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GOPEN RAI

Preparing the field

The uncertainty about elections (doubts about whether the main parties wanted them) was somewhat allayed this week after Parliament finally passed two bills. The laws allow the government to announce poll dates, and not the Election Commission.

The Commission had argued that if the government is allowed to fix dates, it will do so only if it sees a chance to win. The government had said forging a consensus among the top parties to have elections was more important than following the Election Commission's preparation timetable.

Parliament needs to pass three more bills, and if that is done by the weekend local elections can finally be held for the first time in 20 years. Local elections are also needed for Pushpa Kamal Dahal

to transfer the prime ministership to Sher Bahadur Deuba, as mutually agreed.

Election Commissioner Ila Sharma, however, says passing the bills is not enough. "Apart from these election laws, we also need to know whether we are holding elections to existing or new local government bodies," she told *Nepali Times*.

The commission set up to restructure local bodies has already submitted its report, which recommends 719 local bodies, and that has been greeted by sometimes violent protests across the country.

"We need 120 days to hold elections after required laws are passed," Sharma says, "meanwhile, the government must deploy staff to new municipal and village councils, and decide where their headquarters will be."

The coalition, however, seems reluctant to endorse the report, fearing that Madhesi parties will harden their stand on amending the Constitution. They have sought amendment to the Constitution before holding local elections or restructuring local bodies.

Asked when the government will pass the report on local bodies, Local Development Minister Hitraj Pandey of the Maoist (Centre) shrugged. "How can we tell you when? It all depends on whether Tharu, Madhesi and Janjatis also support it," he told *Nepali Times*.

But Pandey said his party was committed to holding local elections before the monsoon.

The Maoists were relegated to a distant third party in the 2013 elections, and fear losing more strength in the next polls. Dahal thinks his party may suffer an even more humiliating

defeat if elections are held when he is out of power. He wants to hold at least one of the polls before vacating Baluwatar, and is trying to appease both UML and Madhesi parties.

UML is confident its nationalist stance will yield dividends at the ballot box, and appears more flexible on the Constitution. Some Madhesi parties are not satisfied even with the second amendment, and Dahal is trying to take them on board by promising a supplementary amendment bill.

Om Astha Rai



All in the family

Girls are not safe even within their own homes, especially in households dislocated by the earthquake

BY SAHINA SHRESTHA PAGE 8-9

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PERFORMANCE LEGITIMACY

Wining an election no longer guarantees accountability, voters will now decide based on achievement.

Despite the dramatic progress Nepal has made in public health, literacy and poverty reduction in the past two decades, it is clear that we would have done much better if we had our political act together.

Twenty-seven years ago in 1990 Nepal had only 20 hospital beds for every 100,000 population. Today, despite population nearly doubling it has climbed to 550 beds per 100,000. The ratio of doctors then was 1:10,000, today it is five times more.

Literacy rates have gone up, especially of women. The average lifespan of Nepalis has improved dramatically, with steep drops in child and maternal mortality rates. Nepal's Human Development Index has been improving, and in the past ten years the Multi-dimensional Poverty Index has shown that the numbers of absolute poor has dropped from 70% to 40%.

The rise in female literacy has direct correlation with fertility rate, and Nepal's annual population growth is down to



1.6% — which means that although the demographic transition and the youth bulge will mean the total population will keep growing for some time longer, Nepal has begun to defuse the population bomb.

All this despite a ruinous 10-year war, ten years of unproductive peace, chronic instability and dysfunctional governance. Just imagine how much further ahead we would be if we had not squandered the last two decades.

To be sure, these improvements are uneven. Parts of the country are doing much better than others, even though the quality of health care and education is still poor. Private hospitals and schools are not affordable for a majority of the population. Female literacy is stagnating, and the dropout rate at Grade 5 is unacceptably high. Neo-natal mortality has been halved in the past two decades, but 20 babies out of 1,000 are still dying in the first four weeks of life.

MEGO Syndrome

The eyes of readers glaze over reading write-ups like these. We think health, education and the environment are 'development' subjects best left to INGOs and the UN. Yet, affordable and accessible health care is a matter of life-or-death for citizens, quality

education for children is a priority for all parents -- hence it comes under the mandate of the state.

Improvement in service delivery is only possible with greater accountability and better governance. In other words, politics. This does not necessarily only mean political stability, but politics that ensures institutional continuity that gives direction and purpose to national plans.

Unfortunately, Nepal has been stuck ever since the conflict ended 11 years ago. The peace process has moved in fits and starts, politicking has impacted on development, economic growth, investment, and service delivery.

An inclusive constitution supposed to resolve this stalemate and allow us to make up for lost time was promulgated by a majority in the Constituent Assembly last year, but negotiations on amending sections of it dealing with future federal demarcations has been mired in short-term electoral calculations.

As we pointed out in this space last week, the three main parties are now a *bhagbanda* syndicate, and rule the country like a cartel. The traditional elite has been replaced with a greedy neo-elite that has honed rent-seeking into a fine art.

Structural corruption and appointments pre-paid by the highest bidder have reduced the impact of public spending on the one hand, while freezing capital expenditure on the other. There is plenty of cash around, it's just that people in charge on deciding where to spend it don't want to disburse unless they get a cut. Nepal is not poor, it is very poorly managed.

Crooks in high places over successive governments since 1990 (and many of them are still around, even though they have lost elections multiple times) have ensured that energy and highway projects that should have been completed in five years have taken 50.

The only way out of this rut is to hold elections, so that those with vision who have shown through their performance that they are for reform and action will be elected. Electoral legitimacy in Nepal's democracy has failed to produce accountable leaders, the voters should be allowed to decide on performance. Who got rid of load-shedding? Who finished a delayed highway project? Who mplemented health insurance? Who helped improve the quality of education in government schools? Who gave migrants the choice to work in Nepal?

Let us start with civic elections by spring, and polls to provincial councils and the federal Parliament by the deadline of 18 January 2018. This is our last chance to set things right.

Times.com

WATCH VIDEOS



UNSAFE HOMES

When a woman thinks about safety, she thinks of home. But when her home becomes the most unsafe place, there is nowhere a girl can turn to. Listen to three girls as they talk about their harrowing experience of abuse at the hands of their family members.



THE WAIT

It has been five years since Lal Bahadur and Pabi Magar talked to their son Tak, who left for Malaysia to support his family. While hundreds of Nepali migrant workers return home in coffins every year, a lesser known is the fact that many like Tak simply disappear.

MOST WATCHED



HANGING IN THERE

After the April 2015 earthquake, the movement of local people and trekkers on the Manaslu Circuit was affected as Upper Gorkha was cut off. Unique steel pathways have been installed to reconnect the region. Watch how it was done.

RECONSTRUCTING DOLAKHA

Save it before the dozers raze the heritage and architecturally significant buildings to the ground ('Dolakha reincarnated', Sahina Shrestha, #842). Good that the reporter goes beyond Kathmandu and emphasises the need to rebuild and restore heritage in other ignored and neglected parts of the country.

Himal Bista

MENTAL CARE

The government has not been able to provide proper healthcare, let alone mental health care which has been considered an 'evil' thing ('Stigma and silence', Ketan Dulal, #842). However, this still does not mean the media should give up and this article is a prime example of that.

Sahana KC

A DAUGHTER'S TRIBUTE

Beautifully written and testament to a family inspired by their father to not just to promote gender equity but to embrace it ('This much.', Rupa Joshi, #842).

Sara Parker

WHAT'S TRENDING



Most reached on Facebook
(6,574 people reached)

Cantilever Trail

by Sonia Awale
Find out how workers built unique steel pathways to reconnect Upper Gorkha which was cut off for a year after the earthquake. A similar metal trail is now under construction at Tsum Valley.

Most popular on Twitter
(158 retweets, 368 likes)

Most visited online page
(2,630 views)

Most shared on Facebook

Dolakha Reincarnated

by Sahina Shrestha
The earthquake destroyed the historic trading town of Dolakha, rebuilding it would revive its historical importance.



Most commented

Bhagbanda Politics

Editorial
Things start falling apart when the centre cannot hold because it is too busy dividing up the spoils.

twitter QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
Tharuhat protesters paid Rs 1,000 each to join #Tikapur lynching & threatened to fine each household Rs 500 if not http://bit.ly/2jguZsl

Shiwani Neupane @ShiwaniNeupane
@nepalitimes This is pretty insane. all that we have been saying about forced narratives, ethnic cleansing is getting more true

Amritt @AmrittBh69045616
@nepalitimes Nepal is in deep trouble. Authority must act sooner

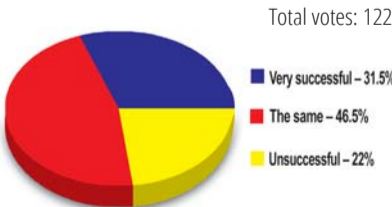
Nepali Times @nepalitimes
A 195m metal path along a cliff at Yaru Bagar now connects the Tsum Valley and Larkya La. http://bit.ly/2jel6b3 @SoniaAwale

Ekendra Lamsal @Ekendra
@nepalitimes And yes, good things happen in Nepal as well. Forget politics, let's work.

Times

Weekly Internet Poll #842

Q. What are the chances of Govinda Raj Pokharel being successful at the National Reconstruction Authority?



Weekly Internet Poll #843
To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Do you support the new government policy that requires Nepalis to obtain permission before going to work in India?

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Programmed to be heartless

We have become hardened and automated when confronting death. Madhav Ghimire would have been able to contextualise.

On social media, it comes very easily for people to write 'RIP' as throwaway acronym when a post is put up of someone's death. It is a slight



ON THE WAY UP
Kanak Mani Dixit

to the departed, this perfunctory ritual finished in all of three letters banged on the keyboard.

Perhaps this heartlessness in the face of dying is the result

of the years of conflict, coupled with the ultra-progressive justification of political violence. Far from being philosophically karmic in countenancing death, our living instincts have become dulled and distorted.

You can see this happening in how on occasion parents themselves seem programmed in their response to the demise of, say, a child in an accident or in a hospital emergency room -- they are immediately on the street demanding compensation. The smart phone close-ups of

near-and-dear ones on the funeral pyre as the flames begin to eat, the degrading treatment of coffins bearing migrant workers who have died in the Gulf or Malaysia at TIA baggage collection...

This new, automated reaction to death may answer one question that has refused to go away from my mind these past four months: why we have failed to mark the passing of Madhav Ghimire four months ago, to mourn the departure of the extraordinary civil servant who also served simultaneously as Home and Foreign Minister in 2013-14.

A well-liked bureaucrat who rose to be Chief Secretary (2009-12), an expert in development, foreign aid and local government, with deep knowledge of national security matters, Ghimire made a mark as the point government official on the peace process.

Ghimire was chosen to be Foreign/Home Minister in the Khil Raj Regmi interim government. Though many, including this writer, were against the formation of that government for going against constitutional and democratic norms, it was due to Minister Ghimire's diligence in organising elections that we came around in support. With some exceptions, the 2013 polls were free and fair and the credit goes mainly to Madhav Ghimire.

He was an un-ostentatious public figure who did not change his old cell phone even as he became minister. That phone hardly rang, because he worked through the institutions; and there was no crowd of hangers-on in front of his official residence when we went to meet him several times on urgent election and human rights matters. He was genuinely concerned about saving the lives of Nanda Prasad and Gangamaya Adhikari.

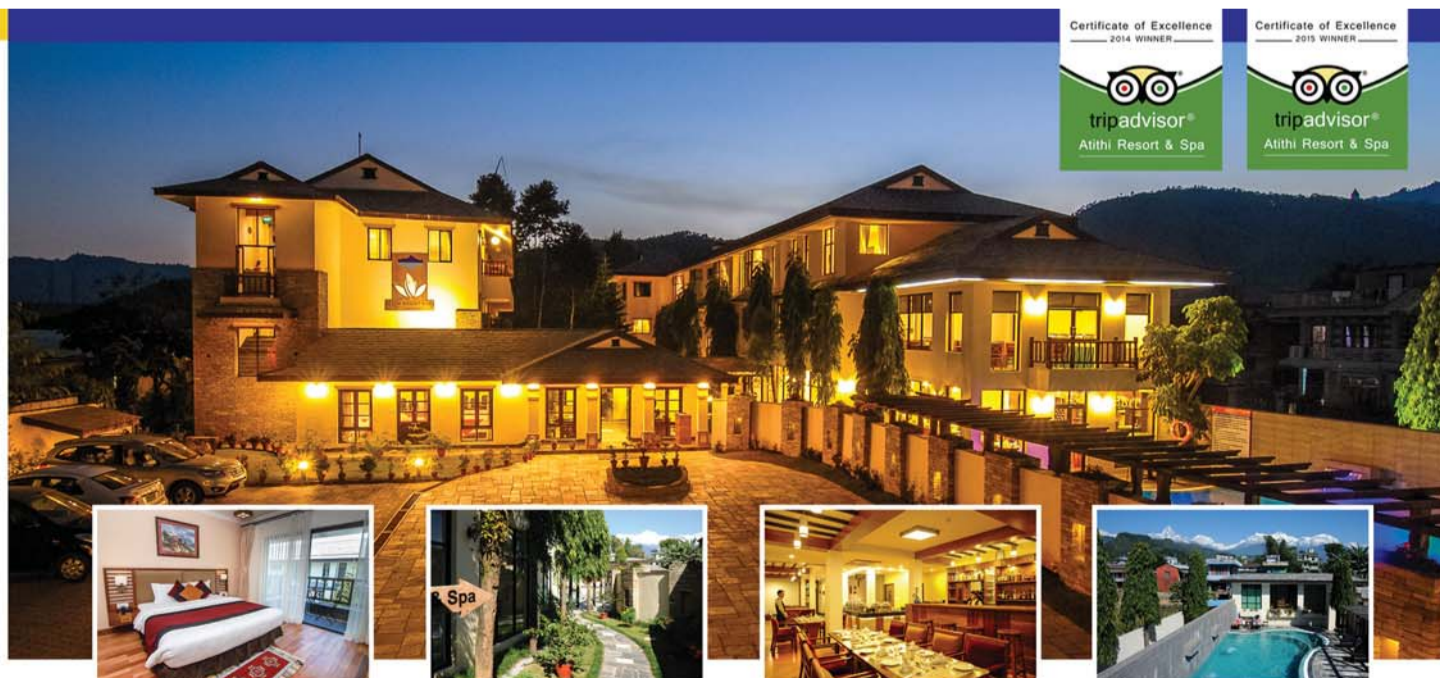
As I sat down to write this article, I was surprised to find Madhav Ghimire's Twitter handle is not suspended yet. It is with great poignancy that one notes his latest interests were all centred on the state of governance and the people's distress. In the first

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half of September, he was writing that political leaders, ‘rather than taking stance on number of (local government) units, should focus on service delivery and upholding the spirit of the Constitution’. And in another tweet: ‘only viable local government units make federalism viable altogether’; or ‘political leaders must stop double-standards in the conduct of foreign relations, whether they are in government or outside’.

Ghimire’s last approving retweet is of a post by researcher/archivist Deepak Aryal, who wrote in Nepali: ‘Why do we need political parties when bureaucrats manage the Constitution, the Army does business, businessmen make policy, and middlemen implement it?’

While most tweet on public affairs with of frustration and disgust, Ghimire’s positioning was based on a mix of idealism and pragmatism. His concerns were governance, representation and political stability in a country whose political, geopolitical and administrative innards he knew better than most others. He had the experience, exposure and credibility to ensure a ‘safe landing’ for Nepal, and did his bit to provide administrative and political continuity.

Ghimire was driving on Prithvi Highway on 25 September afternoon, returning with his family after a *saraddha* ceremony for his late father at Muktinath. At a point where the highway siding had collapsed two weeks previously when a truck went over, his jeep flew off the highway into the Trisuli. His elderly mother, two brothers and a nephew died. Ghimire’s body has not been recovered.

The media (as well as social media) did not immediately go into ‘obituary mode’ because for days there was still the lingering hope that he was alive, somewhere. But as the days passed, death became a certainty.

It is tragically intriguing, that someone so important to the national polity has gone permanently with so little mention. It seems our minds are so collectively hardened, our hearts turned to rock, that we cannot even muster the imagination to remember the man that was Madhav Ghimire.

He was a thoughtful person, and one who would have competently analysed this sociological phenomenon – this new and scary reaction (or lack thereof) to death and where it intersects with the state of the polity.

Madhav Ghimire was one who I could have gone to in my search for explanation of this phenomenon. But he himself is no more. 🇳🇵

prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

Jet set go

Turkish Airlines will be adding Conakry in Guinea as one of its destinations from 30 January onwards. Roundtrip flights between Istanbul and Conakry will be operated twice in a week on Mondays and Thursdays. The starting roundtrip fare will be \$699.

Tea time

Himal Tea Industries unveiled Rakura Tea 2.0 in the market last week. The new variant will be available in 25 double-chambered teabag packs in eight new varieties. The company will be distributing it in major cities across the country between Rs 100 and Rs 160 depending on the variant.



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Back in the USSR

A resurgent Russia is reviving the interest of Nepalis in education, trade and tourism

KRISTINA SHPERLIK

Russia is on rise on the world political stage with the possibility of a return to Soviet-style international cooperation similar to what existed during the Cold War, and this has revived hopes among Nepalis who studied in USSR universities for closer bilateral relations.

Many Soviet-era alumni around the world share nostalgic memories of their student days in Moscow, Kiev, Odessa or Leningrad, and still call it their “second home”, and say that private cultural exchange can help to prepare the ground for future official cooperation.

“When I was in St Petersburg at an international conference for ex-graduates from the USSR in 2002, among them were three presidents from Guinea, Mongolia and Vietnam and at least 20 serving ministers,” recalls Dipak Gyawali, a graduate from the Moscow Power Engineering Institute in 1979 who himself served as Minister of Water Resources in 2005-6.

Soviet-Nepal diplomatic relations got off to a rocky start when Nepal’s membership in the United Nations was vetoed by the Soviet Union in the 1950s, but it improved rapidly after the official visit by King Mahendra, one



GOPEN RAI

of the first by a monarch to the USSR after the murder of the Czar Nikolai II’s family.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 Nepal and Russia were too preoccupied with internal political instability to keep up with bilateral cooperation, the Russian Embassy in Kathmandu was downsized and the flow of Nepali students on Soviet scholarships stopped. However, some Nepali students-turned-entrepreneurs like Upendra Mahato adapted well to the post-communist economic upheaval to become one of the most well-off overseas Nepalis today.

Between 1960-1990, the Soviet Union became a temporary home for over 6,000 Nepali students who could be seen everywhere from Tashkent to Riga and from Kherson to Vladivostok. Students were attracted by the generous scholarships, the quality of higher education and also the friendliness of the Russian people.

“Political situation is not important, when this feeling of being with family is still there,” recalls Saroj Krishna Shrestha, an orthopedic surgeon who graduated from the Odessa Medical Institute in 1986. “One winter an elderly woman stopped

RUSSIAN CONNECTION: Nahendra Pradhan graduated from the Lvov Polytechnic Institute in 1986 and heads the ex-Russian students’ alumni group called Mitra Kunj.

me on the street and told me to put on warm clothes otherwise I would be sick. Till today, whenever I meet a Russian I feel like I have met a brother.”

Anton Maslov at the Russian Embassy’s Cultural Centre in Kamal Pokhari admits that attempts to revive government-to-government cooperation has been slow.

The Soviet Union left a big

imprint on Nepal that is still evident. Unlike engineers, doctors and scientists educated elsewhere, those who graduated from Russia mostly returned to Nepal and have risen up the ranks in government departments, or private institutions. Some have supplemented their degrees with additional studies in the West. Gyawali, for instance, was a Fulbright scholar in Berkeley after graduating from Moscow.

The first batch of students that returned in the late 1950s included government officials like Meena Acharya, the daughter of Prime Minister Tanka Prasad Acharya. The quality of education is considered one of the best in the world and the young graduates could start to work immediately on return, building good careers in any field from physics to law.

“My classmates from Odessa Medical Institute which is still counted as one of the best in Europe now work all over the world at top posts,” Shrestha says.

About 30 Nepali students still go to Russia to study each year, but the government scholarships which used to be coordinated by Mitra Kunj, the alumni of Russia-returned students, have dwindled.

“Many students still want to go to Russia, but they can’t afford it even if it is partly financed by the host country,” says Nahendra Pradhan (*at right in picture*) of Mitra Kunj who graduated from the Lvov Polytechnic Institute in 1986. Mitra Kunj has over 6,000 members with 600 active participants and is celebrating its 50th anniversary in May. It also offers Russian language classes for students, tour guides. 🇷🇺

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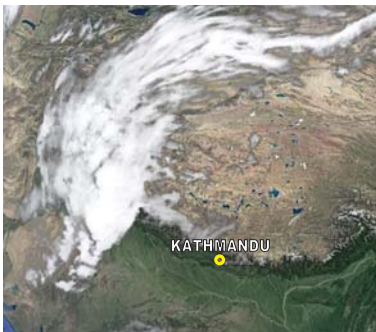
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A westerly front is approaching fast and furious, and it is already dumping rain and snow across Pakistan and Northern India. Expect cloud-buildup by Friday morning and some passing showers. Trekkers at higher elevations should be alert about snowfalls on high passes on Friday. However, this is a fast-moving system and will pass over Kathmandu Valley quickly bringing in a bright and sunny Saturday. It will also temporarily wash off the Indo-Gangetic pollution haze that had infiltrated into the Himalaya.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
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Sounds of Shillong

With their upbeat medleys and soothing vocals, the Shillong Chamber Choir is out to get the world



PICS: SHILLONG CHAMBER CHOIR

SMRITI BASNET

One country at a time, the Shillong Chamber Choir (SCC) and the soothing scores of this group from northeastern India are echoing across the world. With tours through China, the United States, Canada, Singapore, Malaysia, Dubai, and now in Nepal, the multi-genre choir has created a big buzz with its distinct blend of Bollywood and Western music.



When Neil Nongkynrih (*pictured, below*) started the choir in 2001, he had never imagined it would go so far. “It was never meant to be professional, it started as a fun thing. When we began we were never interested in making a living out of it,” he told us this week after a performance in Pokhara.

After returning from Europe where he worked as a classical concert pianist for 13 years, Nongkynrih saw the potential of starting a choir back home in Shillong. Using his vast knowledge of Western classical music, the 2015 Padma Shri award winner brought sounds India had never heard before.

“We don’t simply do covers, we try to do each piece differently and these pieces are fresh for India,” explained the maestro. The choir performs from Mozart, Handel, Bach, Gershwin, and adapting songs by more recent bands like Queen and ABBA, Bollywood numbers as well as Nongkynrih’s own compositions and medleys.

“People are still trying to understand how we have managed to dovetail classical and Bollywood,” he says.

Their medleys like Disco Deewane / Voulez-Vous and Baar Baar Dekho / ‘S Wonderful have crossed 100,000 views on YouTube.

This attention and appreciation for the SCC reached its height after the group won the India’s Got Talent show in 2010. Following the win the band performed for Barack Obama during his visit to Delhi, and has also shared the stage with Bollywood superstar Amitabh Bachchan.

Winning three golds at the 6th World Choir Games is another highlight for the group.

“Now youngsters look up to them and admire the work they have done. They have redefined the music culture and made their name known all over India,” said N Munish Singh of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations.

Looking back, the band’s alto Donna Marthong says the group has become more versatile because of its willingness to adapt local songs and tunes to their repertoire.

This week in Pokhara and Kathmandu, they won the hearts of many Nepalis with their beautiful rendition of 1974 AD’s *Gurasai Phulyo*.

Besides concerts, the choir is also taking over YouTube by storm with its well choreographed videos. What has remained the band’s biggest strength is team work and their mentoring. “Uncle Neil is the tree, and we are its branches. He is preparing us to become our own trees someday,” said band member, William Richmond. “Music has the power to transcend all differences that have been created by people.”

After their concerts in Nepal, the group has gigs in Mumbai, Jaipur and Delhi. Later the band flies to Russia, Sweden and London for concerts.



Listen to Shillong Chamber Choir blend western music with Bollywood numbers.

nepalitimes.com

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ALL IN THE FAMILY

Girls are not safe even within their own homes, especially in households dislocated by the earthquake

SAHINA SHRESTHA
in DOLAKHA

Nestled in the lap of majestic Gauri Shankar, Dolakha is a scenic six hour drive east of Kathmandu. But the beauty masks a brutal reality of life after the 25 April 2015 earthquake. The 7.3 magnitude aftershock on 12 May was even more destructive because the epicentre was close by. Many of the 67,000 families identified for reconstruction grant are still camped out.

The literacy rate of this ethnically diverse district is 62. 78 per cent, which is less than the national average of 65.9 per cent and there has been a massive out-migration of men in recent years. Of the families that remain, alcoholism and domestic violence remain a major issue.

Although female literacy has improved the status of women, sexual abuse within the family and by neighbours in households dislocated by the earthquake and migration appears to have increased, and is a cause of serious concern for social activists.

“Violence against women has always been a serious problem here but the incidence of abuse is on the rise after the earthquake,” explains Sudip Basnet, Sub-inspector of Police of the Women’s Cell in Dolakha.”However, it is difficult to say if there are more cases because of the earthquake, or because more victims are now coming out to report cases of abuse than before.”

Dolakha Police reported 14 cases of rape of which three were by family members this year, which is double the figure for last year when there were seven cases of which one was of forced incest.

According to Sirjana Karki of the

shelter, Aawaz Nepal, the rise in cases of rape is because families are broken by migration, alcoholism, and due to society’s patriarchal norms.

“In many of the cases, the victims are blamed for what happened to them and the legal system is not friendly to those who suffer abuse,” says Karki.

It is especially difficult for those who are raped by family members. When a girl is abused by her family, the first thing she needs is a safe place to stay which she cannot usually get.

Advocate Sushama Gautam explains: “It starts with the family not supporting the victims, especially in cases of incest. Then the public prosecutor and the police don’t investigate the cases properly. But what is missing the most is protection for the victim in our legal system.”

A rape victim can stay in a safe house for two to three months, but after that she has to either go back home or look for another shelter. There are currently 14 women and children living in the shelter run by Aawaz Nepal here.

Perpetrators also get very light sentences. The maximum punishment for forced incest is 15 years. Victims are often terrified when the family member or neighbour comes out of jail. 🇳🇵

Centre for Investigative Journalism



HANGING IN THERE

Listen to the heart-wrenching experiences of Sita, Pabitra and Prakriti. Hear how they are trying to get over the abuse they suffered and what they hope for in the future.

[nepalitimes.com](#)

All names of victims have been changed.



Prakriti, 16

There are five members in my family: my parents, my elder brother, sister-in-law and I. The earthquake damaged our house, so we were living in a temporary shelter near our house.

My family hadn’t returned from the fields and I was feeding the chicken, when this person from our village called me to this shelter, saying he needed some help. I didn’t think much of it, after all he was older and our families knew each other.

Inside his tent, he closed my mouth and forced himself upon me. I couldn’t shout for help, he threatened to kill me if I told my parents. This happened three

times while my family was not at home. I was too scared to tell anyone.

When I got pregnant , I stopped going to school. The villagers accused me of having a bad character and insulted my family.

My parents took me to the police, there was a lot of pressure on me to say that it was consensual. It was not, he had raped me.

I cannot go back to the village because my family and society will not accept me anymore. I have a five-month-old baby, I need to take care of it and without an education and income, it is difficult.



ALL PICS: SAHINA SHRESTHA



Pabitra, 13

After my father passed away, my mother married another man. When my mother had a baby, I had to take care of her while she and my step-father went to work. When I finally got to go to school, I was still required to do house

work. My step-father used to beat me and my mother frequently.

About two years ago, when my mother had gone to the temple my 75-year-old step-grandfather sent my sister away in an errand and pulled me inside his room and locked the door. I shouted for help as he raped me. I told my younger sister and she told my mother. Word got around the village and the police were called.

When it was time to give my statement, my step-father and a lawyer told me to say that another person in the village had given me money to say such things. I was scared, but my sister being the smart one told the police everything. After that, my step-father started beating my mother even more. I heard my grandfather was sent off to an old-age home, and not prison.



Nirjala, 15

I lived with my parents and two younger sisters in the village and I have an older brother who works away from home. I didn't really like going to school, so I spent most of my days playing around the village.

Last year, when my parents had gone to the field and both my sisters were at school, a neighbour asked me to go fishing with him. He was about 24 and taught karate. I didn't really know him well, so I refused. But he insisted and I went along reluctantly.

There is a small forest on the way to the river. That is where it happened, when I tried to struggle and shout he threatened to kill me and warned me not to tell my parents. After being violated, I ran home but couldn't tell my parents.

However, it turned out there was someone from the village who saw it happen. A few days later, he told my father. But the boy's family was powerful, so everyone was scared. My mother finally mustered the courage to take me and become witness to the police. I didn't want to speak to the police because of the questions they asked me and the way they asked them. They initially refused to register the complaint, but finally gave in after my mother started crying.

He is now in jail but I couldn't stay in the village anymore because his family threatened to kill me. I am now living away from my family for a crime someone else committed.



Sita, 20

We are six in the family: my parents, my elder sister, younger brother, younger sister and I. My parents were working in Kathmandu, so I lived with my grandparents till the age of eight. When my parents returned, I moved in with them and my elder sister decided to stay back with my grandparents.

My parents ran a small eatery in town and we lived in a rented space. The kitchen was downstairs and our living quarters upstairs. There were two rooms, but all of us slept in one. My father wouldn't allow us to sleep in the other room

saying it was unsafe for girls to sleep alone.

As soon as we started living together, the beatings started. My father was a tyrant, he drank heavily and hit everyone in the family. We had to answer to his every beck and call. It terrified us, and we tried not to provoke him in any way.

One evening, I was helping my mother in the kitchen when my father called me upstairs. I was unwilling to go, but my mother was afraid so she told me to go up.

I was 12 when my father raped me for the first time. I was in pain and afraid. I didn't know how to tell my mother, and was afraid she would get into trouble if I did.

The abuse happened frequently for three years: in the morning, in the afternoon and in the evening. I tried telling my mother on

numerous occasions, but could not muster the courage. One day, when my father was away I told my mother everything. I cried a lot that day.

When my father came back, my mother confronted him. He refused to admit he had done anything and blamed me instead. I had to prove to my mother that I was not lying, but we were too scared to go to the police.

When I refused to go upstairs my father threw me out of the house. I worked in an office and told my colleagues, who helped me get in touch with a women's rights group. My father was jailed. Instead of supporting me, my family pressured me to get him out of the jail. He is now free, and I am constantly afraid he will hunt me down and kill me. I cannot go back to the family.

EVENTS



Nepal Literature Festival,

Don't miss out on the sixth edition of the international literary festival in the lake city. With eminent Nepali panelists and littérateurs like Khagendra Sangroula, Kanak Mani Dixit, Dhruba Chandra Gautam, Chaitanya Mishra, vlogger Samriddhi Rai, comic artist Kripa Joshi, Indian authors Ramchandra Guha and Durjoy Dutta and many more. Attend the four-day festival for a good dose of culture, literature and enlightening discussions.
27 to 30 January, Pokhara, For more information: nepalliteraturefestival.com

Movie screening,

Screening of a documentary film based on the life of Nepal's ultra running sensation, Mira Rai.
31 January, 3 to 4.15 pm, *Voices of Women Media, Chagal, 9860670971*

Hike to Chitlang,

Gear up for a hike and over stay at Chitlang. Familiarise yourself with the local culture, customs and traditions of the place.
28 to 29 January, 7 am onwards (28 January), For more details: 9808962677



Agro fair,

Don't miss out on more than 50 stalls of organic tea, coffee, vegetables, juice, herbs, spices from across Nepal.
27 to 30 January, 10 am to 6 pm, *Patan Museum, Patan Darbar Square, 9851082828, kteorganicfair@gmail.com*

Art exhibition,

Artist Erina Tamrakar showcases her work 'In Between The Third Eye', a collection of her work inspired by travels in Lo Manthang and various remote corners of Nepal.
27 January to 19 March, 10.30 am to 6 pm, *Park Gallery, Pulchok, (01) 5522307*

Nepal reads,

Be part of the book discussion on 'These Fine Lines', a poetry anthology, organised by US Embassy's Book Bus.
28 January, 2 to 4 pm, *Bodhi Books and Bakes, Maharajgunj, 9851193603, Register: <https://goo.gl/nbdMNH>*



Heritage walk,

Experience the culturally rich and beautiful Bhaktapur Darbar Square preceded by a yoga session and followed by a sumptuous Newari meal. The event is organised by Sooriya Wellness and Yoga Centre.
31 January, 8 am to 1 pm, (01) 4001714, sooriyawellness@gmail.com

Women of the World,

Mark your calendars for Women of the World festival, a one day festival to celebrate women and girls featuring talks, workshops, performances and more.
18 February, 11 am to 8 pm, *Staff College, Jawalakhel, (01) 4410798, <http://bit.ly/2hf6v8>*

Festival management,

Train with facilitator Amy Walker and learn how to manage a festival with social focus, a three-day workshop organised by Kathmandu Triennale.
6 to 8 February, 2 to 6 pm, *British Council, Lajimpat, Apply: <https://goo.gl/forms/DTTgXWvPKqalWE9x2>*

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MUSIC

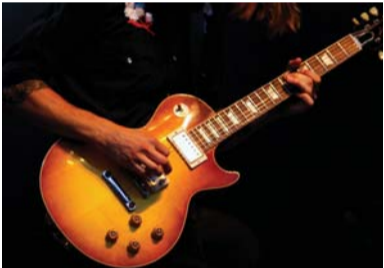


Sufi nights,

Spend a musical evening listening to sufi melodies with Amrit Chhetri this weekend.
Every Friday & Saturday, *Green Leaves Restaurant, Uttar Dhoka, Lajimpat, (01) 4433002*

Kar.Ma sessions,

Live music featuring Nomad Radio coupled with hot cups of coffee and tasty snacks.
27 January, 4 to 8 pm, *Kar.Ma Coffee, Jhamsikhel*



Mt 8848 live,

Don't miss out on the live performance of Mt 8848 as they belt out some of their hits.
28 January, 7 pm onwards, *The Victory Lounge, 9801031277, 9801444055, 9818337060, Tickets: Rs 1,000*

Open mic night,

Grab the mic and sing your heart out at the House of Music every Tuesday.
House of Music, Thamel, 9851075172



Kanta dAb dAb,

Enjoy your Friday nights listening to Kanta dAb dAb, a Nepali fusion trio band using sitar, percussion and bass.
27 January, 7.30 to 9 pm, *Places Restaurant & Bar, Thamel, (01) 4700413*

DINING



Dwarika's Hotel,

A special night of sumptuous BBQ with live cooking stations every Friday. Reservations recommended.
Every Friday, 6.30 pm onwards, *The Dwarika's Hotel, (01) 4479488/ sales@dwarikas.com, Rs 1800 plus taxes*

Hyatt Regency,

Usher in the Chinese New Year with a wide variety of sumptuous and mouth-watering dishes. Also, win a chance to stay at the hotel by participating in a lucky draw.
27 January (Dinner), *Rs 2,000 plus taxes per person, 28 January (Brunch), Rs 2300 plus taxes per person, The Cafe, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, Boudha, (01) 5178334*



Phat Kath,

Offering French-ish food, a takeaway crêperie, low tables and hookahs for hippies, tables and chairs for normal people, and a formidable hip hop soundtrack for everyone.
Thamel, 9816696571

Soaltee Crowne Plaza,

A spread of delectable Lucknowi dishes sure to transport you back to the era of the Nawabs.
Until 4 February, 6.30 pm onwards, *Garden Terrace (Deck), Soaltee Crowne Plaza, Tahachal, (01) 4273999*



Bodhi books & bakes,

A quiet, snug place offering a rich collection of cakes and pastries.
Maharajanj, 9851193262

Anne Frank in Kathmandu

The Diary of Anne Frank is being performed in Kathmandu at a time when there are fears of the rise of elected fascists around the world. It is also a sombre reminder of the triumph of the human spirit, during, and despite the Nazi crackdowns against Jews in occupied Holland.

Deborah Merola, Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett's adaptation of the moving story of a 13-year-old Jewish girl who hid two years before being transported off to a concentration camp is presented by One World Theatre.

Otto Frank and his family moved to a little attic above his business space in Amsterdam which they shared with four other friends. During this time, young Anne wrote down her observations of life



around her. And no amount of history classes on the Holocaust will prepare you for the stories told, and the hard-hitting reality of emotions laid bare in this biographical record of a teen a string away from torture in concentration camps.

The practice location, a single room behind the main building of a college, on a partly deserted lane in Baneshwor, seemed completely capable of transporting us to the tiny attic in Amsterdam. This slightly crammed and partially run down room seemed to tick all the right boxes in terms of set and design for this historical biographical drama. What was short in terms of stage props was made up through powerful performances delivered by the cast: a good mix of amateurs and professionals who complimented each other well.

While most of us know the end to this story, we as the audience aren't just left to drown in grief and lament over the helplessness of the situation. We are witness to more than just uncertainty and impending doom. Through a series of episodic events, best and worst of human actions and emotions during times of peril are narrated, acted out and made to come to life on stage, reminding us all of our demons that lie buried comfortably until disaster strikes.

'Death is certain. Life is uncertain,' is more than just a proverb in this case. But in the midst of all the trials and tribulations, we bear witness to budding friendships, selfless love and adjustments made out of necessity.

Two hours and several deaths later, you do question the brutality of the actions of the Nazis. But as you walk away from the stage and the actors who brought to life the most trying of times, you take with you the satisfaction of knowing that Anne and her friends and family did not merely exist in their years of hiding, they lived and believed that 'In spite of everything, people are still good at heart'.

Anne Frank is being staged in collaboration with the United Nations, the European Union, and the embassies of Germany and Israel in Kathmandu.

Raisa Pande

30 January and 1 February, 6 pm onwards, *Naga Theatre, Hotel Vajra, Swayambhu and 2,3 & 4 February, 6 pm onwards, Yalamaya Kendra, Patan Dhoka, 9803715959*

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Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.

- Martin Luther King Jr.

Miss Moti-vation
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National interest, not nationalism

Tikaram Rai in
Himal Khabarpatrika, 22-28 Jan

हिमाल
खबरपत्रिका

There has been a marked surge in nationalism in Nepal of late, which is largely due to New Delhi's tendency to poke its nose into the country's internal affairs.

India has always interfered in Nepal's domestic politics ever since the two countries signed a friendship treaty in 1950. As long as India continues to meddle in Nepal, there will be nationalism which could lead to ultra-nationalism, and eventually even militancy.

New Delhi is pressuring Kathmandu to amend Nepal's constitution, and is always keen to decide who becomes Nepal's next Prime Minister or security chief. This has led to a rise in anti-India sentiments, and Nepali nationalism is becoming synonymous with anti-Indianism. As a result, Indian projects are not getting public support in Nepal.

Nationalism creates a binary of us and them, and cultivates a culture of fragmentation. In Nepal, the rise of nationalism and anti-Indian sentiments threaten to create a divide between the peoples of the two countries.

The rise in anti-India sentiment is also pushing Nepal closer to China. Indians call it Nepal 'playing the China Card', just as King Mahendra once did in the early 1960s when his relations with New Delhi soured. Every time Kathmandu-New Delhi hits a

low or China announces more investment in the Himalayan nation, India accuses Kathmandu of using the 'China Card'.

Nepal is now institutionalising federalism, which is important to address the political and economic aspirations of a diverse country. However, some political forces still do not like the idea of federalism, and they could use the rising anti-India sentiment as a weapon to foil this attempt to institutionalise decentralisation. Take for example the anti-federalism statements by UML Chair KP Oli and senior leader Bam Dev Gautam amidst protests over Province 5.

Last year's Indian blockade not only fueled anti-Indian sentiments, but also emboldened Nepal to sign trade and transit treaty with China. India always claims to have a 'special relationship' with Nepal, but the blockade taught Nepalis otherwise. At the same time, Nepalis' affinity with China grew so much that Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal lost his public support when Chinese President Xi Jinping cancelled plans to visit Nepal.

Instead of waving the nationalist flag, Nepal's leaders need to understand our national interest – especially when it comes to balancing the geopolitics of relations with India and China. Nationalism is a love-hate option, in which both love and hate are counterproductive. We need to have pragmatic and balanced relations with both countries to safeguard our national interest.



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4TH FEBRUARY, 2017
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FLORENCE FOSTER JENKINS

The awards season is here and with it the Oscar nominations, the official harbinger of the films that are supposedly worth seeing. This year brings a refreshing list of films, nine in total (up to ten films can now be nominated in a system that bewilders everyone but



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

industry insiders), that steer away from the usual Hollywood tropes, bringing diversity in both structure and performances, breaking out of the mostly white person dominated cinema that has caused the industry to receive so much flak in recent years.

Among the surprising but, in hindsight, understandable nominations is for Meryl Streep yet again, in a wonderfully

nuanced, comic role in *Florence Foster Jenkins*, a film about the eponymous American socialite turned opera singer whose dubious talents nevertheless entertained a generation of soldiers and high society New Yorkers during the grimness of the tail end of the Second World War.

Directed by Stephen Frears, this warm-hearted film by the witty, loquacious, generous minded former actor is a completely feel good piece of cinema. It is made transcendently funny by the talents of Meryl Streep, Hugh Grant (as St. Clair Bayfield, Foster Jenkins' second husband), and Simon Helberg (as Cosmé McMoon, the long suffering accompanying pianist to the protagonist's ambitions) who excel in their respective roles as compassionate but clueless performer, doting but not foolish husband, and ambitious but gentle souled composer.

This true story is a strange one to choose to retell, considering how awfully it could have fallen flat (pardon the pun) without a performer who can navigate the subtle difference between pathos, bathos, and outright comedy, quite frankly a feat probably only really possible by the multi-talented Streep. The veteran actor has, in the last decade, truly blossomed with her comic talents with films like *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006), and *Julie and Julia* (2009), catching up with the likes of Diane Keaton who has always been the darling of the directors who like a sweet sarcastic zinger directed in just the right tone.

Florence Foster Jenkins is a film for a day when you feel like you can't stand any more corrupt politicians, another critical voice (even your own), and just want to unwind, laugh, and pretend that the world isn't full of awful people who lie, cheat, steal, harass women, and still walk around unscathed.

Pardoning my political rant, and coming back to the quality of the acting, the performances in this film are the heart of what makes it extraordinary. Streep is rightly recognised for bringing so much humanity to a story about a rich woman's travails, and Hugh Grant finally returns to the warm hearted comic performances that once made him such a star. Just a warning though, when Streep launches into one of her performances be prepared for both disbelief, and pure hilarity. 🇳🇵

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View trailer

HAPPENINGS



GOPEN RAI

MANAGING MIGRANTS: Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, flanked by Foreign Minister Prakash Saran Mahat (*left*) and Labour Minister Surya Man Gurung (*right*), unveils a new policy Tuesday requiring Nepalis to seek permission before going to work in India.



GOPEN RAI

MOVING FORWARD: Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Krishna Bahadur Mahara visits the six-day of CAN Info-Tech 2017 that kicked off in Kathmandu on Thursday.



GOPEN RAI

DIGITISATION LOAN: Finance Secretary Shanta Raj Subedi and the World Bank Country Manager Takuya Kanata on Monday signed a \$150m loan which will be used to develop a digital system for civil registration.



BIKRAM RAI

EQUAL FOOTING: Participants at a disability-friendly earthquake safety walkathon near Patan Darbar Square on Monday.



GOPEN RAI

UNVEILING APRILIA: Authorised distributor of Piaggio in Nepal, D-lifestyles, introduces Aprilia SR 150, its sports crossover model in Kathmandu on Tuesday.

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PICS: UPASANA KHADKA

Victims help would-be victims

Having endured hardships, migrant worker returnees help others avoid suffering the same fate

UPASANA KHADKA
in MAKWANPUR

Every day, Kathmandu airport offers a fascinating study in the sociology of migration. At the departure area throng eager migrant workers with red tika on their foreheads and garlands, bidding tearful goodbye to family members. At the other end of the terminal are the much awaited reunions as migrant workers return with their earnings.

Among the returnees are those who are back for good with skills and aspirations to make a living back home in Nepal. Having gone through hardships, some returnees want to help others like them and promote safe outmigration.



Tulsi Lama

By deploying Returnee Volunteers, projects like Safer Migration (SaMi) try to make migrants ready to go abroad aware of what to expect. Here in Makwanpur, where 10 per cent of all migrants are female (compared to 3.5 % nationwide) women returnees are playing an active role in facilitating safe migration.

The Aprabasi Mahila Sewa Kendra (AMSK), for example, is a network of returnee migrants (mostly from Kuwait) who volunteer to warn those aspiring to go abroad about the pitfalls, from travelling illegally through India to what to expect in the Gulf.

“While we are committed to the cause, we are engaged in other full time jobs and this is a voluntary effort that our returnee members do on a periodic basis,” says Renuka Chowdhary, who returned from Lebanon.

Predatory agents scout potential migrants and lure them

with tales of how others have struck rich. Fishing for potential migrants from the same pool is a repeated transaction and cheating can come with a high reputational cost as recruiters and their families live in the same community where agents and migrant households coexist.

In Siraha, the fifth highest migrant-sending district, a hairdresser, a shopkeeper and two farmers have all worked as recruiters. One of them, Binod, said: “I started helping locals by delivering passports and paperwork or being their travel companion and before I knew it, I started getting paid for it.”

One of the migrants Binod cheated, Sovit, is still facing mental and financial stress for what he went through on his failed trip to Qatar. “Social clout



Bishnu Gurung

can influence how agents respond when the cheated confront them,” said Sovit, who is from the Musahar community here.

After three months in Qatar, Sovit returned and was able to get back Rs 40,000 from the 75,000 he had paid Binod after community mediation. Most other recruiters get away, like Ramesh who absconded with a lump sum collected from five aspirants.

The contribution made by organisations like AMSK need to be scaled up in a similar manner to the work of Nepal’s Female Community Health Volunteers (FCHVs) who, after basic training, have become an integral part of Nepal’s rural health system. Returnee migrants can also be trained to become an important part of the effort to deal with exploitation by agents, and orienting migrants to the rules, expectations and resources while abroad.

Another key barrier in

making migration safe, according to returning women domestic workers, is language. Returnees agree that their transition would have been much smoother had they learnt Arabic before they went. But while the lanes of Bag Bazar are filled with Korean and English classes, there are no institutes for Arabic.

Bishnu Gurung spent two years in Kuwait and plans to re-migrate, recalls how she started jotting down Arabic words in her notebook.

“The first was the word for kitchen, and then onion. My employer would point at things and show me what they are called, Gurung said, “I started memorising all the words, and was lucky because I had a patient employer, and also because I could write.”

Tulsi Lama was not so lucky in Kuwait where she spent more than four years in different jobs. “When my first employer asked me to bring something, I often made mistakes, my memory of the first few months of work abroad is of confusion.”

As many of the returnees are fluent in Arabic, training in pedagogy could allow them to impart language skills to women waiting to go abroad. The language is not as necessary for, say, construction workers, but is a must for domestic helpers who have to live with the families they work for.

However, most migrant workers are in rush to get their travel documents ready before they leave and are not in the frame of mind to learn a foreign language. Besides, given the government ban on outmigration of young women to ensure their safety, many returnees instead travel through illegal channels.

Pre-departure training is mandatory but often times they are just checked boxes where prospective migrants are taught to report to authorities that they have taken the required training. Free visa and ticket policy is in place, but most migrants still pay recruiters exorbitant fees.

Providing the right incentives will be key to ensure that outgoing workers are adequately prepared and returnees can play a prominent role in facilitating this.

High risk, no return

Nepali migrant workers borrow money, do not earn promised salaries, and if they die their indebted families are cheated of compensation

PURU SHAH
in DUBAI

When Surya Nath Mishra, the former Nepali ambassador to Qatar met officials in Doha, they often praised Nepali workers, saying: “We like workers from Nepal because they are hardworking, loyal, honest, and easy to control. Qatar needs more workers like them”.

Mishra worked to improve pay and conditions of Nepali migrant workers in Qatar, and by the time his four-year tenure ended in 2011 was able to double wages for unskilled labourers from 400 Riyals to 800. Despite two wage hikes, which were vehemently opposed by manpower agencies in Nepal, it was still lower than other South Asian and Filipino workers on the same jobs.

“Qatar has a liberal labour economy, the wages are set by host countries,” Mishra says, “the wages of Nepali workers were so low because the government of Nepal had not revised wages since 2002.”

Unlike Gurkha soldiers who get recognition for their service, potential residency rights in Britain, and a generous pension when they retire, migrant workers in the Gulf or Malaysia receive very little pay, no respect or residency rights, and no pay after termination. Gurkhas take a low risk, high return route to a better life, while migrant workers are limited to taking a high risk, low return approach.



PURU SHAH

LEFT BEHIND: Halima Khatun, whose husband was killed in Qatar in a traffic accident six years ago, shows his cancelled passport.

Young males between 15-44 account for 84 per cent of all Nepali migrant workers, and their mortality rate is higher than for that age group in the general population. Nepali workers borrow money, do not earn what they are promised, and if they die while abroad their families are cheated of compensation and face indebtedness.

That is what happened to Halima Khatun who lives in Harsar, a village 20 km north of Janakpur. She has two huts, one for her buffalo and the other for herself. Her husband, Bhori Kawari, was working in Doha and was struck by a car six years ago while returning from evening prayers. Halima became a widow and had the sole responsibility to raise a son and daughter.

Halima cannot read or write. Her husband had borrowed Rs 300,000 from local moneylenders to pay for his visa, airfare, and recruiting agency. Now, she is saddled with the debt. The state of Qatar made a blood money payment of \$32,000 to the family, out of which Halima received only \$22,400. She says government officials took the rest.

She was also entitled to Rs 600,000 compensation from the government, and was cheated by a local agent who had accompanied Halima to Kathmandu. He made her sign papers and prevented her from appearing in person at the office in Babar Mahal. She only got Rs 15,000. She used what she got to pay off her debt, marry her daughter, and buy some land which she now farms with her son.

The death of Halima’s husband was not isolated in 2010, he was among 123 Nepali migrant workers that died in Qatar that year. Another 133 died in 2011. The figure has been increasing every year with 179 in 2012, 206 in 2013, and 211 deaths in 2014.

Never heard from again

Hundreds of Nepali migrant workers never return home, not even in coffins. They simply disappear.

OM ASTHA RAI
in NAWALPARASI

There are plenty of stories about the high mortality rate of Nepali workers abroad, or migrants being cheated by recruiters. Less well known is the fact that many Nepalis simply disappear while working abroad.

The Gulf countries and Malaysia have become a black hole for hundreds of migrant workers who have vanished without a trace over the years. Their families are helpless, and do not know whether their loved ones are dead or alive. The government is of no help.

Since it started monitoring in 2009 the Foreign Employment Promotion Board has records of 5,000 Nepalis who have died abroad. But it does not have numbers for the missing.

In Nawalparasi alone, the Safer Migration (SaMi) project knows of 73 missing migrant workers. Dhading has 28 workers officially listed as missing. Extrapolated to Nepal's other districts in proportion to their migrant populations, the total number missing migrant workers would well exceed the 1,334 missing during the conflict.

SaMi forwards details of missing migrants to the Pravasi Nepali Coordination Committee, a Kathmandu-based NGO run by former migrant workers which tries to trace the missing (often unsuccessfully) through its network in the Gulf and Malaysia.

Ranjana Lamsal, a counselor on safe migration in Nawalparasi, says it is mostly men who go missing in Malaysia, but in the Gulf it is mostly women who disappear without a trace.

"In Malaysia men who go illegal cut all contact with their families," Lamsal says, adding that the problem of female migrant workers missing in the Gulf is much more worrisome.

"They are mostly women who are trafficked to the Gulf via India to work as housemaids," she says, "and the families do not have the documents to trace them."

Bal Bahadur Thapa of a new network of former migrant workers in Nawalparasi, says: "The government does not care whether we die or disappear. It just cares about the remittance we send home." ■



PICS: OM ASTHA RAI



Parbati Karki Missing in Saudi Arabia

Parbati Karki spent two months in a dingy hotel room on the suburb of Mumbai before finally flying to Saudi Arabia via Delhi.

The agent had taken her to Mumbai, promising to fly

her to Saudi Arabia in a few days. After two months, the agent rerouted her to New Delhi, and on to Saudi Arabia.

Her family heaved a sigh of relief when she finally made it. But the worst was yet to come: she called her husband, Ram (pictured above holding her photo), from Saudi Arabia, and told him that she was abused and tortured almost every day. There was no

contact until Ram received a call from her employer in Saudi Arabia. One of Ram's nieces who had just returned from the Gulf translated from Arabic that he would send Parbati home in a few months. But there was no response on her phone after that.

"I am really worried, but I don't know how to help her," says Ram.

Sita Rai Missing in Kuwait

Bishnu Rai (pictured, right) did not want to send his wife, Sita, to Kuwait to work as a housemaid, but he could not stop her. For a year, she would call her husband every month, asking about their four children.

"She was a doting mother," he says. "I never thought she would forget us just like that."

After one year, Sita stopped calling. Bishnu had no way to contact her. He kept waiting for her calls, but there were no messages and no money.

"I don't know if she is alive," he says, "my hope is fading."

Bishnu worked all his life as a



Tak Bahadur Magar Missing in Malaysia

Pabi Magar (*at left in picture, left*) flips through an old photo album, searching for the pictures of her son who has been out of touch for almost five years now.

“Here he is,” she says, pointing at a faded photo in which a young man is posing in front of skyscrapers in Kuala Lumpur. “He sent me this photo years ago. I don’t know what he looks like now.”

Tak’s father Lal Bahadur (*at right in picture*) rummages through a file and brings out the citizenship card of their son. “This is what is left of him,” he says.

Tak is their youngest son. He got married, had a child by the time he was 18, and decided to go abroad to support his family. A year later, his wife found another man and married him. Tak Bahadur stopped calling home and didn’t send any more money. Lal Bahadur and Pabi now look after their 6-year-old grandson.

“No money, no telephone, no message,” says Pabi. “I am not sure if I will ever see my son again.”

The family had borrowed Rs 120,000 to send Tak Bahadur to Malaysia. His parents now plan to sell off a portion of their land in Kumarwanti village to pay off the loan.

“I don’t want money from my son,” Lal Bahadur says, “I just want him to come home.”

VANISHED WITHOUT A TRACE



Watch video of Lal Bahadur Magar and Pabi Magar, whose son Tak Bahadur went to Malaysia to work and has been out of touch for almost five years now.

nepalitimes.com



farmer, and never wanted to work abroad. Sita felt she needed to earn, and decided to go herself.

Through a local agent in Nawalparasi, Sita first went to Saudi Arabia as a housemaid. At that time, the government had imposed a ban on Nepali women’s entry into the Gulf. So

she was flown to Saudi Arabia via Delhi.

She returned home after three years, but their financial condition did not improve. After spending a few years in the village, she flew to Kuwait once more, but was never heard from again.




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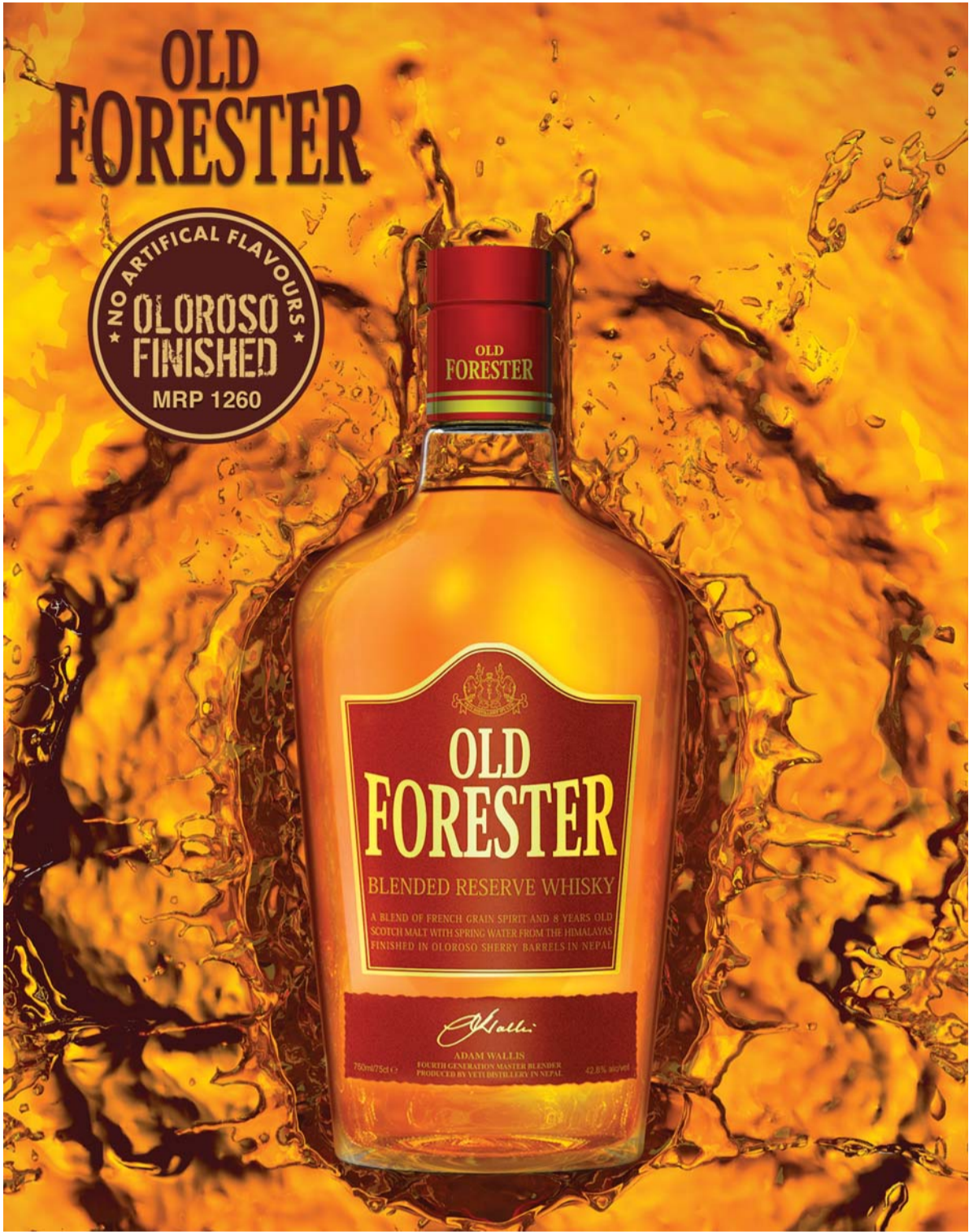
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Nepalis of the non-resident persuasion

So it looks like The Federer Democratic Republic of Nipple (damn autocorrect) is finally giving in to the 125-point demand of Non-resident Nepalis, and allowing them to have dual citizenship.

Good move. One wonders, though, that if a Nepali passport was such a sought after item, why did they leave Nepal in the first place?

In the last fiscal year, two members of a government delegation vanished without trace in Brussels, and a dance troupe decided to stay on in Trumpistan. Put these two items of news together, we have to conclude that if present trends continue, in the not too distant future, there will be only two kinds of Nepalis left:

- a. Non-resident Nepalis who want to permanently reside in Nepal, and
- b. Nepalis who want to permanently reside in a non-Nepali country.

Since resident Nepalis have messed up the country big time, how about subcontracting the control of the government to non-resident Nepalis? The idea is to leapfrog the current generation of Nepali leaders and hand it to the next generation of Nepalis in an as-where-is condition. Fine print: conditions apply, overseas relatives of current rulers and ex-CIAA chiefs currently in Mauritius not eligible.

But till then, GONE has shown that it is deadly serious about providing incentives to NRNs who want to invest in their ancestral domain. After all, there is an ancient Vedic saying: “NRN is God”. (We checked with God, and he has no objections to the slogan.) As a first step, the Department of Irritation has decided to open a special fast-track NRN immigration desk at TIA so foreign Nepali investors don’t have to queue up like ordinary Nepalis just returning from four years of hard

labour in the Gulf.

“This is a major concession, we haven’t extended this courtesy to anyone else, not even to resident Nepali ex-prime ministers,” said one official.

However, in the national interest, a word of caution here. There are certain sensitive sectors like Defence, Aerospace and Breweries in which His Majesty’s Government cannot have foreigners (even if they are of Nepali origin) investing. Other strategic sectors that we want to keep away from NRN hands are instant noodles, brick kilns, cabin restaurants, packaging clinker and calling it cement and gold smuggling. These are areas in which resident Nepalis are already involved and they should be protected from competition.

But certain exceptions can be made, and the government is now set to approve NRN applications to set up the following industries:

- **White Elephant Polytechnic for Smuggling Wildlife Contraband**
‘Putting Nepal’s strategic location in trans-Himalaya trade to good use’
- **Fly By Night Airlines, Pvt. Ltd.,**
‘Fly Nepal’s First Night Vision-Equipped Domestic Airline’
- **Poodle Noodle**
‘Most-Nutritious Junk Food preferred by NRN kids’
- **Monkey Business Export-Import, Inc**
‘F-1B visas for all rhesus monkeys and their spouses at research station in Texas’



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