A winter sets in and air quality deteriorates, most of Kathmandu Valley’s 18 mayors gathered on Thursday in Patan to listen to experts, and discuss a strategy to reduce air pollution.

The Mayors’ Summit on Air Pollution heard from scientists that Kathmandu ranks 381 among the world’s 3,600 most polluted cities. And that a third of the Valley’s population is caused by vehicular emissions, 28% from road dust, 23% from garbage burning and 18% from brick kilns. In winter, local air quality is worsened by industrial pollution and crop burning smoke blown in from India.

“People are cursing us because we have not acted to reduce pollution, this forum gives us an opportunity for the Valley’s municipalities to work together to address this public health menace collectively,” said Lalitpur mayor Dhiren Bahadur Mahajan (pictured above, left, sitting with Kathmandu Mayor Bishnu Shrestha). One of the Valley’s most pro-active mayors, Madan Bhandari of Thimi has been building bicycle lanes and widening sidewalks, and advised fellow mayors that there was now enough awareness, and they should move into implementing remedial measures. The Mayor’s Forum will soon decide on steps to be taken to improve the Valley’s air quality.

The Mayors’ Summit was jointly organised by Kathmandu and Lalitpur Municipalities with Clean Energy Nepal and the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD). Bhushan Tuladhar of Clean Energy Nepal pointed out that 20% of Kathmandu’s vehicles caused half the Valley’s pollution, and urged national and local governments to improve fuel quality and enforce green emission stickers.

“It is time for the municipalities to act, and Kathmandu could learn from Mexico City which has curbed air pollution,” Tuladhar added.

Mexico’s ambassador to Nepal Melba Prieto presented a checklist of measures undertaken after Mexico City was declared the most polluted city in the world in 1992, and used to have only eight days of good air quality in a year. By 2015, it had 248 days of good air.

Prieto said the trick was to take a measurable step-by-step approach to ensure clean fuel, introduce catalytic converters, efficient public transport, and move out industries.

Interview, right. Video online.

“Mexico City and Kathmandu are both situated in bow-shaped valleys, but Kathmandu is where Mexico City was 30 years ago. We can offer lessons on how to clean the air. Don’t wait till the birds start falling dead from the sky, like what happened in Mexico City,” Prieto told Kathmandu Valley mayors.

The mayors discussed how policy changes to improve air quality like better fuel and vehicle standards, and urged national and local governments to pass the national government, but other measures like pedestrianisation, bicycle lanes, and public transport could be municipality priorities. But it was vital to have the political will to remove air pollution and improve public health.

The ICIMOD director General David Medellin: “Our organisation is based in Kathmandu Valley, and our research into air pollution can make a difference if it is used by national and local governments for policy interventions.”

Sonia Awale

Mexico City’s lessons for Kathmandu

Mexico’s ambassador to Nepal Melba Prieto spoke to Nepali Times about what Kathmandu can learn from Mexico City about improving air quality.

Nepali Times: You are based in Delhi and have set an example by riding an auto-rickshaw with a Mexican flag. How has that gone down?

Melba Prieto: At first everyone was very surprised that an ambassador would drive a small vehicle like that. But then millions of Indians use it every day. The first thing we have to do is change our behaviour towards air pollution. I’m just using a vehicle that is much better for the environment, and I live in Mexico City that was once the most polluted in the world. We are still fighting against pollution, and cannot say we have won the battle.

Kathmandu Valley and Mexico City have similar topography that traps pollution. How do you improve air quality when the source of pollution is so diverse?

There is no one source. For many years, crop burning was in Mexico City. We have to re-educate the farmers, provide them with machinery, and the government has to help them. We have to look at all the fuels we use. Our cars need to have catalytic converters. Industrial units need to be far away from residential areas.

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HARDWORKING STUDENTS

It's National University Student Week this week, an opportunity for students to highlight the importance of higher education and the contributions that students make to society. This year, the theme is “Empowering Our Future,” emphasizing the role of education in preparing students for meaningful careers and civic engagement.

The week includes various events and activities designed to engage students, promote awareness, and foster a sense of community. Students have the chance to showcase their talents, share their experiences, and connect with peers and faculty. With a focus on diversity and inclusivity, the events aim to create a welcoming environment that encourages everyone to participate.

One of the highlights is the annual Student Research Symposium, where students present their research projects on a wide range of topics. This event provides a platform for students to share their findings, gain feedback, and network with other scholars.

Another popular event is the Career Expo, where students can interact with employers, learn about job opportunities, and explore career paths. This year, the expo has attracted more than 50 companies, offering a diverse range of positions for students.

In addition to these major events, there are smaller gatherings, workshops, and workshops that cater to specific interests and needs. These include sessions on mental health, sustainability, and leadership development.

Overall, National University Student Week is a vibrant celebration of student engagement and achievement. It's a time to reflect on the contributions of students and to envision the future role of higher education in society.
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Dollar Laxmi

The fall of NPR vis-à-vis USD is a bonanza for Nepal’s remittance-driven economy

Anil Chitrakar

Nepal Telecom (NTC) is losing market share so rapidly to private rivals that many have begun to compare it with Janakpur Cigarette Factory, the Soviet-era public sector enterprise that was allowed to go bust. Nepal’s tobacco market for two decades, but died slowly to death because of corruption, mismanagement and political interference. Since privatization in 1990, the factory premises have been converted into the headquarters of the Province 2 government. Just as Janakpur Cigarette Factory rapidly lost market share to private tobacco companies in the 1990s, NTC is following the same pattern, and falling behind the aggressive growth of Ncell owned by the Malaysia-based Axiata group.

Nepal Telecom’s assistant spokesperson Shobhan Adhikari justifies the slowdown in income from international calls, arguing this is now the trend worldwide. “It is not just us,” he said.

But there are other trends that allow NTC to claim from being the country’s largest tax-paying company till a few years ago. Ncell is now paying more in taxes than NTC, with more than Rs24 billion (in each of the last three fiscal years). NTC’s tax total went down to Rs8 billion, compared to Rs13 billion three years ago.

To make matters worse, NTC is currently rocked by a corrupt committee enterprise that is seeking a new CEO. The anti-corruption watchdog CADA is investigating the company for inflating its work to award a multi-billion dollar 4G service contract to a Chinese company, which reportedly quoted a much higher price than the estimate. Ncell has also said that spending billions in expanding the 4G service would be a waste of resources because the world is moving towards 5G. The controversy has delayed NTC’s expansion plans for its 4G service beyond the Kathmandu Valley and Pokhara.

When Nepal Telecom launched 4G service in the valley in 2015, Ncell was not allowed to upgrade its service for failing to clear its capital gains tax. But Ncell acquired a license to launch 4G service last year, and it has already expanded to 21 cities. NTC is lagging far behind.

A former top manager of Nepal Telecom says: “The State-owned company is collapsing any time soon, but its downfall has definitely begun.”

For tourists visiting Nepal, everything will seem cheaper, but hotel rooms, air tickets, tour packages are all priced in dollars and therefore should really make no difference. Tourists are going to be iritated that entrance fees to Nepal’s conservations areas have gone up since they get on their flights to Nepal.

Ideally for those exporting goods and getting paid in USD, the situation is rosy, unless you have component inputs like oil, machine parts, ingredients that have US dollar price tags.

While everyone complains that everything is getting more expensive, few blame the political parties for the state of the economy. Shekhar Koirala and the Gurna Bank to “do something”. Should the Nepali currency be unpegged and we get a new par-rate to the Indian currency? Do we need to cut the Nepali–India border before we do that? The regulators in China got accused of deviating their currency to help exports, should Nepal use this opportunity to boost exports?

Decisions like these require sound market information which we seem to lack. We rely on tables and indices made by donors and multilateral agencies. One thing we can be sure of is that there will be a seminar on the topic of the fall in rupee after Laxmi Puja. Experts will present their views and proceedings will be recorded. Runaway capital will go on to foreign-funded fact-finding junks to study the impact of currency drops on national economies.

Actually, the falling value of the Nepali (or) currency could result in the US dollar being an advantage for Nepalis who depend on products for those who want to produce and export. It is a real good deal for those who want fewer pump sets, and those sending children to study abroad. For those earning in dollars and are yet to sell rupees, things could not be better. For the poor and middle classes who can’t afford this whole discussion is mute.

Anil Chitrakar is President of Siddhichinmay,

Nepal Telecom, for go or? Ramesh Kumar

Nepal Telecom (NTC) is losing market share so rapidly to private rivals that many have begun to compare it with Janakpur Cigarette Factory, the Soviet-era public sector enterprise that was allowed to go bust. The cigarette manufacturer dominated Nepal’s tobacco market for two decades, but died slowly to death because of corruption, mismanagement and political interference. Since privatization in 1990, the factory premises have been converted into the headquarters of the Province 2 government. Just as Janakpur Cigarette Factory rapidly lost market share to private tobacco companies in the 1990s, NTC is following the same pattern, and falling behind the aggressive growth of Ncell owned by the Malaysia-based Axiata group.

NTC was the unchallenged leader in the country’s fast-growing telecommunications sector when most users used cell phones for voice calls. But market dynamics began to change with the shift towards mobile data, and most cell phone users spending more for the Internet rather than voice calls.

Three years ago, NTC had 46% share of the country’s internet data market, with Ncell (at that time owned by Telia-Sonera) holding 40%. Today, NTC’s internet market share has shrunk to 44%. Ncell too has lost its internet market share, but not as much as NTC.

NTC’s income dipped slightly to Rs41 billion this year from Rs44 billion last year, largely due to a fall in income from international voice calls. The company has lost 26% of its earnings from international calls in just three years because of breaches by internet-based messaging apps.

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A former top manager of Nepal Telecom says: “The State-owned company is collapsing any time soon, but its downfall has definitely begun.”
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Feminist prints

This year’s Photo Kathmandu has a unique multi-chapter exhibition titled The Public Life of Women: A Feminist Memory Project which displays archival images collected by Nepal Picture Library showcasing women of this country. Exhibitions outdoors at Patan Durbar Square, the pictures show Nepali women gradually moving beyond the confines of the household to public life, breaking away from social norms to be involved in street demonstrations, taking jobs, becoming public figures.

It took six months to curate this exhibition on the history of the women’s struggle in Nepal, and it will continue,” says organiser Nayantha Gurung Kakshapati. “The response has been overwhelming, not just from families that offered photographs, but also from visitors.”

The first part of the Feminist Memory Project titled ‘Women of the People’ seeks to create a visual archive of women’s movements in Nepal through photographs, other documents and oral testimonies from around Nepal. The profiles women are seen at key moments in Nepal’s history – as pioneers of the democratic struggle and human rights activists.

Many visitors are moved by the images of Ramala Ray, Laxmi Shah who committed suicide in full bridal Wear after her husband was killed during the anti-monarchy revolt in 1962. Many of these are unknown and unnamed personalities from the past who have remained in the shadows because of a male-dominated historiography.

The second part is ‘Stepping out into the World’ displayed in Dharagai which showcases Nepali women on trips abroad, wearing saris and carrying quintessentials. ‘Reading Under the Candlelight’ explores experiences of Nepali women in public education.

Patan’s Rashik Promise sees the exhibits every day on her way to work, and says: “The images are powerful, and passing them repeatedly in a public space drives home the important role Nepali women have played in our history.”

Another exhibit has recreated in Nagbahal the study of novelist Paramjeet where she wrote her famous books, and where Nepali intellectuals used to gather.

Nepal Picture Library is a photographic archive that has contributed to the study of Nepali photography and to explore the issues of memory, identity and history.

Monika Deugala

Go online for full Photo Gallery.

The Public Life of Women: A Feminist Memory Project

Photo Kathmandu 2018

http://www.photokathmandu.com/

12 October-16 November, 11am-7pm, Mangal Bazar, Patan
The violence of violation

Kanwar does not just examine the price women pay for the wars men fight, but also how the citizens are resisted and remembered. We watch the story of a mother who weaves her murdered daughter’s courage into a shawl – the red background standing for rebellion, the dot-like patterns for her relentless pursuit of justice.

The female body itself becomes a symbol of dignity and protest. Theatre artist Shibiti Heisam enacts a real-life drama in which Drupadi, an indigenous woman, refuses to be clothed after being raped by police, shaming the rapists with her nudity. Heisam has been performing this play for decades, but in 2004 real life mothers in Manipur also protested naked in support of a woman murdered after rape.

Kanwar’s film is from 2007, but is relevant today as an epidemic of rape sweeps the Subcontinent and MeToo gathers velocity on the Internet. The woman’s body continues to signify honour and humiliation, political disputes and caste wars are still settled by physically humiliating women. The film does not offer solutions, but links us to the past as we can contemplate present day violence of violation.

Women through history have been trapped between honour and shame. A look back at this history may help us understand man’s immunity to woman, so it is not repeated in future. This is an overwhelming installation, and the most sobering in this year’s Photo Kathmandu festival.

Kanwar says he projected eight separate screens at once because it is important to see what happened in history and what is happening today simultaneously.

He adds: “I hope it will help us understand what women go through during any conflict.”

The lighting testimonies by Amit Kanwar
Photo Kathmandu 2018
1164 – 7 PM
6th Floor Chitka Centre, Thamel
18 -19 April, 2019

Sewa Bhattarai
Sewa Bhattarai
26 OCTOBER - 1 NOVEMBER 2018
#932

Nick’s Cousins [USA]
Nick’s cousin plays Avant Garde Jazz with a rock punch, aggressive and exploratory, with a strong sense of melody. Their music is mostly written by the saxophone player Marty Harris. They’re in India to perform in Nepal, to see the homeland of their drummer Michael Thomas, and for the art of music.

The essence of jazz: "Jazz is freedom, a musical adventure without boundaries. There is a variety of experimental music, and we appreciate and learn from everything we hear."

Eduardo Mendonca [Brazil]
Mendonca’s origins are a blend of Brazilian rhythms, jazz, and a large participation in the world of Brazilian swing. He hopes to increase his efficiency and respect for Nepali culture, and to bridge the gap with love and gratitude.

The roots of jazz: "Jazz began in New Orleans, and growing around the world. It is a style that continues to grow, build, and change. Jazz is attention, emotion, movement, and style."

DACH [Austria]
DACH members come from diverse backgrounds: Western Classical, Jazz, Austrian & American Folk, Indian, Italian Classical Music. Their music is enriched by diverse sounds. They like to remain a music the same way twice. They hope to make people smile, cry, and laugh and feel the sounds of music.

What jazz is today: "Jazz is worldwide phenomenon with musicians putting together their styles. Sometimes there is the same core, but in a jazz band there is a big family that we are proud to be a part of. Sadly, there are female players, making a huge creative potential."

Adrien Brandeis Quintet [France]
Adrien Brandeis started his musical career in 2015 and recorded his quartet in 2017. He features various influences like bubbling, dubstep, classical, and African music. Despite the band’s origin in Nepal, the style brings together diverse, thoughtful, and experimental elements in their playing.

What jazz means: "Jazz means freedom, because it’s improvisation, and because you can express yourself differently every day. Improving your mood, jazz also means sharing because it is an interactive between the musician and audience."

Dave Feusi & Groove Gang [Switzerland]
Groove gang plays a mixture of jazz, funk, soul, and world music. For its members, jazz has many faces which can reach out to people who play music, who do not care about stylistic definitions. They seek forward to seeing different angles of life in Nepal, and to give lots of love and music forever.

The legacy of jazz: "Jazz was created more than one hundred years ago and still lives in our hearts and souls. In history, it was always a great source of inspiration for a conscious crowd. Today it is even more important, as an alternative to superficial mainstream, jazz is alive!"

Kathmandu, and all that jazz...

bands will be performing in various venues across Kathmandu from 3-6 November; DACH, Nick’s Cousins, Eduardo Mendonca, and Sewa Bhattarai. Kathmandu also has a distinctive identity.

"Jazz is popular because it revives in Nepal, it has its own style and character and is very attractive. Nepali jazz unique. Meanwhile, Jazzmandu infuses new styles and trends every year into the local jazz music and its performance."

JAZZ MANDU 2018
CONCERT FOR SCHOOL STUDENTS
16-1800 PM, 1 November
Alliance Française, Jhamsikhel
Entry by invitation only
Jazzmandu had a low-key launch with a few concerts playing great music for young minds. The concert for school students continues Jazzmandu’s long tradition of promoting music education and cross cultural understanding. Interested schools and individual students can request invitations by writing to info@jazzmandu.org. Seating is limited. Gates open at 11.30 AM, please be seated by 11.50 AM.

GROOVIN AT UPSTAIRS
7-9 PM, 1 November
Jazz Upstairs, Lastepat
Ticket: Rs 500
Calandra Collection gather new and old friends for an explosive jam at the heart of Jazz in Nepal. Jazz Upstairs. Gates open at 6 PM. A ticket does not guarantee a seat.

VALLEY JAMS
7-9 PM, 2 November
Mok, Jhamsikhel
Jazz at the Temple House

11 AM - 5 PM, Nov 5, 2023

FIRE DANCE (in-venue)

Performance at 11 AM with fire artists, dancing to the music and light rounds.

Informal jams at lunch break and dinner.

SANSKAR NATIVE WOOD CLARINET

Performance at 4 PM with Joshi playing the clarinet and creating an electric atmosphere.

MUSICAL MASTERCLASSES

1 PM, Nov 5, 2023

Drop-in and jam with performing artists.

SOUNDS OF JAM JAZZ

1 PM, Nov 5, 2023

Live music performance in the main stage area.

JAZZ BAZAR

2 PM - 5 PM, Nov 5, 2023

Shop for jazz-themed souvenirs and gear.

AZHANANDU FINALE

7 PM, Nov 5, 2023

Closing ceremony with grand finale and awards presentation.

Abhineet and Maria

Project Sarangi

Of the Santalensemble, Nepal, and the number of Santal musicians from the region.

Aussie artist Abhineet is a Santal musician and performer from the Indian state of Jharkhand.

Nepali Santal musicians will take the stage to perform their traditional music and art forms.

ABHINEET & MARIANNA

Performing Santal music and art forms.

Cradle Music School

A unique musical education program for Santal children, featuring master classes in classical Santal music.

Cradle Music School students.

Rahul La Shrestha

Musician and artist from Nepal.

Rahul La Shrestha Duo

A musical group consisting of Rahul La Shrestha and his partner.

Rahul La Shrestha live performance.

Cradenzo Collective

A contemporary jazz band from Nepal.

Cradenzo Collective live performance.

Masons' Jazz Band

A popular jazz band from Nepal.

Masons' Jazz Band live performance.
**GETAWAY**

- **Nirvana Country Club**
  - Forty-five minutes from Bhaktapur Airport, this 9-hole course in Patan was built at a former recruitment and pension base for the British Brigade of Gurkhas in 1962. The course is par-37 over 18 holes. (Shop on camp, Kharis, +977 5121635)

- **The Last Resort**
  - Bungy jumping, tandem skydiving, or white water rafting—ride an adrenaline rush to Bene Chosin River near the Tibetan border. Make your trekking and mountain-climbing dreams a reality. Strengthen, Thadapalchok, +977 4450292.

- **Dahila Boutique Hotel**
  - A luxury hotel at the Bank of Phewa Lake with 180 degree mountain and city views. A good end to a memorable trek. Lakeside, Pokhara, +977 446565.

- **Club Himalaya**
  - For enjoying mountain views and a refreshing weekend escape, special packages available for Nepali and expatriates. Kegarkot, +977 4451262.

- **Patalbayan Village Resort**
  - A new venture with great views of jungle walks, and picnics to rejuvenate your tired routine. Chhapre, Kathmandu, +977 245537, 9861757054.

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**AIR QUALITY INDEX**

Nepal’s air quality index (AQI) is monitored daily by the Central Department of Health, Ministry of Health and Population. The AQI is categorized into six levels: Good, Moderate, Poor, Very Poor, Severe, and Hazardous. The AQI is calculated using the Air Quality Index Number (AQIN), which takes into account the concentrations of particulate matter (PM) and other pollutants.

**AQIN**

- **Good**: AQIN ≤ 50
- **Moderate**: 51 ≤ AQIN ≤ 100
- **Poor**: 101 ≤ AQIN ≤ 200
- **Very Poor**: 201 ≤ AQIN ≤ 300
- **Severe**: 301 ≤ AQIN ≤ 500
- **Hazardous**: AQIN ≥ 500

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**OUR PICK**

- **Groove at Ustipat**
  - Cadence Collective gather new and old friends for an explosive jam at the heart of Jai Jai Nepal, Jai Jai (11/6)
  - 7 November, 7-9 pm (Guitar, cymbal, violin, folk)

- **Praza**
  - Emjoy Prasad’s aromatic food and special spices accomplished by relaxing music. Their autumn special, ‘Masala momos’ are a must try! Bollard, (01) 4415483.
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९७% सामग्री बादा बवाल गरी रमाउन्नेहो।
साथै लक्ष की इंटरस्टील बुझे आर्थिक उपहारहरू जिल्लुहो।
Western Nepal’s liberated slaves find that freedom is complicated

Sewa Bhattarai
in Baitadi

Ten years after the government finally abolished bonded debt labour, tens of thousands of Halliyas in western Nepal continues to suffer from this form of modern-day slavery. A person became a Halliya if the family could not pay back the money borrowed from loan sharks at exorbitant interest rates. They were forced to work for free to pay back the debt, but many spent their whole lives in slavery because the interest kept piling up. The loan was then passed down to the next generation.

Even though the practice is now banned, activists say that there are about 25,000 still working as bonded labourers in some of the most remote and underdeveloped districts of western Nepal.

Parliamentarian Triswada Timrakoti of Baitadi was not on the list of about 17,000 Halliyas who were ‘freed’ and today makes a living breaking stones by the roadside and working for his employer for a minimum wage.

A new Chimney

Many hotel and restaurant frequents were saddened when the Chimney Restaurant, founded by the legendary Boris Lourieitch, closed last year. They missed Boris’ famous signature dishes like Moschito and Durand and the extraordinary copper chimneys that were the centerpiece of his restaurant. But the heart is still alive, The Chimney is back with a fresh look and even fresher menu.

The new menu has been revised and expanded, adding a new wine list, a new fresh pasta dish, and a new seafood special. The food is still delicious, with the same attention to detail and high standards.

The new menu includes a selection of new dishes like Seafood Risotto, Chicken in a Curry, and the famous Sauteed Beef Steak. The restaurant also offers a variety of vegetarian options, including the famous Pumpkin Soup and the crunchy Green Salad.

In addition to the new food, the restaurant has also updated its decor, with new lighting and a fresh color scheme.

The new outdoor lounge has sleek furniture that invites guests to relax, and enjoy the view and the soothing sound of the water feature.

The restaurant is located in the heart of the city, just steps away from the main street. It is open seven days a week, for lunch and dinner.

The new Chimney is a welcome addition to the city’s restaurant scene, offering a new and exciting option for foodies and wine enthusiasts alike.
to lose but their chains

"There was serious under-counting while identifying Haliyas, and since the government only counts those with official IDs, there has to be another data collection drive urgently," says Rejumnd Bhol, former president of Federation of National Haliya Liberation Societies. The government admits there may have been omissions, but is not inclined to do anything about it for now. “There may be people missing in our list but we are first resettling those identified as Haliya in the first phase. We do not want to take both processes forward simultaneously,” says Gopal Giri who heads the Settlement Management Department in Kathmandu.

But even those identified as Haliyas in the first count are not happy with their resettlement packages to build homes. Half of them are still waiting for compensation. The government has set the unrealistic target of resettling all remaining Haliyas by the end of this fiscal year, but few are convinced.

Those who got compensation packages of Rs10,000-50,000 say the amount was insufficient to get them started in life. Ram Rakhecir Parki of Daudikhola is well known because he was the first Haliya to be freed 10 years ago.

“10 is good to have my own place to live in, but with the money the government gave, I could only afford this barren land,” Kunjerd Parki, who is luckier than most is because he has a related job with the Federation.

The government says it is concentrating on providing land, not livelihoods for freed Haliyas, which threatens their health, education, employment and very survival. Maradri Damai of Tipaiya received seeds, but, sewing machines and tailoring training from various charities, but life is still a struggle.

Sahiti Bhol in Satibagh of Achham has two sons, one of whom sends money home from India, while another studied to be an agriculture technician, but is jobless. She asks: “What is the use of education, if nobody trusts you?”

Then there are reports of some Haliyas lapsing back into debt slavery, and going back to work for their old masters out of sheer desperation.

“Much progress has been made in the past ten years but it is very slow, and one reason could be because they are Dalits,” says Hari Shrestha, former CA member and coordinator of the Committee on Haliya Rehabilitation.

Indeed, up to 94% of Haliyas are Dalit, and caste discrimination adds another layer of injustice to their lives. Back in Railidi, Banan Tiwara automatically opens his feet and drinks water from a tap set aside for Dalits, and does not touch a tap meant for the “upper” castes.

“To this village, there have always been two springs: one for the Dalits and one for the others. Even today we are not allowed to touch the other water source,” Tiwara explains.

Among Tipaiya’s 20 families, only one person has passed Grade 10. Most make a living through wage labour, and the village suffers from water scarcity. Tea shops in the bazaar still do not buy their milk, victims of rape are overwhelmingly Dalit and the perpetrators from outside the community. The town has always had two temples: both called jagannath, and even the temple of the Dalits looks dilapidated.

 Says Dalit rights activist Karen Dayal: “We should evaluate the resettlement packages already handed out, and the next phase of identifying the remaining Haliyas needs to start immediately.”
Migration Certificates

Student visas are now the preferred method for young Nepalis to emigrate.

Prakriti Kandel

A broad study has entered the Nepali lexicon. Student migration now rivals the medical education industry, overseas contract work, and tourism as the fastest growing sector of Nepal’s economy.

Labour migration to India, West Asia and the Gulf, and the remittances Nepali workers send back home from these countries get most public attention, overshadowing the growing number of Nepalis going to Australia, Japan and Europe to study.

At Western countries tighten immigration policies, student visas have become the preferred method for young Nepalis to emigrate. Some host countries have left that door deliberately open as a way to control and curtail the impact of cheap labour for menial jobs their own nationals do not want to do.

Most young Nepalis who line up at ‘education consular offices’ in Kathmandu these days are waiting for a one-way ticket out of Nepal. In a Nepal Times survey this month, most of those leaving on student visas freely admitted that their intention is to emigrate. Last year, Australia was the top destination, followed by Japan, European countries and the US (see Illustration).

Suresh Khadka from Dhankuta is applying to go to Australia because his brother who went there three years ago, has convinced him that studying in Australia will help him become more independent, mature and skilled.

Sushma Rijal is leaving to study culinary arts in Australia, and says he wants better education and experience: “I explored some institutions in Nepal, but found Australia much more attractive.”

Pulaya Karmacharya is studying economics in Australia, and says facilities and level of instruction are much better there. Having studied migration herself, she adds that the main attraction for most Nepalis is that students are allowed to work 20 hours a week, and stay on with post-study work permits to gain experience.

Kajal Rai is in Japan, and says most Nepali students there work more and study less. “They come here mostly to earn money,” she wrote in an email interview.

But Lama’s parents in Helukuda sold family property to pay an education consultancy in Kathmandu Rs 5 million to fix him a student visa. Lama, 26, says it is an investment in his future. He hopes to work part-time to pay the fees at a little-known accountancy college in Sydney.

“I don’t think I am coming back,” Lama tells us frankly, “the student visa is the only way to leave Nepal.”

Student visas have become an easy avenue for young Nepalis to enter Australia or Japan, because unlike work visas, they do not require the presentation of tangible skill sets. Students can work as cashiers, janitors, waiters, or even Uber drivers while studying. Often, they can convert the student visa to work permits.

The number of Nepalis in Japan has grown ten-fold in the last ten years to 60,000, with most of the increase due to new student arrivals. In 2008, there were less than 2,000 Nepalis on student visas in Japan, this year it has jumped to 25,000. (See box, right)

The Japanese government does not want to open the main door for skilled labour migration, so Nepalis are allowed to come in through the back door to fulfil the need for cheap labour to make up for Japan’s shrinking workforce.

Masako Tanaka, professor at Tokyo’s Sophia University who has studied Nepali labour migration, told this newspaper last year.

Language is still an issue in Japan, which is why Australia has now become the #1 destination for migrating students. Shree Ram Twinebazar has been in Japan for nine years, and explains: “Living in Japan is expensive, so students will not be able to afford costs without working. And after starting to work, it becomes difficult to continue studies.”

It is poor pressure and ease of acquiring student visas that has brought young Nepalis to apply to study abroad. Most say they were attracted by glamorous Facebook posts of classmates or relatives. But once they get there, many find things are not so easy.

“People do not want to talk about the hard work and struggle on Facebook, and they post pictures of the occasional outings that makes it seem like life here.
is very prosperous,” says Sugam Suwal who has been in Australia for four years: “Australia is difficult and requires exceptional self-motivation.”

Nearly 5,000 students went to Europe last year, and the highest number to Poland. Although many students went on government scholarships, and are attracted by the high quality of education in Europe, most are there with the intention of migrating. There are also jobs which need to be filled in the shrinking workforce of most European countries.

“If Nepalis receive degrees from good universities, they can compete for jobs like any other European,” says Ambica Ashirikar who did her thesis on migration from Hungary’s Central European University.

But most European schools do not offer scholarships, and students find managing costs and attending college very difficult leading to a high dropout rate. With limited skills, young Nepalis end up as cooks or farmhands. Despite this, earnings are better and Nepali student migrants in Europe prefer to stay on.

“Besides the brain drain and the billions Nepal spend to pay for their school fees abroad, the growing out-migration is an indicator of the disillusionment of Nepal’s aspirational youth with the state of the country’s education, development and future.”

The Returnees

Not all Nepali students who go abroad to study end up staying there, and many working after their studies still nurse a dream of coming back to their home country. Some return because of family, others because they miss the state-run schools in Nepal. Others are motivated by going back to society in Nepal, and say they prefer to contribute to the mainstream instead of being a cog in the wheel abroad. Later, there has been a steady stream of students returning because of tighter migration rules that make it difficult to get residency abroad.

Ashish Tiwari, who studied at Harvard University and came back to Nepal in the 1990s says that his primary reason for returning was to be with family.

“I had first cousins who had gone abroad to study and had come back to Nepal, so I wanted to look up to them,” recalls Tiwari, adding that staying abroad was not as popular a few years ago. The Nepali diaspora has grown, and this has made it easier for them to stay.

The primary reason for the return was the denial of his B-1 visa in the US, a story that made it to the New York Times frontpage. But Periyawanshi adds that the high worldwide expansion of Page Kamps, a New York based company he co-founded with fellow University of Pennsylvania graduates Tid Weng and Vincent Starcher Grace.

But with youths disinclined with the political and economic state of Nepal, the pull force may not be strong enough to convince young Nepalis to return, especially when there are limited job opportunities. Sugam Suwal in Australia says he has a dream to start a construction company back in Nepal but adds: “The situation in Nepal does not really make it possible for us to take the risk.”

New laws in Japan

The number of young Nepalis migrating to Japan is likely to increase further if the country’s plan to allow more foreigners to make up for a decline in the workforce ahead of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics goes ahead.

However, the Japanese government is also planning to reduce its informal visa quotas for cooks and students in favour of five-year work permits for blue-collar workers. This is after reports of misuse of the visas by foreigners, as well as exploitation of students by employers.

Nepalis have been migrating to Japan on visas for chefs, students, dependents or trainees, and the number of Nepalis in Japan is crossing 90,000. The Japanese Department of Justice had been limiting visas in the past because it wanted a legal loophole for cheap labour.

Fewer applicants in Kathmandu for student and professional visas are being approved compared to previously. Prospective students pay Rs 1.5 million to educational consultancies to fix their admissions and visas, but there has been a marked drop in the student visa approvals by the embassy. Those on student visas are allowed to work for 28 hours a week, and many pay their college fees with their earnings.

Nepali students work at night and go to schools in the daytime, with many reportedly falling asleep at their desks. Others drop out of school because they find the language barrier difficult. There have also been cases of some genuine students returning to Nepal, or going on to Australia because they find the quality of instruction not as expected.

Besides the demand for the Olympics, Japan needs more workers in the service industry, agriculture, transport and as care givers because of its aging population, with a third of the population above 60, and 70,000 Japanese older than 90.

Under the plan, which has been opposed by Japan’s rightwing parties, five-year work permits will be given to foreigners in specific professions and they will not be allowed to bring dependents. It will require all migrant workers to learn Japanese before arriving.

There are now 1.3 million foreign workers in Japan, double the figure five years ago. The number of Nepalis has grown ten-fold in the past ten years mainly because of the increase in the number of students and dependents. This is a visa loophole that allows small and medium enterprises in Japan to source cheap low-skill labour.

The new rules will come into effect next April if it is approved by Parliament and will change the process through which Nepalis are going to Japan to work on student visas. With 21,500 students, Nepal is ranked third among countries with the highest number of nationals on student visas after China and Vietnam.

Kunda Dixit in Tokyo

The Returnees

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Kathmandu Top 10 City

Because of the holidays, many of the most important items of news had to be consigned to the dustbin of history because we skipped an issue last week. We repent below one story that fell between the cracks:

Kathmandu Voted Top 10 City

ATLANTA – Lonely Planet and CNN have voted Kathmandu Number 5 among Top 10 cities to visit in 2015. (I am not making this up. Google it.) Finally, a piece of good news to warm our cockles as winter sets in.

But, as long-term residents of Kathmandu, we were surprised to be included. Most of the places we would have been happy to be Number 1. I look at all our achievements:

- Nepal posted a 4.5% growth rate in the last fiscal year. Everything grew the deficit, the consumption of alcohol, the sale of 2.5 million kilos of Pharsa, the size of postcards on the Jagat Road, and according to a new book No Week in a prestigious national daily “The illegal Hash Trade Mushroomed.” Of this, the illegal cannabis trade has been cut in half. Either way, there was a 4.5% growth.
- We made it to the Lonely Planet list because Kathmandu offers the mud baths just round the road divider in Bhauluki, and we have a 20 ton truck to ramble over the puddles, and as a premium spa customer, you will be carried from nose to toe in the acrid clay that used to be a part of Kathmandu’s picturesque little bed.
- Government officials in Nepal’s capital are the most inhibited in the world. They never do anything that can be done the day after tomorrow.
- Nepal Telecom has some of the best tariffs in the world. My bill last month was over 11 rupees, couldn’t actually make any calls because the network was always busy.
- The word “no” doesn’t exist in the Nepali vocabulary. We will not refuse anything, even if we do not need it. As long as it is free.
- Most Nepali have no secrets. In fact, it is no secret that secret talks are going on in secret at a secret venue to supply the government.
- Nepal is also the most transparent nation on Earth. We don’t even try to hide bribery any more.
- Kathmandu people are the most hygienic in the world because they keep all their clothes clean by the early spring, and picking their ears and noses in public. Our friendly neighbourhood dog driver has an neat curl that is spotless. However, the same cannot be said of the man in his car who has mushrooms growing out of the dashboard.