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20
YEARS

Lhotshampa, Rohingya

Burma's pernicious populism and a preoccupied world abandon the Rohingya



GOPAL GARTAULA



SONIA AWALE

The Rohingya tragedy should resonate much more in Nepal than elsewhere in South Asia, because its genesis is nearly identical to the tragedy of the Lhotshampa.

The main difference is one of scale, as Bhutan too carried out state-sponsored de-population of its Lhotshampa Nepali-speakers.



ON THE WAY UP
Kanak Mani Dixit

More than 100,000 were booted out under the son-of-the-soil 'Drig Lam Namzha' banner, to live as refugees for nearly two decades in Nepal before they were fortunate enough with third-country resettlement in the West.

Like the Rohingya, the Lhotshampa, too, were regarded as Bhutanese citizens until the harsh state decided to generate statelessness, with a scorched earth policy that spread fear among the targeted community. The fleeing Lhotshampa entered India, which for its own considerations facilitated the transfer of the refugees to Nepal where they were put up in camps by the UNHCR.

The bulk of the Lhotshampa were invited to the largely uninhabited southern hills of Druk

Yul by the Bhutan nobility, the settlers providing revenue to state coffers. But as the economic and strategic value of the southern hills became apparent in the modern era, and as fear of cultural inundation built up alongside the 1985 Citizenship Act and 1988 census, the Druk government activated its depopulation machine as directed by the then king, Jigme Singye Wangchuk.

In 1992, I was on the ground watching the desperate Lhotshampa arrive by the banks of Mai Khola in Jhapa from their homes in Samchi, Chirang, Geleghphug and other parts. The scale of eviction of Rohingyas is exponentially more horrendous as the fleeing mass of humanity was filmed on land and sea and by airborne drones. The tragedy is ongoing, and the number of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh is hitting the one million mark even as this is being written, which includes those here since 1992.

The Rohingyas' historical home has been the Rakhine region on Burma's west coast, and they were regarded as citizens when the country became independent in 1948, and thereafter as well. Things began to go sour following the military takeover of 1962, and the 1974 Constitution and Citizenship Act of 1982 ended up wresting citizenship from the Rohingya.

The tragedy escalated to

unbearable proportions because the Rohingya are friendless within Burma. The non-Muslim Rakhine people, the countrywide Buddhist clergy, the other nationalities of Burma, the military, bureaucracy, political class or civil society, all seem to be agreed they are 'Bengali' foreigners.

Anti-Rohingya populism within Burma is so vicious that the stand-alone leader and Nobel laureate Aung San Suu-Kyi seems incapable of resisting. Or it may be that her mindset is at one with the chauvinists, which has her ignoring calls for reversal from Desmond Tutu, the Dalai Lama, Malala Yousafzai, the UN Secretary General, as well as the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the last terming the Rohingya tragedy a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing".

Suu-Kyi, evidently in isolated existence at the capital Naypyidaw, cannot even bring herself to mouth the term 'Rohingya'. On the day she delivered her Nobel address in Oslo back in 2012, her response to the rape, arson, lynchings and mass displacement of the Rohingya was (as I wrote then in "Lady Liberty and the Ethnic Cauldron in *Himal Southasian*") 'to equivocate rather than speak directly to the human tragedy'. She took refuge in the absence of proper citizenship legislation, a 'faint-hearted response of a politician (who was) insensitive to their enforced statelessness, human rights, and the right to life and livelihood'.

The rounds of violence and the exodus to Bangladesh began in 1978. There was another bout of depopulation in 2012, and the latest and ongoing tragedy began on 25 August, following reported attacks by Rohingya militants which killed 12 Burmese border police. In exactly two months, 604,000 Rohingya have fled to Bangladesh after their houses were torched by the military, the inhabitants violated and killed. Within Burma, there are said to be another 150,000 kept in internment camps, with

international humanitarian agencies denied access and support.

The Rohingya people are looking into an abyss of statelessness, within Burma as well as in the Bangladesh refugee camps. The international reaction is muted. While the Dalai Lama has spoken on the basis of humanitarian principle, Buddhist societies by and large are silent, be they Mahayan or Theravad adherents. The West is in geopolitical confusion ever since the advent of Donald Trump in the international arena, even as crimes against humanity are committed by

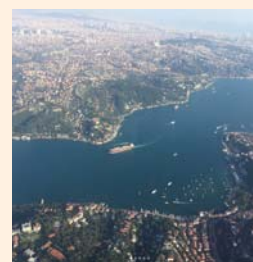
the Burmese security forces. If one were to look to India as the largest regional democracy, we have the shocking absence of empathy that has state functionaries talk brazenly of 'refoulment' (forcible return of refugees to where they are apt to face persecution).

The Lhotshampa, faced with Thimphu's rejection of repatriation, were lucky that the international geopolitical configuration made third country re-settlement available. No such luck for the ten times more numerous Rohingya. One of their 'faults' – being born Muslim. 🇲🇻

prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

Bosphorus experience

Turkish Airlines has launched the 'Istanbul Bosphorus Experience', specially designed



for its Business Class passengers who have transfer time of seven or more hours in

the Turkish capital. The program enables transfer passengers to experience the beauty and cultural facets of Istanbul and the Bosphorus before continuing to their target destination. A guide will accompany participants throughout the program.

Best cargo carrier



Qatar Airways Cargo has won the 'Overall Carrier of the Year' award in the

industry choice category at the Payload Asia Ceremony held recently in Singapore. The Doha-based company also received the

'Best Cargo Airline in Customer Services' award at the India Cargo Awards in Ahmedabad, India last week.

Festival winner

Agni Group, the authorised distributor of Mahindra vehicles in Nepal, has announced



the lucky draw winner of its Mahindra Big, Bigger,

Biggest Dasain-Tihar offer. Kathmandu's Bimala Poudel was the lucky customer, winning a Mahindra Mojo 300cc off-road motorcycle.

Selfie with AI

Oppo is set to launch its latest selfie expert in Nepal, equipped with industry-first AI technology, named 'AI beauty technology', which uses artificial intelligence to beautify selfie photos. The device, which will also feature full-screen FHD+ display and an upgraded operating system, will be for sale from mid-November, says the company.



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PHOTOS: SONIA AWALE

SONIA AWALE
in UDAYPUR

In a town where the sight of Tharu women in saris carrying earthen pots on their heads is commonplace, a woman in a red polo t-shirt and dark jeans riding noisily down the street on a 125cc Enticer raising a cloud of dust seems a bit out of place. But the people of Gaighat have got used to Najbul Khan Nilam zooming around on her two-wheeler.

On a short bike ride from Triyuga Bridge into town recently, dozens of people waved to her as she roared past. Policemen beckoned her to stop and chat: the discussion was about upcoming elections and the health needs of local women.

“A lot has improved here in the last few years: the maternal mortality rate has declined, girls are not trafficked as much anymore,” Nilam explains, shouting to the pillion rider on the back.

The 37-year-old Muslim

woman has battled gender, class and religious discrimination all her life, rescuing women victims of domestic violence, or rushing pregnant women to hospitals.

As a rebellious teenager, Nilam was thrown out of her house when she expressed her desire to study. Her brothers set fire to her books and school uniform. That is why she has worn shirts, jeans and sports shoes ever since as an expression of her freedom. She taught herself to drive a Tempo and plied the Gaighat-Jaljale route to earn a living, while attending adult literacy classes.

She set up Muldhar Mahila Sewa Kendra, which provides 24-hour help and shelter to battered women and victims of trafficking. Her motorcycle isn’t just a symbol of her independence, but serves as an ambulance and a rapid-response rescue vehicle.

But Nilam’s activism against abuse has left her ostracised by her own community as she continues to try to convince Muslim, Dalit and minority families to protect and educate their girls.



“I don’t want young girls to go through the same hardships I did. I would like them to have the support of their family. Despite my past, I’m happy that I have been able to send my younger cousins to school and be looked upon as an inspiration by the same society that once cast me out,” she says.

In the past decade, Nilam has seen the needs of women in this

rural inner Tarai district change. With social media like Facebook, many girls are now falling victim of cyber predators waiting to abuse young women or lure girls to migrate. She sees an urgent need for media literacy, especially among young rural women.

Nilam finally graduated from high school after multiple attempts, and is now an undergraduate

student of rural development and social work. “This is the happiest day of my life,” says Nilam, leaving through the question paper she attempted earlier that day (left). “I never thought I would be going to college one day. Now I feel like I can do my masters too.”

Nilam’s organisation is no longer confined to Udaypur, but is running a nationwide campaign for gender equality and inclusiveness with the slogan ‘*Asan ma mahila, bhasan ma mahila, sasan ma mahila*’ (Women in charge, women in the mainstream, and women in government). The campaign is spread over 24 districts, and has recently been trying to encourage women’s participation in elections.

“The government has to be much more serious about the involvement of women in policy-making and local governance, and we need to keep fighting for equality and equity,” she says with conviction.

“There is still a long way to go, but I know from experience that every obstacle can be overcome,” she adds. 🇳🇵

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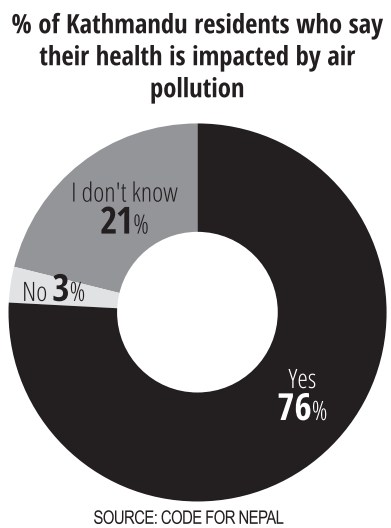
A social media survey reveals the true extent of the health impact of Kathmandu’s deteriorating air quality

AYESHA SHAKYA

With winter approaching, Kathmandu Valley’s air pollution gets worse as the inversion layer traps dust and vehicle emissions. The mountains disappear, flights are delayed and city-dwellers develop persistent coughs.

It didn’t use to be like this. Winter was the time of deep blue skies and dazzlingly clear views of the Himalayan peaks to the north. This year, Kathmandu did not even have to wait for winter for the air pollution to become hazardous thanks to a combination of smoke from crop residue burning in the Indian plains, and dust from Kathmandu’s earthquake reconstruction and never-ending road-widening project.

What is most alarming is the looming health catastrophe triggered by this perpetual pollution. Hospitals report a surge in patients



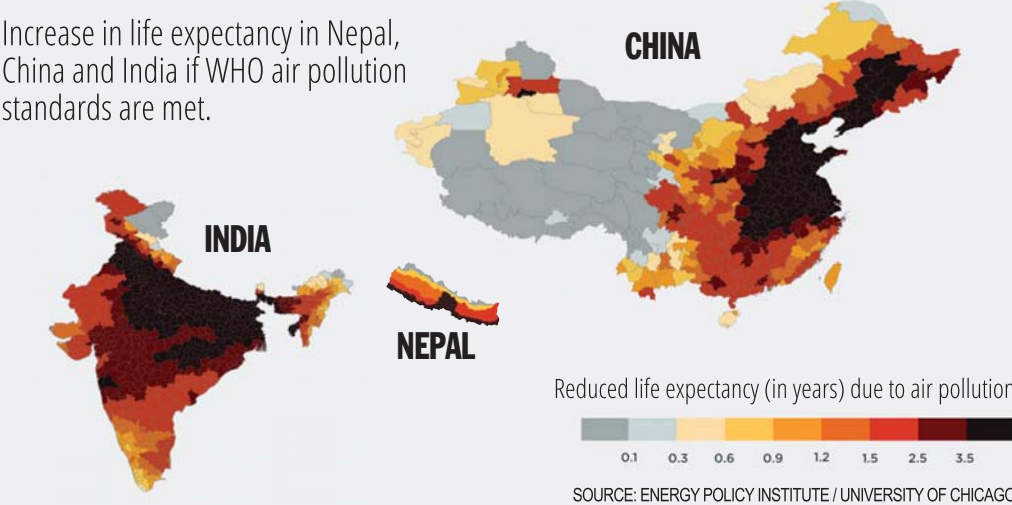
Breathing is hazardous to health

Kathmandu’s poor air quality has become so serious that with the onset of winter there is growing public outrage about its health implications.

Findings released this week by the Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago add further proof that air pollution is emerging as the world’s single largest environmental health threat – and Asian countries are most at risk.

The study has mapped air pollution data to show where it is worst. Deteriorating air quality in Kathmandu Valley due to suspended roadside dust particles, vehicle emission, brick kiln soot and transboundary pollution from India is shortening the average lifespan of people here by up to four years. Pollution levels in Kathmandu are sometimes worse than in cities in China and India.

The findings were published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* last month based on an analysis of pollution data from 154 Chinese cities from 1982-2012 compared with mortality data covering 78 million people from 2004-2012. Researchers found a strong correlation and concluded that life expectancy is reduced by about seven months and one year with every additional 10µg/m³ of particles that are 10 and 2.5 microns diameter respectively.



The results greatly strengthen the case that long-term exposure to particulate air pollution causes substantial reductions in life expectancy,” said Michael Greenstone, an author of the paper and director of the Energy Policy Institute (EPIC) at the University of Chicago.

Researchers studied China’s Huai River Policy, which has provided free coal for indoor heating during winter months for residents in cities north of the Huai River since the 1950s. They found the policy lead to an increase in cardio-respiratory diseases

that have decreased life expectancy in Beijing by 3.1 years, compared to cities to the south. The policy contributed to the increase of particulate matter concentration over time, with PM10 concentrations five times higher than the World Health Organisation (WHO) safe limit (20µg/m³).

China is now engaged in an aggressive policy to reduce air pollution. It is switching to electric vehicles and changing its main source of heating from sulfur-rich coal to gas-fired boilers and electric units. It has shut down polluting thermal powerplants near

cities. As a result, the concentration of 2.5 micron particles in Beijing and other cities has decreased, and it is expected this will now improve average lifespans.

India has 13 of the world’s 20 most-polluted cities, and despite efforts the problem appears to be getting worse every year. The crisis is compounded in winter when water vapour condenses on suspended particles leading to thick smog over the Indo-Gangetic plains, which in turn increases the burden of seasonal lung ailments.

The researchers also developed the Air Quality-life Index (AQLI), a tool that will allow people in different countries to learn how much longer they could live if the air pollution was reduced to meet WHO or national standards for smaller and more harmful PM2.5 particles. In Nepal, people in the Tarai, Kathmandu and Chitwan on average lose four years of life to pollution (*see map, left*).

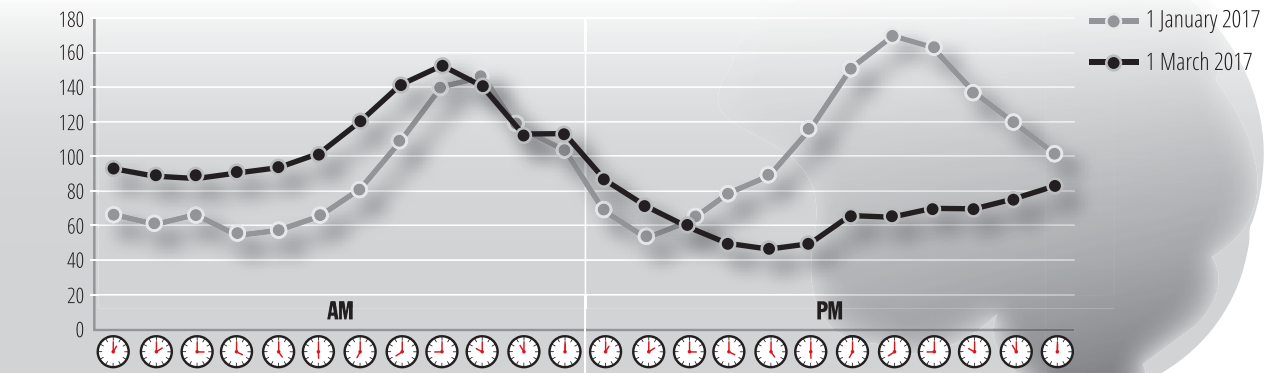
Rising PM2.5 levels have shortened lifespans of South Asians. In Bangladesh, where PM2.5 concentration is often above 60µg/m³, people could live 5.16 years longer if air quality met the WHO standard, while Pakistanis live 2.49 years less than their average lifespan because of air pollution.

In 2012 in Nepal alone, 315,230 ‘person years’ were lost to people getting sick from ambient air pollution. 🇳🇵

Sonia Awale



BIKRAM RAI



SOURCE: DRISHTI

with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, emphysema and even lung cancer.

An online survey by Code For Nepal, #BreatheFreely, sheds light on the negative consequences of breathing this toxic air. Not surprisingly, most of the responses were from Kathmandu Valley.

Of the 789 answers collected earlier this year, a staggering 76% stated that their health has been affected by the air pollution. Most cited were breathing problems, chest pain and eye infection.

'I can't walk or ride my motorbike freely. I have to cover my whole body, from head to toe, just to block out the dust. If I don't use a mask, I'll have to suffer from the ensuing tonsillitis and dust allergy,' wrote one respondent.

The situation is even more difficult for people with existing respiratory problems: 'I am an asthma patient and also have an allergy to dust and cold. So I have to think twice before I go out for a walk or even ride a scooter. Because of the pollution I have increased my meds to twice a day.'

One respondent even stated that the primary motive behind his decision to study abroad was to get away from Kathmandu's worsening pollution. Others noted that it is not only physical health that is impacted: 'The pollution increases my stress level and I become irritated very easily when travelling between home and work.'

Nearly 64% of respondents stated that they used masks on a daily basis. While air pollution is a round-the-clock problem, most said the period between 12-4pm was when the air quality was worst, probably because that is when they were out and about. A survey by the group, Drishti, (*above*)

showed daily peaks in PM2.5 (the most harmful particles less than 2.5 microns in diameter) in the mornings and evenings in winter at 10 measurement stations in Kathmandu Valley.

Drishti's data also show that PM2.5 levels were highest from January to March 2016, reinforcing how inversion during winter months creates a dust-bowl effect, increasing the concentration of pollutants. The levels of fine particles were significantly higher between 8-11am.

On 1 January 2017, PM 2.5 levels saw a high of 170.28µg/m³, much higher than the universally-accepted level of 15µg/m³. Between 7am-11am, PM 2.5 stayed consistently above 104µg/m³.

With 10% more vehicles on the roads than last year, pollution will be even worse this winter.

One respondent pointed out: 'There isn't a single hour when Kathmandu air is clean, except while it's raining.' 🇳🇵

nepalitimes.com

See more tables and interactive graphics online.

DIRTY WINTER



With the early onset of winter, Kathmandu's air pollution is already getting worse due to vehicular emission, dust from earthquake reconstruction, endless road widening as well as transboundary pollution from India.

nepalitimes.com

POLLUTION SOLUTION

People from Kathmandu are used to complaining, but they also have solutions to the pollution crisis. The Code for Nepal online survey elicited suggestions, including the ones below:

- Minimise vehicle emissions. (odd/even number-plated alternate days for petroleum engines)
- Minimise re-suspension of roadside dust. (proper collection and disposal of dust generated)
- Avoid partial combustion and open burning. (Enforce the polluters-pay principle)

- Complete all the infrastructure development projects happening in Kathmandu asap (Melamchi project, road expansion, etc).
- Motivate citizens to use public transport.

Most of the pollution comes from dust due to the ongoing road expansion, old vehicles and, recently, from digging roads for Melamchi. The government needs to do the following:

- Ban old vehicles (15 years and above)
- Black top roads as soon as possible
- Bring in policies so that road expansion, Melamchi are finished

Ban generators, severe punishment for garbage burners, phase out petrol/diesel vehicles, subsidise electric vehicles, make the city cycle and pedestrian friendly

- Better management of road construction, contractor should be severely fined for mismanaging the site and causing health hazards
- Zero tolerance of polluting vehicles with emission checks.
- A mass awareness campaign through media and ground level volunteers highlighting health hazards.

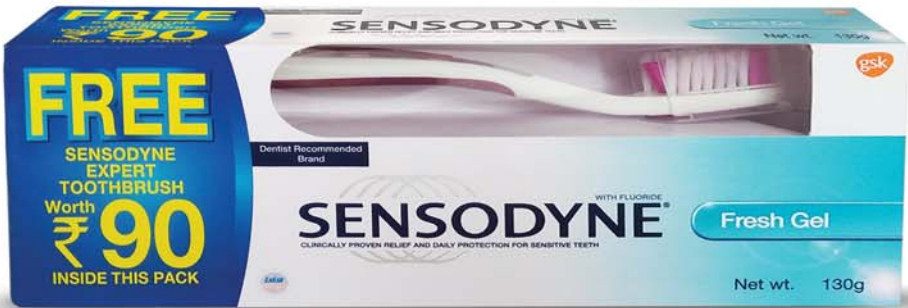
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EVENTS

Film Southasia,

Save the date to watch your favourite films from the list of 63. SAARC country entries include 12 documentaries of dissent and six student entries.
2-5 November, Yala Maya Kendra, Patan,
<http://www.filmsouthasia.org>,
(01) 5552141, 9841908528



The True Stories Mural,

An art exhibition that seeks to highlight the stories of women and child victims whose lives have been uprooted. Includes an exhibition of murals on the themes of objectification, mythology, exploitation and the empowerment of women.
23-29 October, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited,
Entry free, 9818239744, sgamatya@gmail.com

Rock climbing,

Gauge your own strength by trying your hand (and feet) at rock climbing on the Astrek Climbing Wall. The package includes lunch, bottled water and climbing and safety gear. No previous experience required.
Every Saturday, 8am-5pm, Rs5,500 per person
(01) 4419265, 9841313561
www.facebook.com/astrek.climbing



Korean Film Fest,

Watch your favourite Korean movie at the 13th Korean Film Festival. Collect tickets from Labim Mall before seats are gone.
26-28 October, QFX Cinema, Labim Mall
Free entry, (01) 5529924,
<http://www.qfxcinemas.com/>

Bodhi Chhaya,

Experience this artistic and cultural extravaganza combining theatre, dance and music, written and directed by Kavita Srinivasan.
Daily, 6pm onwards, Rastriya Nach Ghar



Saxophone workshop,

Learn to play the saxophone with talented teacher Mathias Hagen from Norway.
27 October, 5:30-6:30pm,
Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory
(01) 5013554, 9813556945, info@katjazz.com.np

Tradition subverted,

An exhibition that explores self-identity and gender identification while engaging viewers in a dialogue about urbanisation and ecology, by artists Erina Tamrakar and Asha Dangol.
13 October-3 December, 11am- 10:30pm, Yala Mandala, Kwalkhu Road, Lalitpur, (01) 5536690

Cinemagraphs,

Learn to create cinemagraphs with Bangladeshi fine art photographer Ashraful Arefin. The workshop is an opportunity to learn to build concepts, shoot and record footage, and other commercial uses of living photographs.
28-29 October, 10am-1pm, KITHUB, Kupondole, Rs800, 9860041091

MUSIC



Songs of the Himalayas,

Don't miss this musical treat featuring the Singing Nun, Ani Choying Drolma, and Bollywood music director Shantanu Moitra.
19 November, 6pm, Rastriya Naach Ghar, Kantipath, Rs10,000 (includes dinner and meet and greet with artists), Rs5,000, Rs3,000 and Rs2,000 (Balcony), 9801141261

Diwas Gurung,

Book your seats for a musical evening with your very own Diwas Gurung, featuring Suncha, Avaya and Kismat from Albatross. Seats are limited.
27 October, RS MOTO, Gairidhara, Rs 500, 9865135937

Classical concert,

A group of talented classical artists will perform as part of the Gharana Musical Festival 2017, which runs until 4 November in selected venues.
1 November, 5:30 onwards, Around the corner, Bansbari, Rs700, Rs350 (students), 9861631197



Saturday Night Live,

Make your weekend exciting with selected food and beverage, and a live musical performance by The Octave band.
28 October, 7-10pm, Ai-La Lounge Restaurant, Kumaripati, Lalitpur, 9801018681

OUR PICK



Opens in Kathmandu on 26 October

In this quintessential film noir from 1947 that set the standard for the genre, the past catches up with a former private investigator, now running a small-town gas station, forcing him to return to the world of danger and double-crossing. Robert Mitchum, Jane Greer and Kirk Douglas star in this dark, complicated story featuring a classic femme fatale, based on 1946 novel *Build My Gallows High*, by Daniel Mainwaring.

DINING



Bubbly brunch,

Book your seats and enjoy Saturday brunch with friends and family for only Rs1500 per person (net). The amazing shawarma and pasta won't let you down. Every Saturday, 11am to 3pm, Shambala Garden and Club Sundhara, Shangri-La Hotel

Saigon Pho,

Spacious interior with authentic Vietnamese dishes.
Lazimpat, (01) 4443330



Creole cuisine,

For exotic and tantalising dishes from New Orleans, Italy, Spain, Africa, Germany, the Caribbean and Portugal
Rs2,000 per person
27 October-5 November, 6:30-10pm, The Cafe, Hyatt Hotel, (01) 5171234

Capital Grill Restaurant & Bar,

Tantalise your taste buds with the best thakali khana set, known as Jimbu Thakali, in town.
Tangal, (01) 4437674

Café Jireh,

For a peaceful evening and the best firewood pizza.
Bhaisipati, (01) 5592102

Little Italy,

Turn vegetarian at this Italian food chain and don't forget to end your meal with the chef's special chocolate bomb.
Kamaladi Road, (01) 4233577, 4233578, 9801195000

GETAWAY



Club Himalaya,

For amazing mountain views and refreshing weekend escapades, special packages available.
Nagarkot, 4410432

The Last Resort,

Embrace nature and test your limits with canyoning, hiking, rock climbing, rafting, mountain biking and bungee jumping.
Bhatekosi, Sindhupalchok, (01) 4700525/1247



Hotel Mystic Mountain,

Plan a weekend trip to this newly-opened exquisite resort located in the forest of Nagarkot hill.
Nagarkot, (01) 4426646

Chhaimale Resort,

Enjoy the beauty of nature and a peaceful weekend. Perfect for BBQs, picnics and family hangouts.
Dakshinkali, (01) 4628121, 9851181409



Thamel Eco Resort

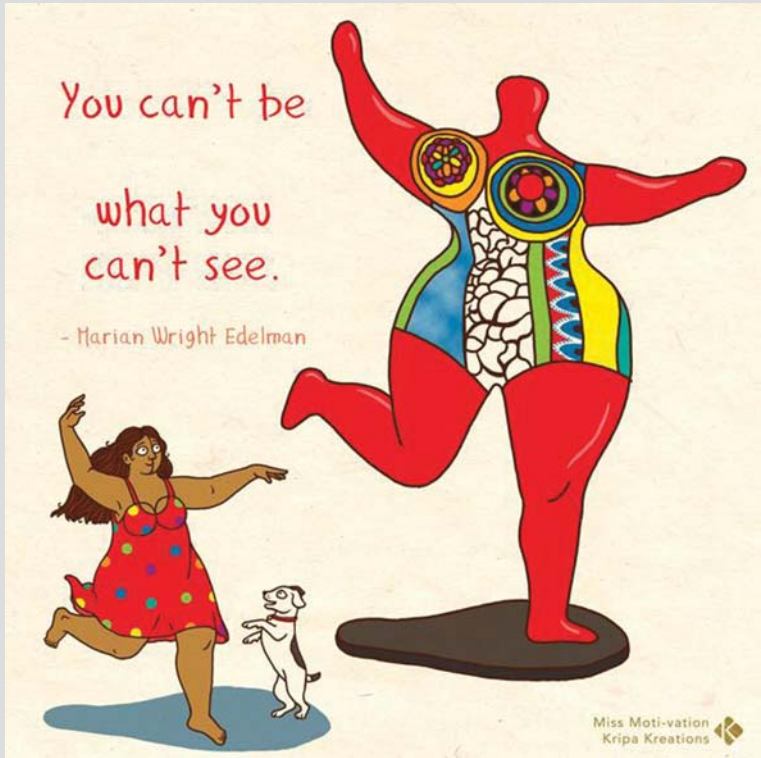
For a relaxed weekend, book a room with yoga, meditation and spa at this eco-friendly resort.
Thamel, Chibahal Club, (01) 4257505

Dwarika's Hotel,

A little slice of paradise hidden in the middle of the city. Start the day off with yoga classes in this grand heritage hotel.
Battispatali, Kathmandu, (01) 4470770

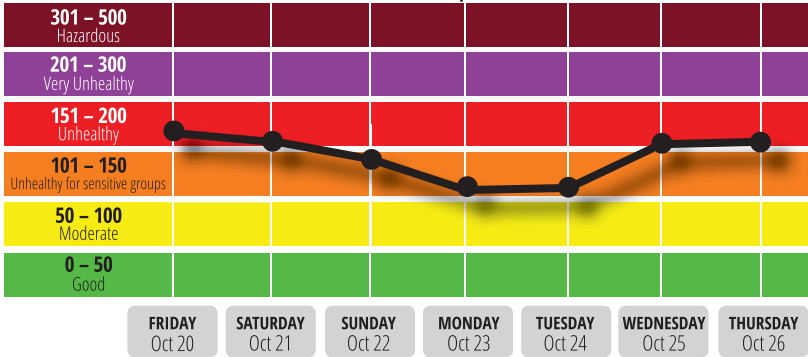
MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, October 20-26



Starting this issue, *Nepali Times* and the US Embassy in Nepal are collaborating on this weekly graph of air pollution in Kathmandu based on measurements from the monitoring stations at Maharajganj and Phora Darbar in order for readers to make informed health-related decisions. The Air Quality Index values in the graph represent the concentrations of small, airborne particulate matter of 2.5 microns and less which are the most harmful to health. Higher AQI values indicate higher air pollution levels and greater health risks. For example, this week the concentration of fine particulates was consistently above 100, indicating the onset of winter inversion and greater vehicular emission after the holidays in Kathmandu Valley.
<https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>

Modinomics falters

Are the Indian Prime Minister's economic reforms on track or too slow? Find out in this preview of the author's new book.

Elected in 2014 on a platform of economic reform, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's reform agenda is being hotly debated three years on. Business publications are not too bullish.



GUEST COLUMN
Pradumna B Rana

The Economist ran a cover story recently arguing that Modi is not really a reformer and lamented the missed opportunity to harness the low price of oil, an important import. The *Financial Times* argued that the economic boom of the past two years is now wobbly, with the main reason being India's serious structural problems.

Government officials disagree. Amit Shah, the president of the ruling BJP, said recently: "(We) have completely transformed the thought process of the people and have been successful in creating brand India." Finance Minister Arun Jaitley claimed: "No government in India has reformed as much as this one."

Who is right? If one's focus is on macroeconomic reforms then Modi deserves credit. His 'Make in India' campaign, together with Skills India, Digital India and Smart Cities campaigns, have helped attract record foreign direct investment (albeit from a low base) despite there being many hindrances to doing business in India. The country ranks 130 among 189 countries in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Indicator.

Modi was also instrumental in pushing a national biometric system (known as Aadhar), which has made it easier to dole out subsidies directly to the needy, bypassing intermediaries who in the past pilfered up to three-quarters of the amount.

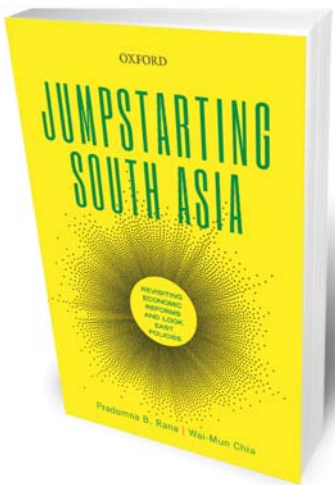
The Prime Minister's most talked-about, and boldest reform, was the surprise demonetisation of large-value bank notes in November 2016. However, recent evidence suggests that the costs (lower economic growth) have outweighed the benefits (digitalisation and control of "black money" and corruption).

The introduction of the Goods and Services tax (GST) had been

under discussion for several years, but it was Modi who pushed it through in July. In principle, the GST is an excellent idea because state taxes hindered the free movement of goods and services, fragmented markets, and raised the cost of doing business. The compromises and complexity of the system have, however, led some analysts to reduce projected growth estimates to only 0.4 per cent.

Macroeconomic sectoral and second generation reforms in governance had underpinned Modi's campaign pledge of 'Minimum Government, Maximum Governance'. During his visit to the US in June, Modi boasted that 7,000 such reforms had been initiated. This was an exaggeration.

The much-discussed privatisation of state-owned enterprises has been slow. Bad debts of banks need to be worked out. The government has also lagged in the provision of basic



Jumpstarting South Asia: Revisiting Economic Reforms and Look East Policies

Pradumna B Rana and Wai-Mun Chia
Oxford University Press (India), 2017
Hardcover, 251 pages

services to the private sector, such as an efficient and clean public administration system, education, healthcare and a functioning market for land and labour.

A new bankruptcy law introduced in May 2016 is an area where some action has occurred, but even this law cannot be fully effective until the judicial system is reformed. There is a huge backlog of pending cases: 24 million, nearly 10% of which have dragged on for over a decade.

Aside from strengthening the Prime Minister's Office, Modi has done little to reform the public administration and the civil service system. The World Bank's governance indicators show India ranking far behind many East Asian countries in government effectiveness, control of corruption, rule of law and regulatory quality.

Educational standards are poor and the country lacks a capable and healthy workforce. Much education

and healthcare is provided by the private sector because of the poor quality of public services.

In many Indian states, firms with more than 100 workers must seek government approval to hire and fire workers. As a result, many resort to contract workers or simply choose to forego economies of scale by remaining small. During Modi's first year in office, states such as Rajasthan, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh had sought to partially liberalise their labour markets. But it now looks like these efforts have stopped.

Slow progress in microeconomic reforms means that the government has not been successful in creating an enabling environment for the private sector, and investment could dip further. The economy grew by only 5.7% in the quarter ending 30 June, the lowest since 2014. As in the past, an inefficient public sector will continue to be all-pervasive in the Indian economy. 🇮🇳

Pradumna B Rana is Associate Professor at the S Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. This article is based on his co-authored book, *Jumpstarting South Asia: Revisiting Economic Reforms and Look East Policies*, which will be launched in Kathmandu on 3 November.

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Denis Villeneuve is possibly the only director working today who could take on the enormously nerve-racking task of making a sequel to the most important science fiction film of all time: the original *Blade Runner* from 1982. Made by the intrepid, visionary Ridley Scott and featuring a young Harrison Ford as the titular “blade runner,” the first film is a noirish meditation on the moral quandaries involved in hunting down humanoidroque replicants made to simulate humans.

In his futuristic vision for the first film (set in 2019), Scott created an extraordinary, now iconic amalgam of cultures, styles, and aesthetics that combine to show a future that is a simulacrum of our own world – but all smushed together emulating the essence of postmodernism: with many leveled domains on top of each other, sleek art deco buildings housing huge corporations, and a darkness that can come from the

dystopia that is inevitable when humans start creating AI that think and feel but are created as slaves.

Blade Runner 2049 continues the story of the replicants’ struggle to realise their own humanity even as the people around them adjust their own to suit this new evolution: there is loathing, but also wonder and fear, a natural but not original trope when encountering an “other” so closely related to us and yet so different.

The plot of the first film weighs heavily on its sequel, and while Ryan Gosling plays another memorable part as “K,” a blade runner who is a replicant himself, there is little in this new film that truly breaks ground. Replicants are still going rogue, and the mantle of generating ever more human-like slaves has been taken on by Niander Wallace (Jared Leto) and his nefarious corporation.

K plods along on his rather sad existence as a sub-citizen, treated like insects by his employers while he must ruthlessly kill his own

kind and return day after day for the now infamous but slightly altered Voigt-Kampff test that ensures his feelings have not evolved beyond the baseline – of relative emotionlessness.

Things spin out of control when it is discovered that certain replicants may be able to procreate. To tell you anything further would ensure that an already fairly clichéd plotline would then be just too tedious to sit through – for this is a long, self-indulgent script by Hampton Fancher, who also wrote the perhaps more flawed but far more stimulating original.

The problem with *Blade Runner 2049* is essentially the problem of Denis Villeneuve – a director who is extremely talented at creating gravitas without an iota of humour to lighten his ongoing love affair with the themes of love, death and procreation.

While this is a good film it is not a great one, neither visually nor in terms of plot or introduction of new character. Even the entrance of Harrison Ford in the latter half of the film cannot really lighten its self-involved grandeur and while the film is supposedly visually stunning it is not even close to Villeneuve’s other, far better sci-fi film *Arrival* (2016) which while heavy, is truly beautiful. 🇳🇵



Watch trailer online

nepalimes.com

HAPPENINGS



RSS

HAIL TO THE CHIEF: US Ambassador to Nepal Alaina B. Teplitz called on Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba at his residence on Tuesday.



RSS

KNOW THE RULES: Election officer Basanta Raj Poudel briefs candidates of Gorkha-1, Narayan Kaji Shrestha (*far left*) of the Maoist (Centre) party and Baburam Bhattari of Naya Shakti (*far right*) in Gorkha on Monday on the election code of conduct.



RSS

FOURTH CEO IN TWO YEARS: The newly-appointed chief of the National Reconstruction Authority, Yuvaraj Bhusal, assumes office in Kathmandu on Tuesday.



RSS

POLICE SCHOOL: Locals in Khotang giving a written exam for temporary police positions on Wednesday. Some 75,000 temps are being hired for provincial and parliamentary elections to be held on 26 November and 7 December.



SONIAAWALE

SELFIE LAKHEY: A woman poses for a selfie with Lakhe masked dancer during this week's Jyapu Museum festival in Patan on Wednesday.

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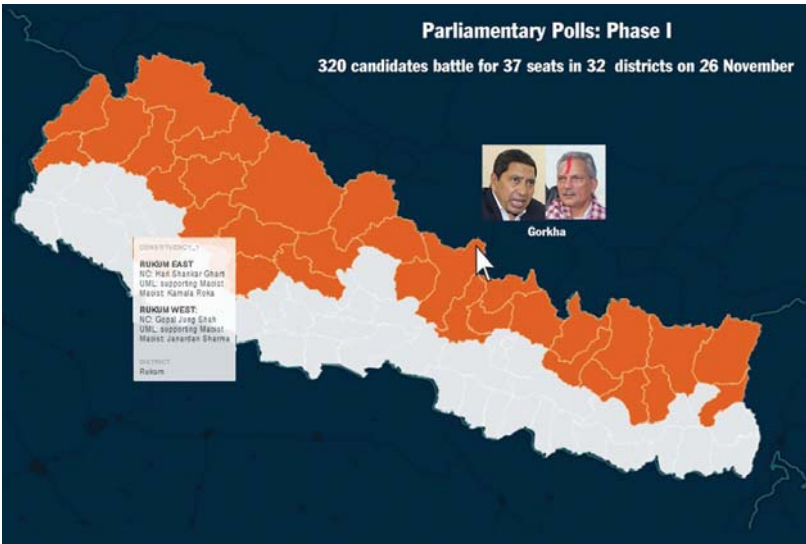
Editorial in *Kantipur*, 25 October

कान्तिपुर

The 2015 Constitution has guaranteed 33% of seats in the federal Parliament and provincial councils for women, but it does not specify how many of them should be elected directly. So political parties intend to fulfil this constitutional requirement by nominating women mainly under quotas for proportional representation (PR) seats, excluding them from a fair chance to contest elections and be endorsed by the people. Parties seem to think that women cannot contest and win elections, which is an insult to women.

Political parties have fielded 802 candidates for the first phase of parliamentary and provincial elections on 26 November. Of them, only 42 (roughly 5%) are women. For the 37 parliamentary seats up for grabs, the NC and the Maoist (Centre) have fielded just 2 and 1 women candidates respectively. The UML has not fielded a single woman candidate. For the 74 provincial council seats, the Maoist (Centre) has

Insult to women



fielded 3 women. The NC and the UML have fielded 2 women each.

It has been a decade since Nepal constitutionally designated one-third of seats for women. But it seems that political parties are still stuck to the Constitution of 1990, which stipulated that women had to have 5% of seats.

If political parties try to justify the disappointingly low number of female candidates, it will be just a

lame excuse. If they argue that there are no competent women, it only reveals that they have failed to empower their women leaders/cadre. Political parties must make amends for this mistake by fielding more women candidates in the second phase of polls on 7 December. It is not a matter of being kind to women, but of giving them what they deserve.

Editorial in *Naya Patrika*, 25 October

नयाँ पत्रिका

The disappointing number of women candidates in the first phase of parliamentary and provincial elections raises a question: what is the status of women in Nepali politics?

Despite fielding only 5% women candidates, political parties can still fulfil the constitutional requirement of reserving 33% of seats for women in both the federal Parliament and provincial councils. For this, they have to nominate more women under proportional representation quotas. This will send a message to women that it is not their right, but they owe their representation to the kindness of the menfolk.

This situation shows how deeply entrenched patriarchy is in Nepal politics. During the Maoist war, many women challenged this patriarchy by standing shoulder to shoulder with male guerrillas. In the wake of the war and the Democracy Movement 2006, the first constituent assembly guaranteed 33% of seats for women. A significant number of women fought and won elections. As the battle for equality weakened, the second CA did not turn out to be as inclusive.

The 2015 Constitution requires political parties to field women to

the post of either head or deputy head of local councils. The parties could not blatantly violate this provision, but they distorted it, by choosing women mostly as deputy chiefs. This time, they have further marginalised women, disregarding the spirit of the Constitution and fuelling social discord.

Editorial in *Nagarik*, 25 October

नागरिक

One of the reasons Nepal's new Constitution is described as progressive is its emphasis on women's representation. But political parties have found it difficult to fulfil the constitutional requirement that women hold one-third of seats.

The UML has not fielded a single woman candidate for Parliament. The NC and the Maoist (Centre) have fielded two women each. If they repeat this mistake in the second phase of elections on 7 December, it will send the wrong message: elections are for male politicians only, women can make do with proportional representation (PR) seats.

It is not true that political parties lack competent women leaders/cadre, but the parties have no faith in their abilities. This state of affairs utterly disregards the Constitution's inclusive provisions.

No stopping elections

Naya Patrika, 26 November

नयाँ पत्रिका

After the Supreme Court (SC) made it clear that the Election Commission (EC) must print two separate ballot papers for parliamentary and provincial elections under the first past the post (FPTP) system, there is speculation that these elections, scheduled for 26 November and 7 December will be postponed, and the country will face a constitutional crisis after 21 January 2018 – the constitutional deadline to elect a new parliament and provincial councils.

But the EC cannot use the SC ruling as an excuse to postpone elections. The commission was already planning to print ballot papers for the FPTP polls only after 27 October. So it still has time to re-design those papers, without wasting much time and resources.



A sample ballot paper for FPTP polls

Even if re-designing ballot papers takes time, it should not be a problem because the first phase of polls will take place only in 37 of the total 165 constituencies. The balance of ballot papers can be printed later. The EC has also argued that it may need more ballot boxes if it is to print separate ballot papers. But this is another lame excuse. If ballot papers are printed separately, their sizes will be reduced by half. So whether ballot papers are separate or not, it will not require more room in the ballot box. If two different colours are used for two separate ballot papers, it will be easier for enumerators to count the votes.

The EC has already printed two separate ballot papers for the proportional representation (PR) vote, but that is not a cause of concern for the SC. The PR polls will go smoothly. So should the FPTP polls.

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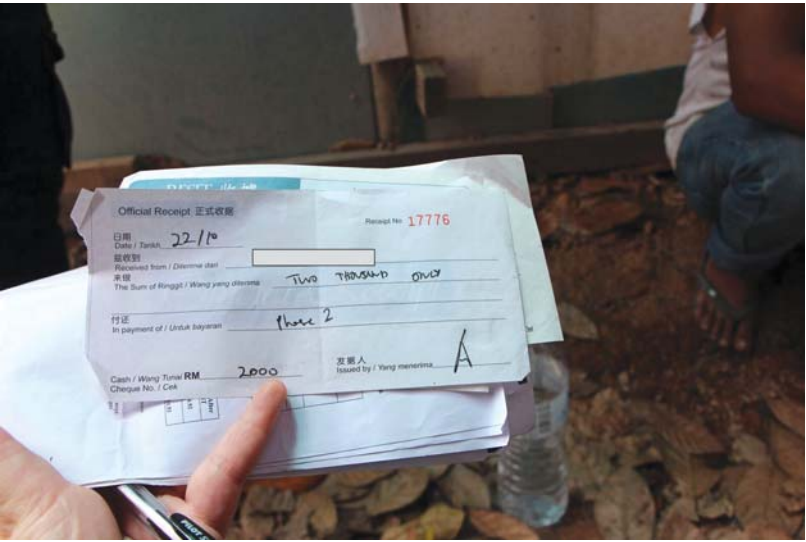
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PAYING THE PRICE: This undocumented worker paid a few thousand Malaysian ringgit to agents to legalise his status but got duped (*above, top*). Failed migrants from Dubai await justice in Kathmandu (*above, right*). Migrants crammed into an apartment in Dubai where space was so tight that anyone who got up to go to the bathroom or for a walk would lose his spot (*above*).



Migrant workers learn to face exploitation and abuse from recruiters at home and abroad

UPASANA KHADKA

Ram was sent to Malaysia by an agent from his village in Dhanusa, and is currently in Kathmandu en route to Dubai. When asked if he used the same agent for Dubai as he did for Malaysia, he replied: “Despite arranging a good job for me in Malaysia, I did not trust him because his involvement in unsatisfactory migration cases while I was away had marred his reputation. So I changed my agent.”

Ramesh, a Qatar returnee also from Dhanusa, says migrant workers like him often exchange information they have on recruiters. “We can contact current migrants easily at destination countries through Facebook Messenger and IMO to get up-to-date information. We ask about the kind of job and the salary that the agent has arranged for them before making a decision,” he explains. Tarai-based migrants prefer agents from their own community to protect them from cheating. Still, Jugnath from Siraha knows of a recruiter named Ramesh who ran away with workers’ advances. He is now in Delhi and runs a momo shop. “He has not dared to come back even when his wife died two years ago,” Jugnath says. While cheating by agents remains common, migrants are being more careful in their selection. Hira from Dhanusa says he investigates the assets of agents to gauge whether they are trustworthy. He says: “Agents with land and houses are tied down and cannot run away and it could

signal their ability to return our recruitment costs if our migration attempt fails.” International migration offers middlemen both in Nepal and abroad myriad opportunities to cheat prospective workers. Given the information asymmetry between an employer in Malaysia or the Gulf and an aspiring migrant, there are many stories of contract substitution upon arrival at the destination with less favourable terms of employment and rent-seeking by agents. However, migrants and even repeat migrants, knowingly continue to rely on middlemen despite the risks and the higher costs. Information regarding job demand is only one of the services provided by middlemen, and there is a love-hate relationship between migrants and their agents. In the Tarai district of Siraha, greater accessibility, familiarity and proximity to agents than with the Kathmandu-based manpower companies makes local recruiters a more convenient option despite their gouging.



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middlemen



UPASANA KHADKA

While agents continue to play a prominent role in migration, conversation with migrants reveal that unlike in the past, when agents were relied upon blindly, migrants have become more careful selecting agents these days. Trust and reputation, asset ownership and demonstration effect emerged as key considerations.

Trust is key, which is either built through personal relationships with the agent or through referrals of trusted community members. However, trust in an agent is not permanent and migrants update their beliefs about them constantly based on recent migration cases.

In addition, migrants also look for other clues to gauge an agents' credibility based on how well their clients have done while abroad. The demonstration effect of factors like property and the kind of schools a current migrant's children go to can be important clues.

But labour recruiter Hari says such evidence can be misleading. "Migrant workers just see the money and not the hard work and overtime under challenging circumstances put in to earn that much," he says. "This can wrongly shape their expectations about the foreign dream because most migrants tend to downplay the difficulties faced abroad."

Manpower companies in the capital subcontract their work to local agents because it is not physically possible to follow up the process with each worker. But they are also outsourcing the need to deal with complaints.

"When manpower companies rely on us, they know that migrants or their families will contact us if things don't go as promised," says Rati from Ilam, who started working as an agent after successfully sending his son abroad. "It is our phones that ring incessantly when migrants or their families are unhappy."

A tainted reputation can be irreparable in the community and local agents often find themselves stuck between migrants and manpower companies. But there are also Nepali agents working in host countries supplying workers to big recruiting agencies.

"I got paid a commission

for each worker I brought to my security guard supply company, and given that many migrants are not happy with their jobs, it is not difficult to attract workers," says a Kuala Lumpur-based Nepali agent named Hari.

The role of agents also increased significantly in Malaysia when it started sending back undocumented migrants on special travel passes. While the process officially costs \$360, migrants end up paying twice as much since agents know how to grease the wheel.

"Of course we would prefer to get the paperwork done ourselves, but given that they made the process easier for us at a markup, we rely on them," shrugs Tirtha, a recent returnee from Malaysia, who worked as an undocumented security guard.

Migrants choose foreign-based agents on the basis of trust and referral by social networks, but still get duped. They don't have the same level of accountability that they expect from Nepal-based agents from their own communities. Unanswered phone calls and visiting cards with fake office names are the norm.

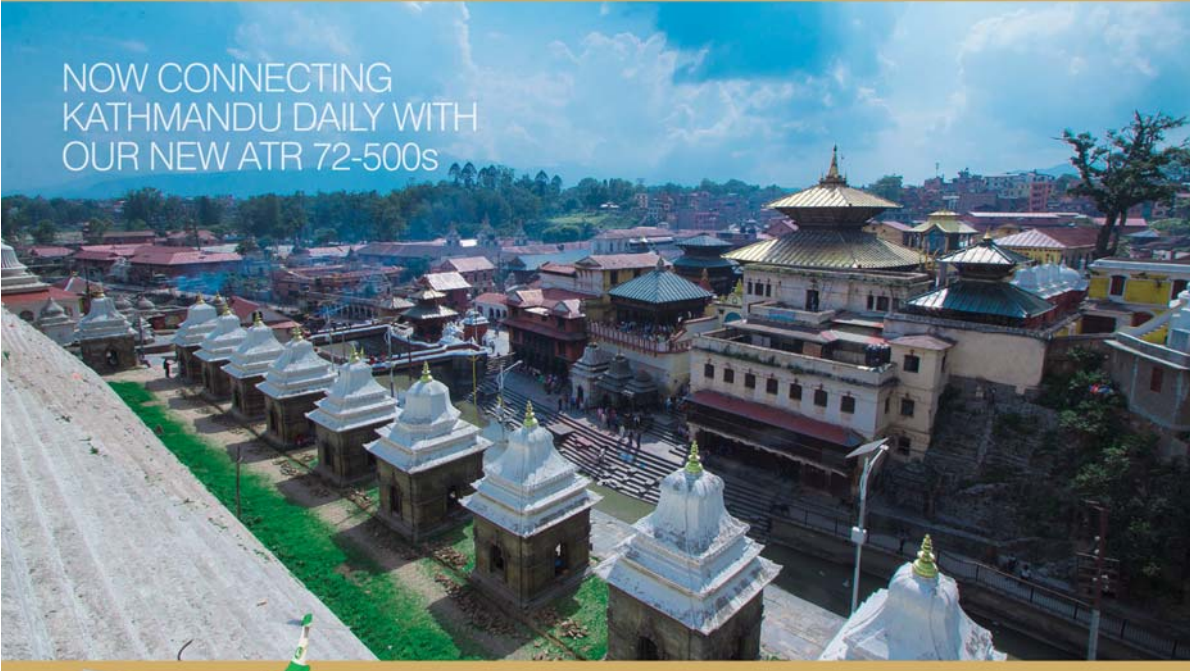
Jana, an undocumented worker in Malaysia, was duped by an agent who charged him to legalise his status. "Even though I have the receipt, there is nothing I can do with it because of my undocumented status," he says.

Fourteen Nepalis were recently deported from Dubai after being sent by agents on visit visas instead of worker visas, on the pretext that it was a quicker way to go abroad. The agents paid Rs28,000 per migrant to Kathmandu airport staff to let their clients pass through.

They were promised that a Dubai-based agent named Prem would get them jobs as lifeguards. One of them, Padma, recalls his sinking feeling when he saw a large number of flipflops outside Prem's Dubai apartment, where there were 22 other workers crammed into a small room for months. Instead of finding them jobs, the agent started abusing them verbally and physically, and they returned when their visitor visas expired. The 14 were cheated by agents in both Kathmandu and Dubai, and now await justice. 🇳🇵



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SongsOfTheHimalayas

All my troubles seem far away

I know many of you are worried about the state of the country. The garbage piling up on the streets bothers you, there is doubt even at this late stage whether or not there will be elections, and if so, what proportion of candidates will be convicted serial killers, and then for those of us who are adherents of quantum mechanics, there is always the overarching uncertainty about the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle that gives us sleepless nights.

In a futile effort to deal with the mental tension many of you have tried reducing your caffeine intake, gone on 15-day Vipassana retreats, had an acupuncture performed on your cerebral cortex, and some of you have even darted yourselves with tranquiliser guns meant to be used to translocate Asiatic One-horn Rhinoceri.

there God? If so, is it a he, she, or it? Is there life after death?

Asteroid Hit:
Last week, a spinning rock the size of Labim Mall whizzed past our Home Planet. There are a couple of million other near-Earth asteroids out there just waiting for the opportune moment to drop in on us unannounced.

Geologists reckon 90% of the species on Earth, including the dinosaurs, were wiped out in a mass extinction after a meteoroid strike 65 million years ago. It is likely to happen again.

Brood twice a day, while emptying your bowels, over the likelihood of the Earth being hit by a haemorrhoid, and nothing scary about Nepal's politics will ever spook you again.



Which is why, in the interest of sanity, it may be advisable to take your mind off mundane day-to-day worries about politics, pollution and potholes, and fret about much more frightening things. Thinking about some of these impending global catastrophes will make all your current troubles seem far away, and petty everyday concerns that presently loom large in our lives will pale into insignificance.

So, ready? To take your mind off the Supremo Court restoring the head of Nepal Oil Corruption, let us plunge right in to list the even scarier stuff you should really be agonising about:

Are We Alone?
Are we alone in our Milky Way Galaxy? Is there intelligent life on other planets and if so, do they have higher IQs than Donald Trump? Are there parallel universes and if so, how many? Is

Nuclear Winter:
Atomic scientists have just adjusted the Doomsday Clock because the likelihood of all-out thermonuclear war has increased with the ongoing contest between Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un about which one has more sinister-looking hair on his warhead. It is not enough to destroy the world only once, we have arsenals to obliterate it many times over. Think about that, and relax.

Global Climate Change:
When you're down and troubled about the state of Nepal, turn your attention to melting polar ice caps, Iceland turning into Greenland, the Maldives becoming an Underwater Republic, Khumbu Waterfall replacing the Khumbu Icefall.

See? Didn't I tell you you'd feel much better?



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