The heat is killing us

An increasing number of Nepali workers in the Persian Gulf and Malaysia are dying of heat stress, and experts warn that the mortality rate could go up as the global average temperature rises in coming decades.

A recent study published in the journal Cardiology presents a strong correlation between average monthly afternoon heat levels and mortality among Nepali workers in Qatar. Of the total fatalities due to cardiovascular disease (CVD) among Nepalis, 98% occurred during the summer months and 22% in winter, mostly caused by heat stress. This is much higher than the global average of 13% of total deaths in the 25-35 age group being due to CVD.

There was a strong correlation between average monthly afternoon heat levels and cardiovascular disease mortality. It is likely that a large proportion of these CVD deaths during hot months were due to serious heat stroke,” the report states.

Nepali climate expert Ngamindra Dalal agrees. “Deaths of Nepali migrant workers in the Gulf due to excessive heat is not new, but the climate crisis has made working conditions outdoors hotter and more humid.”

A study of high-resolution climate models published in the journal Nature Climate Change projected that much of the Gulf region will be uninhabitable before the end of the century. The Persian Gulf is the fastest warming sea on the planet due to its shallowness, a process that is increasing humidity, making the region sweltering.

Ironically, the part of the world that is exporting most fossil fuel energy will now feel the brunt of the greenhouse warming caused by carbon emissions.

Climate simulations show that by 2090 average ‘wet bulb’ temperature – a combination of temperature and humidity – in cities like Dubai and Doha will exceed the threshold of human adaptability of 35°C, the temperatures beyond which the human body is unable to survive more than six hours at 70% humidity. A recent investigative report by Inside Climate News and NBC News showed that at least 17 US soldiers have died of heat exposure during exercises at US military bases since 2008.

Many Nepali migrant workers in the Gulf are exposed to similar conditions since they work in construction, which requires them to be outdoors all day. Many of them are not properly briefed about the dangers of dehydration, and at the end of the work day return to chilly air-conditioned rooms.

Bishnu KC from Okharkot village in Pithan went to work in the Gulf 10 months ago. He often told his sister back home how difficult it was to work on the high scaffolding in the heat. KC came home in a coffin recently, just another of the 7,000 Nepalis who have died working overseas in the past 10 years. Others return with kidney problems, and need dialysis or transplants.

Bays Dalal. “This problem is getting worse. Pre-departure orientation for workers should emphasize how to cope with heat stress, and the importance of keeping hydrated”.

Sunita Rana

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CHARITY CONCERT
Association of St. Mary’s Rummien Nepal (AMS) is organizing a charity concert to raise money to build libraries in government schools. The concert features Alka Yagnik and the Swami Singers, Salil Mirchandani, Kishore Kant and more.

MEET THE KYA
Durga Lai Shrestha’s Nepali children’s songs turn into illustrated books, include lovely characters, like the Kyua, Maika, Tanku and more. Celebrate these characters with puzzles, mazes, face painting, a mini-arts and crafts session and crafts.

KATHMANDU BLUES
The 13th Annual Kathmandu Blues presents free music in the heart of Thamel. Features: Adrain Desreu, Lawson, the Himalayan Herd, look from 10:30 to 1:30.

SUGAM POKHAREL
Listen to Nepali pop sensation Sugam Pokharel singing his greatest hits.

TRIPLETS LIVE
Nepali folk trio The Triplets will be playing a medley of songs in the aisles, flute and guitar.

EL MERCADO
Enjoy a Saturday of live music, cocktails, handcrafts and a selection of heirloom wines including Bouchard and Clospey Albarino. Taste reservations in advance are recommended.

TEJ MELA
Celebration in style and support more than 125 women entrepreneurs at this year’s Tej Mela. Various: jewelry, clothing, food and electronics stalls will be present.

PAINTING EXHIBITION
Dulal’s Art Space presents Volume IV: Structural Beauty by Bishal KC. The painter presents a series of works inspired by his tour of Mustang a year ago. The exhibition opens on 2 August at 5:30 pm.

MEDITATION VIBES
Listen to the calming vibes of the singing bowl and learn about its history. At Aram Shankar presents in an hour-long audio and visual journey.

LA CASTA
With a direct view of Boudhanath Stupa, La Casta is the ideal place to take pictures, and eating some burgers and kebabs.

AIR QUALITY INDEX
KATHMANDU, 26 July – 1 August

HIMALAYAN FRONT HOTEL
Surajkumari’s Himalayan Front Hotel is located atop Swayambhunath overlooking the Kathmandu Valley. With service staff, breathing fresh air and one of the best restaurants in Kathmandu (The Summit Restaurant) this is the ideal place to unwind.

PEACOCK GUEST HOUSE
The guest house is a 700-year-old UNESCO heritage building that represents true Nepalese architecture. Take a stroll around the Old City of Shikrapur, indulge in local cuisine and view the Himalayan Coffee Masterpiece Workshop. Rohini Dale, Shikrapur Square, Bhaktapur (01) 6671629

GETTING AHEAD WITH A LUXURY TRAVEL AGENT
With the monsoon coming to a close, this week saw a rise in the Air Quality Index (AQI) in the larger Kathmandu Valley. The emissions increase, as well as rainfall, can be seen in the rise of ozone levels too. The AQI has been below the 50 mark, however, it’s been above 100 at times during the past week. For more details, visit World Air Quality Index.

https://waqi.info/kathmandu/aqi-quality-chart/
After much controversy, Rani Pokhari is finally being rebuilt using traditional methods. Watch a team of 40 workers from Bhaktapur hard at work at Rani Pokhari every day, clearing the overgrown vegetation, levelling the ground, and lining the pond with a layer of impermeable black clay.

“According to Vasta principles, Pratap Malla must have dug separate wells to fill and to drain the pond in the northeast and southwest corners respectively,” says Tiwari. “This was the ancient, proven and sustainable way of keeping the water flow under human control. The present reconstruction method is not investigating this method.”

Cultural preservation activist Sudhak Manandhar feels Rani Pokhari is being turned into a traditional swimming pool. “If the ancient system of natural water flow is not revived, the valuable engineering knowledge of our ancestors is lost forever. That lowers the value of the historical pond,” he says.

“Tiwari’s committee had also recommended that the flap Gopalswore temple be rebuilt in Shikha style keeping with king Pratap Malla’s original vision. The Department of Archaeology, however, ignored that advice and went on to rebuild the temple with a dome roof following the Ranara reconstruction model. Once more, sustained public pressure forced the government to correct the mistake, and the NRA has now published a design to rebuild the temple in the Shikha’s style. This is another major win for heritage conservation.”

Mahant Thapa Rijjhandari, a young heritage enthusiast from nearby Asan, sums up the reconstruction: “We were about to forget what we stood on. But sustained activism prevented that. From happening. From the Rani Pokhari episode, we have learnt that if we raise our voices and are persistent, we can bring even the most powerful government to heel and set things right.”

**QUEEN’S POND**: More than four years after the earthquake, Rani Pokhari is finally being rebuilt to look like it did in 1646. In this drawing by a German artist (above). Women from Bhaktapur are using traditional methods using day and bricks to rebuild Rani Pokhari’s Banks (left).

**REBUILDING RANI POKHARI**
Continuum

Artist Sujiita Rana's imaginary locations transfer the viewer to a dream world; ethereal light shines through trees with red, yellow and pink leaves, and the water in ponds give a sense of tranquility. Rana's exhibition, Continuum, at GG Machine, captures her artistic vision of nature.

"I think art has no boundaries, and neither do nature and life. We all come from nature, and go back into nature. That is why my art is mostly focused on this subject," says Rana, who is also president of the Women Artists' Group of Nepal (WAGIN).

Rana's series on nature is a visual delight, with surreal landscapes that blend imagination and reality. In one, we see a wide plain full of colourful trees, reminding one of the hills of Nepal, but the glittering golden and lavender leaves are more imaginary than real. In another, a lush forest is shown near a pond, but only the forest's airborne elements are reflected on the water surface, not the actual trees.

There are green trees in the forest, and white trees made of lightning in the sky. Rana has rendered all the elements of nature — trees, rocks, water — with the precision of a realistic painter, but added her own fantasy elements to beautify them.

Her other favourite theme is women. She has drawn them in exotic locations like Mustang, or framed them in contrasting colours to highlight their features. In one piece, a woman wearing peacock feathers stands out from the background of men milling around.

"Women have a large role to play in society, but they are often hidden in the background. I wanted to change that by bringing them out front and highlighting them," says Rana.

A visual artist who works in multiple mediums, Rana has also done installations and sculpting, but this exhibition showcases her various styles of painting. It includes monochrome pieces and some abstract works in dark browns and black. Rana's work is notable for its cheerful use of colours that also impart a sense of serenity.

Sewa Bhattarai

(Continued) GG Machine, Jorpati.
Migrants abroad left in lurch

Hem Kaki in Kuwait, 29 July

The Nepali government banned labour permits aiming to block workers from going abroad as domestic workers without actually meeting any women in that role. Though members of the International Relations and Labour Committee visited Gulf countries, they only met some of the women at Nepal’s embassies.

The government stopped issuing work permits for domestic workers on the committee’s recommendation, which impacted hundreds of thousands of men and women already working as domestic help in the Gulf. About 3,99,000 domestic workers abroad have not returned to Nepal in the past 2.5 years, because they are afraid of losing their livelihoods. Those who have returned have not been able to go back because of the ban. They have asked the committee to review the decision. The National Human Rights Commission has also said the decision is not fair.

The seven-member parliamentary committee, led by Pushpa Dahi, visited Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and UAE in March 2017. On 2 April, it directed the government to ban domestic workers going to Gulf countries. Ashok Kumar Mandal, Pratikshor Shah Teli, Snehl Sreesh, Radhabinu Timila, Raju Lakshmi Shrestha and Lalit Kumar Shrestha were the other members of the Committee.

They reached Saudi Arabia on 18 March, and met 24 women migrant workers who had taken refuge at the embassy in Riyadh after being taken there from Kuwait.

The committee met Saudi Arabia’s Labour Minister Ali Bin Nassar Ghafeer, and held discussions with the Nepali community in Riyadh and Dammam. According to the report, the discussions were attended by Nepali businessmen in Saudi Arabia and agents of recruitment companies.

Nepali women, as farm hands, cooks and drivers — classified as domestic workers — were not invited to the discussions. “I have been working in Saudi Arabian farms for the past 15 years. I earn 1,000 riyal (almost Rs15,000) a month,” Umesh Kaji from Kautahat says.

“Everything is going well for me, except that if I go back home on holidays. I cannot come back here. What did the parliamentarians ask when they were here? Who did they meet and how did they come to that decision?”

The committee went to Kuwait after four days, and did not meet any domestic workers there, either. The government issued 19,064 permits for domestic workers in Kuwait, while the committee met 25 women who were about to be deported back to Nepal.

“I have been working as security guard for the past eight years. On paper, that counts as a domestic worker, too. We are not able to leave this job and go back home,” says Ramesh Gurung of Kuwait. The committee noted its decision was based on the accounts of people abroad and interested who met at the embassy. It assumed that everyone in Kuwait is going through the same plight, and this has created hassles for us.”

The committee members then headed to Qatar, where they visited the Qatar Mail Service, a company run by a Nepali that employs mostly Nepali women workers. There, the women told the committee that they were paid less than Filipinos who did the same work.

More men than women work as domestic help in Qatar. Most of them in camel racing, but the committee did not meet any Nepalis working with camels. “It’s a little difficult to work in camel races,” says Umesh Kaji, who has been working in the Sakanyia region for the past 17 years. “My boss is good. I earn Rs40,000 every month, and my food is paid for. But was the labour permit banned? My wife and children keep calling me back home. But I cannot leave everything behind and go home.”

In UAE, the parliamentarians were told that Nepali workers had started coming to the country through legal channels, and the committee was advised to let this continue. There are 130 legal domestic workers in UAE, and they face no problems since the laws are designed to protect the rights of human workers.

There is one Nepali couple who both work for an Emirati employer. “I drive for my boss while my wife is a domestic worker,” says Raju Shrestha of Gilmi. “We have not been able to return home.”

Health at home is an organisation which facilitates home-based health care services. Health at home service promotes health care i.e., out of hospital setting to the clients, being the best of its kind in the whole South Asia. Health at Home is here to cater to the needs of those who desire health care facilities to be delivered at their doorsteps.

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His last journey

Bishnu KC from Piuthan becomes a mere statistic in the grim saga of migrant labour

Shankar Dahal in Piuthan

Keshav Khatri was pacing up and down the arrival area of Kathmandu airport one recent morning, frequently glancing up at the Arrivals monitor. It had been more than two hours since the Delhi flight landed, yet there was no sign of his brother-in-law, Bishnu KC.

Finally, he saw them—three grim-faced men pushing two luggage trolleys with a red box. Two months after leaving his home village of Okharkot in Piuthan, Bishnu KC was coming home in a coffin. A few minutes later, another coffin arrived containing the body of a Nepali who had died in Saudi Arabia.

Other happy returning workers rolled heavy, polystyrene-wrapped suitcases as they emerged from the arrival concourse when relatives who had been waiting waved at them from behind the glass partition. These were happy reunions in the parking lot. They barely noticed the two coffins being strapped to nearby pickups.

Bishnu KC was now a statistic: just one of 670 Nepal workers overseas who died in the last 12 months, and 6,921 in the past decade, among them 1,367 in Qatar alone. At the nearby Departure area, other Nepalis were lining up at the special gate for overseas workers to check in for flights. At least 400 are still leaving every day, yet this number is down due to a freeze on Malaysia work permits.

Ram Bhusi Yadev, KC’s roommate in Qatar, accompanied the coffins and handed Khatri a bag with his brother-in-law’s belongings, including his remaining salary of 4,053 Qatari Riyals ($1,133). The certificate in Bishnu KC’s name from the public health department of Qatar stated the cause of death: ‘Died in sleep of natural causes, heart failure.’ There was no post-mortem report.

The pickup then left on the 450km journey to Okharkot. Driver Rubish Shrestha, from Ramshahi, works as a bouncer driver for the Foreign Employment Promotion Board. He thanks the Valley at Thankot, driving at top speed. He says he has to return to Kathmandu to collect another coffin the same day. (See box)

Occupants of the pickup reach Bhalising on the East-West Highway past midnight, and decide to catch some sleep in their seats. They have timed their arrival in Okharkot in the morning so KC’s family can immediately perform funeral rites. Although tired after the long ride, no one can sleep. Khatri thanks of Bishnu, who was 27 and had only his mother at home. His brother lives elsewhere, and his sisters are married, one of Kumar’s kids.

“He was promised work in the Global Link Food Service in Dubai, but ended up working on a high rise construction site in 56 degree heat,” Khatri recalled. ‘He used to write home to his sister that he was finding the work very difficult.’

There was a big crowd of relatives and neighbours when the pickup reached the village the next morning, accompanied by loud wailing as the coffin was taken out. Bishnu’s mother whispered ‘mamu’; when she saw her son’s lifeless face, and fainted. Relatives draped the body

Dignity in life and death

Sonja Awale

Appalled by the shabby treatment of dead overseas workers, Nepali activists petitioned the Supreme Court two years ago to demand autopsy to determine cause of death, and to provide a more dignified return home to Kathmandu airport.

The NGOs, Poushakhi Nepal and Law and Policy Forum for Social Justice, filed the public interest litigation well demanding the right of migrant workers to a post-mortem and more respectful bandover of bodies in a separate section at the airport. They won the case, but implementing agencies have been slow to act.

“We are heavily dependent on remittances from migrant workers but where is our respect for the individuals who make it happen?” asks Manju Gurung of Poushakhi Nepal. “We do not care for their working conditions, we mistrust them and we do not even respect them after they have died. The cause of death goes uninvestigated and their bodies

are unmanaged.”

Activists claim that doctors in the destination countries are aware of the actual causes of the majority of these fatalities, but are often bribed by employers to pass them off as ‘natural death’.

In addition, many workplaces do not meet even the most basic standards of safety and minimum working conditions, they say, which often leads to occupational hazards that can result in death. If the real cause of death is revealed, employers are liable to pay hefty compensation and hence to try and cover up the true cause. Most deaths are described as ‘heart failure’, ‘natural’, or ‘cardiovascular disease’.

Sifting average temperatures in the Gulf region due to climate change have also increased the incidence of heat stress among those who have to work outdoors. Experts say many of the deaths of Nepali workers are due to heart failure caused by heat and overwork.

Apart from the daily average 3-5 migrant workers who arrive at Kathmandu airport in coffins, many others remain in moraras

NATURE LIMITS Ourselves

Heat maps of the Gulf (from left to right) show ing current average temperatures, under a 1.5°C升温 in global average temperatures, and 2.6°C (RCP8.5) by 2100. The Austral Peninsula Gulf is the fastest warming sea in the world.
In yellow, optically blended and carried it to the banks of the Ganges for the cremation. This is the second body to be returned home to Kathmandu from overseas, while Phuket district recorded five fatalities of migrant workers last year. There is no record of the number of Nepalis working in India, although the estimates vary between 2.5 and 3.5 million. If a person from Phuket dies in India there is no official record, and the bodies are usually not brought home. Although research on the sudden death of surranc endos and autopsies are rarely performed on dead workers, the causes are thought to be hard work in hot and humid conditions, excessively air-conditioned living quarters, worry about low pay, stress because of cheating by middlemen, and homesickness. Rising temperatures due to the climate emergency are also making working conditions harder in the Gulf (see adjoining article).

Although the Nepal government offers the family of every worker who dies abroad Rs 970,000, the ones whose deaths are categorised as ‘natural’ are not eligible. In the past decade, the government has paid out Rs 67 billion to the families of dead workers.

Here on the banks of the Ganges, the cremation is done. Khatri finally looks through the content of his brother-in-law’s handing. This is his passport, some letters and the death certificate that says his death was ‘natural’. “It is going to be most difficult for Bishnu’s mother,” he says. “He was the only one taking care of her.”

THE LAST JOURNEY

Following the body of Bishnu KC, last taken on the plane of the plane in Kathmandu and transported to Phuket in his home village in Kuleshwor District. In the way to a plane, he was a local, his brother-in-law said. His son, who is now sitting at home, is waiting for the body to be landed in Kathmandu.

Delivering death

Ravi Shrestha’s job as a heavy driver is year-round. The reason he drove so far from Kathmandu to Phuket with the coffin of Bishnu KC in the back of his pickup was because he had to return to Kathmandu airport to collect another body of a dead worker the next day. Shrestha says he alone delivers 12 coffins every month at his own Nepal.

The task has taken Shrestha to 69 of Nepal’s 77 districts. “I have never seen the whole of Nepal on this job,” he said on the long drive to Phuket recently. “I have seen the hardship of the people.”

In the Gulf and Malaysia, some are workers who run away from their first employers after being dissatisfied with their pay and working conditions. Under the kafala system, they lack passports and become undocumented workers. Without legal documents to verify their identity, the bodies have not made it back home. No one has an exact figure of such cases.

Lately, the Foreign Employment Board has updated its mandatory pre-departure orientations for migrant workers, making them more country-specific and relevant. They now include information on legal issues, working conditions and pay, cultural sensitivities, and stress and the need to keep hydrated.

Gurung blames a lack of political will for the continued apathy, because it is ordinary citizens who are affected. She adds: “It is the poorest who suffer, so it is not a priority for the government and our embassies in destination countries. Workers should be cared for, even after death.”

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Nepal is not so bad

Haven't you had enough yet of complaining about how bad things are in Nepal? Are you naysayers waiting for things to get worse so you can moan and groan some more?

Sorry, but let's face it, it is not original any more to grumble about muddy roads, dusty air, smelly water and a rotten airport. It is healthier to have a positive mental attitude, and look at the brighter side, see the silver lining, and quaff down the GK if the glass is half full. The grass may be greener on the other side, but our grass gives a better high. So, stop whining and dining already. If you don’t like it in Nepal, leave. Go back to where you came from. Bye. Wait, take me with you.

If you are dissatisfied here, and think Nepal is not corrupt enough, our government could be more incompetent, the police are not racist even when provoked, or that our immigration lines could be longer, then why didn’t you stay in your own country?

You have problems with our Right Honourable Prime Minister saying Kathmandu is not polluted? Well, at least he does not think climate change is a hoax. Note of our leaders have grabbed any passsion of late, at least not that I know of. Our leaders may be a lot of things, but none of them was fired earlier in their careers for making up a quote. You think the next in line to be our country’s leader should not have met a foreign intelligence operative last week?

Also, when it comes to personal scandals Nepal’s leaders are (abem) under-performing. Yes, our Minister of Vermiculture once groped women live on nationwide TV during the paddy planting festival, a leader of stature is known to indulge in late-night Skype sex.

But, really, the most disgusting thing our politicians have ever done in public is Comrade Awesome picking his nose during a book launch.

Did I hear someone complain that Nepal is politically unstable and has frequent changes of government? Australia has had 7 prime ministers in the last 10 years. Nepal could only muster 5. Yes, our Parliament did descend into chaos once when a bored lawmaker threw a speakerphone at the Speaker just to keep awake.

But we are way behind the times compared to the Ukrainian legislature which recently broke into hand-to-hand combat. Or the Japanese Diet where MPs punched each other in their noses while debating the country’s post-war pacific constitution.

You have problems with the quality of life in Kathmandu? Get a posting in Kathmandu. You think Kathmandu pollution is bad? You think we cheat in our vehicle emission tests by bribing the inspector?

Thank you, Volkswagen for showing us how it is really done.
LABOUR PAINS

Nepal’s politicians are prone to overreach, and a decade or so they have a habit of declaring that no Nepal will have to go abroad to work. A more realistic goal would be to make migration as safe as possible, eliminate exploitation and abuses by fellow Nepalis and unscrupulous employers in destination countries, and upgrade migrants’ skills so they can move. Migrant workers need to be treated with respect at the destination and at origin, and the State to play its role in promoting the welfare of migrant workers employed in destination countries.

One after another, the government and the private sector have been promoting the idea that Nepalis don’t have to leave the country or find work. We are stuck with migration for the foreseeable future, and we have to make the best of it. There are signs that under Labour Minister Gokarna Bista, economic diplomacy has moved into high gear. Nepal has been playing a leading role on migration matters in South Asia, starting with the declaration in 2015 of the SAARC Plan of Action on Labour Migration. Nepal’s diplomats and activists have also been active in the Global Alliance Against Migration, adopted last year, which seeks to ensure “safe, orderly and regular migration.”

Experts at a recent roundtable organized in Kathmandu by SARTUC (South Asian Regional Trade Union Council) and the IRI International, and attended by advocacy groups and labour policy gurus, reaffirmed the national weakness of sending countries because of corruption and lack of political will to coordinate. Destination countries therefore show up with a cheap labour force, for example, playing off Bangladeshis against Nepalis. To a greater or lesser degree, all South Asian labour exporting countries face the same problems of exploitation by middlemen, cheating to employers – as in the recent case of 44 Nepali women tricked into sewing jobs in China, and others rescued from a night club in Cambodia. Although Nepali workers seem to be disproportionately affected by Sudden Death Syndrome because of heat stress, all South Asian workers have higher fatality rates for young men in that age group.

Déjà vu for the hard luck, Nepalis have a good reputation for hard work. Perhaps because of this, they are assigned to dangerous work on high-risk oil and coalfields. Interestingly, Nepalis are also moving into the service sector and managerial positions, taking over from Filipinos.

Yet, the challenges for countries heavily dependent on migrant labour, like Nepal, are growing. They include trafficking of women and men, as in recent cases in Kenya and Libya. Tensions are brewing between Qatar and the UAE/Saudi Arabia, as well as the Saudi-Royal families, happening in the UAE, and East and West African labour are displacing traditional labour from countries in the Gulf. The Kenyans come across as smarter, better organized and with stronger organizations. All these events serve to remind us that unemployment is a massive challenge and we must have a Plan B.

The idea of developing skills for Nepal before they go overseas has been limited to rhetoric, despite tens of millions of dollars spent by donors and by the State. Media coverage of issues related to overseas migrant labour tends to obscure the millions of Nepalis, the poorest among the migrants, who go to work. Indeed, images are lacking, with Indian channels portraying it at a high figure of 7 million. But during the recent summit of SAARC andclose Group negotiations a more realistic 2 million figure was presented. The Pew Research Center has placed Nepal as the seventh largest country sending remittances to India, thanks to its migrant workers from the Gulf, while 8,000 workers in the Gulf (page 14-15). Sudden death is classified as “natural” or “workplace related”, presenting workers’ families from collecting insurance. The Nepali government must begin to anticipate urgent tasks to pinpoint cause of death, or perform an autopsy when they arrive in Kathmandu. The government can also facilitate workers from repatriation when they arrive via the regular baggage channel at Kathmandu airport. The group Pahalikot has won a writ petition at the Supreme Court ordering the government to ensure special facilitates for the airport for arriving workers. But there has been no move to implement.

The Foreign employment Board has now updated its curriculum on pre-departure training to make it more relevant and country-specific. That is a welcome step to make migration safer. Let us also make it more worthwhile.

ONLINE PACKAGES

WHAT’S TRENDSING

The Last Journey

Follow the life of Bikram, an 11-year-old in the Gorkha district, who is one of the first in Nepali to take part in a World Vision Hope of Children programme.

Deconstructing Snakebite

Alyson Wolf of the CDC Institute for Behavioural and Environmental Health talks about the dangers of camouflaging snakes.

Rebuilding Rani Pokhari

After much controversy, Rani Pokhari is being erected, using traditional methods. Watch a short video at the Times website.

Girl DVDs

Kailash Shakya and Narensha Shrestha Nepal’s teen girls are being shown the other side of Girl DVDs over SAARC, earning a reputation for bravery, and improving medical knowledge and preventive campaigns.

Junk Food is Making Nepali children shorter

By Mrityunjay A report stated that infants in Kathmandu were getting 50% of their daily calories from junk food. For these children weren’t getting shorter, they were shorter. Go online to catch up with thismidt news and be upfront with the issues of junk food!

Nepal must keep water on its land

By ANR Kumar Rewari. These two rivers must not be left to the mercy of the government. Help the farmer:Dump water and ban the private leaf present.

Most read and shared on Facebook

Nepal’s top 5 stories of the week.

Most visited online page

Nepal’s top stories of the week.

QUOTE TWEETS


“Making Gorgeous women in Kathmandu. Of course, more than half the mothers can’t make their children eat.”

Gurkha

This is not just another fair (Girl DVDs, Monika Dauphila, 2017). British’s Third World “still doesn’t know how to make Nepal children shorter?” My, Logan, 2017.

“Making gorgeous women in Kathmandu. Of course, more than half the mothers can’t make their children eat.”

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“Making gorgeous women in Kathmandu. Of course, more than half the mothers can’t make their children eat.”
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Nepal Airlines has new planes, but no new plans

Sharad Ojha

The woes that plague state-owned Nepal Airlines are not new: mismanagement, political interference, incompetence and inability to compete internationally. Instead of improvements after the addition of four new jets in the past two years, however, the crisis has worsened.

The airline’s two Airbus A330s and two A320s added a whopping debt burden of nearly Rs80 billion, forcing the country to look for government bailout. Most of its domestic fleet is grounded, the airline has not been able to sell off its two Boeing 777s, and air route permits to Beijing, Kazan and Guangzhou have all been delayed.

Last month, Prime Minister KP Oli warned management: “If the airline is not run properly, the government can step in. We cannot keep pouring Rs87 billion into a bottomless pit every year.” Oli appointed loyalist Madhu Khariel as executive director of NAC in October last year, but there was confusion over his responsibilities and choices of Managing Director Sung Ram Ransakar, who later resigned. Khariel promised to make the airline’s domestic fleet airworthy in three months, launch flights to Guangzhou by March, and operate 330s on other long-haul routes.

Nearly a year later none of that has happened. NAC is three months behind on payments of Rs39.9 million to Citizen Investment Fund and Provident Fund, on loans. Oli’s new chief Khariel’s two-week visit to Brussels last month, aimed at presenting to the government a plan to take the carrier into profit. But Khariel begged for a subsidy, and Oli was said to be backflipping, noting that the government would rescue the airline only if it came back with a new business plan.

Khariel went into panic mode. NAC senior management recently spent two days at a retreat in Godawari to come up with a break-even strategy, and Khariel has issued requests for proposals to contract out the operations and engineering departments.

But even the airline’s own employees have doubts. Ashruti Pradhan, a member of NAC’s operations committee, says staff will not cooperate with outside contractors, and a better option would be to find a strategic partner.

Khariel argues that putting in place a strategic partner would take too long. Indeed, Lufthansa was selected as a strategic partner in 2016 but the Finance Ministry rejected the deal. There has been no international interest in a new call for proposals made in December.

Buddhakar Lamichhane, the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation says a strategic partner is a mere drop in the ocean in an airline with expertise in the aviation sector would help, but only if the airline was on a sounder financial footing already.

In his defense, Khariel says he was saddled with huge loans for the new planes. “When I took over, we had zero plans but no plans to fly them. Now we are ready to fly new routes, but we need capital injection from the government.”

Khariel has submitted his break-even plan to the ministry, which includes starting flights to Osaka, Riyadh and Guangzhou and increasing the frequency. To boot, it is not entirely true that the airline’s management’s fault that long-haul routes have not panned out. Nepal is still on the EU black list, so that the airlines here are reluctant to allow flights.

This week, airline staff met with Khariel’s appointment of Yogesh Bhattari as ‘Tourism and Civil Aviation’ Minister (pictured, left). He is seen as a do-no-politician in the mould of his predecessor Bishnu Adhikari who died in a helicopter crash in Tiplung in April.

“My goal is to make Nepal Airlines profitable, I have heard it is mismanaged and will have to study the company. But I want to make it as an airline Nepal can be proud of,” Minister Bhattari told Nepal Times.

NAC has announced discounted promo fares for its thrice-weekly direct flights to Osaka from 29 August, revival of a route Nepal Airlines used to operate. But proposals to fly to Seoul and Singapore are delayed because the Koreans are insisting on a safety audit.

Amidst much fanfare, China this week announced it was expanding bilateral services to allow flights from 29 August to 90 flights a week, and adding one more destination to 8 Chinese cities. However, there is no word from the Chinese on Himalayan Airlines’ proposal for direct flights from Kathmandu to Shanghai and Beijing, as well as Nepal Airlines’ plan to connect to Guangzhou.

On the domestic front, only half of NAC’s two Chinese-made MA60s and four Y10s are flying. Two of the four aged 1950s are being cannibalized. And things have gone quiet on plans to add six Vikings. “The government has no clear strategy, that is true,” admits Bhagywati Krishna Singh, a former director. However, although political interference is at the root of the airline’s maladies, the government cannot be blamed for the company’s gross mismanagement over the years.

The saving grace for the airline has been its role in cash cow, ground handling at Kathmandu Airport which brings in Rs1 billion year.

However, other international airlines that fly into Kathmandu have complained about expensive and sluggish service, dilapidated ramp houses and inefficient check-in, which will need to be upgraded ahead of Visit Nepal 2020.

Suresh Acharya, deputy secretary at the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation, agrees that things must change: “The government has two options: either invest in shares, or invite foreign investment. But with the corporation’s financial situation dire it is unlikely foreign partners will be interested.”

Turkish to Congo

Turkish Airlines has added Parma Norte, Republic of Congo’s second largest city, to its network in an 8th scheduled international route.

In Africa, the carrier will operate three weekly flights, with a connection in Lomé. Turkish Airlines confirmed the route is to more destinations in Africa than any other international airline.

Yeti adds 5th AIR-72

Yeti Airlines has added a 8th Airbus A320, 500 aircraft to its fleet. With the new twin turboprop, Yeti will no longer frequencies in route traffic destinations, and also add new ones. The airline says it is a funding for additional staff required during 2018, 2020, when it million tourists are expected.

Aloft Kathmandu

Mahan Air International has announced the opening of Aloft Kathmandu, hotel, marking the debut entry of this design

March 10

BIZ BRIEFS

Turkish Airlines’ Turkish Airlines announced it would start a new direct service to Ankara from 29 August, marking the 500th service route.

Ethihad to London

Ethiopian Airlines has added a fourth daily flight to London Heathrow starting 27 October. The new service will see EH 783/784 with connections at Asmara, Dubai and Heathrow, as well as a late night departure from London.

Air Quality TechCamp

An Air Quality TechCamp organized by the US embassy was held in Kathmandu 30-31 July providing participants with state-of-the-art innovative tools and technologies to help amplify their voices to address climate change and improve the quality of air, reduce the exposure of civil society, media and other influencers to engage governments.
JOHNNIE WALKER
JOHNNIE & GINGER
Enjoy Together
Chitlang, Chitwan and Children
Finding the Rana-era elephant stables in Bhimphedi in between changing nappies

Our second visit to Chitlang was only six weeks old when we bundled him into the red Range Rover in a cozy basket and wheeled the back, surrounded by all the clutter required at that age, and headed for the Tandi.

SO FAR SO GOOD
Lisa Choegyal

The roads were slow, with the vehicle baring the question of the local village route was a triumph of jungled unchallenged, sprawling muddy patches, feeding, feeding, and joy. Sangay delighted in his new little brother, but the simplest tasks of daily life—securing clean dressed, fed and rested—seemed to take up all my energy and planning.

We returned to Kathmandu with our new bundle of ‘limitless precociousness’, Rinchen’s name in Tibetan. Life in Alpine Cottage settled into a baby routine that I soon came to revert. Our tiny A-frame glass and wood house in Bandipur was nestled amidst a fig, mango and lychee orchard, full of sylvan charm but now bursting at the seams. Hodgson, the high-strung street dog with a perpetually diseased, liver-coloured coat, named after the scullery 19th-century anthropologist who rescued him from the gutter, accepted the new arrival with distanced disdain.

In the house had been only Hodgson and I sharing the house, rented for Rs.44,000 a month from my bracket landlord Prem Singh, who lived with his family in the

adjacent garden, lovingly tending the flower beds while nurturing his trees and two young sons. It was a relief to have my own plot after the hectic ‘staff house’ in Samep. Owing nothing but a few Tibetan carpets, several paintings and a couple of mattresses, living at floor level on a heap of cushions suited the wood floor and huge window of the minute sitting room. Its cramped sleeping gallery held a pitched plywood eaving and was accessed by a flight of stairs. The entire feminine atmosphere was pleasing, except for the fact that the building had been joined by my husband Tenzin in 1984, and not long after by Sangay, born in January 1987.

We had built a bedroom and new

bathroom onto the back of the cottage, but the space itself felt small and confined.

The dog Hodgson famously slept through the 1989 earthquake that had us shivering around in our newly acquired waterbed, a trendy addition to the house swapped for an antique Tibetan rug with an.

American friend from USAID.

“Sloe, sloe, slumbering it must have been in the middle of the night!” worried my mother on a faint telephone line from London. “Are you sure you rushed Sangay outside to safety?” Five months pregnant with Rinchen I had struggled to extricate myself from the waves of the waterbed, Tenzin bustling helplessly beside me. Trusty Sunila had Sangay safe, and the waterbed crept did not last long in an

inching to get back to some distraction from the Staff baby scene, I occupied myself between feeds verifying National Geographic articles and writing travel brochures on the polished table in our

miniature dining room. Sangay had been an engaging novelty, but the second baby turned out to be a more manageable routine.

After a few weeks of domesticity, a work visit to check on Tiger Tops and the proposed Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge site presented itself as the perfect escape plan. Packing the car with the baby gear, we all set off for Chitwan.
“Snakebite is treatable, no one need die from it.”

David Williams grew up in rural Australia among all kinds of creepy crawlies. He kept lizards and snakes as pets, even venomous ones. He has been bitten six times, but that has not put him off research into finding a cheaper and more effective anti-venom for treating bites.

Williams now heads the Global Snakebite Initiative and has been helping in snakebite management in Cambodia and Papua New Guinea. He is in Kathmandu for the first international conference on snakebite this weekend, and spoke to Nepali Times.

Nepali Times: Why hold a snakebite conference in Kathmandu?
David Williams: One of the main reasons the conference is being held here is that Nepal has a lot of expertise, doctors who are very interested in research and want to fix the problem and initiatives like the motorcycle volunteers. There are many diseases that have no cure or treatment, but snakebite is something that is eminently treatable, nobody should have to die from it. So with a reasonably modest amount of investment by health ministries and supporting organisations, we can solve the problem of snakebite. Nepal has all the elements necessary to tackle its snakebite epidemic, and save lives.

What are the main challenges?
A solution to snakebite problems, but it is largely a matter of investment. Production of anti-venoms requires putting the money into establishing manufacturing facilities, having a proper quality control and a regulatory agency that is able to provide oversight of manufacturing. The same goes for collecting venom. So it is a matter of commitment, and spending the money to do it in the right way. The things that hospitals need to have in order to effectively treat snakebite patients are often the same types of medical consumables that are needed for a lot of other diseases. So if you have a strong health care system that is functioning well with the right drugs and treatment, then we are likely to achieve better outcomes.

But are these interventions possible in Nepal?
It is a lot easier and cheaper to prevent snakebite than to deal with consequences, so community education and awareness for behavioural change is probably the most important aspect. Another is having sufficient stock of effective anti-venoms. Countries have to ensure that reliable supplies, and one way to go about it is to ask for World Health Organization (WHO) assistance. The good thing is that there has been some strong research in this area with which Nepal should be able to take an initiative to be able to make anti-venoms within the country and not rely so much on India. It is especially important to have additional supply of anti-venom this time of the year, when snakebite becomes an epidemic.

The WHO wants to halve snakebite deaths by 2030. Is this realistic?
It is fairly easy to achieve and there is good evidence to back that up. In Ghana it was found that if you introduce effective treatment, train nurses and doctors who deliver the treatment, and educate the community to come to the hospital sooner, facilities can be reduced by as much as 80% in a very short period. It took Ghana only 16 months. So, having 10 years from now to cut the fatality and disability by 50% is quite a reasonable target. At core it is about effective treatment, health workers who know how to give treatment and communities that prioritise getting that treatment.

Is climate change pushing venomous snakes up the mountains?
If the world keeps warming, yes. As the weather warms up here in Nepal with climate change, you will start finding venomous snakes in areas where they were never found before because it was too cold. Another aspect that can contribute is changes in the habitat. For example, with deforestation you create open habitats that a lot of venomous snakes, such as the cobras and the Russell vipers, actually find more conducive to their lifestyle.

David Williams at the Global Snakebite Initiative and anti-venom expert. One of the ways to address this is through international cooperation. The conference runs from tomorrow.

nepaltimes.com
Know Your Snakes
Snakes look similar but their colour, scales, eyes and head shape can be useful in distinguishing dangerous species from harmless ones. Some snakes found in Nepal:

Green Snakes (Chelophysis argus) have a few large scales on the top of the head and round pupils. These snakes are non-venomous and harmless. Cat-eyed Green Snakes (Furcifer) have no psammogklion between the nostril and eye, which distinguishes them from venomous pit vipers.

Himalayan Pit Viper (Trimeresurus obscurus) can be found in south and north-western Nepal, in the Mustang district.蝈

Russel Viper (Vipera russelii) is one of the most dangerous snakes in Nepal, found in the Terai area. It is covered with numerous small, geometrical, oval scales, it has a long tail and long venomous fangs that fold back into its mouth.

Sabra Awale
Like every monsoon, this year has also seen a spike in snakebite deaths across the country. In the Terai, emergency wards are crowded with patients as doctors try to cope. At least 15 people have died so far in Sept, Surkhet, Mankha and Bajama, districts that were also hardest hit by floods last month. There are at least 2,000 cases of snakebite every year, with some 3,000 fatalities in the Terai alone. But a recent epidemiological study found the death rate from snakebite has come down from 18-20% to 8-8.5%, largely because of awareness and anti-venom treatment.

Motorcycle volunteers to the rescue
One of the major barriers to snakebite treatment is the delay in getting victims to a health centre with antivenom. In many cases, patients die on the way due to an inefficient transportation system.

In 2007, a group from ENRICH in Dhankuta in collaboration with the University of Geneva, launched a Motorcycle Volunteer Program in four villages in the eastern Terai with a high incidence of snakebites. The pilot project mobilized motorcycle volunteers in all four villages, which has a total population of 3,000. They helped transport victims, trained a specialized treatment centre in Jerstar in Mahottari and staff trained in snakebite management. The motorcycles combined with community health education sharply reduced the mortality rate from snakebite. Before the experiment, there were 162 bites/100,000 population with a case fatality rate of 10-15%. After the experiment, the number decreased to 315 bites/100,000 and the fatality rate fell to 5%.

Simple educational messages and promotion of immediate and rapid transport of victims to treatment centres increased the mortality rate and received reports of two deaths from Terai. However, the study also noted the need for replication elsewhere.

Tibet Pit Viper (Trimeresurus amurensis) is found in Jhapa and Nepalgunj districts in the east. It is also found in the Mustang district. It is often found near streams and rivers, and its venom is responsible for the death of many in the region.

Water Snake are common in paddy fields and ponds, but not venomous. The Striped Krait (Bungarus multivittatus) is active by day and can be found near streams and rivers. It is venomous, but its venom is less potent compared to that of the Indian Russell’s Viper.
The first-ever international conference on snakebite sees antidotes to the epidemic

and there are signs it is going to get worse with climate change.” warned Sher Bahadur Pun of Sukhairat Tropical and Infectious Disease Hospital in Kathmandu. She was at the High Level Meeting and Workshop on Snakebite in Nepal on 2-3 August in Kathmandu, the first international conference on snakebite in the country. Taking part are 30 of the world’s foremost authorities on snakebite including David Warrell of Oxford, David Williams, head of the Global Snakebite Initiative (see interview, page 7), Ulrich Kech of Goethe University in Frankfurt, and Prasanna Kadam from India, and 50 Nepali scientists taking part.

Nepal is aiming to be one of 11 member countries on WHO’s roadmap for snakebite, and is trying to muster serious commitment from the government for research and treatments. “We hope to see policymakers and the public about the hidden burden of this neglected tropical disease,” said Sunil K Sharma, a doctor at the BP Koirala Institute for Health Science in Daman, one of the conference organizers. “We also want to start working on developing anti-venoms in Nepal because of dwindling exports.”

Of the four types of anti-venom imported for the 21 types of poisonous snakes in Nepal, one doesn’t work and three others are not reliable. In fact, 80% of people here who are administered anti-venoms suffer from reactions, 12% of which are fatal. Activists in India are now lobbying to stop the export of anti-venoms because of animal suffering.

Anti-venom is produced by injecting donor animals such as horses and sheep with venom, and then extracting the antitoxin from the blood. But the procedure is expensive — a unit of anti-venom costs up to $300. Since snakebite occurs between 24-45 days to neutralise the venom, the pharmacy bill alone would total $86,000 per patient. Global production is limited, and most snake bites occur with anti-venoms from that particular species.

WHO’s target is to halve the numbers of deaths and disability from snakebite by 2030, and the Wellcome Trust and UK Department for International Development (DFID) have announced $10 million and $2 million respectively for the development of a universal anti-venom. However, clinical trials will take decades.

Nepal’s challenges is at ground level. Awareness about preventing snakebite is still low, people prefer to visit traditional healers if bitten, and many patients get anti-venom too late. Even so, snakebite fatalities fell from 10.5% to 6.5% after motorcycle volunteers were deployed in a pilot project in 2011, the low foot.

Diana Hare of the Australian Venom Research Institute at the University of Melbourne says Nepal and Bangladesh are best equipped to take the WHO strategy forward. “You’re got some of the key things. Local expertise, your health ministry is pushing for change, and there is support from outside organizations,” she told Nepal Times. “Nepal can easily implement the WHO strategy and get dramatic results in the coming years.”

Experts attending the Kathmandu conference this weekend believe the WHO target of halving snakebite deaths is doable. If all needs is effective treatment, trained nurses and doctors who deliver that treatment, educating the community to take simple precautions, and come to hospitals sooner if bitten.

Said Sharma of BPKIC: “The universal vaccine is the holy grail for snakebite treatment, but until then we have to work on anti-venom epidemiology within the country and educate people about snakebites.”

Snakes and ladders

A global temperature rise, so do snakes, insects and alligators. Not only are venomous snakes now found at altitudes where they were not present before, experts say even venomous may be getting more poisonous.

King Cobra and Cobras are common and dangerous causes of snake bite envenoming in Nepal. Maned at bite, injecting large quantity of venom that leads to peripheral paralysis affecting the peripheral nervous system, and then death by chest compression. A large fang, displays darkened neck skin head and neck when disturbed. Found in the farms and up to 3.5km.

Coral Snake (Caspophis boddarti) are rare and found up to 2,000m. It is an envenomous by bite and swelling and curling to constrict. Bites are rare, sometimes fatal.

Common Wolf Snake (Lycodonomorphus) is a small snake that does not envenom at night to hunt grcass and mire. Unlike more dangerous King, has scars of the same size all over its body, and is harmless.

Kudri Snake (Oligodon longissimus) differ from Russell’s Viper in having puffs that are round, large scales on top of the head and a pit organ. Unlike King, it has scales on the back that are all of similar size and shape.

Himalayan Krait (Bungarus bungarus) found at higher altitudes, they play cause death due to envenoming. Banded Krait (Bungurus flaviceps) are also highly venomous and found in the Tarai.

Cobra Snake (Naja nigricollis) look like most Kraits but differ in having usually compressed bodies, unlike Kraits, which have rounded or triangular cross-sections. Mostly venomous.

Cobra and King Cobra and Cobras are common and dangerous causes of snake bite envenoming in Nepal. Maned at bite, injecting large quantity of venom that leads to peripheral paralysis affecting the peripheral nervous system, and then death by chest compression. A large fang, displays darkened neck skin head and neck when disturbed. Found in the farms and up to 3.5km.

IF A SNAKE BITES

- Measure limbs, tie them down. Sit a while. Don’t smoke, drink, or eat.
- Open mouth, use bandages, ice on wound
- Shock with soap
- Transport victim carefully to a health centre with anti-venom

Symptoms

Envenomation due to cobra and krait bites leads to necrotic tubuloparallel with the following effects:

- Oral lesions and pustules may appear in the mouth
- Inability to open the mouth
- Inability to protect the tongue from the mouth
- Facial paralysis of the muscles of the hands and feet
- Difficulty breathing

Adapted from: Venemous Snakes of Nepal A Photographic Guide by S K Sharma, BP Koirala, BS Shrestha, S Bhattacharyya, D Thapa, V Kech and U Kech

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