Try Visiting Nepal

Charles Shohdra once claimed that he could pass an elephant through Nepal’s customs, and that is still true at Kathmandu airport, where inadequate facilities are compounded by what insiders say are widespread loopholes for big-time smugglers while innocent passengers are hassled.

After outings from passengers, ‘Tribhuvan Airport is getting a facelift, but most of it superficial. As a $100 million upgrade lies in limbo, Nepal’s only international air gateway gives a poor impression to passengers.

Tourism Minister Rabindra Adhikari says not everything at the airport is under his ministry, and it is difficult to coordinate between the 174 government, security and private entities there. His effort to turn TIA into a ‘boutique airport’ is being frustrated as it takes hours to get through visa lines, customs x-ray bottleneck, and luggage carousel. Then passengers are forced to negotiate an obstacle course to a new parking lot 200m down without trilfleys, and a tuk-tuk breaks his leg last month after slipping in the dark.

Chief of airport customs Gopendra Kumar Thakur opens the book to the ministry. “We have only half the staff we need, and that means we are overwhelmed when many planes land together.”

One afternoon last week, angry passengers muttered profanities as they waited for 45 minutes to be checked if they were “metal free” at the arrival x-ray (photo, above) supposed to detect passengers bringing in more than the allowable 1 litre of liquor, or 50g of gold ornaments. Two passengers were apprehended every week, but the x-rays do not seem to have detected smugglers who pass gold by the kilogram.

The airport’s reputation as a den of smugglers was spotlighted after the scandal involving 33kg of seized gold that went missing last year. A Parliamentary committee recommended plugging loopholes, but the passenger bottleneck remains, inconveniencing passengers ahead of Visit Nepal Year 2020 when the country hopes to bring in 2 million tourists.

“’We found that the biggest problem lay in the customs mechanism,’ Jnanman Joshi of the parliamentary sub-committee revealed. The report was presented to Parliament’s Good Governance and Monitoring Committee last year, but Joshi says nothing happened. Airport officials promise the arrival concourse will have two more conveyer belts by May.

Spokesman Pratap Bhatta, TIWA says the runway and apron expansion will resume soon, the terminal will have free WiFi and “soothing music.”

After waiting hours at Immigration and customs, the last thing passengers want to hear is blaring music. Sewa Bhattachar

AIN’T SEEN NOTHING YET

EDITORIAL

PAGE 2
AINT SEEN NOTHING YET

What makes Nepal scenario is also what makes it seismic. The country is located in one of the most vulnerable regions of the world for earthquakes, and our efforts were used to them happening regularly. They know that as they rebuild after one earthquake, they have to prepare for the next one.

A scientific paper published in Nature Geosciences this month reveals a sobering reminder of this danger. Even so we catch up with reconstruction and rehabilitation after 2015, we have to scale up to the whole country our preparedness for the Next Big One.

Himalayan earthquakes fall into two main types. There are moderate intensity quakes like the ones in 2015 and 2008 which are accompanied by a lot of shaking, but do not deform the surface. Then there are gigantic upheavals like the 8.3 magnitude 1934 quake epicentred in eastern Nepal which destroyed much of Kathmandu, and the 8.7 magnitude Assam earthquake in 1950, described as the greatest earthquake to hit the Himalayas in recorded history. Magnitudes like these will surface and tests what formed the Himalayas. Seismologists studying data from the 2015 event have concluded that the Gorkha Earthquake ruptured eastwards, and stopped underground southeast of Kathmandu Valley, and instead of releasing the stresses, increased tec-tonic tension underneath Central Nepal. They say moderate quakes like 2015 can actually trigger future megateques as the rock layers accumulate stress along faults. These latest warnings came as Nepal marked the anniversary of the 1934 magnitude 8.7 last year’s National Earthquake Safety Day. As if to remind us, there were two tremors in the rupture zone below Kathmandu this year.

Himalayan seismologist Roger Braham says the 2008 earthquake was not the Big One which scientists had feared. In fact, it is still collecting energy beneath us and it could be felt off in the near future just as the 1833 earthquake in Kathmandu was followed by another one 30 years later. The second year this time could cause more damage because its epicenter may be directly beneath Kathmandu Valley.

Add to the Railgun’s snarled business of 2015, there is also the danger posed by the seismic gap in western Nepal which has not seen a megateque since 1569. The western half of the country was not affected by 2015, and is at double risk because of the long seismic gap and relatively low awareness there about earthquake safety.

The focus on rebuilding in 14 districts of central Nepal hit by the 2015 earthquake should not stop us from getting western Nepal prepared for the Big One. Indeed, the whole of northern Nepal, southern India and the region should brace itself because a megateque of 8.5 magnitudes in western Nepal would cause widespread death and devastation across northern South Asia, which is the world’s most densely-populated region of the world. Seismologists warn it could possibly be the last disaster in human history in terms of loss of life.

Responses to the 2015 earthquake should now encompass the whole country, as we await the Big One.

Response to the 2015 earthquake should now encompass the whole country, as we await the Big One.

The 2015 earthquakes were an important warning for us to better prepare for the really big one. Despite the tragic loss of 8,900 lives, Nepal got off relatively lightly three years ago for a quake of that magnitude. It struck on a Saturday when schools were closed, the telecommunications network was functioning, highways were open, electricity supply was restored fairly quickly and Kathmandu Airport we managed. Next time we may not be so lucky.

Monks in Tibet noted the exact time of the last big quake to western Nepal at 6:46 on 1 June 1935. Estimated at 8.9, that earthquake devastated north-western Tibet and Agus and other Mysth city, may triggered the Antcmumbus slope collapse that dammed the Seti River which burst to create the debris field where Pokhara is located today.

There is now so much slip deficit beneath western Nepal that a sudden elastic rebound can move the entire half of the country southwards by a shocking 14m. The Gorkha Earthquake three years ago was just a forewarning of an even bigger disaster to come.
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Kathmandu Airport is
The only aerial gateway of the country leaves a first and last impression

It would be a symbol and a message to the whole world that Nepal is moving towards a classless society, and that all forms of feudalism have come to an end thanks to our glorious revolution. If the rulers of this country were to make an example of themselves and use the same facilities as the people, they would go through the same terrible experience that passengers have to endure on a daily basis. After that, perhaps things would improve for everyone. But don’t bet on it, we live in a real-life Animal Farm.

Airports around the world may look different, but they all have the same basic function. Kathmandu’s terminal building with its brick facade is actually unique because it is not an anonymous glass and steel sculpture. Touchman Mitra and Bahadur Adhikari has a point; we should call it a ‘boutique airport’.

However exotic an airport is, and whatever you call it, airports need to keep passenger convenience top on their list of priorities. Kathmandu airport is not just inconvenient, it is a torture chamber— and that says a lot about the state of the country. If airports create the first impression of a country, then we are doing a horrible job of it. The experience of going through the Kathmandu airport is not simple, not easy, not smooth, not efficient, not welcoming, not respectful, not friendly, and definitely not fast. Getting to the parking lot and finding a ride out has just gotten much more complicated. Who came up with the idea of the ‘lower level parking’, anyway? A tourist booked an airline two weeks ago while negotiating the steep path to the new parking lot off the Ring Road. And the horrendous queue at the ‘Metal Free’ x-ray after arrival immigration is an absurdity that deserves a whole new column.

Bicycling in Waling

Located in the mid-mountains of Nepal with a stunning backdrop of the Himalaya, the trail offers a run through a culturally diverse area. The first Waling 100 offers one of the highest prize money in the MTB racing world with the title prize of Rs500,000 and a historic opportunity for the title winner to name the trail. The female biker who comes first will get Rs300,000.

Exclusive fares
Turkish Airlines introduces a new promotional campaign valid till 31 May 2019. Passengers can now fly to selected destinations in Europe from $350,000 (excluding taxes).

Sun power
NRB Bank has signed a private power purchase agreement with Solis Uja Local for a 50MW solar power project to be set up within a year. The project will cost $150 million.

Cricket ambassadors
EA’s Klaus has appointed four Indian cricket legends to its ambassadorial team as part of its brand ambassadorship. The year-long engagement will see both the teams working closely to promote cricket among the youth and to help regulate and develop the sport in the country.

IELTS on screen
British Council Nepal has introduced IELTS on screen—a computer-based alternative to the traditional paper-based test—without changing the content, timing and structure. However, the test remains face-to-face with a trained IELTS examiner. Participants can also take the test at their home, typically between 3 to 7 calendar days after the test has been completed.

Bicycling in Waling

Located in the mid-mountains of Nepal with a stunning backdrop of the Himalaya, the trail offers a run through a culturally diverse area. The first Waling 100 offers one of the highest prize money in the MTB racing world with the title prize of Rs500,000 and a historic opportunity for the title winner to name the trail. The female biker who comes first will get Rs300,000.

The race is being organised by the Waling Waling initiative with Waling Municipality and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry and will have 25 foreign and 150 Nepali cyclists.

Waling and Syangja are rich in natural and cultural diversity, we want to combine the two and promote the district as a prime tourism destination,” says Dinakar Nepal of Wonderful Waling.
Nepal in a microcosm
of Nepal for visitors, and it is not pleasant

FIRST IMPRESSIONS: Passengers have to wait at the top of the escalator because of the overflow from the ‘metal free’ area in the main concourse at Kathmandu Airport (far left). It takes passengers 45 minutes to reach the runway (right). There is little coordination between the Customs Department and the Civil Aviation Authority that manages the airport (far left). Airport. This makes it easy to blame someone else.

Most of Nepal’s infrastructure, including the Kathmandu airport, were built at a time when the volume of people using them was much less. It is in the same with power generation or water supply, roads, hospitals, offices; they are all too small to handle the exponential increase in people seeking services. That is where efficiency comes in, the idea of doing more with less has to be central to management in our economy. In a multi-party democracy, competition should be the key that drives political decision making and choosing the best people to do the job. In Nepal, we really have to wonder if there is any competition. Everything seems to be about syndicating, cartelling, and setting, so that the same people benefit no matter who wins the elections. The young no longer believe that this situation is going to change anytime soon, and hence are voting with their feet – as can be seen at the airport with 2,000 students and workers leaving the country every day. They are looking for opportunities around the world where their skills and knowledge will be valued and rewarded.

There are good, competent people here, but they would not fill the criteria the rulers look for. It is clear that improving the airport for the passenger is never the agenda. Extracting resources, exploiting hapless travelers and making it as inconvenient as possible is at the centre of political decision making in Nepal today.

Anil Chitrakar, President of Sudhondo.

serve their own personal interest. Systems would mean you would have to get in line like everyone else. No one in power would like that to happen. Kathmandu Airport is also unique because the people who ‘work’ here and manage the various services report to the aforementioned 18 boxes. There is no one person given the requisite authority to manage the airport and hence, very conveniently, no one can be held responsible. We love the term ‘accountable’ in our new republic, but no one can be held accountable for our collective and individual bad experience at the airport.

It is the small details that give you the big picture.
Why Nepalis are learning Mandarin,

Rachel Zhang in Kunming

Kung fu, paper decoration and calligraphy — these are the three classes management student Prakash Nepali is attending those days in this southern Chinese city. The reason: He is interested in computer programming, but he cannot do hands on practice because there is only one PC in the lab and the professor uses it for his powerpoint for the class.

Nepali has been studying logistics management with a full scholarship in China’s Yunnan University since 2017 and gets $400 a month from the Chinese government to cover his living expenses. It sounds like a good deal, but Nepali says he would not recommend it to others back home.

As bilateral trade and investment increase, there is growing interest among Nepali students to study in China. In 2017 alone, more than 6,496 Nepalis flew over the Himalaya to the north for their higher studies. They were attracted by the chance to learn Mandarin as well as government scholarships. But not everything is what they expected.

“I’ve forgotten why I came here. I got into a study program not relevant to the trade business that I want to be involved in when I get back,” Nepali told us.

Bishwesh Shrestha and Nepali have been friends since high school. They applied for the same college together by paying $4,000 to an education agent. They are the only two Nepalis in the Silk Road Program of Yunnan University.

“Everything is ok here, except we end up having to teach ourselves. The level of instruction is not what we expected,” says Shrestha. Nepali had 11 compulsory courses in his first semester last year. Besides main courses such as management, microeconomics, mathematics, he had to take eight other intensive courses introducing Chinese language, art, and policy.

All the subjects are taught in English, but the two say the Chinese professor’s English is not even as good as theirs and it is difficult to understand. They say the syllabus lacks focus, and even their teachers in Nepal had better motivation. Another Nepali student, Pawan Gole, however, has no complaints. He is satisfied with his studies and in two years, speaks Mandarin fluently. He says, “Of course, you have to work hard. If I don’t I would lose face in front of my classmates who work hard.”

Feeling optimistic about his future, Gole has given up the thought of going back to be a Chinese teacher. He thinks he has a better career as a Mandarin interpreter as Chinese investment and trade with Nepal grows.

Saba Ram Pandel is also doing well, and has been at Yunnan University for three years and is now a post-doctoral fellow in biology. His paper on Himalayan biodiversity was praised in the journal Evolution last year.

Drizdis of class, Gole has Chinese friends, but other students say they do not mix much with their local classmates. “Maybe people ignore me because I look Chinese,” jokes Sameer Pradhan, another student at Yunnan University. Most Nepali students here hang out with international students from 32 countries, cooking with Thai classmates and Pradhan says he can speak Bengali because he spends so much time with his Bangladeshi friends in Kunming.

A week after the interviews in Kunming, the students are moving on. Nepali is excited that he does not have to take calligraphy and kung fu classes next semester. Gole is travelling to Beijing for Chinese New Year. Shrestha and Pradhan have returned to Nepal for winter holidays with suitcases full of presents for relatives and friends.

We ask Nepali on WeChat how it is going. He replies with an emoji that means “hard to say”.

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Tara Air
and Chinese are learning Nepali

When Bala Ram Aryal first started teaching Nepali language in 1988, there were six other teachers, but only one foreign student. This year there are more than 300 foreign students learning Nepali in Tribhuvan University's foreign language campus. Similarly in 2017 only one university in China had a Nepali language department. This year, three more universities are teaching Nepali to Chinese students.

Nepali Times reached out to three students who study Nepali in China, and all said they chose the major following suggestions from their families.

Wen Lin, the only Nepali professor at the Communication University in Beijing, says: “Most of my students don’t know what they want to do in future, and I tried to convince them that there is potential in learning Nepali.”

Quanyuan Zhao is a handcraft worker who does not even speak English but wants to settle down in Nepal and open a business. “I found a Nepali language book and found the rules were simple. Now, I can read street signs even though I don’t know what they mean,” says Zhao after five months of learning Nepali. He plans to finish the 6-month program at Tribhuvan University and move his family to Kathmandu and give his children a more international education.

Xiaoli Sun has never been to Nepal, but is passionate about learning Nepali. When Nepali Times gave her a call last week, she was in the library preparing for her final exams in Nepal. “I enjoy learning new languages and Nepali was so exotic for me because so few foreigners can speak it,” she said.

Xiaoli admits that when she was admitted to the Communication University two years ago, her mind went blank. “I knew nothing about Nepal and the Devnagari letters looked more like drawings than characters,” she recalls. Now, Xiaoli can fluently communicate in Nepal and will come to Kathmandu for an exchange program next year.

Not everyone is like Liu and Zhao, whose study coincides with their interests. Most students learn it for other reasons. Aryal says most of his students enrol because they need visas for long-term stay in Nepal. Many never show up in class after the first semester.

Most Chinese people study Nepali because they need it for their businesses. Huan Wang quit her job in China and started a building material business in Kathmandu three years ago. She uses her Nepali language to build trust with her Nepali business partners to show that she has long-term plans to stay in Nepal, and this gives her the confidence to cooperate with her Nepali business partners.

Chinese professor Lin attributed the increase in interest in Nepali language to China’s Belt and Road Initiative. “Under the initiative, there will be more Chinese projects in Nepal and this means there is more interest in learning Nepali.”

Yiwen Wang, Lin’s student, says her relative used to ask her why she was learning a “useless” language. She says her seniors found good jobs in big companies because they spoke Nepali, and she wants to do the same.

Meanwhile, in Nepal there is also greater interest in learning Chinese because of the prospect of higher studies in China, and the increasing number of Chinese tourists and investors coming to Nepal.

Sumit Tuladhar has been studying Mandarin for one month at a monastery in Kathmandu, and says he wants to work in tourism, where his knowledge of Chinese will help him. Tuladhar’s friends are also learning Chinese now for higher studies or business in China.

Rachel Zhang

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Developing a horse sense in Kathmandu

Horses help humans heal, bond with animals and compensate for the nature of the sport

Prakriti Kandel

The most unique aspect about equestrian sports is that it requires perfect coordination between two different species: the horse and the human who rides it. Understanding and respecting horses, bonding with these powerful creatures is a crucial element of the sport, which is catching on in Kathmandu. Once an activity restricted to royals, there are now horse riding schools catering to a growing interest in the public.

One of them is Wind Horse Stables in Gokarna which started 15 years ago and has a stable of 5 horses and 100 members who learn to ride and even practice modern dressage.

Says owner Nitin K.C: “To learn riding, you first need to build that connection with the horse, to understand their moods and psychology.”

Indeed, riders and grooms must be able to decipher the horse’s body language, its intricate flick of the ears, rolling of eyes, or feet movements.

Horses require extensive care: an adequate diet, regular grooming, exercise, and training to prepare them for rides. But physical fitness alone does not suffice, horses have mood swings just like humans, and need leader, loving care. Horses in the face of human emotions, if treated with love, they reflect that affection. If abused, they respond with violence.

Wind Horse Stables and others in Kathmandu teach dressage or equitation, a sport in which horses are trained to perform walks, trots, and canter. Riders must communicate efficiently through movements to elicit required responses from their horses. Horses are also involved in games such as polo, show jumping, horse racing, vaulting, or polo.

Even though they are used today predominantly for recreation, horses have been part of human civilization for thousands of years. Believed to be originally domesticated for meat and milk in Central Asia, the horse’s subsequent use for transportation gave speed to humans unattainable before, helped expand human settlements, agriculture, and economies.

In Nepal, horses are still used for transportation in some Himalayan settlements because of their ability to navigate through difficult terrain. In the First and Second World War, horses have battled alongside the Gurkhas.

The cavalry in Nepal was first established in 1849 by King Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah, and horses were used in battle in the 1856-58 war with Tibet. Today, the Nepal Army cavalry owns the greatest number of horses in Nepal with 107, and more are being bred in Bhiratpur. The army cavalry also has its own riding school at its headquarters at the Narayan Han palace museum.

The former war horses today mostly have a ceremonial role in festivals, and during official ceremonies. The annual Ghode Jatra festival is possibly the most important, where army riders perform a range of equine stunts and games in Tundikhel. Myths have it that the thunderous sound of horses’ hooves repels child-eating demons.

Har Prasad Chnhale of Nepal Army Cavalry says the animals now have a largely ceremonial role, as mechanized transport takes over military and civilian roles of the animals. An increasing number of women are now interested in riding and handling horses. AmRESH Devkota took up horse riding a year-and-half ago and says, “Horse-riding has natural healing power, and it relieves people suffering from nature deficit. Riding helps overcome anxiety and become more concentrated and calm.”

Devkota, managing director at Manasavatara School, adds that riding is a good exercise, helps reduce weight, and to stay physically fit. He brings his students once a week to Wind Horse Riding Stables so they too can experience horses’ love and soothing power.

“Working with horses just brings out a sense of inner happiness,” says Madan Pandey, who worked in the Army Cavalry.
deficit of city dwellers

with horses for 16 years, and performed at Ghandi Jatra. He missed his horses after retirement, and got a job as a groom at Wind Horse Stables.

HORSING AROUND

Join our video team on a visit to the Wind Horse Stables and take a ride on one of the magnificent animals. Learn how horses bond with humans who ride them, and how they have mood swings just like people.

HORSING AROUND

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IF WISHES WERE HORSES

Riding Schools in Kathmandu

1. Wind Horse Stables, Golamni
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GETAWAY

Flute with Manose

A flute and manose: Singers from India go on a concert and workshop tour of India. 25 January, 8.30pm, Moksh, Kalaniketan, Free entrance (01) 8460004

Stand-up comedy

Enjoy the grand stand-up comedy show from the laughter reunion comedy tour. 26 January, 4pm and 8pm, Outdoor Adventure Centre, Thamel, (01) 4412515

Transformative tech

Join in to understand how portable ECGs, neuroimaging, and skin-conductive cognitive function and physical capabilities can be used to calm your mind. EEG is a new business opportunity, designed to enhance neurophysiological well-being, cognitive function, and physical capabilities. 2 February, 7pm, Moksh Banquet, Kathmandu, Register: 27020840

Writing for Dummies

A workshop by Prashri: If you’re an aspiring writer, this workshop is open to anyone wanting to improve their skills and to become more creative. Go back to the story in your head and create your own. 26 January, 11am to 9pm, Book Club Fistal House, Khokana, Kathmandu, 8461111001

Coffee brewing course

The most accessible coffee brewing foundation and intermediate combo course by one of the highly skilled and reputed Specialty Coffee Association Certified instructors, Misra. 22-14 January, 8.30am-5pm, NOH Coffee Lab and Training School, 81812501

Facing our Time

Celebrating the 70th anniversary of the bilateral relations between France and Nepal, the French Embassy in Nepal, Alliance Française Kathmandu and the Nepal Economic Forum are organizing a panel discussion on “Exploring the emerging discourses from a multi-faceted and multi-disciplinary approach”. RSVP by 18 January. 21 January, 4pm, Alliance Française, Naubise, cummunityevents@gmail.com

Arko Mukherjee

Arko Mukherjee featuring Kari Mahajan and Rikesh Chauhan are going to give you full musical pleasure. I know it’s a farewell weekend getaway with your family and friends. 22 January, 5pm onwards, Devk:The Spring Resort, Kavre, 8330009820

MadJazz Quartet

The jaiil band has repertoire stretched from Kurt Rosenwinkel, Jason Van Rooyen to Clifford Brown and Miles Davis. MadJazz Quartet delivers something which should be listened and not just heard or seen or danced to. Come if you really want to listen to the truth. 28 January, 8.10pm, Star Upstairs, Lumbini, (01) 4416193

Kanta Dáb Dáb

Kanta Dáb, a well-known train with warm, perspicacious and keen playing some unique contemporary compositions, creating a joyful fusion grow. 25 January, open air event, Himalaya Restaurant, Thamel, (01) 4366879

Mithila Cosmos

Mithila Cosmos, Songs of Innocence & Experience is an exhibition of paintings by S. C. Sum. 25 January – 20 February, 9am-5.30pm, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Budhanilkantha

Mask Unmask

Nepal Imprv, an improvisation theatre troupe, will be creating characters and stories on the spot without any script or rehearsal. See the performers embrace uncertainty to create dramatic pieces. 26 January, 6pm onwards, The Fanou Visage, Mohanlal, Kathmandu, 846710

Jewels of Newar Art

The second edition of the art exhibition displaying some of the best traditional Newar arts along with works from other diverse fields. It is also the inaugural day of the art fair. 29 January – 2 February, 11am-7pm, Boudhanath Gallery, Kathmandu, 83610255

Trisara

Trisara, the third garden of heaven, is a picturesque outdoor restaurant offering the most sumptuous food and drinks. Try their Menu of Thai fried rice. Lumbini, (01) 4412200

Buingal

A multi-award-winning restaurant that is a causal get-together with friends and children on a sunny winter day. Vegetarian sathaa is finger licking. Maruwa, (01) 4417897

Beer and Barbecue

Enjoy succulent barbecue along with sumptuous buffet spread, all accompanied by a bottle of chilled beer. Every Saturday, 12:30 pm, The Patio Terrace, Valley Restaurant, Kathmandu, (01) 4777213

Kristhanapan

The restaurant at ‘Awayka’ has become a must-see for expats and tourists. Even locals who ear dai dai bliss at home find it spreading and serve exquisite. The ‘Awayka’ Hotel, Bathukulal, (01) 4476388 / 4476779

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Nepali restaurateurs fined in Finland

Owners accused of trafficking and exploiting fellow Nepali workers

Namrata Sharma
in Helsinki

Nepali restaurants in Finland have become so popular in the past 20 years that in many places they have started replacing Indian diners in Helsinki and other cities. It now looks like there was a dark side to this success: four Nepali restaurateurs in Finland have been found guilty of human trafficking, discrimination and tax evasion.

One of the Nepali migrant restaurant workers, Malia, was brought to Finland by an accused to work in Mount Shangri restaurant in the town of Vantaa. Police started investigating the establishment after he filed a complaint, and found two more Nepalis were also underpaid.

There are a range of Nepalis in Finland from engineers and managers, teachers, as well as students who sometimes work on the side as cooks and waiters. Earnings are good, and Nepali restaurants have become popular in Finland with their modified menu that combines man and curry with dhal bhat and momos.

But beneath the surface, there have been indications that all is not well. There was no problem if they worked in Finnish companies as the labour laws are clear and strict. But when workers are brought to Finland through personal connection, they have to accept the salary offered so they can pay back loans. Few Nepali workers are willing to talk for fear of losing even the jobs they have, but the Finnish press has reported on South Asian restaurants selling work visas, trafficking, and violating Finnish labour and tax laws.

Last month, Finnish District Court Judge Mia Oikainen from North Savo District Court found four Nepalis Basanta Adhikari, Prerna Adhikari, Shrijana Ghimire and Ava Paudel guilty, fined them a total of €227,000 and sentenced the main employer to prison for one year and eight months and another to six months. They also had to compensate Malia, Kanaka and Malia with back pay.

Malia has a masters degree in Business Management, but could not find a job so took cook training to work abroad. When a friend approached him to go as a cook to Finland where his brother owned a Nepali restaurant, he readily agreed to migrate.

An agreement he signed with the owner set a full salary as per Finnish government rules, and working hours stipulated by local labour laws with weekends off. However, he was made to work round the clock with no weekends. The employer also opened two accounts in Malia’s name, one having salaries as per the contract to show the Finnish authorities. But he kept bank cards which he and his wife used for personal expenses. He deposited some money into Malia’s other account. Police used evidence from the two bank cards in their investigation, and presented it to the court.

Malia says he learnt this was standard operating procedure in many Nepali restaurants in Finland. After a year and half, Malia filed a complaint, but first had to prepare to be extracted by the Nepali community. He says he wanted to make his employers and other South Asians here accountable to their workers who were mostly not educated, not aware of their rights, or afraid to raise their voices against their employers.

“As laws in Finland are very strict, we do not get involved in legal issues of Nepali workers here,” explains Basanta Gautam of the Non-resident Nepali (NRN) National Coordination Council of Finland, “however, we think there is a need of awareness to both employees and employers regarding employment rules and regulations in Finland.”

As per Finnish law, since all five perpetrators admitted to their crimes and agreed to pay all financial obligations together with interest and taxes, they have been exempted from imprisonment, but will be remiss under probation.

Another Nepali in Finland says many migrant workers have come to Finland on verbal agreement with a restaurant owner, but they are desperate to get a foothold in Europe. Employers think they are actually doing the workers a favour by bringing them over, and some restaurateurs say not all worker complaints are valid and they “play the victim card.”

NRN CEO Hemant Devadir says: “Safe Migration and respectable foreign employment concerns us, and we provide advice and counselling whenever approached.” He admitted that NRN had no figures for the number of coordination efforts in establishments owned and managed by diaspora. Although the organisation gets frequent complaints, Gautam says the NRN Association is not a policing authority.

After the verdict, Malia has had to endure threatening messages from his former employer. “I was aware enough to know my rights, but most Nepalis who come here are not,” he wanted to show fellow Nepalis that they have to be aware of the risks.”

Some names have been changed.

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New Newa art

Bodhivista Art Gallery has been active in documenting and preserving Kathmandu Valley’s traditional art, and is now back with its first exhibition after the 2015 earthquake. Jewels of Newa Art contains stunning paintings in the Pauhali style, and sculptures made from the last wax method. The exhibition features detailed portraits of Hindu and Buddhist deities including the Green Tara, White Tara, Manjuvarman, and Avalokiteshvar. While most of the deities follow techniques for devotional pashtho paintings, including using natural colours and painting deities according to classical specifications, we can also see many improvisations.

One such work depicts deities in a wall apparently damaged by the earthquake. Others break away from traditional formats of the principal deity in the centre, and show gods in new, contemporary compositions. The exhibition shows us not just how rich Newar art is, but also how it is evolving in the hands of contemporary painters whose motifs are art and not religion.

For centuries Kathmandu has been famous for such ritual artwork, prized for aesthetic beauty and attention to detail. Everything about the deities, from their complexion to their poses, is replete with many layers of meanings: for example the Green Tara’s green complexion symbolises compassion. While these paintings and statues are valued by residents in museums around the world, however, it comes as a surprise to many to learn that the art forms are well and alive in Kathmandu. The exhibition at Bodhivista attempts to bring such contemporary artworks to viewers’ notice.

“Many believe the art is dead and can now be seen only in museums, but in fact Kathmandu continues to produce world-class artwork of great value,” says Arjun Shrestha of the Bodhivista Art Gallery. “The art was dying for a while because the artists did not make money, and the only way to ensure its continuity is to make sure that the artists can access the right art market. We aim to promote the artists by connecting them to national and international buyers who are interested.”

Indeed the gallery calls for exhibitors’ ‘museum quality’, and they will even sell for anything up to Rs. 3.5 million. Three of the pieces will be showcased in Vienna in April in an exhibition of Nepal’s finest contemporary art. The exhibition at the Bodhivista is an opportunity to appreciate home-grown art that may soon be up in famous museums around the world.

Sewa Bhattachar
Jewels of Newa Art
Bodhivista Art Gallery, Kapileshwar
Until 17 February


Comrades-in-Arms: The new Chinese Ambassador to Nepal, Hu Xiaoping, meets with Nepal Army Chief Purna Chandra Thapa at the Army Headquarters in Kathmandu last week. The two talked about strengthening bilateral relations between the two countries.

Power Meeting: Minister for Energy and Water Resources Barshaman Pun meets AI Bhalla, Secretary at India’s Ministry of Power, in Singh Durbar on Sunday.

Sick Nation: Nabin Chandra Matha and Suraj Rai Khanya of Bilkekela Sita Party put in the Extra Newa at the Accident Hospital in Kathmandu on Sunday which is on a life-support death since 17 January demanding reforms.

Snowfun: Tourist enjoy skiing and snowboarding in Huluma on Wednesday morning, as winter rains brought snow and rain across the country this week.
Dry port at Chobhar faces resistance

Prime Minister KP Oli inaugurated the construction of a dry port in Chobhar last week, despite protests from the local community. A leader of the Chobhar residents Panchalai Maharjan informed that 24 people had been taken into custody for peacefully protesting at the inauguration site. They were concerned that the project had not consulted with local people and would eventually displace them. Some of the protesters were injured during the conflict with security personnel.

The site had been previously occupied by Himal Cement, which closed down due to local residents’ concerns about environmental pollution. Four years ago, the government made an agreement to acquire Himal Cement’s land at Chobhar. With a Rs1.5 billion grant from the World Bank, the Ministry of Finance is building a cargo terminal and an exhibition area over more than 40 hectares. The government plans to directly link the dry port to Indian and Chinese Railway stations. It is expected to accommodate 350 trucks and 400 containers, and a 9-lane highway to access the dry port is also planned, linking it to Kathmandu’s Ring Road at Balaju. According to a 2013 agreement with the World Bank, the government would finish constructing the port by 2019. A meeting in mid-November between the Ministry for Industry, Commerce and Supplies Matrika Yadav, the World Bank and builder company Intermodal had decided to take the concerns of local people into consideration. But the construction began without such a step, according to locals. Their main concern is that the proposed road for the dry port would go through the land of more than 200 people who have not agreed to it. They are also concerned that the project will damage Chobhar’s historical, religious and cultural heritage.

The Chobhar Protection Committee claims that the project has been without an Environmental Impact Assessment, and that could prove disastrous for the entire Kathmandu Valley because Chobhar is a fragile point which is the only outlet for the Bagmati from Kathmandu Valley. They argue that the so-called ‘democratic government’ is behaving in a dictatorial manner, and imposing a project that is bound to create noise and air pollution on unwilling residents.

Chobhar residents are already tired of the pollution from Himal Cement factory, and are angry that the government’s compensation from cement dust never materialized. They say the 5-point agreement was never implemented, and they demand an immediate stop to the construction process.

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Gurkha Grandparents

Despite free health care, elderly ex-Gurkhas and their families in UK ache for home

Sikuma Rai
in London

Sikuma Rai, 61, was at Kathmandu Airport last month, waiting to return to the UK after a family visit. Like many army wives, she had left Nepal with her husband, former British Gurkha soldier Ibal Bahadur Rai, 78.

The Rai feel more at home in Nepal, but were attracted to stay in the UK because of the monthly allowance, free medical facilities, house rent, and even an extra heating allowance for the winter for ex-Gurkhas – but most of all it is the free health care.

Rana Bahadur Thakali, 76, and Krishna Shrestha, 65, have been living in the UK for four years now, and are happy they came here. “If I was in Nepal I would have suffered or even died by now,” says Thakali who has hypertension and thyroid problems. Shrestha shows a drawer full of medicines she and her husband have to take.

“If we had stayed in Nepal, we would have had to sell our house to afford these medicines,” she says. Despite the free drugs, however, elderly Nepalis have to find someone to take them to hospitals, which is sometimes for away. Because they lack English, many cannot even call for an ambulance.

“We have everything we need here, but it is not home. We miss our families in Nepal,” says 72-year-old Jan Bahadur Rai, who was waiting outside a Nepali shop in Fulham near London for his wife, Ganji Maya Limbu, whom he married after his first wife died. “It is even harder to live here if you don’t have a partner,” he adds wistfully.

Indeed, most elderly Gurkhas and their spouses here say they are living in the UK for the sake of their

Timeline of How Retired Gurkhas Ended

1816
Sugauli Treaty formally allowed the British to recruit Nepali soldiers into the army

1914-1918
Same 20,000 Gurkhas died in World War I

1939-1945
Another 25,000 Gurkhas died in World War II

1947
The Empire agreement between the United Kingdom, India and Nepal gave undivided Gurkha recruitment

1990
Gurkha Army Co-Operative Society (GACS) was formed by ex-UK Gurkha veterans in Nepal

1997
In July, Britain functor press in London to invite British Gurkha veterans to live in the UK

2000
Gurkha Rifles 1st class against the Government of Nepal to review the agreements and demand equality for British Gurkhas

2001
British Gurkha Study and Research centre issued a research document on pensions of British Gurkhas
not served the 15 years needed to qualify for an Army pension. These Gurkha veterans or widows have been provided with welfare pensions by The Gurkha Welfare Trust.

After a long agitation, the British government in 21 May 2009 officially allowed settlement visas for all Gurkha widows who have served in the British Army for at least four years, along with their spouses and dependent children. Even some widows of ex-soldiers have been allowed to stay since then. Most of the elderly Gurkhas interviewed for this report admitted that they would go back if Nepal offered better medical facilities. One ex-Gurkha who was reluctant to relocate to Britain was 81-year-old Tej Bahadur Gurung, a veteran of World War II and his wife Komal Gurung, 77. Both appeared inform. They were happy enough living in their ancestral village near Pokhara, but the 205 earthquakes destroyed their home. They had the choice of either coming to the UK, or using a grant from Gurkha Welfare Centre to rebuild. They chose to come here, (Himal) Rai, a retired British Gurkha Captain and an activist now says, "After a long struggle Gurkhas who could not complete full service were provided a redundancy package," says Rai, "however the protests are still ongoing to review the package and for other benefits."

When asked which country they would choose to stay in, nearly all ex-Gurkhas and their families said they would return to Nepal if there was better health care there. On a recent sight back from Heathrow to Kathmandu, the plane was full of elderly Gurkha couples heading back to Nepal to avoid the English winter. One ex-soldier and his wife had re-entered the UK a month ago, and are heading right back to Nepal. He said: “We miss our children, and the land we were born in. We had enough of England, we are going back to Nepal for good.”
The Ass

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