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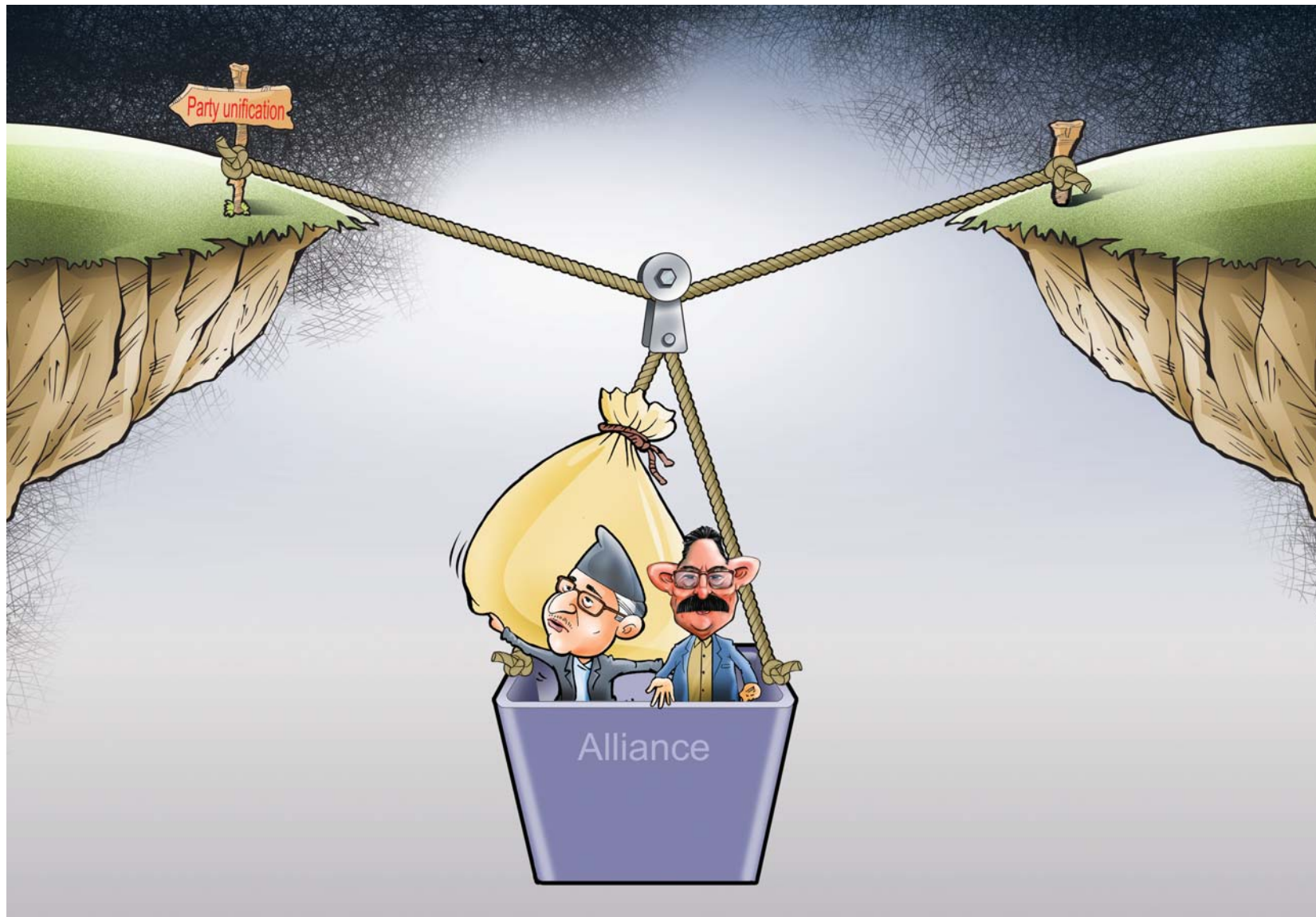
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BHANU BHATTARAI

Game of thrones

The louder the clarification, the deeper the speculation. This appears to describe Maoist Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal's statement that he will not form the new government outside his party's alliance with the UML.

After some NC leaders publicly backed the Maoist supremo as the next PM, Dahal clarified that the people have endorsed left unity and it would be sacrilege to violate it even if he benefitted personally. But NC leaders have interpreted Dahal's statement as a message to UML Chair KP Oli: I will stay within the alliance only if I am made the PM, or at least the unified party's Chair.

Maoist spokesperson Pambha Bhusal told *Nepali Times* that Dahal is not toying with the idea of leading the next government with the backing of the NC and Madhesi parties, but added: "Our party

Chair must be given one of the two executive posts. That's the deal between him and Oli."

Oli, widely viewed as the next PM, has neither confirmed nor denied the deal. He kept mum even after UML General Secretary Ishwor Pokhrel proposed him not just as the PM but also the chair of the unified party. After winning a near-majority, the UML looks confident that it can rule Nepal even without the Maoists.

This has made Dahal insecure, and he is bargaining to secure 50% of seats for Maoists in the unified party. The UML, given its strength, is unlikely to accept that demand. This has given the NC a chance to drive a wedge between the two communist parties.

Mahendra Yadav, Minister for Drinking Water and Sanitation, was one of the first NC leaders to propose Dahal as the new PM. "Given his commitment to

addressing Madhesi grievances by amending the Constitution, Dahal is best suited to be the next PM," he told us. "If Oli becomes the PM, he will create a divide between the hills and Madhes, and the country will plunge into another cycle of conflict."

Yadav claims that Dahal has not rejected the NC's offer. "He is just using it to strike a better deal with the UML," he says. "If the UML does not show flexibility, Dahal will do what he has done in the past: ditch the UML to partner with the NC."

Although technical issues like choosing temporary headquarters of provinces, appointing the Heads of State and electing the Upper House seem to be delaying the transfer of power, the game of thrones playing out after the parliamentary polls is what is actually causing difficulties in the changing of guard.

Om Astha Rai

buzz

FASHIONISTA

Stylists who made it big on social media open stores to woo more customers

BY ZIYU LIN

PAGE 8-9

SEPARATED AT BIRTH

Cartoonists in the Nepali media have had a field day ridiculing and casting doubt that the promised unification of the UML and Maoists will actually occur.

PAGE 13

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GOING PLACES TOGETHER

28.6%

The UML swept the local elections in mid-2017, and as a member of the Left Alliance went on to win a near-landslide in parliamentary and provincial elections last month. Voters showed they were attracted by the Alliance’s catchy slogan of ‘prosperity with stability’.

We can’t comment about stability because the *dramatis personae* of Nepal’s never-ending transition are the same. In the month after elections, they have shown no real change in their modus operandi.

But we can hold out some hope on the prosperity front. Well, maybe not wealth creation as such, but certainly in reducing overall poverty. As the result of the latest wave of the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) survey conducted by the National Planning Commission in 2014 shows, Nepal has seen the incidence and intensity of poverty fall by more than half – from 59.3% in 2006 to 28.6% in 2014 (*see Guest Editorial below*).

The figure of 28.6% is slightly higher than the national rate for income poverty of 23.8%. The reason for this is that MPI takes into account a diverse range of parameters to measure deprivation: it goes beyond just income figures to factor in nutrition, education, child and maternal mortality, household energy use, along with roofing and flooring of a house, sanitation and water supply.

What is surprising is not that poverty has decreased dramatically over the last decade, but that it has decreased despite chronic instability and poor governance under successive regimes since the end of the conflict in 2006. One of the reasons is the \$6.1 billion that Nepal receives annually from overseas workers, although the figure

is probably much higher because it is only an estimate based on official bank-to-bank transfers and does not include money the 2.5 million Nepalis working in India bring home.

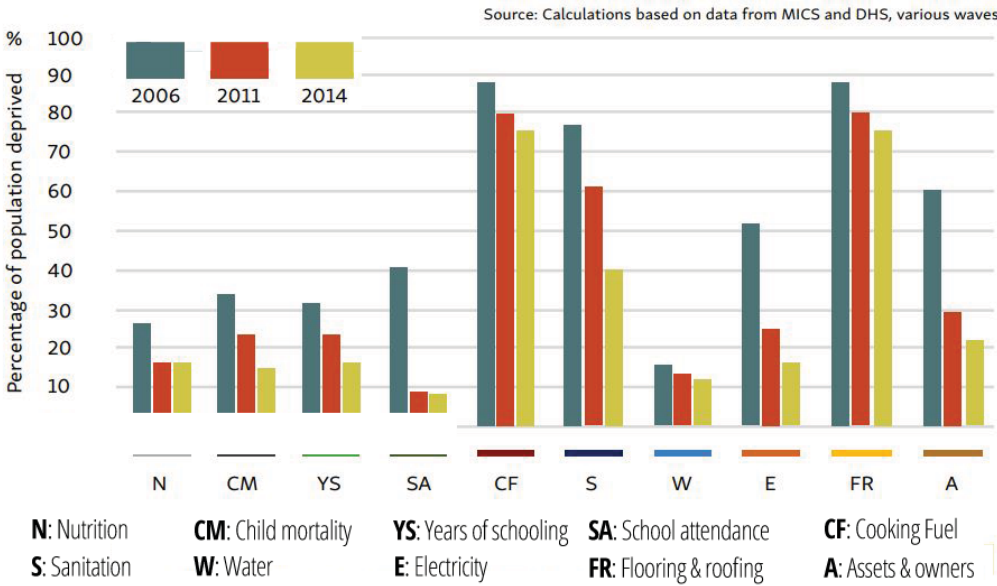
Yet, as the graph below shows, we should not be uncorking the sparkling wine just yet. The 28.6% figure is a national average: a breakdown by newly-formed federal provinces shows that although Province 3 (which includes Kathmandu Valley) has a poverty headcount of about 12.2%, Province 6 and 2 have MPI poverty rates of 51% and 48%.

Nothing surprising there: we have always known that the mid-western mountains and the eastern Tarai have suffered from topographical challenges and state neglect. The survey results offer an explanation about which dimension of poverty in each of the provinces contributes to deprivation in that part of Nepal. For instance, Province 2 has the highest number of poor, but is not monetarily as poor as some of the others. The plains region is kept back by housing, energy use, nutrition criteria and chronic floods (*see page 14-15*).

There are entrenched pockets of deprivation in Nepal, and the largest contributors to national poverty overall is the high dropout rate and nutrition – factors underlined by targets that Nepal did not meet for the Millennium Development Goals.

Measuring poverty is one thing, alleviating it is another. Nepal’s poverty rate has gone down in the last decade despite poor governance. The new government in the new year has a chance to ensure stability so we can augment accountability, improve governance, and address the structural poverty that stems from discrimination and neglect.

Go online for full report:
www.npc.gov.np/images/category/Nepal_MPI.pdf



GUEST EDITORIAL
SWARNIM WAGLÉ

Schooling and nutrition

The National Planning Commission (NPC), with the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), released Nepal’s first official national Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) survey last month.

The index shows 28.6% of Nepalis are still multidimensionally poor – meaning that their lives are battered by several deprivations simultaneously. But it also shows that Nepal halved its official MPI between 2006 to 2014. This confirms that the pace of poverty reduction in Nepal, measured both on monetary and non-monetary terms, has been impressive.

But the span of human deprivation, especially concerning nutrition and schooling, poses a formidable policy challenge in specific geographical areas. The MPI, disaggregated by provinces, gives Nepal’s new beginning as a federal country an influential policy headstart.

OPHI Director Sabina Alkire said at the launch of the report: “The scale of national poverty reduction is both dramatic and encouraging ... this Nepali achievement shows that change is not only possible but can also be accelerated.”

The Nepal MPI follows indicators of the Global MPI, having 3 dimensions and 10 indicators, such as malnutrition, low education or inadequate sanitation. The latest data adapts the Global MPI to national needs, for example in the case of Nepal to including roofing materials as one of the new indicators of poverty measurement.

The index exposes substantial variations in the rate of poverty across the newly formed seven provinces of Nepal. Provinces 6 and 2 have the highest rates of multidimensional poverty – about half the people are poor. Children in Nepal are disproportionately affected by multidimensional poverty.

As the new government takes up its responsibilities, the MPI can be used to shape budgets and multi-sectoral policies that will accelerate progress in the coming period.



Swarnim Waglé is the vice-chair of the National Planning Commission.

ONLINE PACKAGES



Unlike traditional businesses, where shops turn to social media to market products, new Nepali online fashion sites, having established themselves virtually, are planning to set up physical stores to promote their designs. Meet online designers Akash Shrestha and Meena Gurung who, after their success on Instagram, are setting up an actual studio that gives a better sensory experience for customers who are increasingly opting for diverse Nepali designs. *Read story: page 8-9.*



It's not just overseas migration, tens of thousands of labourers flock to Kathmandu from all parts of Nepal and beyond, driven by opportunities to earn. Follow us as we take you to Jhamsikhel to meet one young family from Bardia living and working in a tiny, bare concrete room in the under-construction Hotel Kutumba. *Read story: page 5.*

LONG BEFORE STABILITY

Stability for uncontrolled inflation, migration of youths and incompetent governance was always there ('A stable Nepal in 2018?', Yvonne Pande, #890). And such stability will continue to remain in this New Nepal. Too early to say anything about the Left Alliance ('Shape of things to come', Kunda Dixit, #890). At this stage, it is the game of bargaining, within UML, Maoist (Centre), between them, and as well as between Madhesi parties. It would be better if the bargaining game ends quickly, and the inclusion of one or the other Madhesi party in the government is good for relatively more stable polity.

K. K. Sharma

Yes, the UML and Maoists may have their share of blame but to exonerate the NC, as this article seems to do, is to miss the forest for the trees. Let's face it, the NC lost and they are acting like sore losers. Deuba should step down and let the new government, the one with a fresh mandate, deal with formation of the Upper House. NC and Deuba have zero moral authority and legitimacy to deal with this issue and would do themselves and the country a favour by getting out of the way. The NC is on a path of self-destruction and taking the country down with it.

Pankaj Nepali

PEOPLE AND THE GOVERNMENT

Nobody cares about the poor people of Nepal ('Nepal's #1 export: People', Editorial, #890). The rich criminals of Kathmandu get richer each day, and poor Nepalis keep dying in the deserts of Qatar or Saudi, while the women are sold in brothels worldwide. Nepal is ruled by criminals and smugglers.

Ramesh Magar

■ We are used to blaming government for everything. Our society needs to face the reality of international migrations. Today, my family is ready to send me to the gulf with loan while I'm asking for some capital to work here.

Ashish Panday

WHAT'S TRENDING



From Chitwan to Chiyoda

Go online to read our exclusive, most-read story of last week about why there are 10 times more Nepali workers in Japan than 10 years ago. Watch the video where Nepalis and Japanese discuss the new challenges faced by workers from Nepal.

- Most reached and shared on Facebook
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Nepal's #1 export: people

Editorial
'2018 should be when a new federal government under a new, inclusive Constitution starts creating conditions for Nepalis to work and live in Nepal.' Read this new year's editorial and follow our continuous coverage of Nepal's migration-based economy at nepalitimes.com.

Most popular on Twitter

A stable Nepal in 2018?

by Yvonne Pande
'The Nepali people value political stability, and they know first-hand the cost of not having it. If the political parties know that, they should not let the people down this time.' This optimistic op-ed was popular among readers and generated numerous comments on our website. Go online to read the feedback, and send in your own thoughts.

Most commented

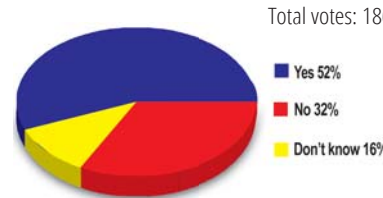
QUOTE TWEETS

- Kunda Dixit** @kundadixit
Chitwan to Chiyoda There has been an exponential growth in the number of Nepalis migrating to Japan. Read and watch video about why this is happening and the challenges it is throwing up in this exclusive @nepalitimes
- suryaparsad upadhy** @UpadhyasP
An excellent article. The same can be said about NRNs and other South Asians who used a similar loophole in the UK in the nineties and brought cooks to run their restaurants and made a lot of money from Nepali cooks coming to UK
- Nepali Times** @nepalitimes
Edmund Hillary passed away 10 years ago, but the legacy of his work in Nepal lives on, writes @lisachoeagal in her column So far so good
- Helen Clark** @HelenClarkNZ
This story brings back many memories of a decade ago - and of the many years of achievements and public service of Sir Ed.
- Nepali Times** @nepalitimes
#AQI We don't know if Christmas celebrations had anything to do with it but the Air Quality Index (AQI) in Kathmandu Valley on 26 December was in the purple 'Unhealthy' band. Not that the rest of the week was any better. @USEmbassyNepal
- Bhushan Tuladhar** @BhushanTuladhar
Our Christmas gift was "Very Unhealthy" air not just "Unhealthy" which is the norm for this time of the year. Wouldn't be surprised if we get a similar gift for New Year.



Weekly Internet Poll #891

Q. Will we have more political stability in 2018 compared to 2017?



Weekly Internet Poll #892
To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Do you understand why formation of a new government is delayed after 2017's elections?



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Who needs fire trucks?

Kobold’s unusually titled book offers revealing insights about Nepali society’s relationship with foreigners

“So, what’s your story?” I asked Michael Kobold, the German-born, American watchmaker and mountaineer, at Himalayan Java in Thamel. “In one line, I love your country,” he says, adding grandiosely, “probably more than many of your countrymen love it.” Kobold has recently written a book about a fantastical road expedition in which many



CONNECTING DOTS
Dinkar Nepal

Hollywood and Bollywood celebrities, as well as world-renowned mountaineers, adventurers and diplomats, drive fire trucks into Nepal. He has collected some ‘used but serviceable’ fire trucks in the US, and wants to gift them to the Nepal government, after generating enough pomp about the initiative to create a buzz around the world. Kobold came to Nepal to summit the highest mountain in the world, which he did successfully – twice. He escaped death during

the second expedition, during which he was saved by the Sherpas climbing with him. Afterwards, he established the first ‘Made in Nepal’ brand of watches training the same Sherpas as watchmakers. “After I experienced the risks involved in high altitude mountaineering, through a near fatal personal incident, I wanted to help the Sherpas,” he says candidly. “What they did for us cannot be paid back, but I wanted to do something to keep them away from the dangerous lives they lived year after year.” Kobold had used a piece of rock from the top of the world to make the dial of the watch, ‘Kobold Himalaya’, which he designed himself for Kobold Nepal, a company owned by Namgel and Thundu Sherpa. Kobold’s book is about his gratitude for the Sherpas, his friendship with the American actor James Gandolfini, who died of a heart attack in 2013, and about the fire truck expedition to Nepal, which he initially planned to undertake with James but now has decided to execute as a tribute to the actor. *Who needs fire trucks? is*



Kobold’s frantic attempt to launch his dream via crowdsourcing after having failed to get international sponsors. He says he penned it in only 12 days to meet the deadline to release the book in time for Christmas. ‘My heart breaks thinking about the miseries the people of this beautiful country suffer every day,’ he writes, echoing the seemingly readymade concerned but foreign viewpoint. Kobold touches almost

every problem facing Nepal: ‘the youth of this country have to go to the Gulf to work for a meagre amount, and what is worse, parents are forced to sell their children for a petty sum of less than a thousand dollars.’ After having touched all the populist nerves to tug at Nepali heartstrings, including the 2015-16 Blockade by the Indian government after the Constitution was promulgated, Kobold is literally trying to ‘sell air,’ as one of his prospective Nepali sponsors put it. He partnered with former US ambassador to Nepal, Scott H Delsi, to set up the Soarway Foundation to raise awareness for earthquake preparedness in Nepal in 2015. Ironically, three weeks later the big one hit, on 25 April that year. “The expedition has grown in these seven years in its scope,” Kobold tells me, still highly hopeful that he will be able to pull it out despite the hurdles he has faced. His friend’s untimely death, lack of funds, the earthquake, and the Indian Blockade were not the only challenges. Kobold also faced the frustrating inefficiency of the Nepal Government machinery and

learnt to work around it. He has cultivated high-level contacts in the government and Kathmandu society -- learning lessons from the illogical and nonsensical hurdles he faced at every step. “The media called me a Rock Mafia’, he says, remembering the uproar caused in the local media when the issue of using the rock from Everest for his watches became controversial in 2012. In his book, he recounts the story of his tussle with a government official who was reluctant to grant permissions for the fire truck expedition because the official was brokering a deal to buy 50 substandard fire trucks from India. In the end, unable to resist the insurmountable political pressure Kobold managed to throw on the official, he asked him, ‘Why are you so determined to get these fire engines to Nepal?’ Kobold writes that he waited for the official to sign the papers, took it in his hands, and replied ‘Unlike you, I love your country.’ Making allowances for the self-aggrandising, idealistic romanticism and poor attempts at humour in many places of the hastily written book, it is indeed an inspiring tale of how a foreigner has learnt the tricks of negotiating a complex society bereft of norms and ideals. And given the lack of infrastructure and trained human resource in our unplanned cities, Nepal definitely needs fire trucks, and this expedition. 🇳🇵

A real taste of China



Bao Xuan, in Soaltee Crowne Plaza, features authentic and high-end Chinese cuisine.

ZIYU LIN

There are Chinese restaurants, and then there are Chinese restaurants. Chinese cuisine is among the most popular worldwide, and a major projection of Beijing’s soft power. In South Asia, even the better Chinese restaurants tend to not be the real thing, and that includes most Chinese restaurants in Kathmandu – except Bao Xuan, which has just opened in Soaltee Crowne Plaza,

featuring authentic and high-end Chinese cuisine. Most readers of this paper will remember China Garden, which Bao Xuan has replaced with a fusion of exclusive Sichuan, Hunan and Cantonese menu items. In November, the restaurant held its first Dim Sum Festival, offering a special menu to provide Kathmandu residents a new dumpling dimension to add to their momo experience. “We were really encouraged by the response, and hope to have more such festivals,” says restaurant manager Rohit Sharma.



Bao Xuan (which means ‘treasure attic’) arrives at a time when the volume of Chinese visitors to Kathmadu is on the rise. The restaurant recently hosted a high-level delegation of government officials from China. “They told us they were really impressed with the authenticity of the ambiance and the food,” recalls Pratiksha Basnet of Soaltee Crowne Plaza. “The technique of Chinese foods is its ingredients,” explains Master Chef Dhan Kumar Limbu, who has specialised in Chinese cuisine for two decades. The restaurant distinguishes itself from other Chinese restaurants in the Valley by its ingredients: except for fresh vegetables and chicken, all other raw ingredients and seasonings are imported from China. Says Limbu: “We have six kinds of flours only for Dim Sum. Everyone can make Chinese food with the recipes, but it is the original taste of the ingredients that

makes the food stand out.” Chinese tourists are the second largest group of visitors to Nepal, following those from India, and their number for the first half of 2017 grew 36% over the same period the year before. Soaltee now sends some staff to China for six months of language training every year and guarantees that at least two receptionists can speak Mandarin. The interior décor of Bao Xuan includes authentic Chinese features like wooden fences, with Chinese patterns separating tables into balconies. The wooden tables have neatly folded cloth napkins and Chinese porcelain ware. “We are targeting Chinese tourists for sure since they are increasing rapidly and we want to

provide tourists and businessmen a place to experience their true food culture in a foreign country,” says Sharma. “However, the restaurant is becoming increasingly popular with locals as well.”

Signature Dishes

- Soup: Chicken Bamboo Shoot Hot and Sour Soup
- Appetiser: Sichuan Style Fried Chicken (Non-veg), Shredded Crispy Potato (Veg)
- Dim Sum: Steamed Chicken Sui Mai
- Main Course: Roasted Cantonese Lamb (Non-veg), Clay Pot Seasonal Vegetable
- Rice and Noodles: Stir Fried Noodles, Sautéed Vegetable Fried Rice

Kathmandu:

Lobby level, Soaltee Crowne Plaza
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prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

Turkish Toys

Keeping in line with its environmental policies, Turkish Airlines has revamped its selection of in-flight toys—all made from natural materials—to provide additional entertainment for kids while simultaneously introducing them to the concept of endangered species.



Immunity Boost

After calculating the Body Mass Index of 35,801 students, from Kathmandu, Pokhara and Narayangadh, and checking cleanliness and drinking water facilities of schools, the Dabur School Immuno Champ program 2017 ended in December.

Projects evaluated

In December, the SAARC Development Fund team hosted project meetings on strengthening of water, sanitation and hygiene



services, and on strengthening livelihood initiatives for home-based workers.

Fresher Face

Hishila Maharjan won the fourth Liril Fresh Face contest by Unilever Nepal. She was awarded a cash prize of Rs100,000 along with a Hero Duet Scooter.



Starring more

Soulmates Enterprises at Old Baneshwor and First Step Enterprises at Kalimati are now selling Goldstar Shoes. The brand also has franchise showrooms at Civil Mall, Sundhara and Jyoti Bhawan, Jamal.



BUILDING A HOME



Watch how various groups of migrant workers build a hotel, and community, in the capital Kathmandu.

nepalimes.com

PEOPLE POWER: (above) Workers demolish a building in Kupondole. (Top) Raju BK, wife Geeta and son Roman in the unfinished Hotel Kutumba in Jhamsikhel. (Below) Rita Urao says the advantage of working in Kathmandu so she can save some money. (below) Geeta rocks Roman to sleep in his roof-top bed.

MARTY LOGAN

In an office in Hotel Kutumba, Raju BK bends over a plate of *dal bhat*, his infant son perched on one knee. A couple of colleagues are scattered around the room intently scooping up handfuls of food from plates on their laps. Raju's *bhauju* is crouched on the floor cooking over an open flame and clothes are drying on a short line strung along a wall.

Hotel Kutumba in Jhamsikhel is about six months away from opening. Raju, 25, has been living in this bare, concrete room, about 3m x 3m for a year. His wife and year-old son joined him six months ago.

Scattered throughout the six-storey building are other groups of workers, about 20 in total. Raju's family is from Bardia, but other groups come from Saptari, Sunsari, Sindhuli, Kailali and even India to work in Kathmandu's construction industry.

They will work, eat and sleep together in this concrete shell for months, then move down the road to the next project.

Some workers, like Raju, have been toiling and living in these grey structures for a decade or more to send money to families, and only making quick visits home for holidays.

While the struggle of Nepali workers in the Gulf or Malaysia gets much attention, the plight of Nepalis working in Nepal seldom makes it to the news.

Raju is the leader of the 'Bardia Group', which includes his wife Geeta, younger brother Ganesh and two teenagers. He earns Rs500 for an eight-hour day plus overtime, and the group works 7 days a week. Geeta and other women receive about two-thirds of men's salary for the same work.

Raju says he is better off doing construction than he was working in the garment industry in Delhi, where he toiled 12 hours a day for



PHOTOS: MARTY LOGAN

just Indian Rs300.

He found this work by chance. While staying in a hotel in Thamel waiting for a work visa to a Gulf country 10 years ago, he ran out of money. Taking a friend's advice, he worked on a building site to cover his costs. The visa never came, but he has been working ever since.

"It's tedious but the income is good," Raju says, standing in a bare corner room with gaping holes where the windows will be, among bags of cement and a pile of sand on the floor. "I want to go back home but I can't make this kind of money there," he says

Raju's wife Geeta, 22, also works in the building, mainly cleaning. "I feel better in the village, my whole family is there," she says, "here I have to clean floors and carry bricks for my husband's work."

In a dim, corner room, one storey below, Sunita Urao is sitting on the

concrete floor feeding her six-day-old daughter. A small wood fire burning in a shallow, metal dish next to her provides extra warmth.

Her husband Mahesh says they wanted to have the baby at his home in India, across the border from Sunsari district, but it takes three days to travel there from Kathmandu. Instead the baby was delivered in the maternity hospital in Thapathali.

Asked how they feel about living in the half-finished building with the child Mahesh answers: "We are happy, we will have to be here for five or six more months."

Up on the roof shovelling sand, Rita Urao, 28, says there is work at home in Sunsari but they don't get paid monthly, unlike here. "I can save some money but back home you finish what you earn. It is difficult, but what choice do us poor people have?"

Standing on the same roof a few days later, owner Sanjaya Parajuli points out the location of the hotel's future beer garden, on this clear autumn afternoon gifted with a view of gleaming, snow-topped Himalayan peaks.

He has been building the 22-room boutique hotel on family land for three years, including an interruption after the earthquake.

Parajuli thinks the location is an advantage, close to the UN and offices of international non-profits. Rooms here will cost \$75-100. He says he's happy with the job the workers are doing, although, because labour is so scarce, occasionally they get transferred to other sites.

Asked how long they plan to keep working in the capital, Raju's wife Geeta says: "We have the kids to send to school: I think we will stay a little longer." 🇳🇵

Building Kathmandu



Rajan Magar at the site of his current project in Suryabinayak, Bhaktapur.

Climbing the ladder

Ten years ago Rajan Magar (above) was hefting loads of sand and bricks at building sites in a *doko* slung on his forehead. Today he is the boss of a handful of labourers who construct the houses that he has been hired to build.

Magar, 28, says moving up from labourer to contractor is all about dedication. "I worked very very hard to get to this point. If you're willing to work this hard then definitely you'll succeed."

He also had a headstart: his father was a builder in Dolakha, where he grew up in "very humble circumstances".

Magar says the amount he makes on each job depends on how quickly his team works, and how many 'extras' the homeowner requires, like the ornate columns that flank the front doors of many houses.

He pays his workers Rs1,200 per day, Rs1,500

to the skilled ones. They work 10 hours minus 1 hour for lunch and 30 minutes for tea. Those conditions are a combination of union rules and terms adopted by a group of about two dozen builders operating in Suryabinayak Municipality.

"Workers are hard to find but I have seven or eight people who are continuously with me," he says. They are from Sindhuli, Rasuwa and Sindhupalchok. If necessary, Magar says, he can 'borrow' workers from fellow contractors, and vice-versa.

A former colleague notes that Magar throws a party for his workers after each job is finished, suggesting that is one reason why the young man is prospering.

"I'm doing well," the builder agrees. "I'm able to send my child to a good school." His plans include investing future profits in land speculation.

Sir Ed's funeral

Edmund Hillary passed away 10 years ago this week, but the legacy of his work in Nepal lives on



PHOTOS: LISA CHOEGYAL

The call from Lady June Hillary came early one opaque Kathmandu morning. “Lisa, sorry to wake you but I promised to let you know — Ed just left us. Please come.”

It was 11 January 2008, and life throughout New Zealand paused as the loss was digested. The day had arrived, the lanky hero was gone, his craggy face familiar from the country’s five dollar bills. Sir Edmund Percival Hillary KG ONZ KBE was not only the conqueror of Mt Everest but a statesman, ambassador and knight of the garter.



SO FAR SO GOOD

Lisa Choegyal

Television presenter Mark Sainsbury, on the road to Wellington, screeched to a halt and headed his aging white Jaguar back to Auckland. The news reverberated around the world. In later years Ed delighted in meeting people who told him: “I thought you’d been dead for ages!” Now he was.

June was pausing at the traffic lights on her way to the hospital when Sir Ed succumbed to heart failure. Ironically it was the day he was due to be discharged — registered as ‘Vincent Stardust’ to mislead the media.

Everyone wanted to be part of the *burra sahib*’s departure. A state funeral in Auckland cathedral had always been on the cards, a rare honour and New Zealand’s first for many years. Whilst family and friends mourned, the government rallied, the services cranked into gear, and the clergy dusted off their ceremonial vestments. Holy Trinity was made ready for the lying in state, and the adjacent St Mary’s Church cleaned and wired for sound and screen. Expanses of carpets were laid, pews scrubbed and flowers arranged. The organ was tuned, choirs rehearsed and chosen soloists practiced — Dame Malvina Major, a Tongan tenor and a violinist friend.

The Prime Minister’s office led the funeral preparations. The wake would be hosted by the Governor-General in the sylvan gardens of Government House, and friends invited to dinner afterwards, catered in a white marquee

FOND FAREWELL: Friends of Edmund Hillary, led by Ang Rita Sherpa, lay ceremonial *khatas* on his casket during the state funeral service at the Auckland Cathedral ten years ago (*above*). The New Zealand five dollar note depicting Edmund Hillary (*right*).

at Sir Ed’s home. Tributes poured in, invitation lists were assembled and a national holiday declared. Mark Sainsbury would commentate the worldwide TVNZ coverage, and on the night of the funeral Tom Scott’s documentary *Remembering Ed* would be broadcast — we had helped him shoot it in Nepal.

Five of Ed’s Khumbu Sherpa friends and Elizabeth Hawley were government guests, and I flew with them from Kathmandu to New Zealand helping with the hiccups — a ticket did not match the passport name and a suitcase went missing. In Auckland we were welcomed at the aircraft door by a tall official in a pinstriped suit with a military bearing and distracted demeanour. “I’m Elizabeth Hawley, not you!” Andrew Beattie reeled at the fierce little lady in a wheelchair berating us for losing her luggage, but I was used to it — the bag had been left behind in her bedroom. He helped us whizz through immigration and handed me the keys to a large gold Toyota sedan before hurrying off to another appointment. Once we were settled in the guesthouse opposite Ed’s house in Remuera, the Sherpas lined up to practise laying *khatas* on the luggage rack while I helped Elizabeth replenish her wardrobe, then we walked across the road to June.

The house was full of flowers and family, and the doorbell and telephone never stopped ringing with more condoling friends and overseas guests, the great and good of mountaineering and polar exploration. June was dazed but doing well. The Herald of Arms, a sympathetic dapper chap with thick white hair, came to collect Ed’s medals, which after a panic were eventually found safe in



the sock drawer. Norbu Tenzing Sherpa, Tenzing Norgay’s distinguished son, was gentle and supportive. Jan Morris popped in, dishevelled from her London flight, and George Lowe, already confused and forgetful with his final illness.

Prime Minister Helen Clark kicked off her shoes and relaxed on the sofa as she discussed arrangements with June whilst chatting Himalayan Trust with Ang Rita and Nepali politics with Elizabeth. I helped the generously bearded Jim Wilson nervously rehearse his best friend’s eulogy. We dispensed endless cups of tea and a thoughtful convent had sent a huge cold ham — meals, friends and family came and went around the kitchen table.

One afternoon, I slipped away with June’s daughter Sue and grandson Sam to the undertakers where Ed’s coffin was open for the family — he looked peaceful enough, but I wished I had not gone.

“Call Andrew, he’ll fix it!” was the mantra in the mourning Hillary household during those days leading up to the state funeral. Andrew Beattie would arrive looking harassed as though he should be somewhere else, always smart in suit, white shirt and sombre tie, twitching gently at the pressure of keeping all the organisational balls in the air. Smiling kindly, he reassured us whatever it was would be solved. “He’s marvellous, he thinks of everything,” sighed Lady June.

A proposal that Tibetan prayer flags decorate the cathedral — no way, Ed was a New Zealander for heaven’s sake. Refined jostling for invites — the Prime Minister seated with the widow, of course. Can the bell from Antarctica’s HMNZS Endeavour be rung at the

ceremony — it was, but none of us remember hearing it. Can the Hillary College kids do a farewell haka for the departing hearse — they did, and it was terrific. Health and safety objected to the Alpine Club members’ ceremonial archway of steel ice axes outside the cathedral — hold them upside down. Whatever the problem, Andrew made it go away.

For two days and one whole night the line of mourners snaked down the Parnell streets, queuing to pay their respects, filing past the greatest Kiwi who was lying in state in Auckland cathedral. Late that evening I slipped through a side door to marvel at the diversity — old and young, smart and scruffy, trim and tattooed, small children in pushchairs, and even hospital patients on drips pushed by their nurses. Beneath the modern stained glass windows, the Indian community had lit lamps beneath a garlanded portrait, his medals were arrayed on blue velvet cushions, and the ice axe used on Mt Everest in 1953 lay on the flag-decked casket. One of the naval cadets guarding each corner swayed precariously.

When the day arrived, we dressed in black and assembled early at Ed’s house. The decision was made not to wear hats, but I wore one anyway. June was serene and severe in black, her blue grey hair swept into the usual immaculate chignon. Helen Clark, the family and I left in a cavalcade of large shiny government cars, with Andrew in the driveway twitching more than usual, watch checking and mobile phone glued to his ear. I travelled with the oldies, Elizabeth Hawley and Ed’s elder sister June Carlile — more than a little vague she turned to me as we set off: “What lovely weather! Is Ed well enough

to be with us this morning?”

Andrew had us arrive last, with the congregation already seated, and we negotiated the length of the church to discreet whispers and nudges. It was a shock to see Sir Ed’s body waiting in front of the altar, the casket grandly draped in the flag with white lilies, medals and ice axe. June rested a gentle hand of farewell, the Sherpas laid their well-rehearsed khatas, and the cameras clicked and purred.

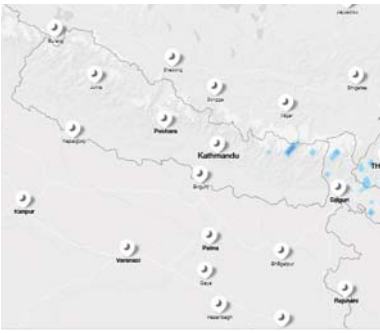
The service was a blur of music, hymns, tributes and speeches. Seated in my black hat, grandchildren fidgeted in the pews, an eccentric niece laid on healing hands, and Elizabeth fussed with her walking stick, then suddenly it was all over. The defence force escort hoisted the huge casket onto their uniformed shoulders and our little procession followed, led by June and Helen, with suitably bowed heads.

Leaving the cathedral, a light rain matched the mood. Our cortege of black cars followed the hearse through the hushed streets of Auckland. “Delays likely! State funeral!” motorists had been warned for days to avoid the route from the cathedral down Remuera Road to the crematorium. The nation’s standards flew at half-mast and the museum stretched a massive mural of Everest across its portico.

Every inch of the way was lined with people, some waving, some silent, some wiping away a tear, and many spontaneously clapping in admiration of the world’s most famous New Zealander. Toddlers were lifted by proud parents, and teenagers in togs ran barefoot, wrapped in Kiwi flags. Uniformed firemen at the station opposite Ed’s house saluted, old men snapped to attention, and I even saw a woman waving her dog’s paw. The government driver was wrapt, shaking his head in wonder as he steered through the crowds: “In all my years I’ve never seen anything like this.” A large Maori man ran onto the road to lay flowers in tribute on the bonnet, causing an anxious moment but security held their nerve. I sat next to an unusually silent Elizabeth Hawley and a teenage granddaughter, grieving in black lace and red lipstick.

The levity lifted when we reached the end of the journey, away from the crowds and faced only by finality. With difficulty the men of the family, led by son Peter, hoisted the heavy coffin across the courtyard for cremation, the Dean said a few words, and afterwards I found daughter Sarah sobbing in the Ladies.

It was several days later that I wondered aloud: “Where’s the ice axe?” A national treasure usually enshrined in the Auckland Museum, it had lain atop the casket, last seen leaving in the hearse. June looked sharply at Andrew. Andrew blanched and went quiet. After some tense moments on the Blackberry with the suited leg jiggling in agitation, Andrew confirmed that the undertakers had retrieved it after the ceremony — rescued from incineration for all time. 🇳🇿



We had the second westerly front of this winter fizzle out halfway through Nepal again, dumping all its precipitation in the far-western mountains. There is still some cold air and water vapour trailing and this could mean some snow flurries in the mountains on Friday. This will leave us with a smoggy weekend in Kathmandu, with maximum temperature dipping into the mid-teens because of passing clouds and night minima at 2-4 Celsius. Tip of the week: no strenuous exercise outdoors in the mornings.

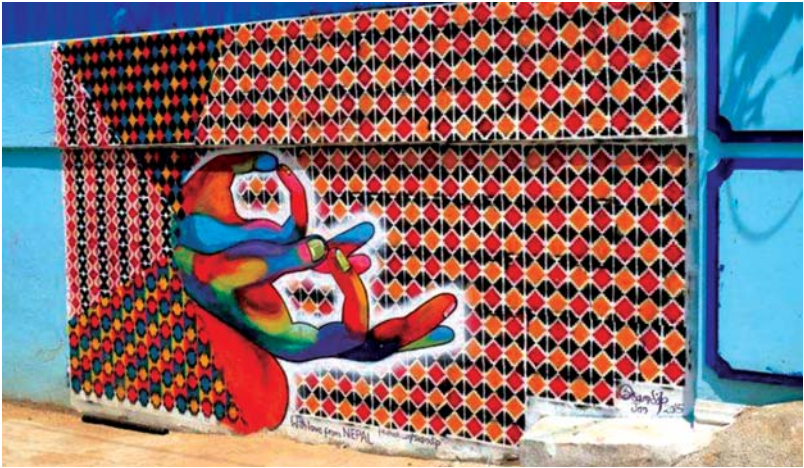
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PAINTS AND PATTERNS: Sramdip Purkoti (*below*) works on his calli-graffiti inspired by Ranjana lipi in Sao Paulo, Brazil. The healing hands mural (*above*) painted in Cambodia and Purkoti's first mural (*left*) created during Kolor Kathmandu in 2013.

SAHINA SHRESTHA

Tucked away on a wall on the streets of Beco do Batman, the meeting point of three alleyways in Sao Paulo known for its gallery of murals by artists from around the world, visitors are greeted by gold and silver writings in an 11th century script from halfway around the world in Nepal. The calli-graffiti, in Ranjana lipi, painted against a black backdrop, easily stands out amidst the dense concentration of wall art that lines the street. It is the latest work of Sramdip Purkoti, a Nepali artist who has set out backpacking around the world creating street art. “It is the pursuit of happiness that makes me do what I do,” explains Purkoti, “and I am happiest when I am travelling and creating art.” Currently in Brazil, Purkoti has travelled and painted in Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos and Chile after embarking on his global backpacking trip from Malaysia in 2014. A self-taught artist, Purkoti painted his first mural in Patan during the Kolor Kathmandu project in 2013, which brought together national and international artists to paint 75 murals representing 75 districts around Kathmandu. He painted a large cat with Dhaka pattern paying homage to Tehrathum, the second largest producer of Dhaka textile in Nepal. Dhaka pattern has since been Purkoti’s signature style, the recurring pattern showing up in a majority of his work.

His portrait of Chilean composer Violetta Parra in Santiago is set against a backdrop of red, yellow and blue Dhaka patterns. The healing hands mural he created in Cambodia too is woven into beautiful Dhaka patterns. The psychedelic cove in Vietnam also resonates the same style. “My inspiration comes in different medium or in different contexts: people, places, nature, history, or it could be the energy of the moment. Whatever touched me in that present moment is reflected in my work. But having said that, I am very much drawn to patterns. I see that in nature and fabrics of different ethnic groups, and that is why you will see plenty of repetitive patterns in most of my work,” says Purkoti. Patterns and geometric shapes are also recurring themes in many of the tattoos he has worked on. Purkoti picked up tattooing in Vietnam, after fellow backpackers wanted his designs as tattoos. A local tattoo artist gave him a four-hour crash course and the rest he learnt from YouTube. Working as a tattoo artist has given him the means to travel and paint murals. “There have been people who have donated paint and commissioned artwork,” says Purkoti, who has had his share of woes travelling with a Nepali passport. When he tried to cross into Singapore from Malaysia he was stopped at the border, while his visa process to Argentina took ages. “The experience in Malaysia taught me a huge lesson. Now I don’t try to go to a country without a visa first, even if it says they have visa-on-arrival for Nepalis,” says the artist, who has tried to restore his country’s image by signing all his artwork: ‘With love from Nepal’. When he started, Purkoti’s work was based on stencil and spray, but he has since experimented with doodles and these days he works on calli-graffiti. Although the medium changes, he says his art hasn’t: “My art is me, representing my experience, observations, social encounters, my take on the unknown.” Future plans? “To travel to more countries and paint even bigger better murals.” 🇳🇵

Nomad art



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PHOTOS: ZIYU LIN

Online designers get real

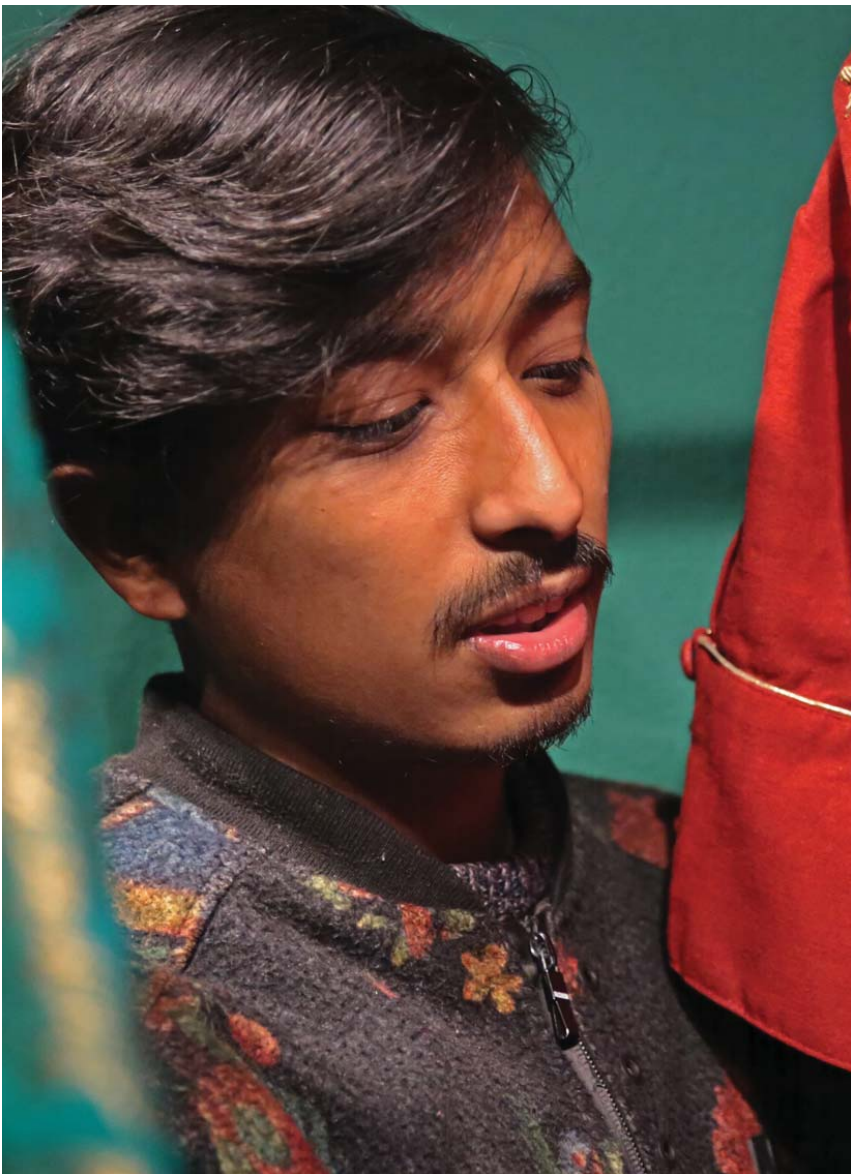
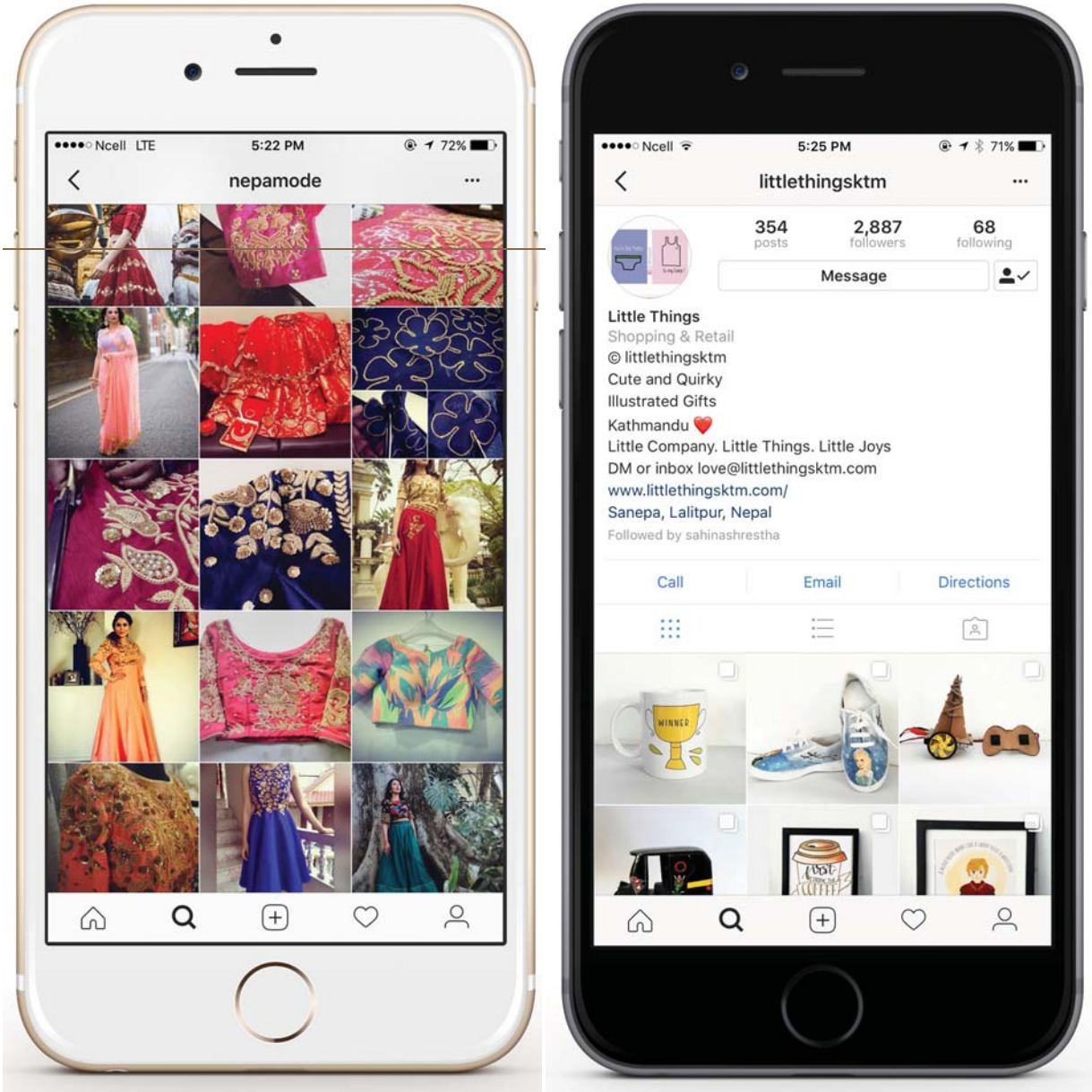
Stylists who made it big on social media open stores to woo more customers

ZIYU LIN

Aakash Shrestha and Meena Gurung got to know each other on Facebook, then met face-to-face, and now sell their fashion line on Instagram. They represent a new breed of Nepali millennials who are blending traditional talent with dissemination and sales through the Internet. While randomly searching Facebook for like-minded people, Aakash came across Meena. Four months later, they were collaborating in a clothing design studio called BORA X Nepamode,

which serves as a physical shop as well as a workshop in Gairidhara. When Aakash set up the Instagram account for his brand in 2014, he never expected he would be using it to fill orders for fashion items worth Rs55,000. “This is quite motivating,” recalls Aakash, who now deals with more than 100 inquiries monthly on Instagram, replying to every customer query about things such as measurements, price as well as detailed questions about clothes. With the rapid uptake of

smartphones, increasing Internet penetration and the growing popularity of social networking, young Nepalis are ripe for the emerging e-commerce market, which includes dozens of local online shopping platforms. Young, digital native fashion designers started their businesses even before Facebook and Instagram had become a popular platform to stalk products and place orders. Today, social media provides shortcuts for anyone who wants to commercialise designs, even though



there is a wide range in quality. Almost 200 local fashion brands are now selling on Instagram and Facebook.

Shreeya Shakya Risal says she prefers original designs of local designers: "I will choose to buy them only if they have unique and creative designs with better quality materials."

Littlethingsktm is another fashion line with a diverse collection of local designs that is choosy about reviewing products pitched by designers and artists. "The review team consists of three persons, including two designers and a social media manager. We review the designs according to several rules," says co-founder Sabin Bhandari.

"There have been a couple of occasions when our team missed out plagiarised designs and sometimes customers let us know about the sources. We either take down the design or attribute it to the original artists," Bhandari says.

Unlike traditional businesses where shops turn to social media to market products, new Nepali online sites having established themselves virtually are planning to set up physical stores to promote their designs. Physical presence gives a better sensory experience for customers, and increases the exposure of trending designers.

Littlethingsktm opened its first physical store in Sanepa recently and is already frequented by trendy young Nepalis and expats. Displayed through its French windows are badges, cards, totes, mugs and cover sheets with patterns of Nepali designers.

Since last September, the business has launched a start-up to sell products online through a website, and advertise its products on Instagram.

"Some of our regulars still prefer to come to our shop to purchase," says Bhandari, "but there are quite a few new customers who are not active online, and old customers who keep coming back."

The Local Project Nepal and Timro Concept opened early this year, borrowing the idea of creating co-working spaces where designers rent a space and sell their products. In Local Project Nepal, designers take three-month contracts and pay rent according to the amount of space they occupy, with the store earning commissions on sales.

"Designers want to have more exposure through a physical store but they don't have enough money to set up their own," says Binam Shakya, co-founder of The Local Project Nepal.

"If the brand doesn't sell well, we may suggest they take a break and come back with a new collection," explains Shakya. "People can get to wherever they want to by motorbike in Kathmandu, and there are customers who still prefer to see the designs and touch the materials and try them on," he adds.

The Local Project Nepal now has five brands lining up for display, and is planning to open more physical stores in other parts of the city. Meanwhile, Aakash and Meena are working on new collections, managing the Instagram account and setting up the studio at the same time. 

ONLINE TO OFFLINE



Meet Akash Shrestha and Meena Gurung, two online fashion designers setting up an actual studio that gives a better sensory experience for customers.

nepalitimes.com 



ONE-PERSON ARMY: Meena (left) and Aakash (left, bottom) describe themselves as a one-person army. They manage social media accounts, pick the fabrics, contact the tailors, and sometimes sew as well.

Aakash studied fashion design in Paris for a year,

which gave his designs a blend of western and eastern aesthetics.

Littlethingsktm opened its first physical store in Sanepa recently (above). Displayed are badges, cards, totes, mugs and cover sheets featuring the patterns of Nepali designers.



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EVENTS



Swing Dance,

A free class for beginners to learn the basics of the Lindy Hop, a partner dance originated in the 1920s in Harlem, New York.
5 January, 5:30-7:30pm, Moksh, Jhamiskhel, (01) 5013554/9813556945, info@katjazz.com.np

The Art Market,
Come and shop for contemporary and unique art pieces by professional artists, photographers, art organisations and designers—their third anniversary.
6 January, 1-5pm, The Yellow House, Sanepa, (01) 5553869



Qigong & Tai Chi,
Nepal Natural Home and Chai Tea Tai Chi have come together to organise a peaceful and productive one-day urban Qigong, Tai Chi and meditation retreat. The package includes breakfast, lunch and transportation fee.
9 January, 8am-5:30pm, Nepali Natural Home, Dhapasi Height, For Registration: 9815912148

Get engaged,
After sharing aspirations for 2018 last week, it is now time to talk about ideas to grow your project with lots of community engagement.
5 January, 5pm onwards, Nepal Communitere, Pulchowk, (01) 5530229

Bike Farm,
A 3-4 hour bike tour to the South of Lalitpur: Satdobato - Dhapakhel - Nagdaha - Badegaun - Godamchaur - Godavari – Sadobato; distance of around 34km.
6 January, 7am onwards, The Bike Farm Nepal, Jhamsikhel, 9813806446

Hydro Expo,
For the first time in Nepal, an exhibition showcasing various hydropower-related products and services is being held. More than 100 stalls will feature hydropower producers, manufacturers of products, suppliers, designers, insurance company, consultants, investors and banking companies.
5-6 January, Bhrikutimandap, Kathmandu, (01) 5180402, info@eventsolutionnepal.com

Arts for Kids,
An opportunity for your 8-14-year-old child to develop art techniques like Paper Mache, Zentangle doodling, water colouring, animal caricature, origami and DIY frame making. Bonus: field trip, film screening and their own exhibition.
7-13 January, 10am-4pm, Sattya Media Arts Collective, Jawalakhel, For Registration/ Information: 9813485716, collective@sattya.org



Music for Kids,
Workshop on music, vocal and percussion alongside Zumba, Hip Hop and Lindy Hop dance class to let your child (5-12 years) dive into their musical journey.
8-12 January, 10am-4pm, Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, Jhamsikhel, (01) 5013554 / 9813556945, info@katjazz.com.np

MUSIC



Abhiyan at Ai-La,
Enjoy a live musical performance by Abhiyan with friends and family for a laid back catch-up.
6 January, 7pm onwards, a Lounge, Kumaripati, (01) 5008681

Hotel Imperial,
End your hectic week with a relaxing live performance by singer Yam Baral, every Friday.
5 January, 6pm onwards, Hotel Imperial Kathmandu, Gaushala, 9801084294



Ash King,
The Mozart of Romance and singer of hit songs like Baarish-Half Girlfriend, Te Amo-Dum Maro Dum, I Love You-Bodyguard and many more will be performing at the grand opening of Turtle Lounge & Club.
13 January, 7pm onwards, Turtle Lounge & Club, Rs 2,000, 9851090349/9813089163/9801031277

Album Launch,
The rebellious new age metal band, Underside is releasing its long overdue 'Satan in your Stereo'. The EP is mixed and mastered by Sikh's Justin Hill.
20 January, 5pm onwards, Purple Haze, Thamel, 9849276214, flowerflight666@gmail.com

DINING

Chez Caroline,
Experience French cuisine and the charm of this Baber Mahal landmark restaurant. The umbrella heaters near your table will keep you snug.
Chez Caroline, Baber Mahal Revisited, (01) 4263070

Bao Xuan,
Authentic flavours of China can now be tasted at Bao Xuan, the Chinese specialty restaurant at Soaltee Crown Plaza. Among a range of Cantonese, Hunan and Schezwan dishes, Lantern Prawn speaks loud. Try it for either lunch or dinner.
Soaltee Crown Plaza, Tahachal, (01) 4273999

Tasneem's Kings Kitchen,
For gourmands of Indian cuisine: Chicken Tikka, Mutton Sheekh Kebab and crispy Naan with lemony green chutney. Take your portion home if you do not want to leave a single bite behind.
Pulchowk, 981282727



Alchemy,
This pizzeria and Italian restaurant has one of the Valley's greatest pizzas, accompanied by good ambience and service to fill your Italian craving. Gelato or Tiramisu for dessert—you pick.
Saatghumti Chok, Thamel, (01) 4701572

DanRan,
Japanese Udon noodle is one of the best dishes to help you forget winter woes. This little restaurant in Jhamsikhel offers Prawn Tempura and Chicken Teriyaki that explode with Japanese flavours.
Jhamsikhel, (01) 5521027



Saigon Pho,
If you know your Pho, then this is the place to go for a healthy and hearty Vietnamese cuisine. Chicken or shrimp Pho, spring rolls, pork ribs, everything is finger-licking good.
Lazimpat, (01) 4443330

GETAWAY



Dwarika Resort,
To explore nature and the self: a holistic lifestyle retreat, drawing on Vedic principles, Buddhist philosophy and Himalayan practices. The Himalayan range will surely peek out to welcome you.
Dhulikhel, (01) 4479488, info@dwarikas.com

Baber Mahal Vilas,
A former Royal Palace turned into a Royal suite, this cosy Vila will make your stay in Kathmandu feel far away from the city's madness. Antique show pieces, painted portraits and the welcoming library provide a Rana-era vibe.
Baber Mahal Revisited, (01) 4257655

Grand Norling Hotel,
Overlooking the golf course, monkeys and deer herds, this hotel will provide you with a retreat not far from Kathmandu.
Mulpani, Gokarneshwor, (01) 4910193, norlingresort@mail.com.np

Balthali Mountain Resort,
Surrounded by hills and mountains, this hotel featuring scrumptious food is a must visit destination.
Balthali, Kavrepalanchok, 9851065001, info@balthalimountainresort.com




The Fort Resort,
Drive 90 minutes from Kathmandu city and you will be buffeted by the chilly Nagarkot winter wind. This eco-friendly boutique hotel, built in a traditional style, will be your refuge.
Nagarkot, (01) 6680069, fort@mos.com.np

Hotel Heritage,
For an authentic experience, get away to this boutique museum hotel, which incorporates the true art and architecture of Nepal along with its traditions and culture.
Suryabinayak, Bhaktapur, (01) 6611628, info@hotelheritage.com.np

MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI





With the new day comes new strength and new thoughts.

- Eleanor Roosevelt

Miss Moti-uation will not appear from next week while Kripa Joshi is on temporary leave.

OUR PICK



Opening in Kathmandu on 5 January

Following the success of the *Insidious* trilogy, the creators have come up with another chapter, *Insidious: The Last Key*, featuring the franchise standout Dr. Elise Rainier. When Rainier and her team investigate a man's claim of a haunting, she realises that the house is her own family home. The film, written by Leigh Whannell and directed by newcomer Adam Robitel, is sure to give nightmares.

AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 29 December - 4 January

301 – 500 Hazardous							
201 – 300 Very Unhealthy							
151 – 200 Unhealthy							
101 – 150 Unhealthy for sensitive groups							
50 – 100 Moderate							
0 – 50 Good							

FRIDAY
Dec 29

SATURDAY
Dec 30

SUNDAY
Dec 31

MONDAY
Jan 1

TUESDAY
Jan 2

WEDNESDAY
Jan 3

THURSDAY
Jan 4

With the onset of deep winter, the Air Quality Index for Kathmandu Valley is worsening. Since News Year's Day the daily average of concentration of particles smaller than 2.5 microns suspended in the air has been in the purple 'Very Unhealthy' band. This would make it hazardous to be outdoors and engage in strenuous exercise at any time of day. The reasons for this sharp deterioration include the overnight inversion layer that traps pollutants, the start of the brick kiln season, heavy traffic, burning of garbage on streets, and road dust. The reading on Thursday, 10AM, at the monitoring station at the US Embassy in Mahariganj was 198, but it was 214 at Phora Darbar.
<https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>

A LONG WAIT: Karma Tshomo and her mother, Wangmo Dorji (*right*), showing their refugee IDs in Beldangi II, weeks before their resettlement to Massachusetts, USA.

Devi Charan Acharya and Khina Maya Acharya (*far right*) have waited three years for a departure date for Canada.

JENNA KUNZE
in JHAPA



PHOTOS: JENNA KUZE

As the resettlement program ends in 2018, remaining refugees from Bhutan who spent 25 years in eastern Nepal are left with two options: repatriation to the country that exiled them, or assimilation in a country whose constitution denies them citizenship.

“Landless, citizenless, homeless, respectless, everything less,” said Kamala Pradam, a 47-year-old teacher in Beldangi II Camp, who is among the remaining refugees facing an uncertain future.

The Lhotsampa are Nepali-speaking descendants of farmers, many of whom had lived in Bhutan for centuries. Nearly 100,000 were forcibly evicted from southern Bhutan by the King Jigme Singye Wangchuk regime starting in 1991, then transported through India to eastern Nepal where they lived in UN-supervised refugee camps. Some 90,000 have been resettled in third countries in the past decade, and 8,540 remain in the camps.

The Lhotsampa accounted for one-sixth of Bhutan’s population before the evictions. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) ran the camps, and the resettlement was handled by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

The UNHCR had three solutions for the refugees: third-country resettlement, repatriation to Bhutan and local assimilation in Nepal.

Since 2007, the third-country resettlement program has sent 90% of the refugees to the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Denmark, Norway, the UK and the Netherlands. Of the remaining 8,540 refugees in Beldangi and Sanischare camps, nearly 1,000 are still being processed for resettlement, which UNHCR is wrapping up by December 2018.

The program was especially appealing for younger refugees who wished to seek education and opportunities abroad. Unfortunately, it almost always meant family separation. For Karma Tshomo, it was from her father. He remains in Beldangi II, while she and her mother resettle in Massachusetts State in the US.

“She is only going for me,” Karma says before departing, nodding at her mother across the room. Their plan is to stay long enough only for Karma to attend college, and then later to return “home,” whether that be in Bhutan or Nepal.

Among the remaining refugees, there are those, mostly elderly and those with parents or siblings left behind, who still hope to return to Bhutan. Though UNHCR does not have an exact figure, those opting for repatriation is a small portion of the remaining refugees. Those affiliated with repatriation groups claim the number is around 2,000, but Camp Secretary Tikaram Rasaily, who also supports repatriation, says it is much lower.

“Until and unless this repatriation will happen, I’ll be here,” said DB Subba, a member of Bhutan’s Indigenous Peoples Forum within the camp, which fights for return to their motherland. He says only international pressure on

Thimphu will make repatriation possible.

Between 1993 and 2003, the Bhutan and Nepal governments held numerous bilateral talks for repatriation of 108,000 refugees, all of which were futile.

“Unless they can agree to sit in a meeting, what options do we have?” asks Ram Babu Dhakal of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kathmandu. The Druk regime insisted during the Joint Verification Process that a majority of refugees were Bhutanese, and had emigrated voluntarily.

“We are refugees, we will get discriminated everywhere, until and unless we are not citizens,” says Rebika Adhikari, a 25-year-old single mother from Beldangi II. She works as a teacher outside of the camp in Damak, earning less than her Nepali co-teachers.

Local assimilation into Nepal has happened over the last 25 years. Since they look the same as Nepalis and speak the language, refugees are

able to find work outside the camp, though they are at the will of their employers. But to stay on in Nepal, the refugees would need guarantees like citizenship, work permits, ability to open bank accounts or own property.

The majority of the refugees don’t wish to return to Bhutan or remain in Nepal: they had problems with documents and now want to be reunited with their families abroad.

Rebika Adhikari’s family is in the US, and she is virtually alone in the camp because of late paperwork. She says: “I don’t have any reason to go back, and I don’t have any reason to stay here. I want to move forward, not back.”

Devi Charan and Khina Maya Acharya

The Acharyas have been packed and ready to go to Canada for three years now.

Devi Charan Acharya, 85, and his wife, Khina Maya, 83, completed the process for third-country

resettlement, including preparing travel documents and getting vaccinations. But they are still waiting for their departure date.

The Acharyas’ long wait is an anomaly. The elderly couple have health issues: he is blind and diabetic, requiring insulin injections two times a day, she is hard of hearing. UNHCR says that disabled and vulnerable populations normally receive priority in resettlement, but the Acharyas are still waiting. Of their 11 children, five are resettled in the US, two in Canada and four remain in Bhutan, including one who is in prison for being a dissident.

“If the UN can send us to our son and daughter in Canada, at least they can look after us,” Khina Maya said. The couple initially tried to settle in the US, but were denied without explanation.

UNHCR said it doesn’t comment on individual cases, adding that the final decision remains with the resettlement country.

Ram Pradhan

“From tomorrow, don’t come to work, and leave this country,” Ram Pradhan, 63, was told by his superiors in the Bhutan Army 27 years ago. Despite his official position and years of service, his own colleagues turned against him when the regime started evicting the Lhotsampa in 1991.

“The army chased me from my village,” he said, remembering that his wife and small children ran all the way to the Indian border.

Today, Pradhan lives with his second wife in Beldangi III, all of his five children have been resettled in Nebraska State, US, but he has no interest in joining them there. He ultimately wants to return to Bhutan, otherwise he is happy to stay on in Nepal.

“We suffered in Bhutan and the government didn’t see our pain,” he says, “but no one saw our suffering. Not government, not people, not any officials.”



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'Dunkirk'



MUST SEE

Sophia Pande

The problem with Christopher Nolan's *Dunkirk*, right off the bat, is that if you don't see it on an IMAX screen, as it was intended, the film tends to be a bit of a bore. This is probably sacrilege to those who did see it on the largest of screens, but what can I say: that's how I felt. A small part of me remains unconvinced that even had I seen it on a gargantuan screen, I would still remain slightly blasé about this extremely serious World War II film that aims to show the gravity of the evacuation at Dunkirk.

The film tracks, excruciatingly slowly, the plight of the men stranded on the beach at Dunkirk, a once Flemish-speaking, now largely Francophone town on the northern-most tip of France, where the allied troops become cornered in 1940, driven onto the beach as the Germans close in. As British and French troops line up in an

orderly, but desperate fashion, they are an open target for the Nazi dive bombers who aim at both the men on land as well as those in the Navy vessels deployed from England, just across the channel. At risk from sea, with U-boats sinking ships that are then finished off by the dive-bombers, the men are in a state of heightened anxiety and there is a palpable sense of fear, which the film conveys, repeatedly, to the now also anxious viewer.

As we follow two soldiers who are trying to make it off the beach, and a father and son team who set off from Weymouth to bring home as many soldiers as they can, the film relies on set action pieces bringing together the destinies of air men, navy soldiers and the infantry to tell the story of a landmark event. The battle left hundreds of thousands of soldiers hopelessly stranded, almost abandoned by a Britain who held back her full support in case it would be needed for a last stand against the Nazis.

There is always a sense that we are watching a would-be 'masterpiece,' with Nolan intensely at the helm (pardoning the pun) trying his damndest to bring home an Oscar for making a film about a

suitably heavy subject. The sound design, instead of featuring the soaring orchestral score that usually augments these kinds of films, has been replaced by a monotonous, almost maddening track that beats home the stress of war, jarring viewers and making us want to stick our fingers in our ears as well as bite our nails.

War is inconceivable to those who have never been in it, and while Nolan's efforts to educate us on its horrors is commendable, another, far more poetic, filmmaker makes a much more memorable point with *The Thin Red Line* (1998) – the great Terrence Malick's ode to the American soldiers who fought in the Pacific during the Second World War.

If you have a few hours, find it and watch it: it will never leave you, unlike *Dunkirk*, which is disturbing but so very nebulous that I can barely recall it a week after seeing it.



Watch trailer online

nepaltimes.com

HAPPENINGS



RYAN CHANG

PRICE HIKE PROTESTS: Members of student unions protest outside Ratna Rajya Laxmi Campus in Kathmandu on Wednesday. They were demanding the rollback of fuel price hikes and immediate release of the results of the proportional representation election.



BIKRAM RAI

WOMEN IN RED: Women make their way to the Saali River in Sankhu, Kathmandu Valley, on the second day of the Swasthani Brata festival, Tuesday. The month-long festival is dedicated to God Madhav Narayan and Goddess Swasthani.



BIKRAM RAI

HATS OFF: New graduates celebrate during the 43rd convocation of Tribhuvan University in Pulchowk on Sunday.



BIKRAM RAI

TOPI DIWAS: Youths take a selfie during a program organised to celebrate *Dhaka topi* day at City Hall, Kathmandu, on Monday.



GLOBAL IME BANK

11 YEARS: Chiranjibi Nepal, Governor of Nepal Rastra Bank, inaugurates the new corporate office of Global IME Bank on the occasion of its 11th anniversary on Tuesday.

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Remittance slump



Ramesh Kumar in
Himal Khabarpatrika, 31 Dec
2017-1 Jan 2018

हिमाल
खबरपत्रिका

During all these years of political instability, Nepal's leaders were able to keep wrangling for control without having to address economic problems.

No longer.

As the Left Alliance prepares to form the new government, there are signs that the engine of the economy is failing. The Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) has just released scary statistics, warning that the remittance-driven economy is collapsing and Nepalis might be pushed further into poverty.

In the first four months of this fiscal year, the volume of remittance received by Nepal decreased 1.4% compared with the corresponding period last year. Because remittance makes up nearly one-third of the GDP, even a small decline could have severe impacts on the economy.

There were signs of distress as early as 2015, when the number of outbound migrant workers began to fall, and remittance growth slowed. But this year, the volume of remittance itself has declined.

“Remittance growth has already reached a saturation point, and it can no longer sustain our economy,” says Nar Bahadur Thapa, Chief of the NRB’s research department.

Gulf countries, mired in a serious political crisis that threatens to escalate into a war, are not hiring as many migrant workers as they were until a couple of years ago.

Although the number of Nepalis who went overseas for employment in the first four months of this fiscal year fell by just 1% over the same period last year, the numbers of Nepali workers migrating to Qatar and Saudi Arabia have declined drastically: 23.58% and 49.98% respectively.

After Qatar won the bid to host the FIFA World Cup in 2022, it needed a huge labour force to build stadiums, roads, hotels and other

infrastructure. As a result, Qatar emerged as the topmost labour destination for Nepali workers.

However, after a Saudi Arabia-led coalition of West Asian countries began to blockade Qatar last year, the emirate is in trouble. Ram Prasad Bhandana of Nepal Association of Foreign Employment Agencies (NAFEA) says: "We hear that many Nepalis working in Qatar have not received salaries for months."

Saudi Arabia itself is facing an economic slowdown mainly because of a fall in global gas and oil prices. So are other Arab countries where Nepalis work. Malaysia, the only country outside of the Gulf that hires thousands of Nepali migrant workers every year, is now relying more on Bangladeshi workers.

The NRB has already begun to witness impacts of the remittance slump on the country's cash reserve and balance of payment. Soon, Nepalis' purchasing power will decline, and the government will have to deal with a dramatic rise in unemployment.



Knotty Alliance
 “Come here”
 Top corners: Prime Minister
 Bottom corners: Chairman

Rajesh KC in *baahrakhari.com*,
2 January

१२ खरी

Separated at birth

Cartoonists in the Nepali media have had a field day ridiculing and casting doubt that the promised unification of the UML and Maoists will actually occur.



Fire: Party Unity
Yellow book: Multiparty Democracy
Red book: Maoism

Rabin Sayami in *Nagarik*,
3 January

नागरिक

NOMINATIONS

BEST NEW ARTIST

1. Bartika Eam Rai - *Khali*
2. Mental Radio - *Nasodha*
3. Pahlenlo Batti Muni - *Bari Lai*
4. Samik Sapkota - *Sadhain Sadhain*
5. Sound Wings - *Yatra*

BEST SONG ORIGINALLY RECORDED FOR A MOTION PICTURE SOUNDTRACK

1. Deepak Sharma - *Dekha Na Champa Suna Na Champa*
2. Kali Prasad Baskota - *Nira*
3. Kali Prasad Baskota - *Thamel Bazaara*
4. Rajan Raj Shrivakoti - *Purba Paschim Rail*
5. Tara Prakash Limbu - *Sare Sare*

BEST VOCAL COLLABORATION

1. Karna Das & Anju Panta - *Timro Mero*
2. Manila Sotang & Uday Sotang - *Dui Dinko*
3. Milan Amatya & Shiva Pariyar - *Dekhyo Bhane Maya Moha*
4. Nattu Feat. Trishala Gurung - *Aankha Bhari*
5. Rajesh Payal Rai & Indira Joshi - *Kanchhale*

BEST FEMALE POP VOCAL PERFORMANCE

1. Anju Panta - *Aankha Rasayera*
2. Bartika Eam Rai - *Khali*
3. Mausami Gurung - *Ali Ali*
4. Shital Moktan - *Ke Ma Swatantra Chhu*
5. Trishna Gurung - *Garyo K Timro Mayale*

BEST MALE POP VOCAL PERFORMANCE

1. Bharat Sitaula - *Halka Halka*
2. Bipul Chettri - *Siriri*
3. Deepak Bajracharya - *Sani*
4. Hemant Rana - *Saili*
5. Shiva Pariyar - *Allare*

BEST PERFORMANCE BY A GROUP OR DUO WITH VOCAL

1. 1974 AD - *Pathai Deu Na*
2. Mental Radio - *Nasodha*
3. Nepathya - *Ho Rama Rama*
4. Pahlenlo Batti Muni - *Bari Lai*
5. Satyakrit - *Ganesha Gananayak*

FOLK RECORD OF THE YEAR

1. Anju Lama & Milan Lama - *Himal*
2. Birahi Karki - *Aamako Tasbir Haataima*
3. Bishnu Majhi & Binod Bajurali - *Pardesh No. 7*
4. Deepak Sharma - *Hey Barai*
5. Sargam Shah Joshi & Gokul Raut - *Company Tolako*

BEST POP / ROCK COMPOSITION

1. Bipul Chettri - *Siriri*
2. Deepak Bajracharya - *Sani*
3. Garima Gurung & Iman Bikram Shah - *Nasodha*
4. Kali Prasad Baskota - *Saili*
5. Satyakrit - *Ganesha Gananayak*

BEST ARRANGEMENT

1. Ashish Abiral - *Timi Bina Ek Pal Pani*
2. Bipul Chettri - *Siriri*
3. Deepak Bajracharya & Rhythm Band - *Sani*
4. Maharaj Thapa - *Sanglo Sanglo*
5. Rikesh Gurung - *Saili*

BEST COMPOSITION

1. Ashish Abiral - *Timi Bina Ek Pal Pani*
2. Hari Lamsal - *Aaja Pheri*
3. Karna Das - *Sanglo Sanglo*
4. Karna Das - *Timro Mero*
5. Shiva Pariyar - *Chhahare Khola*

BEST ROCK VOCAL PERFORMANCE

1. 1974 AD - *Pathai Deu Na*
2. Axix - *Chyangba*
3. Mental Radio - *Nasodha*
4. Nepathya - *Ho Rama Rama*
5. Sound Wings - *Yatra*

BEST FEMALE VOCAL PERFORMANCE

1. Anju Pant - *Timi Bina Ek Pal Pani*
2. Banika Pradhan - *Purnimako Raat*
3. Jonisha Paudel - *Dukheko Naya*
4. Melina Rai - *Aaja Pheri*
5. Milan Amatya - *Ke Samjheu Malaai*

BEST MALE VOCAL PERFORMANCE

1. Ajar Jangam - *Aaja Pheri*
2. Karna Das - *Sanglo Sanglo*
3. Rajesh Payal Rai - *Kulchi Hida*
4. Satya Raj Acharya - *Kali*
5. Shiva Pariyar - *Chhahare Khola*

ALBUM OF THE YEAR

1. 1974 AD - *Hazaar Sapana*
2. Bartika Eam Rai - *Bimbaakash*
3. Mental Radio - *Mental Radio*
4. Rajesh Payal Rai - *Darshan Namaste 3*
5. Sanjeev Singh - *Timi Ra Ma*

SONG OF THE YEAR

1. Bartika Eam Rai - *Khali*
2. Birendra Pathak - *Aaja Pheri*
3. Ek Narayan Bhandari - *Timi Bina Ek Pal Pani*
4. Rajendra Thapa - *Dukheko Naya*
5. Shweta Mainali - *Chhahare Khola*

RECORD OF THE YEAR

1. Bipul Chettri - *Siriri*
2. Deepak Bajracharya - *Sani*
3. Hemant Rana - *Saili*
4. Mental Radio - *Nasodha*
5. Shiva Pariyar - *Chhahare Khola*

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Floods in the Tarai repeatedly inundate villages, submerging villagers in poverty

SHREEJANA SHRESTHA
in DHANUSHA

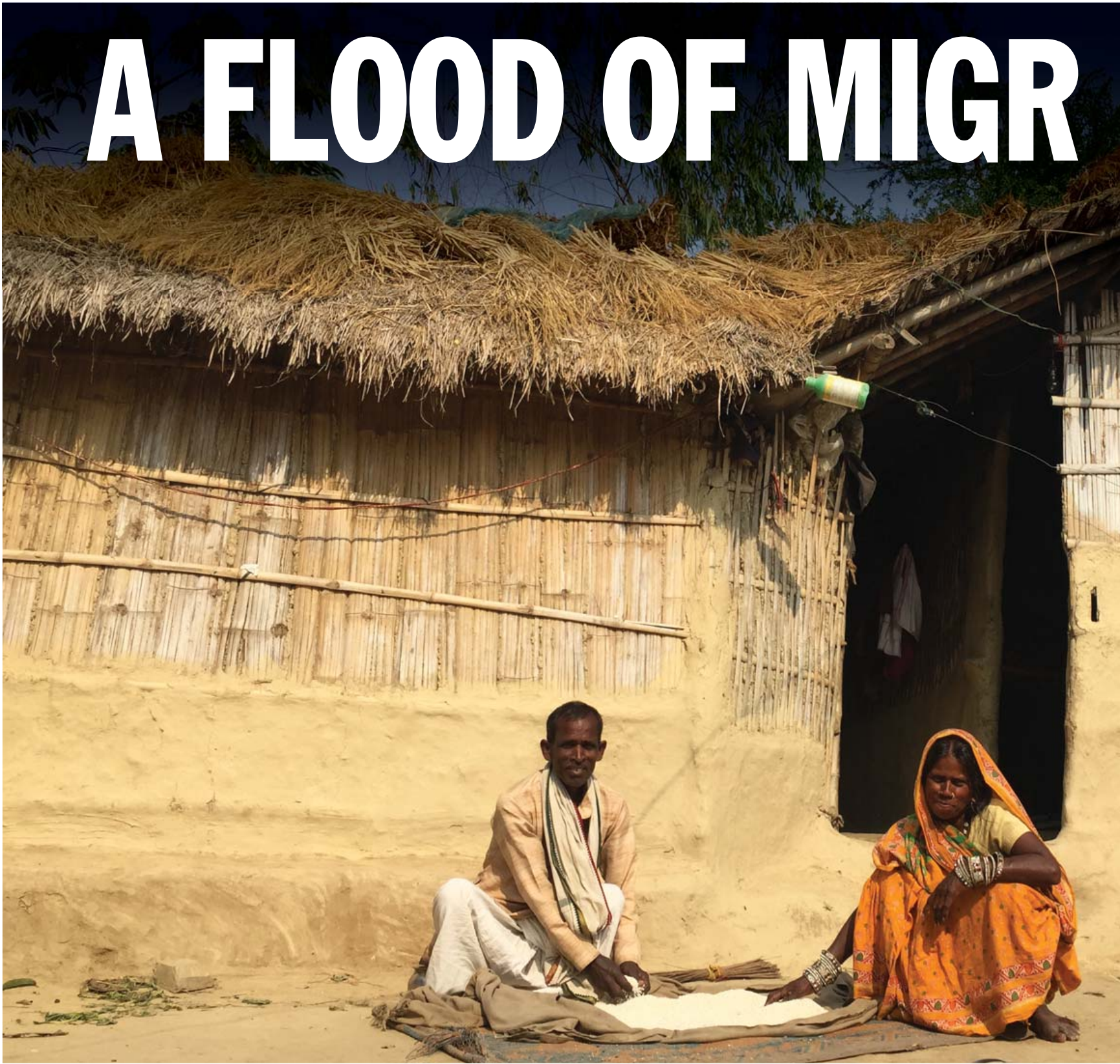
Ramji Mukhiya lives in a thatched mud hut that may collapse any time if there is another flood. The rising waters in August damaged his house, and he rebuilt this one with loans — not for the first time.

Mukhiyapatti Musharniya village is near one of the lowest points in Nepal along the Indian border, and is hit by recurring floods. Extreme weather events caused by climate change, deforestation of the Chure hills and obstruction of natural drainage because of highway embankments and constricted rivers have led to ever-more destructive floods.

“I already rebuilt my house four times, and I have not only spent all my savings, but took loans to rebuild every time floods washed it away,” says the 55-year-old Mukhiya, who sent his eldest son to work in Qatar while his second son is soon leaving for Malaysia.

Nepal’s overall poverty rate may be going down, according to the Multi-dimensional Poverty Index report released last week by the National Planning Commission (*see Editorial, page 2*) but here in rural Dhanusha, floods are pushing farmers like the Mukhiyas into ever-deeper poverty.

“My sons couldn’t finish school because of the floods, and now I



have to send them abroad to earn so we can repay our house loans,” Mukhiya added. “I think I can survive for a few days without food, but not without a house.”

His neighbour Mohan Yadav, 60, has three sons, one in Mumbai the others in Malaysia. The 2010 floods washed away his house and all his property. He had taken a Rs100,000 loan to rebuild, but before he could pay it back the floods in August destroyed everything again.

“I had to take additional loans

to send my son to Malaysia three years ago, my loans have now grown to Rs1 million,” rued Yadav, who survives on the money his sons send home, but has nothing left to repay loans or rebuild.

As elsewhere in the Tarai, the floods in Dhanusha have not just washed away people’s homes but also their land and crops. With no home, no crops and the farmlands washed away by the waters, farmers have no option but to migrate.

“We are left with nothing, and I wouldn’t have sent my sons to work

in Malaysia if I still had my land,” Yadav told us.

The government has a list of 275,723 flood-affected families in Dhanusha alone from the last 10 years. Nearly 7,000 homes were damaged and some 3,800 washed away by the Jalad, Kamala and Jamuni rivers, which are dry now in winter, but in summer are raging torrents.

Dhanusha today is devoid of young men. Every household has several people in India, Malaysia or the Gulf — most of them on a

mission to earn enough to pay back loans. The few men we spotted, were processing their passports and work permits to leave.

Bhikhari Yadav has four sons: two have already left for Malaysia and Delhi while another one is waiting for his work visa for UAE. The father has a loan of Rs700,000, which he used to rebuild his house and process his sons’ employment contracts.

Sunil Kumar Jha of the District Disaster Relief Committee, Dhanusa, admits that indebtedness



ATION



ALL PHOTOS: SHREEJANA SHRESTHA

due to recurring floods has impoverished his district: "Building a house is the foremost priority of people here, boys drop out of school and migrate to support their families. It is the same in every household."

It is no surprise that Dhanusha district has one of the highest migration rates in Nepal, thanks to the floods that destroy crops, farms and homes. It has become almost impossible for people here to escape this vicious cycle of disasters and indebtedness. 🇳🇵

RECURRING NIGHTMARE: Ramji Mukhiya and his wife in front of the house they have rebuilt four times (*above*).

Mohan Yadav has three sons, all of them are working as labourers abroad (*right*).

Ramji Mukhiya's wife points out the roof damaged by heavy rainfall (*below, left*).

Bhikhari Yadav with his son, who is leaving for a job in UAE (*far left*).

Loyalty mocked



Nepali migrant workers are deemed to be 'loyal' to their employers, but a new Amnesty International survey suggests that the label reveals their vulnerability as well as their virtue.

The survey says some recruiters — who trap workers into bonded labour by saddling them with huge debts — market Nepali migrants to prospective foreign clients by highlighting how unlikely they are to quit jobs.

Amnesty International reviewed and analysed 100 recruitment websites, and found that Nepali workers are frequently advertised using descriptions such as 'loyal' and 'completely dedicated to work even in adverse situations'. The results of that survey rightly points out that workers are loyal by force, not by choice.

In November 2016, Amnesty interviewed four Nepali workers who had been deceived by their recruiters about working conditions in Malaysia. When they quit their jobs, they were not given return tickets, and were able to return home only when their families took more loans to buy them tickets.

Not all migrant workers trapped overseas can

afford tickets to freedom, and they have to endure extremely harsh and inhumane working conditions. Their perseverance earns them the reputation of being 'loyal' — a label used by recruiters to trap migrant workers into a vicious cycle of debt and deception.

Publishing the results of the survey in December, Amnesty also slammed the Nepal Government for failing to crack down on recruitment agencies. "The Nepali government's weak enforcement of the law is playing straight into the hands of extortionists and loan sharks," said James Lynch, deputy director of Amnesty's Global Issues Programme.

"Migrant workers all too often end up trapped in the soul-destroying situation of working abroad for years simply to pay off the huge, often illegal fees they were charged to take the job. Tackling this exploitative industry is a matter of urgency."

Amnesty International's survey included mobile phone surveys with 414 Nepali migrant workers in Malaysia and Nepal. 🇳🇵

More online: www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/12/nepal-migrant-workers-failed-by-government-exploited-by-businesses/



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Rani Pokhari Fun Park

I agree with many of you irate readers spewing venom at Kathmandu's newly-elected Mayor for what he is doing to Rani Pokhari. Turning this historic 16th-century pond into a concrete-rimmed swimming pool is a terrible idea. If Mayor Shakya had any intestinal fortitude he would turn Rani Pokhari into a much more ambitious Fun Park with water slides, splash pads, swan pedal boats. If he had any imagination (which he obviously doesn't) he would also introduce a high-speed hydrofoil ferry to ply between Tri Chandra College roundtrip to Durbar High School, so commuters could bypass traffic jams in the Ratna Park intersection.

Not that The Ass has been asked for any advice by City Hall, but if I was, there is a whole bunch of beautification and modernisation schemes I would propose. These ideas are top secret so don't go around blurting them out to anyone:

- Tundikhel**
This last bit of open space in Kathmandu is the city's lung. But it is a diseased lung, so we should give it back to the ex-Royal Nepal Army which used it as a parade ground for the cavalry. HQ should be allowed to use the field's

entire length to showcase its ballistic missiles on Phulpati and Shivaratri, and build underground launch silos there.

- Sano Tundikhel**
This forgotten little brother of Tundikhel can be recommissioned for the Army's hush-hush centrifuge facility for making weapons grade plutonium.
- Dharara**
The site of the former tower should also be handed over to the Army, where it can rebuild the minaret in the shape of a missile as a decoy to fool spy satellites.
- Tinkune**
The Mayor should turn this into Disneyland Kathmandu with Astro Orbiter, Disney monorail, Dumbo the Flying Elephant fantasy ride, and last but not least the Golden Zephyr thrill ride.
- Durbar High School**
Nepal's first school to be converted into Durbar Mall, with Cine 4D and IMAX multiplexes.



The Ass

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