legislature, judiciary and executive—into controversy.

The latest casualty was the Office of the President which is now seen by many as just a rubber stamp for the prime minister. As head of state, Bidya Devi Bhandari, should have been beyond reproach and above the fray, but by hastily signing the ordinance to amend the law on the Constitutional Council this week, she faced unprecedented ridicule.

It was all unnecessary because Oli and Dahal smoked the peace pipe ahead of the NCP Standing Committee Meeting, and the prime minister decided to take back the ordinance (for the second time this year). The Standing Committee has also been put off till 21 December.

By passing the ordinance



CARTOON BY SUBHAS RAI / NEPALI TIMES #22, 22-28 DECEMBER 2000

amending the Constitutional Council law, Oli may have just been trying to demonstrate to Dahal how far he would go to get his way. But the damage has been done. Not just to the esteem of the President's office, but to himself, his party,

the Constitution and Nepal's democracy.

The Oli-Dahal row this year has been a wrecking ball on the Nepali state, and its nascent Constitution. It was predictable, therefore, that the opposition and the smaller

parties would move to cash in on the disarray in the NCP, and fill the political vacuum.

Nepal's Hindu-right held a series of rallies across the country last month which were increasingly well-attended, calling for the scrapping of the country's secular republican constitution. There may not be widespread public support for the return of the monarchy, even a ceremonial one, but declaring Nepal a Hindu state is a popular notion among the dominant majority community.

For its part, the opposition NC had been under relentless pressure ever since its battering in the 2017 election, to play a more effective role as an opposition party. It had to assert itself for fear of the rightists pulling the rug from under them with a Hindu agenda, and since Parliament is not in session had no option but to stage its own show of force.

Prime Minister Oli's brinkmanship did the trick, and he bought himself some more time. But at what cost? He has isolated

himself even more within his party and shown an authoritarian bent, he single-handedly dismantled an essential check-and-balance of Nepal's democracy, he put the Speaker and the leader of the opposition on the spot.

Oli's act of defiance against his party rivals led by Dahal, has undermined the Constitution and the rule of law and pushed the Nepali state closer to the edge.

Both feuding men bear responsibility. ☑



INSIDE

Special Nepali Times package on International Migrants Day 18 December



Editorial

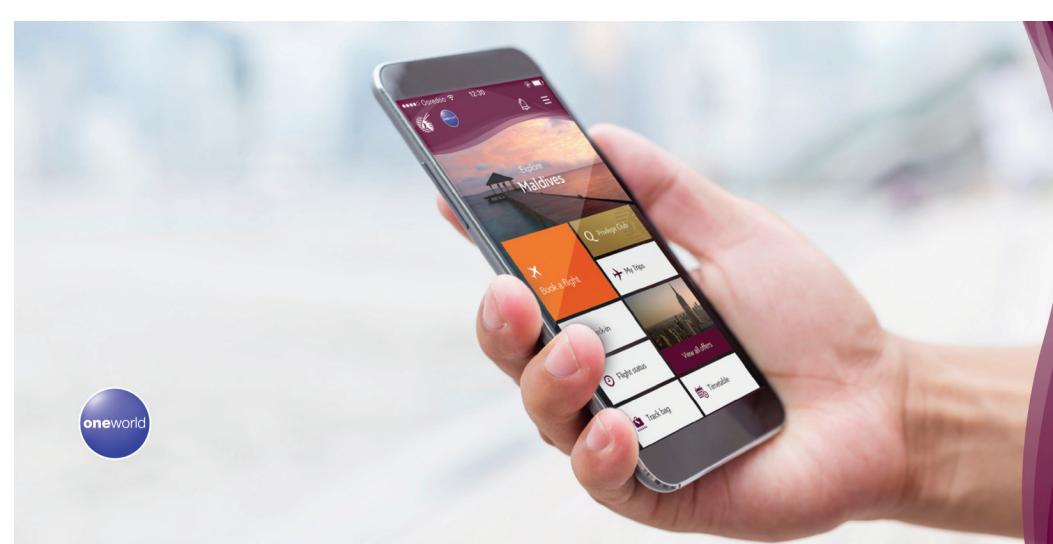
The Year of the Migrants PAGE 2

Sons of Their Fathers PAGE 8

Labour Mobility PAGE 9 BY UPASANA KHADKA

New UK Options for Nepalis PAGE 10

Nepali Rescued after 12 Years PAGE 11



Book now, pay later

Take advantage of our flexible payment options by booking your next journey online at qatarairways.com and paying for your flight in person within 24 hours of making your reservation.*

Simply choose your preferred form of payment and then proceed to make your purchase at our Qatar Airways sales office.

 qatarairways.com  Call +977 01 4440467

 Contact our Qatar Airways sales office or your preferred travel agency

*Terms and conditions apply; please review at the time of booking.

QATAR
AIRWAYS القطرية

GOING PLACES TOGETHER

The Year of Migrant Workers

2020 turned the world upside down, and in Nepal, one of the most dramatic impacts was on the country's economic mainstay – overseas contract workers who sent home nearly \$8 billion during the pandemic.

The year forces us to re-examine long-held assumptions about Nepal's remittance economy. And on International Migrants Day, Friday 18 December, *Nepali Times* has a special package of reportage, analysis and commentary on the subject.

When citizens are treated shabbily by a government, their health and education needs are neglected, they have no meaningful employment at home – they will leave. And it may be naïve to expect a state that has created the very conditions for millions of Nepalis to migrate to suddenly be conscious about their welfare.

Nepal's past governments have used migration as a safety valve, so millions of unemployed youth do not create political instability at home. The money they send back keeps the economy afloat. Nepal's remittance-

own country," he told us then, as he trudged to the Nepal border on India's Shramik train.

Five months later, he is back in Ahmedabad with the same employer despite the Covid-19 crisis in India. On the phone this week, he asked us rhetorically: "How will my family survive if I don't migrate?

Migration is inevitable, so we have to manage it better. There is a whole checklist of things to do, and a lot of it begins at home:

- Ensure a clean and transparent process
- Reduce the economic burden of recruitment
- Upscale vocational and pre-departure training
- Eliminate bureaucratic hassles and fees
- Control extortion and corruption every step of the way
- Sign bilateral labour agreements and implement them
- Prompt help by embassies to workers in need
- Soft loans for business development of returnees
- Invest in mass-job creation at home

All this is not going to happen overnight.

Demographic shifts worldwide, salary differences and aspirations of youth are real. Even as Nepal develops, its youth gets better education, the push factors for migration will continue to grow.

The destination may change from India to Qatar, or Qatar to the UK, but it is all mobility nonetheless. The choice ahead of Nepal is not whether we can curb migration (we cannot) but how we can benefit from this phenomenon while giving the youth attractive economic opportunities back home so that deciding to stay is not an unusual choice.

As 2020 draws to a close, we must also ponder how the pandemic did not just limit outmigration but also prevented Nepalis from coming back home. The inaction has been stunning. The Labour Minister was AWOL. Repatriation flights were a mess, with flip-flopping rules, lack of information for workers in limbo. When flights did resume in July, the government could not decide who should benefit

from airfare support – undocumented workers were not eligible for the ticket scheme when they are the ones who needed the help the most. Many Nepali workers overseas did not even bother to register to return, preferring to hold on to the jobs they had, even when wages and hours were not ideal.

Through all this, remittances defied expectations and continued to hold strong. Nepal's migrant workers contributed directly (by engaging in critical essential work in host countries) or indirectly (by sending remittances to Nepal). International Migrants Day celebrates their sacrifices, but we need to do much more than just appreciate them.

Hari made an arduous journey to Banke district from Ahmedabad in May when the lockdown forced millions of labourers to head home, many on foot. "It is better to die in my

grave

Twenty years ago this week, the Maoist insurgency was gaining strength, schools were on strike and the government of Girija Prasad Koirala was seeking to set up an Armed Police Force to fight the insurgency. The rebels capitalised on the chronic infighting between the NC and UML, and the lack of performance of the state. The public disillusionment with politicians and democracy itself was fuelling the insurgency.

Excerpt from a page 1 story by Binod Bhattarai from *Nepali Times* #22 of 22-28 December 2000:

What is astonishing is how quickly in the past month the country's mood has turned from bad to worse. Underneath the seeming calm of the bustling streets of the capital there is a deep sense of foreboding that we are all being pushed to the edge by forces beyond our control. Five million children couldn't attend classes last week because a student group sent out photocopies of a mildly worded letter ordering schools to close. Just to show they meant business, the pro-Maoist students roughed up a few principals. What it showed was not how much the Maoists are in control, but what little government control there is. The Maoists are simply exploiting a vacuum created by absolute disarray in government, in the politicised bureaucracy, and in a leftist opposition that seems to have gone into winter hibernation.

Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala has been trying to set up a specially armed paramilitary unit. After six months of toing-and-froing between Singha Durbar and Naryanhiti Durbar, the draft law has finally

been sent for approval by King Birendra. That is supposed to be a formality, but one has to factor in the army's extreme reluctance to agree to such a force. Even if it does get royal approval, the bill will have to be ratified by the winter session of parliament. For now, a demoralised police force cannot put any pressure on the Maoists even if it wants to; it is poorly equipped, inadequately funded and lacks training.

So far, Nepal's Maoists have out-done Mao by carrying out a revolution in fast-forward, and they need to maintain the momentum. The school strike could have been a diversion to strengthen their base areas and hold elections to what they called district-level "people's government". One of the biggest factors working in the Maoists' favour is that most of our democratically elected leaders have completely discredited themselves in the

public eye. The Maoists say they are now taking their struggle from the "Strategic Defence" phase to "Strategic Balance". In Mao jargon, that means creating alternative governance structures to fill the governance vacuum in the mid-western hills.

The Maoist leadership has its own internal challenges to face: their junior cadre are armed and impatient, but not adequately politicised. They don't want the violence to spiral out of control even as they reign in a guerrilla force that has tasted blood.

From the archives of *Nepali Times* of the past 20 years, site search: www.nepalitimes.com



ONLINE PACKAGES



Lilamaya Dhimal speaks exclusively to *Nepali Times* after landing in Kathmandu on 16 December after 13 years working as household help for the family of an abusive Saudi employer. She describes her torture, dramatic rescue and return to Nepal. Story: [page 11](#).



In the past when the average lifespan of a Nepali used to be 40-45, living long was a cause for celebration. Even today, the Newa community celebrates 'Janko' to mark certain milestones. Watch the ritual in this video only on our YouTube channel.

MAHENDRA'S PUTSCH

The bitter truth is that we Nepalis cannot cooperate and work with one another ('Putsch Ek', Kunda Dixit, #1039), BP-Mahendra, GP-Ganesh Man, Surya Bahadur-Lokendra Bahadur, GP-Sher Bahadur, KP Oli-Prachanda. The list goes on.

Shyamal Krishna Shrestha

• Whoever may say whatever, but there has never been such a visionary leader as BP. Mahendra had the power and BP the idea to drive the country to prosperity. For some reason, to the plight of Nepal, they were unable to work together. Mahendra cosied up with the communists who celebrated his takeover, and led to the demise of monarchy. All this has culminated in our present sorry state.

Lal Bahadur

• Viva la republica. Most Nepalis have had a taste of freedom, I don't think anyone would want to go back to an autocratic feudal system of governance.

Samyeck Shrestha

• That was a demand of time. King Mahendra did the right thing to contain avaricious leaders.

Janak Sapkota

• Mahendra was a mono-maniacal oligarch with the poorest of leadership qualities. Even his bloodline was severely polluted.

Robert Cardinalli

CANNABIS
Now the government needs to control the number of companies that want to register to start the business ('Nepal to benefit from cannabis legalisation', [nepalitimes.com](#)). Or else, cannabis cultivation will face the same fate as carpet, pashmina and garment industries.

Sunita Singh

• Keshab Sthapit was the one who was very vocal about legalising cannabis cultivation. I appreciate his far sightedness.

Arniko Rajbhandari

• This would help farmers immensely and we won't be as dependent on tourism for income.

Parkaz Gorkhali

CLIMATE TALK
In the recent years, I've witnessed more and more people coming forth to speak about climate change and its adverse effect on the people living in the Himalayan regions. This is commendable but not much has been done in terms of preserving ecology and glacial lakes from bursting because of prevailing ignorance among administrative staff and locals ('Peak Ambition', Lisa Honan and Nimsdai Purja, #1039).

Nagawang Tenzin

HISTORY THROUGH ART
What a wonderful read as usual ('Nepal's history through art', Lisa Choegyal, #1039). Nepal's history (and its present) is quite intriguing and these paintings, drawings and watercolors are enchanting. Thank you for sharing your knowledge and thoughts on this topic.

Renate Schwarz

• What a fine collection you have acquired, Lisa! Wonderfully evocative.

Sam Cowan



'Putsch Ek'

By Kunda Dixit

It has been exactly 60 years since King Mahendra's putsch on Pous 1 (15 December 1960). The coup determined the course of Nepal's history for decades. Visit our website for details of that fateful day and join online discussion.

- **Most reached and shared on Facebook**
- **Most commented**



"You inspire others by learning, not teaching," Santosh Shah

From Siraha to Cinnamon Kitchen in London, Chef Santosh Shah has come a long way and is a finalist for the title of *MasterChef: The Professionals 2020* on BBC One. He spoke to *Nepali Times* about his journey and his grand plan to introduce Nepali cuisine in the international stage. Go online for full interview.

Santosh Shah

• **Most popular on Twitter**



America, Nepal and the Royal Coup

By Tom Robertson

A historian pores through declassified papers that reveal American response to King Mahendra's coup in 1960 and how the takeover and Cold War geopolitics affected US's policy towards Nepal. An exclusive Longread on [nepalitimes.com](#)

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Mt Everest grows by 86cm, now measuring 8848.86m #Nepal and #China jointly announce the new height of Everest, the world's highest point.

Sujan Dhakal @SujanDhakal90
Over the past two years, 80 surveyors from Nepal's Land Survey department have hiked, driven & flown thousands of kms to take complex measurements of Mt. Everest. But now China claimed joint credit for an effort to which it has contributed very little to. This is not done!

Lisa Honan @lisahonan07
Interesting to hear about China's reaction to the new height of Everest this week in @NepaliTimes. There was much excitement over this side of the Himalayas @CScottFCDO

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
A #British crew of four members will be taking on the @TalismanWhiskyAtlantic Challenge, rowing approximately 5000 km to raise \$300,000 to help build schools in #Nepal.

Rupen Pradhan @rudupen
Inspiring. When will we start thinking for our school in remote areas? We Nepalis need to stop talking and start doing. Thank you @NepaliTimes for bringing the story of kindness.

RewatiRamanDahal @rewatiniti
Thank you very much for sharing such incredible news. It's worth a lot for philanthropy practitioners like me. Big thanks!

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
@chefantsoshshah, the Nepali Chef on #MasterChefTheProfessionals talked to Nepali Times about his journey from #Siraha to MasterChef.

Kashish Das Shrestha @kashishdas
Amazing! What a glorious gastronomic moment for Nepali cuisine:@chefantsoshshah makes it to the finals of @MasterChefUK! Lost his father at 5, started working at age 9. Youngest of 7 children. Hard life, hard work, ambition, humility — do read this interview.

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Tom Robertson sieves through declassified documents revealing the American response to King Mahendra's coup d'état 60 years ago.

Akhilesh Upadhyay @akhileshu
Very interesting research article on US foreign policy in Nepal in the 1950s-60s during the Cold War. Mahendra dismissed an elected government of BP Koirala, who was rated highly by the Americans; the king not so much. But it all changed... #SovietUnion #US #China #Communism

TATA MOTORS
Connecting Aspirations

ALTROZ
THE GOLD STANDARD

WORLD CLASS SAFETY

GLOBAL NCAP
5-STAR SAFETY RATING

Price starts at **Rs 29.99 Lacs**

Available in Petrol

- GOLD STANDARD OF DESIGN**
 - Future Inspired Design
 - Cockpit Inspired Interiors
 - 90° Opening Doors
 - 17.78cm (7") Digital Cluster
- GOLD STANDARD OF SAFETY**
 - GNCAP 5 Star Rating
 - Advanced ALFA Architecture
 - ABS, EBD & CSC as Standard
 - Dual Airbags as Standard
- GOLD STANDARD OF TECHNOLOGY**
 - Auto Headlamps
 - Rain Sensing Wipers
 - Cruise Control
 - 17.78 cm (7") Harman™ Infotainment
- GOLD STANDARD OF DRIVING DYNAMICS**
 - Powerful Petrol Engine
 - Idle Stop Start
 - Multi-drive Modes
 - Agile and Widest ALFA Architecture
- GOLD STANDARD OF CUSTOMER DELIGHT**
 - Serene Blue Mood Lighting
 - Flat Rear Floor
 - Rear AC Vents
 - Multi-functional Steering Wheel

How a 105-year-old beat the virus

A Nepali great grandmother who recovered from the coronavirus that infected her whole household

Six weeks ago, the live-in nurse who takes care of my 105-year-old grandmother-in-law (Muwa) fell ill. She had developed cold-like symptoms and a headache, but no fever. After she went back home for Tihar, Muwa developed a dry cough, without fever.



COMMENT
Rupa Joshi

She began to take cough medicine, but we also applied home remedies, steam treatments, turmeric water, honey, ginger, what have you. The fact that this could be indicative of Covid did not even cross my mind because I still somehow believed that having the coronavirus meant high fever. On the third day, Muwa's cough got better.

But then I developed a fever the day before आइटिक on 16 November and isolated immediately. I could only get tested the day after Tihar, and the next day my husband developed a fever as well. My report came back positive 24 hours later, and all other seven members in our house, including my grandmother-in-law, tested positive.

The news of Muwa at her age testing positive was chilling. We had taken every precaution, ensured every measure to keep her safe. The days were filled with worry.

However, if we could look for a silver lining during this ordeal, it was that we did not need to follow strict measures of isolation, since everyone in our household had tested positive. We had been worrying about making different sleeping, cooking, and bathroom arrangements while we were waiting



Muwa lost her only daughter-in-law, Angurbaba Joshi, during the pandemic. A month after her passing, she lost her sister Binda Shakya with whom she was very close. We broke the news of her passing two months later when Muwa began to ask why her sister had not been visiting.

One day, as she was expressing her annoyance over Binda Didi's continued absence, without thinking I said, "She can't come anymore." She immediately asked, "Why? Is she dead?" I answered, "Yes."

Muwa was inconsolable over the next three weeks. She has begun to forget a lot of things, but she has not forgotten that her sister has passed. In her grief, she has started to reconcile with her own mortality. "My time has come, this is it," she said one day.

The grief of her having outlived all of her younger siblings, a son, a daughter-in-law, and other loved ones shows clearly on her face. Sometimes, she sees her own longevity as a curse. "Why hasn't god taken me away yet?" she asks.

Muwa overcame 'Karuna' (what she calls the coronavirus, and a Sanskrit word that means 'compassion') better than any of us. The doctors have always told us that her lungs and her heart are as healthy as a young woman's.

Her immune system is strong, perhaps from the clean and fresh surroundings and food she grew up with. She has hardened, enduring a great deal in life, as a child widow, and as an elderly woman who has seen many loved ones pass on.

Muwa's mental fortitude is a testament to the fact that she is still here with us. Her memories may be blurred, but she is not inactive and silent, and will never be. ☺

for all our results to come back, but that was not necessary anymore.

So we shut the front gate, and sealed ourselves from the world. No one was allowed in or out. Our daughter and my sister-in-law left enough essentials on our doorstep to last the duration of our isolation.

Of the eight people in our home, my husband and I were the only ones who developed a fever, the others all had only mild symptoms. But while my fever peaked at 100°F, my husband, who is diabetic, had a high fever right from the start.

When his oxygen level began to drop, he had to be admitted to hospital where he stayed for two weeks, completing a course of

steroid and antibiotic treatments for secondary lung infection.

It was a stressful time back at home. On one hand, I worried about my husband alone in the hospital. On the other, I worried over what to tell his grandmother whenever she asked about her grandson.

One day, Muwa said, "It's so lonely here with just you and me." Maybe she realised that it would just be the two of us in that family from then onwards. So when her grandson came home after two weeks in hospital, she exclaimed in relief, "Finally, I can see you like this."

Muwa likes to watch the tv news every day, and when she asks,

"What happened today?" we know she wants us to know how many people died of Covid-19 that day, and we give her the figure.

Muwa often asks when her grandchildren, who live abroad, are going to come back home. We tell her that planes were not flying because the pandemic was spreading all over the world. But since the lockdown was lifted and flights resumed, she sits on the terrace and keenly watches the planes fly by.

Some days she notices that there are very few planes. Other days, she muses, "Quite a lot of flights today." The planes in the sky have become symbols of hope for her to be reunited with her family one day.

Staying positive to become negative

A journalist recovering from Covid-19 discovers that the news can be harmful to health

Mukesh Pokhrel

As part of my job as a journalist, I have interviewed many in the past months who were sick with Covid-19. On all those occasions, at the back of my mind was the fear that I might be infected one day.

Our work takes us to the frontlines of this pandemic. When the lockdown was imposed, I started working out of my home in Butwal. Regardless, I had to travel to nearby regions to report. And while I tried to follow all the necessary safety measures, I never really found out where I caught the coronavirus.

The infection hits patients with varying degrees of intensity. Some show severe symptoms, while others have milder ones, followed by a quick recovery. Mine were mild, and did not last long. I have since recovered.

I experienced those 15 days of isolation were different for me. As a journalist, I was constantly exposed to how the news, social media interactions and conversations with friends can affect the morale of those infected.

It was on the day of Bhai Tika (16 November, 2020) that I started feeling lethargic and weak. By evening, I was running a slight temperature. This was not unusual, I often had fevers and they passed.

I took paracetamol and managed to get some sleep, but at 3AM I was wide awake with 37.3° fever. This was not high, but I had a hard time going back to sleep.

In the morning, I went to Lumbini Regional Hospital in Butwal for PCR test. At around



4PM, I received my report. I was confirmed Covid-19 positive.

I had prepared myself for it mentally, so I took it well. I had no other symptoms besides fever. Once I took a paracetamol, my fever would go down, but it would return every six hours. This went on for three days.

I found my CT (cycle threshold) value to be at 14, which is considerably low, so I visited the hospital to get further tests done. The reports came back normal. After the third day I no longer had fever, but a blocked nose.

But it was after Day 6, that I started to experience a sore throat. Gargling with salt water twice a day, helped gradually reduce the cold and the soreness by Day 8.

I had heard about how a positive mental attitude builds up physical immunity. From the beginning of isolation, I was careful not to let external factors influence me. I removed Facebook and Twitter from my phone, stopped checking online portals to keep myself away from news about Covid-19 deaths.

I had noticed that negative news made me

anxious. It made me sweat profusely and I had difficulty breathing. Because my oxygen saturation level was normal at 97, I was clearly overthinking. It was my exposure to media that was affecting my physical recovery.

So, I tried my best to forget about things by watching travel and environmental documentaries. I listened to folk music and positive discourses. I took in the sun.

I asked my wife to forward to me any positive news she came across. Politician Chitra Bahadur KC's recovery, and news about successful vaccine trials gave me hope.

Throughout my career, I have heard people complain that journalists only report negative news. As a Covid-19 patient in isolation, I realised how true this is.

Positive news is like oxygen for those who are trying to recover from the coronavirus. Positive thoughts can be half the cure.

There were many who tried to give me advice. Not all of it reassuring. "Can't say anything with coronavirus, even the healthiest have died just like that," said one friend. Another called to say: "You should have had severe symptoms, but you seem normal."

Take it from me: trust only the experts.

Doctors confirm that the impact of the virus is stronger in people with weaker immunity. Many acquaintances have been severely affected. But because I was conscious about my diet and fitness, it seems I was able to fight back. More importantly, I was mentally prepared.

It has been a week since I tested negative, but my health is still not back to what it used to be. I feel lethargic and listless, and cannot concentrate on work. But I am getting there because to be negative you have to be positive. ☺

Mukesh Pokhrel is the Himal Khabarpatrika and Nepali Times reporter based in Nawalparasi, covering the environment and development.



KUNDA DIXIT

Tourist visas now open for Nepal

Restrictions on foreigners further eased and flights to India resume, but confusion persists

As Nepal finally resumed flights between Kathmandu and New Delhi on Thursday after 11 months, and restrictions on foreigners visiting Nepal were eased, there is still confusion about the conditions for travel.

Whereas only trekkers and mountaineers had been allowed to visit Nepal after 17 October, all foreigners will now be permitted provided they get tourist entry visas from Nepal diplomatic missions abroad, or have a pre-approval or recommendation from a concerned ministry to get an on-arrival visa.

Nepal's land borders with India and China remain closed for all foreigners, according to a notice put out by the Department of Immigration this week.

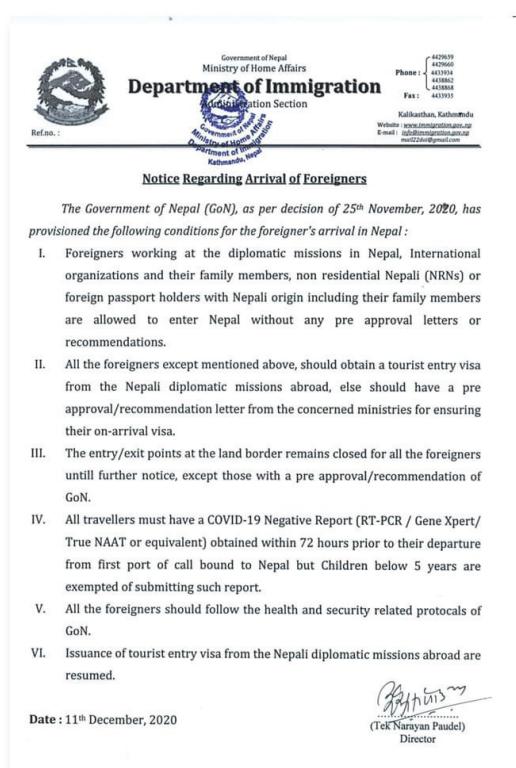
All air travellers are required to have RT PCR negative reports obtained 72 hours prior to departure from first port of call. All Nepali and foreign passengers also need to spend one week in home or hotel isolation in Kathmandu.

Limited flights resumed between Kathmandu and Delhi on 17 December ahead of a visit to India by Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali. There will only be two daily flights by Air India and Nepal Airlines, and only Nepali and Indian nationals allowed, no onward travel permitted, and a two-week quarantine for passengers arriving in Delhi.

Travel trade representatives, while welcoming the move, have said that the guidelines are too complicated and confusing, and many of them cannot be enforced. For example, the list of rules for India-Nepal travel is three pages long.

Meanwhile, a visitor who applied for a tourist visa at a Nepali Embassy in Europe told *Nepali Times* the visa officer did not seem to have information about the new rules, and his application was forwarded to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kathmandu.

"There is utter confusion," said the visitor on condition of



anonymity. "If my application has to be sent to Kathmandu for approval, what is the point of saying that Nepali diplomatic missions abroad have resumed issuing tourist visas?"

Indeed, there is also a lack of clarity about the kind of pre-approval or recommendation letter from a concerned ministry needed for on-arrival visa. What should the content of such a recommendation be, who is eligible, what is a 'concerned ministry'? There have been several passengers who have been prevented from checking in on flights to Kathmandu this week because of the confusion.

"The instructions about letters for on-arrival visas are so vague that our check-in officers puzzled about who is allowed and who is not," said the representative of an international airline serving Kathmandu. Since airlines are penalised if passengers do not have proper documents, most carriers err on the side of caution.

All this means that the new rules that were supposed to make it more convenient for non-Nepalis to take flights to Kathmandu have had just the opposite effect. Visitors that *Nepali Times* spoke to who had hoped to travel to Nepal for Christmas and New Year either for tourism or to see friends said they were not going to take the risk.

Only the most determined foreign travellers, or those with connections in the travel industry or government, appear to be buying tickets to Nepal.

Most airlines report that only 5-10% of their passengers to Kathmandu on every flight are non-Nepalis.

Nepal had a target of attracting 2 million tourists under the Visit Nepal 2020 campaign, but after 220,000 arrivals between January and March, there were no visitors till restrictions were partially lifted in October for hikers and climbers. Since then, there have been about 500 non-Nepalis landing at Kathmandu airport every week, mostly from the United States, UK and China.

Members of the Non-resident Nepalis Association and foreign passport holders born in Nepal have been allowed to return to

Nepal to see family members, but again, airlines do not have clear instructions about what kind of documents they need.

"The main reason for this needless confusion is because there are so many agencies of government involved with their own criteria and rules, and no one is coordinating," said the travel trade representative.

The Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation with the Nepal Tourism Board have been pushing for opening up, but the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) has its own process. The Ministry of Health has been issuing contradictory statements. The Department of Immigration has its own rules. And the Covid-19 Crisis Management Centre which is supposed to streamline the process has not been able to issue clear and non-ambiguous guidelines.

Although all arriving passengers are supposed to stay one week in home isolation or hotel quarantine, there is no monitoring about whether anyone actually does so. Many who are supposed to self-isolate at home have been seen in weddings, and there is no one checking to see if a person in hotel quarantine checks out after an over-night stay.

Health checks at the airport are equally lackadaisical, with just a person with a thermal gun pointed at each passenger's forehead.

prabhu BANK



Nepal anti-TB drone project awarded

Drone therapy for tuberculosis diagnosis in Nepal's remote and hard to reach mountains has won at the 2020 International Air Cargo Association (TIACA) Sustainability Awards and will receive



\$10,000 in prize money as a start-up category winner. Drone Optimised Therapy System (DrOTS) by Nepal Flying Labs with support from Birat Nepal medical Trust (BNMT) flies from a central district hospital to health posts in the mountains to collect sputum samples and deliver both diagnoses and treatment to patients. Samples are tested using a high-end GenExpert kit.

Says Biplov Pageni of Nepal Flying Labs: "We hope to scale our drone cargo technology to other rural locations and establish networks of medical cargo drones to help more people in the coming days. Drones are said to be the future of air cargo but I believe they are the present and we are using it to save lives in Nepal."

Nepal Private Equity Association

Nepal's prominent private equity and venture capital firms have come together to setup the Nepal Private Equity Association (NPEA) to promote alternative investment in Nepal's expanding entrepreneurial ecosystem. One to Watch (OTW) was supported by UKAID to incorporate the NPEA which will provide growing private equity/venture capital sector with representation, as well as upskilling.

TATA Service Camp

Sipradi Trading has kickstarted the 5th edition of a week-long Tata Global Service

Camp at 50 different showrooms and outlets where the customers can get pre-booking for their vehicles' servicing and as well as get a chance to win smartphones on a daily basis.

Sanima ties up with Ncell



Sanima Bank has signed an agreement with Ncell Axiata Limited to provide a free

SIM card and data package to its mobile banking (Sanima Sajilo e-Banking) users.

IME's branchless banking



Global IME has launched six new branchless banking points in Nepal taking the total to 238 across the country. The bank has already appointed suitable representatives to lead the additional sections.

Team Nepal 1st Prize

Nisarga Batika School's Anushna Gautam and Nightingale International School's Saurya Shrestha won the 1st



prize of the Wild Wisdom Quiz (WWQ) 2020 ahead of finalists from Colombia, India and Hong Kong. Hosted by WWF India, the quiz was held on Zoom with the theme 'Reimagining Our Planet'. Now in its fourth edition, WWF Nepal initially introduced the Wild Wisdom Quiz (WWQ) in Nepal in 2017.

prabhu BANK

HEALTH AT HOME
your health partner!

Nursing Services and Placement

Doctors Visits and Procedures

Physical Therapy and Rehabilitations

Diagnostics (Blood, Urine, ECG, USG etc.)

Equipment Sales and Rental

Prescription drugs delivery

Appointments Management

Taking Quality Healthcare
to people's doorstep.

+977- 9818360166 www.healthathome.com.np

EVENTS

Documentary screening

Be a part of an exclusive live screening of KIMFF 2020 documentary *The Cremator* by Nishon Shakya and KIMFF 2019 documentary *Gaine* by Pradeep Dhakal. Safety guidelines apply.

18 December, 6 pm, The Urban Hub, Pulchowk.



TEDxJamal

x= independently organized TED event

TEDxJamal

With Speakers Dan Wright, Shristi Singh Shrestha, Priyanka Karki, Ram Laxman Rimal, Dr Sushil Kandel, and Pawan Goyal, TEDxJamal looks forward to showcasing and enabling ideas to be put into action.

26 December, 12pm–6pm, Hotel Crowne Imperial

The Online Carnival

The interactive carnival will feature three hours of dancehall, soca, afrobeats and reggae, with special guest appearances, so break out the costumes and make sure the drinks are flowing. The event is also raising money for Brixton Soup Kitchen & Support Centre. Watch the live stream.

19 December 8pm- 3am



Saturn Jupiter conjunction

The two biggest planets are getting closer and closer and will be almost together on the evening of 21 December after sunset in the southwestern sky. Watch from Kathmandu.

21 December



Christmas bazaar

Mithila House in collaboration with Mike's By Evoke has announced a Christmas Bazaar to promote local businesses, artwork, craft, entrepreneurs and innovative products.

19 December, 12pm–5pm, Mike's By Evoke

Christmas Eve at Nomad

Enjoy a night of good Italian food and wines with loved ones at the Piano Piano Restaurant on Christmas Eve. Special cocktails & mocktails offer included. Look at the menu and make reservations now.

24 December, Rs 1800++/ person, Nomad Hotel, Lazimpat, 9869130880



Christmas Market

Upcoming Christmas Market will feature specials like Mulled Wine and Bakes, Churpee Chyang and Millet Doughnuts, Sea BuckThorn Mocktails and Highland snacks and a curated selection of seasonal gifts from a variety of vendors. Free entry.

9am–8pm 19 December, Karma coffee

Real winter is now here. A cold, dry wind will be blowing from the west this weekend sending the minimum temperature plummeting to just above freezing, with frost on Kathmandu Valley's rim. The maximum will also fall to 18 Celsius. But aside from Kathmandu's own pollution, there is no trans-boundary haze to contend with, and the particulates will be blown off by afternoon, revealing great mountain views.



AIR QUALITY INDEX



This week we take a regional overview of the Air Quality Index (AQI) from the World Air Quality Index Project www.aqicn.org which carries daily highs. We can see from this that AQI is in the Purple 'Very Unhealthy' zone in New Delhi, which is actually better than last week when it was 550. This is mainly due to pollution mixed with winter fog in the plains. Kathmandu was an Unhealthy 152 on Thursday morning, while Pokhara hit 166, and Nepalganj had the worst AQI in Nepal at 184.

<https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>

ECOLOGIC WITH MISS MOTI

KRIPA JOSHI



HARNESS THE WIND



The history of humans harnessing wind power dates back as early as 5,000 BC. Wind is an unlimited, free, renewable energy source that doesn't pollute the air and doesn't release any carbon emissions. Although wind farms, or individual turbines, can be expensive to install, once up and running, operating costs are relatively low. Wind energy is also space-efficient. One of the biggest downsides of wind energy is the noise and visual pollution. Turbines need to be located and designed to minimise impact on bird and bat populations. #FridaysForFuture

OUR PICK

Released in 2019, *The King* is an epic historical war drama based on several plays from William Shakespeare's *Henry IV*. A Netflix film directed by David Michôd and co-written by Michôd and Joel Edgerton includes an ensemble cast led by Timothée Chalamet as Henry, Prince of Wales alongside Robert Pattinson (as Louis, The Dauphin) who were praised for their portrayal. Ben Mendelsohn, Joel Edgerton, Sean Harris, Dean Charles Chapman and Lily-Rose Depp also star.



DINING



La Dolce Vita

La Dolce Vita, an Italian restaurant complete with the requisite red- checked tablecloth, is a popular choice for locals and tourists. Located in the heart of Thamel, opposite Kathmandu Guest House, escape upstairs from the bustle of the main chowk and relish in Italian cuisine.

01-4700612



Jatra Cafe & Bar

Jatra offers a wide variety of Continental cuisine. Try the signature Veg Momo and Sukuti Pizza and enjoy the wonderful, cosy ambience with other delicious Nepali and Indian dishes on the menu.

01-4256622



Nandini Food Court

Head to Nandini Food Court at Swotha, Patan to try out the delicious Newa Platter. Or order the much loved Yomari, one of the best dishes on the menu.

9849259212



Fuji Bakery

More shop than cafe, Fuji sets up a few tables and serves tea, Nescafe, and delicious sandwiches. Pick up Fuji's sandwich saviour, the Pullman, or browse through non-bread food products like organic coffee, honey, miso, white cheese and lapsi.

01-5260678



बालबालिका माथि हुने हिंसा, दुर्व्यवहार, शोषण भएको, जोखिमपूर्ण अवस्थामा रहेको वा बालअधिकारको उल्लंघन भएको छ भने बाल हेल्पलाइनको पैसा नलाग्ने

फोन: नं. १०९८ मा खबर गरौ।



नेपाल सरकार
सञ्चार तथा सूचना प्रविधि मन्त्रालय
सूचना तथा प्रसारण विभाग

A Tibetan Mastiff pup who dares to dream

The Ambassador's Dog is a book by a former US envoy and Lo Khyi, a pup he adopted in Nepal

Sonia Awale

The story begins with a tiny Tibetan Mastiff pup, cold, hungry and alone as an icy wind blows across a mountain trail in Tsarang of Upper Mustang beyond the Himalaya.

A boy named Karchung scoops up the shivering ball of fluff. "Little brother, this won't do," says the boy, tucking him inside his fleece jacket and taking him home.

The puppy slurps up the *tsampa*, and as the days go by the little pup gets stronger and dreams of a warm home and family by night, an innocent wish that the high Himalayan winds carry across the land.

When he wasn't chasing after chicken and prancing around the goats, he was restlessly roaming the village, exploring every corner of Saukre.

Villagers recognise pretty early that this handsome blue-eyed Tibetan Mastiff pup has a wandering spirit. But Karchung, his family and most of the village had never left the mountains.

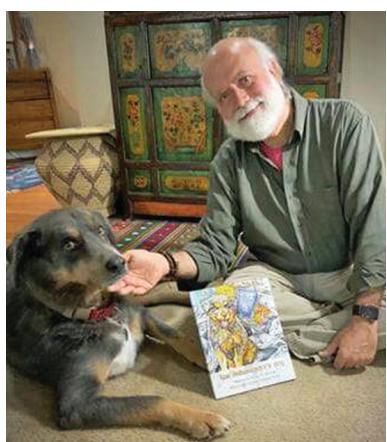
So, the story goes, the pup waits for his true family, perched on his rock overlooking the trail until one day a man with a white-beard and white shirt comes puffing up the trail.

This is not just any other trekker, it is Scott DeLisi, at the time the American Ambassador to Nepal. He and his team were heading up to the fabled walled town of Lo Manthang.

The piercing blue eyes and dignified self-confident air immediately drew him to the pup. If it was not for the eyes, His Excellency may have walked on by since the dog's blue-grey coat was the colour of the land itself,



Lo Khyi now lives in Haymarket, Virginia in the US (right) with the DeLisi family, on the other side of the Planet from his birthplace in a remote village of Mustang in Nepal (left).



and perfectly camouflaged him in Mustang's arid terrain.

Then, their eyes met, and, for the first time, the puppy spoke... and Scott heard him, and that day, the world changed for them both.

The Ambassador's Dog is a tale of Lo Khyi (Lo for Mustang, and khyi, which fortuitously means both 'dog' and 'happiness' in Tibetan), a pup that dared to dream big and who went on to become the source of happiness for Scott, who took the dog to America after his tenure in Nepal.

'Scott' in the book is Scott H. DeLisi himself, who served as ambassador in Kathmandu from 2010-12. Now retired, DeLisi is a career diplomat who spent 35 years from one embassy to the next roaming the world with multiple postings in Asia and Africa. But it was Nepal and Nepalis that touched his heart like no other place. DeLisi is an avid birder, and made a rare sighting of Spiny Babbler during his tenure in Nepal.

DeLisi worked on preparing Nepal for disaster risk reduction as

ambassador, and after retiring had just established Soarway Foundation in April 2015, when a major earthquake rocked Nepal.

As an Executive Director of the Foundation and Engage Nepal, he continues his effort to help Nepal with child nutrition and education, public health, employment generation and rebuilding. Part of the proceeds from this book will go to his charitable organisation.

The Ambassador's Dog has a dream-like quality to it, but at its heart is a story of optimism and positivity. Lo Khyi is a canine medium for an important message: set goals for yourselves and believe in them. And somehow (stars will align, or you will find avenues) your dreams will come true.

Every word in this short tale reveals DeLisi's attachment to his *bhote kukur*, a harbinger of hope and

happiness. This book will surely grip many young readers and inspire them, and they will be particularly drawn by Jane Lillian Vance's exquisite illustrations.

Vance is an acclaimed American artist, her *thangka* painting of *amchi* healer in west Nepal resulted in the award-winning 2010 documentary *A Gift for the Village*. She has worked as an art therapist for children with special needs for 20 years and is a vice-president at the non-profit Help Save the Next Girl.

The illustrations on every page are symbolic, but detailed works of art that are intimate portrayals of the Land of Lo, its Buddhist faith, and its people, animals and birds.

Lo Khyi now lives in Haymarket, Virginia with DeLisi's loving family, on the other side of the Planet from his birthplace in the remote wind-blown village of Tsarang in Nepal.

Lo Khyi is the true hero of the *The Ambassador's Dog*, a short, uplifting ageless read for this dreary Covid winter, and a perfect magical gift of hope for the upcoming holiday season — especially for families with children and dogs. 



The Ambassador's Dog
by Scott H. DeLisi
Vajra Publications 2020
Pages 40
Rs 1,600 (partly goes to the non-profit, Engage Nepal)

Available at Vajra Books, Patan Dhoka Bookshop and Architect's Books in Patan. Vajra is offering Christmas discount at Rs 1,400 and home delivery. Order online through Libary.

Nepal's highest-ever tiger sighting

A tiger has been caught in a camera trap roaming forests at 3,165m in the mountain forests of Ilam

Atiger has been caught on camera trap at an elevation of 3,165m in Ilam district, the highest proven sighting of a big cat ever in Nepal — and the first time that one has been sighted in the mountains of eastern Nepal.

This could be another indication that tigers may be moving higher up the mountains in Nepal due to changes in the climate, or due to habitat destruction in the plains.

The main traditional tiger habitats in Nepal are the Chitwan and Bardia National Parks in the plains, and this is the second high altitude sighting of a tiger in Nepal. Earlier, a tiger was also caught on camera trap in the Mahabharat Range of Dadeldhura in forests at 2,500 m.

Zoologists say tigers may have strayed into the mountains as prey got scarce in their traditional habitats, water sources ran out, or due to higher temperatures because of global warming.

The highest a tiger has ever been spotted is in Bhutan at an elevation of 4,038m three years ago, and in Dibang Valley of India's Arunachal Pradesh at 3,630m.

The Ilam sightings of the same tiger occurred in 13 and 21 November in the Kangchenjunga Landscape region after camera



The same tiger captured in the camera trap in Ilam on 13 and 21 November 2020 in the mountains of Ilam at an altitude of 3,165m. Camera trap image of a tiger at 2,500m in the Mahabharat Range in Dadeldhura captured in April 2020 (below).

trap images were analysed. The cameras are activated by motion detectors, and 20 of them had been placed in strategic areas of the forest to monitor endangered red panda fitted with GPS collars by the Red Panda Network in collaboration with the Department of Forests and Soil Conservation.

"This sighting demonstrate the importance of the Kangchenjunga Landscape in eastern Nepal, and it needs special attention since the forests provide connectivity to the Singalila National Park in India, North Sikkim and the Dooars of North Bengal," said Madhuri Karki



DOFSC/WWF NEPAL

Thapa of Nepal's Department of Forests and Soil Conservation.

Ang Phuri Sherpa, Country Director of the Red Panda Network agrees: "The first-ever record of a tiger in Ilam district demonstrates the significance of this nature corridor in eastern Nepal, and it needs to be a global conservation priority."

Conservationists say that the finding broadens the scope of potential high-altitude habitats for tigers in Nepal, and the need to establish ecological corridors for the safe crossborder dispersal of wildlife and the conservation of species.

The Royal Bengal Tiger (*Panthera tigris tigris*) is listed as 'Endangered' in the International Union for Nature Conservation (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species, and protected in Nepal. Currently tigers are found in five national parks in the Tarai Arc Landscape (TAL) covering 18 districts and seven biological corridors in the plains of Nepal.

Nepal is the first tiger range country to meet a target set at the St Petersburg Tiger Summit in 2010 to double the population of the big cats. A tiger census in 2018 showed that the population of tigers had risen to 235 from only 121 in 2009.

"The tiger is an umbrella species that ensures the well-being of the entire ecosystem," says Mana Bahadur Khadka, Director General of the Department of Forests and Soil Conservation. "This record of tiger presence signifies the importance of high-altitude forest in the mountains as a habitat for these endangered big cats." 

Sons of their fathers

Children of Nepali migrant workers are following their fathers' footsteps to work overseas

Human history is woven in stories of migration for work and livelihood. The trend continues to be a legacy for most Nepali men, who have migrated for work to India, Burma and beyond for centuries, working odd jobs, or defending other countries.

The more recent phenomenon in the past two decades is the outflow of workers to the Gulf and Malaysia, where they face challenges starting from agents at home, to difficult weather and employers. In 2018-19, the government issued 236,208 permits for overseas work, and it is estimated that at least 4 million Nepalis at any given time are working abroad.

Khushiram Gurung, Sultan Tika and Ram from different regions of Nepal, have spent a large part of their lives toiling in foreign countries, while their hearts stayed back home. Now, their children are following their fathers' footsteps in this inter-generational mobility.

Khushiram Gurung has been working in Bahrain as a security guard since 2010. He was first introduced to Bahrain in 2003, when he was a 15-year-old boy in Lamjung. His father, an Indian Army returnee, was waiting to hear from a Kathmandu-based recruiter regarding a security guard job in Malaysia. But the agent came back with a possible opportunity in Bahrain instead.

The family had never heard of Bahrain, but after learning that the salary would be over Rs30,000 per month, they said yes. In the next few days, Khushiram's father arranged Rs100,000 via informal loans, and left for Bahrain.

Five years later, Khushiram's brother joined him in Bahrain. After 7 years, it was Khushiram. Having grown up without his father around, it was in Bahrain that he spent more time with him.



Khushiram Gurung

"When we were growing up my father was away in India, we didn't know when he would return. My siblings and I would wake up somedays and he would be in the kitchen, having arrived late in the previous night."

When his father left for Bahrain, his presence became the letters that arrived at great intervals. "We used to go to the Hulak post office to see if there was a letter. The day the letters arrived, we would run home from school at around 4PM and wait for my mother



Khushiram Gurung with colleagues when he first arrived in Bahrain in 2010. His father also worked there in 2003.



Sultan Tika working on his leased land in Penang, Malaysia, with other Nepali migrants.

to return from the fields. But once she was back, my siblings and I would sit around and my elder brother would read out the letter," recalls Khushiram.

By 2012, with three family members in Bahrain, they were building a house in Kathmandu, but then his mother was diagnosed with cancer.

"The ones left behind rarely get the attention and credit they deserve for keeping families intact. We are viewed as the providers, but to me, it was my mother who was the real leader," says Khushiram.

The family gave her the treatment they could afford, but there came a time when the doctors said nothing more could be done. Khushiram and his brother decided to send their father home. "We had to convince our father it was time he left, without telling him what the doctors had said. He agreed. We cried."

The two spent a few months together before she passed. "But we were not able to spend time with our mother even in her last days. That is the dilemma of foreign employment," he says.

Khushiram, now a father of a six-year-old boy, hopes his son will not have to go abroad for work. "While I want him to stay in Nepal,

our politicians, with their self-interest and cronyism, will likely chase my son abroad just like they did my father, brother and I."

Sultan Tika left Gulmi for Malaysia in 1991. He used his connections to arrange a visit visa as there were no work permits, and Nepalis went via Thailand. "I first went to Malaysia because I had been told that there is an option for citizenship if you stay there for a few years, only to realise it wasn't true," Sultan recalls.

The term 'setting' where transnational networks operated were already a thing then. He had to pay Rs80,000 to the agents. "For someone who had barely seen 500 rupee notes, this amount was really large. At that time, you could buy 1 फीट (0.4 hectare) land at Rs50,000." Tika was paid Rs240 a day to do agricultural work.

"From Thailand, we used to go by road to Malaysia. Once, I even had to go by boat and that was the most dangerous option offered by the smugglers."

The reluctance to hire foreign workers in Malaysia was as real then as they are now. Sectors like agriculture were facing shortages, however, and without legal pathways, illegal options were the only route.



Khushiram Gurung with his family at their Kathmandu home.



Sultan Tika in Malaysia, in front of the Petronas Tower in Kuala Lumpur, and now back in his village in Gulmi.

Tika says Nepalis started coming "in droves" to Malaysia from 2001, when the government introduced work permit for foreign workers, first for agriculture workers then for security guards.

As a veteran migrant worker in the agriculture sector, Tika leased land and started his own initiative in Penang. He also became the go-to person for many Nepalis who had escaped their abusive employers or were seeking work. "For many, it was a transit job so they could earn enough to buy their tickets home," he says.

In 2017, Tika decided to pack up and come home. He has set up an agriculture farm in Gulmi, where he is raising 90 goats and a greenhouse for vegetable farming.

"When I went to Malaysia in 1991, it felt like Nepal and Malaysia were similar. By the time I left, Malaysia had advanced so much," he says now. But he is optimistic about the opportunities promised by mechanised agriculture in Nepal, with the right incentives and policies.

•••

Ram first went abroad for work in 1998. "Everyone said Arab is the place to be, so I too wanted to go," he says. The names Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Dubai sounded familiar but it did not matter to him where he landed up as long as he could leave Nepal.

Ram was charged Rs55,000 for a security job in Dubai. There was not much documentation and process in those days. There were not many Nepalis in Dubai in 1998 but it was exciting to bump into them and ask how long they had been there.

"If they said 4 or 5 years, I would feel a mixture of shock and pity for them. The idea of being in a foreign country for so long was new to me," he says. "Little did I know that I would still be here in 2020."

In Ram's memory, Dubai almost looked like Nepal when he first arrived. "There were no tall buildings. Even the airport was small and dingy. Look at this place now. Dubai has changed a lot, but I have not changed at all."

Working as a security guard everyday for two decades have been a repetition of the previous day for Ram. "No career progression. No change in routine. Some clever Nepali guards become group leaders, but the rest of us are always security officers."

Every year, he spends over 4,000 hours guarding either private residences or commercial buildings. "I usually get the 12-hour night shifts from 5PM to 5AM. It is difficult to feel rested when you sleep during the day. And it takes a toll on your health."

With low incomes, saving is a challenge. And there are always new expenses. There's children's education and bigger investments like land and house. "Then it is your children's wedding. And your parents' health costs. Just when you think you are done some other expense shows up, and you keep postponing your return home."

Ram's elder daughter got married recently and he could not be home. "Remittances helped me pay for my daughter's wedding. But my job did not let me go back to attend it."

Now in his 50s, Ram says that unlike the lyrics to the song *Saili* that says, "we will return home at 40", he is late by a decade. "My visa expires in 18 months. I think I will now head home for good. It is time." ☺

Upasna Khadka





Nepali migration in the 2020s

Amidst a global pandemic, the 20th International Migrants Day is a time to plan for the coming decade

Upasana Khadka

The 20th International Migration Day on 18 December in the midst of the pandemic, with its disproportionate impact on migrants demands retrospection. Let us widen our time horizon to the last decades to see how far we have come, and review the lapses along the way.

Both timeframes are intricately connected. Many lapses in the last 20 years in governance have had an acute, amplified impact on migrants this year. Covid-19 magnified the weaknesses and highlighted achievements that helped migrants cope better.

Communication was critical during the pandemic as that made the long hours of waiting at labour camps, quarantine areas, and even isolation centres bearable. Smart phones have empowered migrant workers, given them the opportunity to be their own storytellers.

In this paper, we reported stories of migrants who received support after they live streamed on Facebook upon facing apathy from the authorities. The Malaysian Embassy's weekly Facebook live programs answer queries of migrants need to be made the norm.

We step into the 2020s knowing that technology has transformative power in migration governance. An example of this is the Department of Foreign

Employment's (DOFE) recent move to allow the renewal of labour approvals and acceptance of foreign employment fund contributions online.

Abdul Sattar, a pioneer recruiter with over 40 years of experience, shared with me the struggles of obtaining job offers abroad in the early days. Nepalis then did not have access to the Gulf employers and they assumed Nepal was part of India. The only job offers for Nepalis came through Indian, Bangladeshi and Pakistani recruiters because employers were unfamiliar with Nepal. Once Nepalis proved themselves as hard workers, the employers became keen to hire more of them.

"Times were different then. We were kept on a different pedestal and treated with respect," Sattar says. Once profits, unhealthy competition and politics entered the industry, things took a downturn.

"Have you ever considered how, since years, we have workers from far-flung areas like Rolpa who had never even come to Kathmandu, working and earning in Qatar or the UAE?" he asks. "Who made that possible?"

The pandemic has further underscored the need for international cooperation in migration governance. At the same time, it has revealed the inadequacies of existing international cooperation mechanisms.

The last 20 years saw the establishment of regional platforms like the Colombo Process between migrant sending countries in 2003, and the Abu Dhabi Dialogue in 2008 between both sending and receiving countries, as well as the Global Compact on Migration.

These forums that allow countries with varying agendas and priorities in migration to come together for a larger shared cause, is a huge step in migration governance and a result of persistent negotiations.

The past two decades also witnessed the signing of several bilateral labour agreements starting with the one with Qatar in 2005. However, their implementation has always been

weak even when there is scope for mutually beneficial cooperation such as skills partnerships.

When Nepalis working in India unexpectedly showed up at the borders in hundreds of thousands this year, it reminded us of not one, but two elephants in the room. The first one was the India-Nepal border that we continue to overlook, and the second was the unpreparedness of local governments which should have been well-placed to address the problems of migration, but have not been mobilised.

Nepal's federalisation offers an immense opportunity in migration governance. There were initial small wins like allowing renewals of labour approvals at provincial levels or applying for welfare fund benefits at local levels. But the pandemic was a wake-up call, as the onus of managing tens of thousands of returnees from India has been placed on local governments amidst lack of data and resources.

Moving forward, leveraging the proximity advantage of local governments and decentralised service delivery will be critical. It means making up for the last three years since local

governments were given a bunch of foreign employment mandate including returnee management, data collection and information dissemination.

Migration has been largely temporary in our part of the world, without a path to citizenship for workers in the Gulf nations or Malaysia. Reintegration never got due attention, while government documents do mention the need to mobilise returnees. There are some positive examples of financial assistance for returnees at local levels, but most migrants cannot afford to keep waiting to be 'reintegrated'. This has compelled them to find ways to remigrate, instead.

Policies on reintegration, especially related to employment, are urgently needed. It is important to be mindful that unless the broader jobs and self-employment

challenges faced by all regardless of your migration history are addressed, impact of specific reintegration interventions can be limited and incomplete. How will a job-search assistance program targeting returnees work if there are no jobs, for example?

While migration from Nepal is considered "temporary", we have seen high volumes of renewals. The song *Saili* aptly referred to returning at the age 40 to be with the sweetheart, and not sooner as one would expect if migration was actually 'temporary', since migrants leave at a young age.

Whether hopping across different Gulf countries or staying in the same country for 20 years (see page 8), migrants spend a significant portion of their working age away from Nepal. Alongside reintegration programs, the emphasis on social security agreements with destination countries as well as the option to participate in contributory social security, is necessary. Nepal recently signed a social security

agreement with Malaysia in favour of migrant workers — a good example that needs to be replicated.

In 2018,

the Nepal's Foreign Employment Information System was a game-changer in providing a comprehensive information on the outflow of Nepali migrant workers. But data on the total numbers abroad are not systematically maintained — an absence sorely felt during the Covid-19 crisis.

A messy data collection exercise took up a good deal of time in the initial period of the pandemic. We also need to focus on nationally representative survey data collection for migrants that cover their aspirations and migration experience.

When it comes to spending on migrant welfare, the Foreign Employer Welfare Fund (FEWF) is viewed as the only resource. As migrants were stranded abroad, the discussion did not move beyond who qualified for the benefits. We demanded that our undocumented

workers across borders be treated well by authorities of destination countries, while the Nepal Government itself was discriminatory towards its citizens who did not have labour approvals and were considered 'undocumented'.

A critical learning highlighted during different emergencies, is the need for strong embassies. While there isn't data on the stock of migrants, countries like Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Malaysia have well over 300,000 Nepalis. The recent rescue of a Saudi case (see page 11) showed that despite having a consulate general office outside Riyadh where the embassy is based, just reaching one migrant worker in trouble took 14 hours, one way.

Nepal's embassies in Oman and Israel have been managing migration issues well, but they have the advantage of the relatively low population of migrants. Embassy staffing and resources need to reflect migrant population and geography.

Reviewing key policies on migration also demands a focus on the free-visa-free-ticket policy and ban on domestic workers. In 2015, when it was introduced, Om Astha Rai in *Nepali Times* aptly asked: 'Zero-cost migration, really? Five years later we are still asking the same question.'

As far back as 2006, Dambar Shrestha in this paper wrote about the ban on female domestic workers: 'There was a general consensus that the ban should be repealed, as a way to monitor overseas employment, and ensure women have legal recourse if mistreated.'

Fifteen years later, the consensus remains while the demand in the care sector has increased globally and women have continued to leave via irregular channels. The question for us as we enter into the 220s is: what do we do about these longstanding policies that are practically challenging to implement, but politically popular? ☐



Upasana Khadka writes this column Labour Mobility every month in *Nepali Times* analysing trends affecting Nepal's workers abroad.

New UK job options for Nepalis

With Brexit, new immigration rules may make it easier for Nepalis to find employment in Britain

Upasana Khadka

Santosh Shah, the now famous Nepali who is a finalist in *Masterchef: The Professionals 2020*, knows how the right combination of effort and luck helped him to come such a long way from a village in Siraha to Britain and onto the world stage.

This is an immigrant success story that proves talent is everywhere, opportunities are not, and migration can be an equaliser of sorts. Hard work, determination, and passion for his chosen profession made Shah one of the finalists in the coveted cookery competition.

"If I can do it, so can others if they are given an opportunity – there is no shortage of talent in Nepal and I am no exception," Shah told Nepali Times in an interview.

However, the less discussed, and perhaps less glamorous part of this globalisation of Nepali cuisine, is that the 'chef' occupation is one of the hard-to-fill occupations in the UK. The shortage of chefs in Asian restaurants across Britain led hundreds of them to close shop even before the Covid-19 crisis.

South Asian restaurants in the UK prefer to hire migrants from the Subcontinent who are familiar with the cuisine, the flavour and the spices. But British immigration rules have made it difficult to hire chefs from non-EU countries. The minimum threshold salary and other recruitment expenses are too high for an employer to be able to sponsor South Asian migrants, says Ravi Thapaliya at City Cleaning, a placement agency.

But all this is set to change from 11pm on 31 December, 2020 when the Brexit transition period expires, and the free movement of EU citizens to the UK will come to an end.

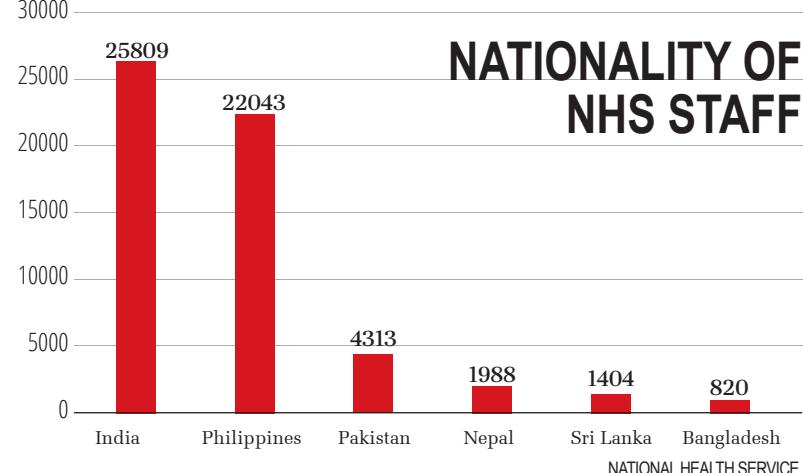
"Non-EU and EU citizens will now be treated equally and be subject to the same set of rules," explains UK-based solicitor Deepak Bhattarai. A point-based immigration system favouring skilled workers will require both EU and non-EU applicants to obtain at least 70 points, which depends on different criteria including job offers that meets salary threshold, English proficiency, education background, minimum salary and whether or not the occupation is in the Shortage Occupational List (SOL), which lists jobs facing a shortage and where it is 'sensible' to fill those with migrant workers.

Now, the threshold salaries for skilled workers, including chefs, has been slightly reduced, and the point-based system has been made more flexible so the UK government can revise the criteria based on labour market requirements.

Chefs have been included in the SOL which rewards additional points to the applicant, but many restaurants find the salary threshold



There are nearly 2,000 Nepali nurses registered with the NHS in the UK, and the country needs more health workers.



is too high, especially with the pandemic crisis. "The incentive in the near future will be to mobilise workers who are already in the UK," says Thapaliya.

Easier immigration rules to recruit non-EU staff was one of the reasons why many in the South Asian Britons voted for the Leave option. But the inaction post-referendum has left the 'curry industry' that employs over 100,000 people, feeling misled by pro-Leave politicians. Hiring both EU and non-EU staff is now more difficult.

"Businesses will continue to lobby with the government to further reduce the salary threshold. But there is a lot of uncertainty regarding immigration at present both because of Brexit and Covid," Thapaliya adds.

Things are different in the health sector, where there is an acute shortage of health workers and there are opportunities for

nurses, including from Nepal. Both Covid-19 and the end of free movement have further amplified the demand for health workers, including from outside the EU.

Britain has introduced a fast-track entry system with certain waivers including reduced fees for doctors and nurses, while visas for current healthcare workers was automatically extended for one year.

Nirmala Simkhada has been working in the UK for the last 12 years and has seen a demographic shift among her colleagues. She says, "Many of my friends from Eastern European countries like Romania and Bulgaria are returning to their countries because of the Brexit uncertainty, added paperwork, lack of access to the same benefits as British nationals."



Nursing Association in the UK.

He says English proficiency is a major obstacle, and Nepal's nursing curriculum could be further strengthened to address geriatric care and other issues, and Nepal must prepare with better policies and partnerships with destination countries. But there are concerns

about the impact of an exodus of health-workers on the health systems of developing countries. There are currently 1,988 Nepali nurses registered with the NHS in the UK. With the added demand for healthcare workers from the UK and elsewhere, Nepal will see a depletion of its own nursing workforce.

Already, an increasing number of students are joining nursing schools in Nepal because it is a path to migration. But even those who stay become frustrated with the low salaries and lack of respect, and end up emigrating, explains Tara Pokhrel, former president of the Nursing Association of Nepal. After spending at least Rs2.3 million for a nursing degree, they earn just Rs10,000 a month in private sector hospitals, she adds.

"The government must strictly monitor the nurse-to-patient ratio in private hospitals in Nepal, and make proper salaries to health workers a criteria during license renewals. Our talent is recognised and absorbed abroad while our own hospitals especially outside the capital suffer from staff shortage. We lack health workers because we fail to reward them adequately," Pokhrel adds.

Skilled workers from Nepal are seeing an increased demand in non-traditional destination countries. Last year, Nepal signed an agreement with Japan for 16 job categories including nurses and chefs and the nursing exams took place in November in Kathmandu.

This year, in the midst of the pandemic Nepal and Israel also signed an agreement to source caregivers with backgrounds in nursing. The UAE and Oman have repeatedly expressed interest in hiring nurses from Nepal via bilateral cooperation.

There is no bilateral labour agreement between Nepal and countries like UK and Australia. In fact, due to the Code of Practice for International Recruitment, Britain's NHS refrains from actively recruiting from countries including Nepal to prevent them from having a shortage of health workers.

But the NHS has over 50,000 unfilled vacancies, and this is further complicated by the impending end of free movement of EU nationals on 31 December. Even without actively sourcing health workers from Nepal, therefore, Nepali nurses will be following the money, convenience and new opportunities abroad.

Just as Santosh Shah of *MasterChef* has become a hero in Nepal, so has the Filipino-British nurse May Parsons who administered the first Covid-19 vaccine in the UK last week. Earlier this year, the Philippine government banned the migration of health workers because of this domestic demand during Covid-19, but the move backfired because few nurses agree to take domestic jobs. The ban was lifted, but there is a cap of 5,000 nurses a year going abroad.

Nepali Seema Pokhrel arrived in the UK two years ago and works as a nurse in Harrow. While most of her nursing friends opted for Australia, she chose UK because of the faster track to become a registered nurse.

"The employer sponsored my second UK qualification exam and we could work alongside as health assistants and earn throughout," she says. "While better salary was the primary motive for my decision to move, there is also better upward career mobility here unlike in Nepal where it was based on connections and not competence."

Nepali in Saudi Arabia rescued after 12 years

Domestic worker Lilamaya Dhimal calls her former Saudi employer "a monster"

Upasana Khadka and Marty Logan

Thirteen years after she left Nepal, and after a dramatic rescue from the home of her abusive Saudi employer, Lilamaya Dhimal returned to a sunny Kathmandu airport on Wednesday morning. (Pictured, right)

She was saved from a cruel man of the house in a well-planned rescue in the town of Tabuk by her brother, the Nepal embassy and other Nepalis. She is ecstatic to be back and reunited with her family in Jhapa, who had given up hope that she was alive.

The Nepal Embassy in Saudi Arabia, where she had been sheltering told her to get up at 9AM on Tuesday to catch her flight via Kuwait. But the anticipation was too much for her.

"I was so excited that I could barely sleep. I was up by 3AM and was on the phone with my children," Lilamaya said after landing.

Lilamaya (who also goes by the name Sharmila Magar) had been out of touch with her family for a decade since first going to Saudi Arabia in 2009. One day, by sheer chance, she connected with a man from Nepal on IMO, and pleaded for help.

He shared her contact information with his sister in Jhapa, who lived near Lilamaya's house and was kind enough to go to her home to pass on her details to her family.

"It was such a shock when I received a call and heard my brother say दिरी," Lilamaya recalls. "I learnt that my husband, who was in ill health and drank, passed away three years back. My children were young when I left, but I have six grandchildren now. I was out of touch for years, and they had given me up for dead."

Lilamaya's employer was abusive and did not pay her. When she couldn't bear the torture, Lilamaya used to ask him what they would do if she died in Saudi Arabia? His response — a nonchalant "Maafi mushki" (no problem).

"I landed in the hands of a monster," she says. "All five of the family's children were below 10 years and were quite a handful. They were gullible and emulated their parents in mistreating me. My days would begin before 6 AM and end after 1 AM."

Lilamaya's brother, Hem Raj Magar, was based in the UAE and helped coordinate her rescue via the Riyadh-based Nepal Embassy which referred her case to the Jeddah-based Consulate.

"My sister can barely read and she had no idea where she was in Saudi Arabia," says Hem Raj. "It took me a long time and several failed attempts so she could finally send her WhatsApp location."

Labour Attaché Prem Upadhyaya at the Consulate in Jeddah recommended that she also send pictures of nearby landmarks. Lilamaya managed to sneak out of the house one day and took pictures of a neighbourhood shop. That was enough to begin the rescue effort.

"The location was in Tabuk, over 1,200 km from where we are based," says Upadhyaya. "So we mobilised Nepalis in the town to confirm the



Lilamaya Dhimal (Sharmila Magar) on arrival in Kathmandu on Wednesday, and after her rescue in Tabuk of Saudi Arabia.

location as we hit the road. We advised her to come outside the next morning once her employer had left for work. We instantly recognised her and took her away in our vehicle."

Lilamaya recalls her nervousness, "My heart was pounding as I was scared I would be caught. I managed to take two small bags of my clothes even though I had been advised not to bring anything."

Consulate staff coordinated with Saudi authorities to ensure that Lilamaya was fairly compensated. "The employer was a no-show at the Labour Office on the first day

but he came in the second day," says Upadhyaya. "After much back and forth, they have finally paid her around 30,000 Riyal (Rs 953,000)."

Until her exit documentation was sorted out and she got

compensated, Lilamaya was living under the protection of the Nepal Consulate and Non-Resident Nepali Association in Tabuk, and then at the Embassy in Jeddah.

She recalls, "One day, there were many Nepalis who had come to the Embassy to talk to me and show their support. I was overwhelmed as I had not seen so many Nepalis since so long. Even though I didn't know

women travelling abroad can be bypassed through the open border with India. Also, there are few domestic employment options for Nepali women.

A recent World Bank Jobs Diagnostic shows that three-quarters of new jobs taken up by women between 2008 and 2018 were in non-wage, self-employment or unpaid family work like farming.

The willingness to bypass the ban to improve their lives is also fuelled by the pressing demand for domestic workers abroad which was growing in the Gulf at 9% annually pre-pandemic. Now, with employer family members home at all times, domestic workers are under added pressure to work more without adequate compensation.

While many sectors face the brunt of pandemic-induced economic fallout, the care economy is expected to grow in the Gulf region and beyond. For Nepali women, whose share in overseas employment has been limited at around 10% annually, overseas options in non-care sectors has remained poor.

But defying the ban means women are not recorded as migrants by the government. It also results in lack of pre-departure training, inability to hold agents accountable, and makes them ineligible for welfare programs -- all part of the legalised recruitment process.

After years of the ban being decried for its ineffectiveness and unintended consequences, in October the Parliamentary Committee on Industry, Commerce, Labour and Consumer Interest instructed that the ban be removed under certain conditions.

Says Bimal Prasad Shrivastav, Chair of the Committee, who led a review trip to the Gulf before the pandemic to assess the situation of domestic workers: "Rather than a blanket ban, we have recommended that country-specific policies be taken to address the situation of domestic workers."

In addition to a comprehensive bilateral labour agreement, these preconditions include a separate domestic worker law, a strong joint mechanism to resolve issues faced by domestic workers, pre-departure training -- including of the local language -- and post-arrival training, equality of treatment between Nepalis and locals, penalties for sponsors who abuse domestic workers, and easy access of domestic workers to communicate with consular officials and families back home.

In early November, Saudi Arabia made some reforms to foreign worker regulations, including giving workers the freedom to change jobs legally to travel outside the country without their employer's permission.

However the changes do not apply to domestic workers. Similar reforms made in Qatar in August this year do, however, apply to domestic workers.

Om Thapa and Lekhnath Khatiwada helped in reporting this piece.



Lilamaya Dhimal speaks exclusively to *Nepali Times* after landing in Kathmandu on December after 12 years working as household help for the family of an abusive Saudi employer. She describes her torture, dramatic rescue and return to Nepal.



A forgotten Gurkha rebellion

Twenty-three years to the day after his return from Brunei, a Gurkha recalls a revolt within his unit

Ram Kandangwa

It was evening in September 1996, and some of us Gurkha soldiers who were fed up with the way we were being treated by our British and Brunei officers were holding a meeting inside the military base to discuss the form of protest to press our case.

With me were Puranjan Rai, Gajendra Isbo and Naren Rai. Our grievances were that we were not getting proper pay, pension, not allowed free meals, as well as being insulted and mistreated. It had got out of hand.

We also felt that Gurkha recruitment for the Brunei security forces should not be conducted by the British Army, but be governed by a separate treaty between Nepal and Brunei.

Our meeting formed a governing committee as well as sub-committees, and more than 2,400 out of the total 2,500 Gurkha force strength in Brunei signed up in support of the movement.

We held talks with the hierarchy, and had started boycotting some of the senior officers. One of our demands was that the 16-year-old Gurkha Reserve Unit (GRU) be disbanded and revert to a security guard force. We submitted a written memorandum, but it was ignored. This dragged on for months.

Then, suddenly one middle of the night, all GRU weapons were returned to the Brunei government, and our unit went back to being a security guard force. However, other demands of salary increment, end of mistreatment by arrogant officers were yet to be addressed. Notwithstanding, the officers had learnt an important lesson that Nepalis will not tolerate injustice and oppression.

The situation was again on the boil, and pressure was building up. It was obvious that the brass would come down heavily on what it considered a mutiny and insubordination in order to instill military discipline.

One evening, I gave a short speech at our meeting, saying that the situation was nearing a make-or-break point, the higher-ups were about to take stern action, and talked about what steps the team should take in case some of us were dismissed and sent back to Nepal.

Three days later, I had a premonition of disaster. Sure enough, 11 of us considered to be instigators were secretly dismissed, and without the rest of the unit having any inkling we were dispatched to the airport for a flight back to Nepal.

We were waiting to board at Bandar Seri Begawan airport, and did not know that back at camp word had spread about our dismissal and deportation. The Nepali soldiers then surrounded the headquarters building to protest and demanded that their leaders be returned, and failing that, to dismiss them too. HQ brought out the riot police to contain the escalating situation and vandalism.

A few hours later, the Permanent Secretary of Brunei (the King's brother-in-law) rushed to the airport to find out from us what had happened. He asked me questions, and after hearing us out, wanted to know if I could convince the Nepalis at camp to go back to their dormitories and end the protest.

I replied that I would do it if



GRU in Brunei in the early 1990s, with Ram Kandangwa, sitting third from right.



After the Brunei revolt, Kandangwa, standing second from right.

our employment was restored, and I was allowed to deliver a short speech to our people at the base. The Permanent Secretary agreed and drove me, along with two fellow Nepalis, to the camp in his Mercedes Benz.

The Gurkhas were still protesting and shouting slogans when we reached camp. I got up and in a two minute speech told them they should now return to their quarters in a disciplined manner because the senior most official of the Brunei government had promised to address our longstanding grievances. I assured them that if we were betrayed, we would once more gather to protest and raise slogans.

After I spoke, there was pin-drop silence and the Nepali troops all dispersed. The discipline and obedience of the Gurkhas seems to have surprised the Permanent Secretary who then went to confer with GRU officers. He then asked us to assemble in the gym hall.

He began by informing us that he had just fired Col F D Scotson, the British officer in charge of the GRU who was our principle nemesis. Now that Scotson was gone, and the GRU had reverted back to security guard status, the Permanent Secretary assured us that all our other demands like salary and pension would be resolved.

We then collectively took the

decision to suspend our agitation, and keep a low profile. Things went back to normal for a few months, but then some Gurkhas challenged the authorities again regarding their promotions. This time, the brass decided that this new rebellion needed to be nipped in the bud, and dismissed the 11 leaders from service. We decided to accept the decision because so many Nepali jobs were on the line if the Brunei unit was disbanded.

In the next 15 months, the GRU became the Gurkha Security Guard. A rare near-mutiny resulted in a successful resolution of our just demands. This was possible because we were united, well educated, patriotic, courageous, and willing to take the risk for the sake of justice and our beliefs. By insisting on a bilateral treaty, we had also acted to stand up to the principle of Nepal's sovereignty.

We finally returned to Nepal with our heads held high on 14 December 1997. It has been 23 years since our run-in in Brunei, and the events are still fresh in our minds. The Brunei Security Guard is still functioning, but the British Army's involvement in recruiting Nepali servicemen to the unit still continues and there is still no Brunei-Nepal treaty.

The Brunei force was set up in 1974 with 27 former Gurkhas of the British Army and Gurkha

Contingent, Singapore (Nepalis serve as policemen in Singapore). It was originally called Gurkha Security Guard but in 1981, the British and Brunei government decided to form the GRU, and had former British Gurkha soldiers serving in the new unit had to work as regular soldiers.

Ever since it was converted into GRU, the Brunei government kept augmenting its strength. By 1996, the GRU's numbers crossed 2,500 — as big as a brigade strength in the British Army. I was a British Gurkha soldier, and joined the GRU in May 1996 even though I had signed the contract paperwork as 'security guard'. When we got there, we were forced to work as infantry soldiers.

Most ex-British Gurkha soldiers serving in the GRU were above 45, and the situation was pathetic. Us over-the-hill Gurkhas were compelled to run Battle Fitness Test (BFT) and Combat Fitness Test (CFT), fire heavy weapons and often had to participate in weeks-long exercises in the dense tropical jungles of Borneo.

Despite being fit, some ex-Gurkhas died of exhaustion during physically demanding jungle exercises. Their salaries had remained stagnant for many lustrums. The other big transgression was that the British government used to charge 2,500 Brunei dollars (USD 1,870) per

Gurkha soldier as monthly salary from Brunei, but but gave us only BND1,100.

Essentially, Britain has been trading in Gurkhas for the last 205 years, ever since the Rana oligarchy in Nepal used us as its main tool of diplomacy. As scholar May Des Chene writes: 'Gurkhas have been sold and bartered and they have been the coin of international diplomacy at key moments in Nepalese history.'

The 'Gurkha Contingent' in Singapore has 2,000 young Nepali soldiers serving as policeman. The Singapore contingent itself was formed in 1949 after the end of the Pacific War, and after 71 years there is still no bilateral treaty between Singapore and Nepal governing recruitment.

It is the British Army that recruits Nepalis on behalf of the Singaporeans. The question is: Who authorised this arrangement? Why is it still going on? Scores of so-called democratic governments have come and gone in Nepal, and no one has shown much concern about this affront to the country's sovereignty.

The Gurkhas in Singapore were kept in British Army enclaves until the late 1990s. Many of them are married, but some 1,500 of these young, educated and dynamic Nepali women are confined to the base and not allowed to work in Singapore.

Over the years, there were more than 15 retired Gurkha majors and about 50 retired captains serving in the GRU. But their status was lower than that of second lieutenants. However, they had handsome salaries, perks and facilities compared to the other ranks. Most Nepali officer regarded them as sycophants, as many of them used to kowtow to British and Bruneian officers.

Des Chene writes: 'The soldiers look upon them with mistrust and regard them as moles who misrepresent their views to the British officers in order to curry their favours in the forms of promotions, good postings, longer services, granting of honorary ranks which carry some monetary benefits on their retirement, etc.'

There was a lot of arbitrary discipline enforced, most soldiers who had been in the British Army found the rules confusing and the officers did not have the same discipline and respect of the rank and file.

When the British were in India, and after the 1816 treaty they did not actually have to colonise Nepal, and never really recognised Nepal as a sovereign independent country until the Chandra Shumshere Rana's Friendship Treaty of 1923.

But at the heart of the Gurkha dilemma is the anomaly that even today, nationals of one country fight and die for another. It is absurd that the United Kingdom, a sovereign country, recruits soldiers from another sovereign, independent country (Nepal) to serve in still another sovereign independent country, Brunei.

Despite this, elected leaders of Nepal and its intellectuals and historians, forever gloat about Nepal's independence and sovereignty, and that the country was never colonised.

Ram Kandangwa is a former soldier in the British Army Brigade of the Gurkhas and served in the GRU in Brunei, where he led a rebellion against his commanding officers in 1996, and returned to Nepal on 15 December of 1997. He has a PhD in Nepal-Britain relations.

