F o u r y e a r s a f t e r t h e C o n s t i t u t i o n was promulgated, the main political actors involved in drafting it are now ruling the country. The 2017 federal, provincial and municipal elections made the most powerful government in Nepal’s democratic history. Yet, the Nepal Communist Party (NCP) has squandered not just its mandate but also the opportunity to make the Constitution work.

There were very high expectations among Nepal’s long-suffering people that stability would attract investment, create jobs and improve accountability and governance. But disillusionment is running high, with opposition parties and dissident groups exploiting the discontent to push for constitutional amendments.

The government’s response has been to crack down on dissent, intimidate and attack those who are critical of ruling party figures on social media, and try to push through bills in Parliament that would curtail hard-won freedoms. Prime Minister Oli himself has ordered that Constitution Day on Friday, 20 September be used as an opportunity to defend the Constitution.

In what critics say is Panchayat-era style, the central government ordered Chief District Officers and local governments to ‘celebrate with much enthusiasm’ Constitution Day for three days, 18-20 September, by proudly flying national flags at home, wearing t-shirts emblazoned with flags and illuminating homes and offices for three nights. The Home Ministry homepage even has a pop-up box displaying the exact dimensions and colours of the national flag, and instructions on correct ways to display it. The new Minister of Tourism and Culture, Yogesh Bhattarai, even tried to get the national anthem played before evening prayers at Pashupati.

Oppositionists are trying to cash in on the public’s anti-government mood. Despite being in disarray itself, the Nepal Congress (NC) has small blood, and its leader Shehbaz Koirala is trying to ride the Pandav wave to have secularism scrapped from the Constitution. Kamal Thapa of the RPF is going one step further to campaign for the restoration of a Hindu monarchy. Former Maoist ideologue Dr. Baburam Bhattarai, now leader of Samajbadi Party Nepal, wants a constitutional amendment for identity-based federalism and executive presidency. And then there is the Big Four faction, which wants to go back to armed struggle.

The NCP is lashing out at critics. Party Co-chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal last week instructed party cadres to ‘retaliating’ against the opposition, echoing Prime Minister Oli’s call to ‘unleash hounds on them. NCP youth have used mob tactics against those posting critical content on social media. Information Minister Gokul Banskota doesn’t hide his disdain for the free press, and is pushing the Media Council Bill, an IT Bill and the Mass Communication Act through Parliament.

Critics say the way to defend the Constitution is not by threatening dissenting voices, but by protecting the freedoms that it guarantees. Former head of the Nepal Bar Association, Sami Pokhrel, says, “If there is a problem with the Constitution, the way to solve it is not by wrapping ourselves in the national flag. The flag is being used to hide defects in the Constitution.”

Saima Rai

Why is Okinawa so popular among Nepalis?

PAGES 8-9

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GOING PLACES TOGETHER
FOUR YEAR ITCH

A fly-by-wire system was still rocking Kathmandu four years ago this month when top leaders decided to fast-track the long lingering Constitution. The government was facing criticism for not doing enough on rescue and relief, and wanted to make its presence felt.

That seven years have since made huge changes in the political landscape is due to a combination of factors: a growing sense of urgency among the youth, the establishment of a more cohesive and united opposition, and the changing political landscape in Nepal.

Among the recent developments, the government’s efforts to address the issue of human trafficking have been widely praised. The government has taken several initiatives, including the establishment of a national task force, and has also signed several international agreements to combat trafficking.

In the past year, there has been a significant increase in the number of cases reported, which is a positive sign. However, there is still a long way to go in terms of awareness and accountability.

The government has also been working on improving the infrastructure, including roads, transportation, and tourism. The country is also becoming a popular destination for medical tourism.

Overall, the past year has been a significant one for Nepal, with many positive developments and improvements. However, there is still a lot of work to be done, especially in terms of economic development and social justice.

For these reasons, the government is working on a new constitution that will address many of the issues that have been raised in the past.

The Constitution will be the cornerstone of a new Nepal, where the rule of law will be respected and corruption will be eradicated. The government is committed to ensuring that the new Constitution is respected and implemented.

The new Constitution will also address the issue of human trafficking, with provisions to ensure that individuals are protected and that traffickers are held accountable.

In conclusion, the past year has been a significant one for Nepal, with many positive developments and improvements. However, there is still a lot of work to be done, especially in terms of economic development and social justice. The government is committed to ensuring that the new Constitution is respected and implemented, and to eradicating human trafficking in the country.

For more information, please visit the government’s website or the country’s official social media accounts.
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TURKISH AIRLINES

BREMEN 
BILBAO
High cost lays aviation low in Nepal

Kathmandu has the highest fuel and handling costs of any airport in the world, and the poorest facilities

Sharad Ojha

Have wondered why the cost of air tickets from Kathmandu is more expensive than from other cities in Asia to the same destinations? How come more European airlines do not serve Kathmandu? Why there aren’t any direct flights to Australia?

Answer: expensive jet fuel and high service charges at Kathmandu airport are keeping international airlines away, and preventing even that fly here from adding flights to meet demand.

High fuel costs mostly pinch airlines that fly widebody aircraft on long flights. Korean Airlines, China Southern, Turkish Airlines, Qatar Airways and Nepal Airlines use widebodies on longhaul routes. Congestion often forces their planes to circle for hours, and the cost of all this is passed on to passengers.

A Nepali Times survey shows the price of ATF jetA1 at Kathmandu airport this week was US$1.050 per kilolitre (KL), almost double the cost in New Delhi and Bangkok (US$0.945 KL) and considerably higher than Kolkata (US$0.750 KL). (See chart, above.)

The cost of fuel is the main expense for airlines, and the feasibility of a route is determined by the fuel cost at the destination,” says Abdullah Tunsu Keceli, Nepali Manager of Turkish Airlines, which operates daily flight using the Airbus 330 from its Istanbul hub.

The carrier plans to continue daily operations for Visit Nepal 2020, but says that plan will depend on lower fuel prices.

After long fights, widebody jets need to top up their tanks with at least 40 tons of fuel in Kathmandu for their return journeys. Qatar Airways, Cathay Dragon, Turkish and China Southern all operate A380s and need refuelling in Kathmandu, as does Korean Air’s Boeing 777s.

Thai International’s 777s usually do not refuel in Kathmandu unless they burn their reserve while waiting to land. Even Nepal Airlines flies into Kathmandu on a full tank so its planes do not need to take on too much fuel here for their next flights.

After a request from the Board of Airline Representatives new Minister of Tourism and Civil Aviation Yogeesh Shrestha assured carriers he would “give the matter serious consideration.”

Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) says it will soon reduce costs by US$0.45 KL, but carriers say that is not enough.

The reason fuel cost is high is because of taxes, and the need to subsidise fuel for domestic airlines, and LNG cylinders for the public,” NOC Spokesperson, Birendra Giri told Nepali Times.

Indeed, NOC’s homepage shows it makes a clean profit of more than Rs5 per litre of jetA1 fuel sold to foreign airlines.

Aviation fuel in Kathmandu used to cost as much as US$1.800 KL before 2015, but fell after the global price declined in 2016, to US$0.65 KL. Since then, there have been steady unexplained increases every few months to a peak of US$1.725 in August last year. The price hikes took place after the Nepali Communist Party government assumed office in early 2018. (See graph, above.)

Aviation experts say high taxes on aviation fuel distort international airlines, which magnify downstream benefits to Nepal’s economy through tourism promotion, cheaper travel for Nepali migrant workers, and by making air cargo competitive.

“Way to make money from airlines is to encourage cheaper flights so there are more tourists. It is counterproductive to squeeze carriers through higher fuel costs and airport fees,” says the representative of an Asian airline.

Besides fuel costs, charges for ground handling, parking and landing fees are also costlier in Kathmandu than in other South Asian airports. A widebody operator with 290 passengers pays $6,000 for ticketing and ground handling per flight at Kathmandu airport, which is twice the cost in New Delhi or Bangkok.

Landing and parking charges in Kathmandu are $2,400 for heavies like the A380 or 777, which is 28-30% higher than other airports in the region.

“Kathmandu has the highest cost among all the airports in our network, but in return we get good quality of service and bad infrastructure,” said an airline source, who did not want to be named because he was not cleared by headquarters to speak to the media.

He added: “The automatic doors on ramp busses don’t work, the airport is over crowded and inefficient, but we take that as given. We just wish there is better communication and amplification notice from CAAN and the airport management about disruptions.”

Nepal Airlines Deputy Managing Director Ganesh B. Chand maintains ground handling charges for widebodies are the same in Kasabari as in Kathmandu, adding: “Our costs are high because the taxes for ramp busses and other equipment make them five times costlier than in Delhi.”

Conclusion: operating costs for airlines at Kathmandu airport is the highest in the world because of abnormally high taxes needed to subsidise domestic air travel and the public’s use of LNG cylinders.
Not so cute

A serious oversight by the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAA) and Kathmandu airport management has led to the expiration of a contract with the global air communications company SITA (Société Internationale de Télécommunications Aéronautiques) for ticketing of airline passengers flying from Kathmandu. The contract expired on 14 September, apparently because no one in Nepal bothered to renew it.

SITA employs an application called Common Use Terminal Equipment (CUTS) to speed up passenger processing by sharing check-in desks, providing a software platform to generate boarding passes and baggage tags, as well as integrating the data with the global airline network.

CAA and the airport paused the book-to-each other last week, but managed to get a two-week extension till 28 September. SITA is demanding a three-year extension of the contract, but CAA officials reportedly only want to do it once.

Kathmandu airport is prepared to do manual check-ins with handwritten boarding passes and baggage tags, which may mean delays at the beginning of the tourist season. Said one airline representative: “We hope it will not come to that next year.”

New Turkish app

Turkish Airlines announces Companion Entertainment, a mobile application that can be paired with the Turkish flight platform, Planet. Passengers will be able to browse content on Planet before flights, add preferred movies, to shows and series to ‘Watch later’, and watch them during their flights. Companion Entertainment will be available on over 100 planes during the first phase.

New Turkish app

Him Bank award

Himlaxmi Bank Limited received a Trade Finance Program (TFP) Award 2019 in Singapore on 3 September 2018 for the highest number of transactions reported from 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2019. The TFP award, the third for Himlaxmi Bank, is given in recognition of the bank’s role in promoting trade finance in Asia and the Pacific.

Dry mixed mortar

Sagarmatha Press Solutions has introduced Dry Mix Mortar products to Nepal. These include Ready-mix Plaster, Bricks Bonding Mortar, Tile Adhesive and Industrial Power Grout. The products are made using global technology and high-quality raw materials tested rigorously in Sagarmatha’s state-of-the-art laboratory, producing innovative products with the best quality, high strength, dimensional accuracy and consistency.

Little Smiles

IMS Little Smiles, an IMS Group company, has acquired the sole national distribution rights for Bliss, a Canadian brand of products for kids and babies. IMS Little Smiles has its showroom in City Centre, Kuma Pokhara, where it sells products from other international baby brands like Dr Brown’s, Crane and Himalaya Baby Care, most of them available for the first time in Nepal.

The company has also made Bliss products available via an online store (Infantino).

Gokarna golf

Six long-haulers took top prize at the Pepsi Open Golf Tournament on Saturday at Gokarna Golf Club in Kathmandu. Playing with a 10 handicap, Ashit Shrestha (Point ahead of Bawaria Shrestha) was able to claim the best gross award after winning first prize in the Open category with four under par.

With Raj Pradhan, Gokarna Golf Club President Sudhir Chhiring and Marketing Manager of Shankar Beverages (Nepal), Pradeep Kumar Rai, awarded the prizes to the winners.

NAMASTE

Lager Beer

Your friends from Jowaskalad remind you to celebrate responsibly.
Smarter Nepalis with smarter devices

Let’s place smart citizens at the centre of planning for new homes, cities, energy and infrastructure

Till only two centuries ago, almost every human being lived and worked from home. The industrial revolution brought factories, offices forced city-dwellers to commute to work and back.

But with the Information Age, smart devices in the hands of smart people means we can once again work from home. Going to an office will and should become irrelevant. Home workers will also not have to work five days a week. They will be so productive, three days will be enough.

That is probably what will also reduce traffic jams, improve the air quality and as we become healthier, we will once again live longer. Where you are physically located will become irrelevant and the notion of going abroad will be limited to leisure, adventure and disposable incomes. But even here, we have seen a 15% drop in domestic air travel in northern Europe as awareness of the impact of aviation on the climate crisis becomes clear.

The transformation in the way we work is going to have great implications for the designs of homes, neighbourhoods and cities. The key word is ‘work’. There are still many who are looking for a Jajati-salaried job in the civil service or private companies. Perception and understanding of work and Jajati will be very different depending on who you ask.

Some still seek a 10-5 Jajati in an office that pays a fixed income each month, comes with a lifelong pension, and takes a little bit of chukar to keep bosses and political masters happy. Performance and delivery of output are not really an issue, and the worst thing that can happen is you get moved to a different office or to some remote area of the country away from your family and the schools your children attend.

Many are seeking a Jajati, while others seek work. From construction to managing a restaurant, from driving a taxi or tipper truck to growing crops and vegetables, there are many who work.

Work requires self-discipline and a high level of skill and knowledge, which come with a piece of paper that proves you can actually do what you are claiming. There are many risks, including not being paid or being constantly told that the work you did was not good enough.

Work may also involve long hours and no holidays, unlike in a Jajati, where days off are published a year in advance. People who seek work, like being independent and want to take risks knowing the benefits are there. They love to have fun, they really know when and how to spend time with family and friends.

With the ongoing restructuring of the state there will be fewer government and private sector jobs going around in Kathmandu. This may be a good opportunity to carve out our work niches for ourselves. Many already have a head start.

Numerous producers and service providers have set up businesses. Many young people tell us that they are skilled, they have support from the family, have a bit of savings and they want to work — gainfully and independently.

These are smart Nepalis with smart devices who want to work smart. They partner with other smart people and wish to live in smart houses in smart neighbourhoods of smart cities. The marketing is all data-driven in an age where data is more valuable than oil.

We now need to extend this concept to our towns and cities. For example, being climate smart is critical for the future of humanity and hence there is a need for all individuals and families to do their own carbon audits. A smart app can tell us our carbon footprint and suggest ways to reduce them.

The smarter system is in our ecosystem, and we are all smart enough to learn how nature produces for us and what its limits are for absorbing what we waste. As we plan our homes, cities, energy and infrastructure, let us place smart citizens and their work at the centre of all planning.

Anil Chitrakar, President of Siddhivinayak

Internet and Digital TV

भाकलिङ्का माथि तिने दिनेस, दुर्योगकर, शोषण भएको, जोशमुख माथि अवसराना रहलिने दिनेसका उच्चिनि भएको छ भने बाल हेत्त्लाई नल्कने पैसा नलामे।

फोन: ६९०१०० मा खाबर गरी।

नेपाल वर्किंग

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When I've had enough of the strip, parking dogs, crowds and cacophony of Kathmandu, I seek out my 'oasis', a small piece of green real estate; that I'm sure, slows my heartbeat and lowers my blood pressure on site in — Dilbazar.

Yes, that's right, Dilbazar, one of the oldest suburbs of 18th-century Kathmandu, once known for its sweet shops and the deserted Charkhal fall, but today recognizable by the educational consultancies and their billboards — Study in Australia, Canada, Cyprus, England, Greece, Ireland — that have spilled onto its streets from Patali Sadak. It's definitely not the first place that comes to mind when you think of Kathmandu and nature.

My paradise is small and tranquil, wild but constrained by the boundaries of private property. On its fringe is an old, intact Nepali brick house and surrounding it 1960s-vintage concrete houses, one of them belonging to my in-laws. It is from my bedroom, the dining room windows to be precise, that I gaze onto the neighbours' pocket-sized 'jungle' with its plum, pomegranate, pecan and avocado trees, small copses of bamboo and a barely visible path fringed by wild flowers in warmer months, which passes by a tiny temple.

I'll step back slowly from the dining-room window, holding my gaze. I soon reach a point where the brown frame is filled with green only. Marveling, I approach again, push open the glass and breathe deeply, in wonder that this tiny piece of nature remains and can draw me as strongly, while all around it the concrete jungle gawls.

Research in recent years has tried to quantify how trees affect human health. By filtering air pollution, trees averted $6.8 million yearly in health costs in the US, a 2014 study in the Journal of Environmental Pollution found. In Toronto, having 10 more trees than average on a street was comparable to a $10,000 increase in personal income, and moving to an area with a $10,000 higher median income or being 7 years younger.

Nature has long drawn me. When I was about 10, my family spent the weekend on an island a short boat ride away from our town. While the adults talked inside, I wandered away, towards the ocean, hopping from stone to stone to avoid the mud and pools of water left behind by the receding tide.

Hunting to peer into one of those tidepools an eerie, tiny world emerged: orange crabs crawled out from under stones, the movement sending up miniature clouds of sand that obscured the scuttling crustaceans. Tiny fish darted, and the long-legged bugs we called 'water skippers' zoomed across the surface. It was only when I heard a voice calling me that I realised I had been lost in my own world — until my brother arrived to make sure I had not passed out, or worse.

Years later, an earnest student in Vancouver, I passed too many hours peering into books under the stark lights of university rooms, but then waiting for the night bus to take me home I would fall under the spell of a row of giant paulownia trees that on windy nights swayed in the street-side shadows above, their leaves rustling like running water.

Fast forward to our first move to Kathmandu, searching for an apartment. We turned the corner of a galli not far from the Charkhal fall and a magnificent camphor tree rose at the F junction ahead. I knew then that I wanted to live on that alley, and soon after we signed the contract.

Back in Toronto seven years later, we were visiting another possible rental in the heart of Canada's biggest city. At one end of the delightfully large apartment was a former balcony, converted into a room for four-season living. Outside its huge windows a stand of maple trees rose above the parking lot. Here's a future office, I thought, and we were lucky enough to rent that apartment too.

Today, I am again fortunate to live in a relatively green section of Kathmandu, with a backyard that hosts pears, mango, avocados, and other fruit trees. Unless the neighbourhood dogs are yapping, birdsong wakes me in the morning and frogs call insistently after a nightime monsoon rain.

I have been luckier than most people to live so often next to nature, which bestows enormous benefits often in small, simple ways. I could spend hours walking in my Dilbazar jungle, but I get the same pleasure from hearing raindrops hit the leaves of the trees outside my open window.

Postscript: The owner of the Dilbazar jewel died in mid-August, before I could go and ask how he managed to preserve a natural paradise amid the steadily shrinking 'empty' spaces of the neighbourhood. I dedicate this article to that man I never met, for withholding the pressure to sell out and cash in.

I am not exactly sure what motivated him to conserve his patch of land, but hearing that just before he died he had asked one of his children to let him seedlings from overseas. I'm confident it went beyond simply keeping the valuable property in the family.
Five years ago, 27-year-old Amrit Sapkota left behind friends and family in Kathmandu to seek a better life on Japan’s tropical island of Okinawa. Sapkota now married to another Nepali, who runs the Shiki Mahal restaurant in Naha, speaks fluent Japanese and is at university studying to be an English teacher.

She was working in a travel agency in Kathmandu, but decided to take the leap to pursue her studies 4,000 km away. “At first I cried a lot, was homesick and did not want to leave my parents,” recalls Sapkota. “I did not know when I would be back.”

The number of Nepalese in Japan has grown 10-fold in the last 16 years to some 89,000 today, and many of them have decided to settle in Okinawa, which is warmer and more relaxed than the main islands of Japan. Nepalis make up the largest proportion of foreign workers in Okinawa at 24.6% — followed by Vietnam (16.4%) and the Philippines (12.9%).

Nepalese students like to come to Okinawa because they are allowed to work up to 28 hours a week during the school term, much longer than in Australia, another popular destination for Nepalis. This allows them to study and work to pay off tuition fees and living expenses.

Another reason is that international students have a better chance of getting employed in Japan now, as the government is encouraging Japanese companies to employ more foreigners, under the Japan Revitalization Strategy.

Many Nepali workers choose to work in convenience stores here because they can practice their Japanese by interacting with customers. Last year, the number of foreign nationals working in Japan’s four major chains exceeded 55,000.

But Nepali migrants pay a price to pursue their dreams in Okinawa. It costs nearly 1,186,680 yen ($11,500) a year to do a two-year course at a

"It was mine, too," says Mari Pakhri. 26, left, has been visiting her home country for a trip of a day. She was a Japanese language student. She now works for Japan Airways and sometimes goes to visit her friend Erina Shari, 43, right, who teaches English for home cooked meals.
The highest number of Nepalis working back in Okinawa...
Nepal Then

Photographer Giri Budhathoki has been documenting Nepal since the 1970s. Now, 40 years after his first visit, Giri Budhathoki will be showcasing a film he made in 1978, along with photographs and two paintings that will be kept.

29 September, 7:30pm, Seattle Art Museum, 100 University Place (425) 564-2500

Arts Power


29 September, 10:30am-5pm, Seattle Art Museum, 100 University Place (206) 547-4600

Women On Stage

Women On Stage worked with 22 women in Kutchamoda to make a film about the birth of 125 traditional stories. Women will be screening their stories through spoken word poetry, creative movement, and visual arts.

10 September, 7:30pm, Seattle Art Museum, 100 University Place (206) 547-4600

Twelve Thoughts

Twelve students from the Community Art School will exhibit their artwork. The event will be held from 9-11pm.

29 September, 7-10pm, Elliott Bay Book Company, 300 Union Street (206) 622-6330

Poster Exhibition

Celebrate 50 years of Nepali film with a poster exhibit!

29 September, 10am-5pm, Seattle Art Museum, 100 University Place (206) 547-4600

Paint Party

Bring your friends and family to paint party! Learn to paint from local artists and let your creativity shine.

29 September, 7-10pm, Limited studio space available. Please call Mary Jo, 954-0275

Global Climate Strike

Friday the 20th of September will be the largest climate strike in history. Join the protest in downtown Seattle.

20 September, 8am-8:30pm, Seattle Center, 300 Alder Street (206) 684-1200

EVENTS

108/4AD

Legendary band 108/4AD will be performing live for the first time since their reunion earlier this year.

21 September, 7pm onwards, $30.00 per person, Hula, (206) 444-8397

Love Juice

Love Juice features soulful, traditional, and contemporary music. The event will be held from 7-11pm.

20 September, 7:30pm, PinHawk Art Cafe, 8510 14th Ave NE

BBQ Brunch

Saturday brunch featuring live music and delicious food. The event will be held from 10am to 2pm.

21 September, 10am-2pm, Hula, $30.00-

Nina's

Nina's is a fabulous fusion of Middle Eastern and Asian flavors. The event will be held from 6pm to 10pm.

21 September, 6pm-10pm, PinHawk Art Cafe, 8510 14th Ave NE

Pop-up Printmaking

9 contemporary artists will present a print-making workshop. The event will be held from 9am to 4pm.

29 September, 9am-4pm, $20.00 per person, Seattle Art Museum, 100 University Place (206) 547-4600

The Midnight Riders

The new band 'The Midnight Riders' will launch their debut album 'Blues in the Moonlight'. The event will be held from 8pm to 11pm.

27 September, 8pm onwards, PinHawk Art Cafe, 8510 14th Ave NE

ClayAction Now

The Seattle Art Museum is hosting an event to raise awareness about climate change. The event will be held from 10am to 6pm.

20 September, 10am-6pm, Seattle Art Museum, 100 University Place (206) 547-4600

AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 13-19 September

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The Air Quality Index in Kathmandu is measured at the US Embassy Station at Thinibitar. The index is based on the amount of fine particles in the air. The index is divided into five categories: Good, Moderate, Unhealthy, Very Unhealthy, and Hazardous Air Pollution.
Man survives steel rod piercing his head

Ranjan Tamang was using a circular saw to cut a steel rod at a metal shop in Kathmandu when a portion of the rod snapped off and pierced his head. The rod entered through his left forehead, just above his eyebrow, crossed the brain in the midline, and exited from behind the brain on the right side. Since the saw was running, it damaged the basal ganglia and internal capsule, the compartment of neurons controlling the movement of the left half of his body. Half of his body became paralysed immediately. Tamang, 23, lost consciousness and went limp.

Doctors rushed him to a nearby hospital in Bharatpur, which said it was not possible to treat him. They then took him to 112 Trauma Hospital in Maharajgunj, where he was turned away because there were no beds in the ICU.

By the time they got to the emergency ward of Nepal Institute of Medical Sciences in Bharatpur, he had been in the ambulance for four hours since the accident.

Doctors were shocked — they had never seen a case like this. “They were doubtful at first that the patient would live,” Quality care was provided through the international guidelines that Shrestha had followed at a similar case in a hospital in Mumbai.

“Once we had done all possible, the only road ahead was brain surgery,” Shrestha recalls. Any foreign object that enters a head has to be taken out from the direction opposite to its entry, since removing it from the same side could inflict additional damage on the brain. An 11-member team, including resident doctors Susu Lahiri, Ranjan Jhami, Matiur Qasim, and neurosurgeons Shubhraj Shrestha and Pratap Shrestha took part in the operation. They also consulted Professor Law, Prat and Round Hop. First, they performed a craniotomy and carefully pulled out the rod to prevent infarction and bleeding.

The only reason Tamang survived the ordeal was because the rod

VACANCY

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Upper Middle School Teacher

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JOHNNIE WALKER
DOUBLE BLACK

Johnnie Walker
Keep Walking

Global Trading Concern (P) Ltd.
Nepal and Malaysia rewrite

Two countries agree on safer, easier and less costly process for workers

Kunda Dixit

In what could be a major step forward in safeguarding the welfare of migrant labour, Nepal and Malaysia have rewritten the rules for work contracts.

After a crossborder investigation by this newspaper’s stall Khusbhatap Ski and Malayastani last year, which exposed collusion between corrupt Nepali and Malaysian officials and private companies to charge workers

investigation showed “This did not include recruiters’ fees and plane tickets that the workers also had to pay.”

After this exposure, Minister Bista signed a landmark MoU with his counterpart, Malaysian Minister for Human Resources M Kulasegaran, in 2018. The agreement required employers to pay for visas fees and air tickets of Nepali workers, who will now be guaranteed salary payments the first week of every month. However, it was not until the technical details were worked out by a joint working group in

Kuala Lumpur last week that the door has opened for Nepali workers to resume working in Malaysia. The major sticking point was Nepal’s demand to increase the 97 institutions the Malaysians had recognised to make medical tests for workers to 122. The Malaysians will send a team to audit the additional facilities in November. During the negotiations, it was also agreed that Nepali security guards would get the same deal as other workers — a point that had stalled previous talks. “Our overall migration governance effort is to reduce the unnecessary burden on workers while providing a loyal playing field for all private stakeholders,” said joint Secretary Ram Prasad Ghimire of the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security. “We wanted to decentralise medical tests to make it more convenient for our workers.”

Ghime, who led the second joint working group meeting in Kuala Lumpur last week, said the flow of Nepali workers to Malaysia could now resume. The Nepal team persuaded the Malaysian side that it was unfair that workers had to spend up to eight months of their two-year contracts just to pay for fees and ticket cost to get to Malaysia. Malaysian employers will now have to pay Nepali recruits the equivalent of a half-month’s salary per worker as a fist of 2000.

The Nepal-Malaysia agreement has set a precedent for migration-related reforms in Nepal and the region, and laid the basis for agreements that Nepal signed recently with the UAE and Mauritius.

Indeed, a visit to the Bangladeshi Supreme Court against a cartel of 10 recruitment companies sending workers to Malaysia cited last year’s Nepal Times investigation by Ram Subedi and Ayesha Aliahad.

NEW MIGRATION: Nepali workers at a synagom factory on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur. There are 420,000 Nepali workers in Malaysia.

New workers will benefit from the agreement signed last week in Kuala Lumpur between Berty Hansen, Undersecretary at the Malaysian Ministry of Human Resources, and Ram Prasad Ghimire, joint Secretary at the Ministry of Labour and Social Security of Nepal (left). Malaysian and Nepali officials and companies were found to be oversigning workers, and the write recognises the Nepal government’s efforts to break such syndicates. In its recent verdict, the court instructed the Bangladesh Government to create an inter-ministerial committee to investigate why only those 10 firms were allowed to send workers to Malaysia.

“We want Nepali workers to spend less on fees, earn more, and be treated well”

Minister for Labour, Employment and Social Security Gokarna Bista spoke to Nepal Times about the renegotiated labour agreement with Malaysia and his other efforts to ensure the welfare of Nepali migrant workers. Excerpts:

Nepali Times: How important was last week’s agreement with Malaysia?

Gokarna Bista: Nepali workers were being cheated by middlemen. They were only paid a small part of their salary. There was a lot of cheating, and theft was common. The workers were forced to work under very harsh conditions.

So why did it take so long?

Our Min. was a broad brush, but the joint working group had to sort out technical details. It was not easy to break the system of political patronage, and we recommended that 122 new centres be approved all over the country for transparency and to decentralise hiring. We also mutually agreed to include the security guard category in the agreement, which was, to a great extent, the key in the case of the MOU. They are now sending a team to audit these new centres outside Kathmandu to ensure that they meet their standards.

How difficult was it to face political pressure in Nepal against the deal?

We had to work hard to iron out the details. There was a lot of concern from both countries, but we got the green light from the ministry. We had to work hard to ensure that they met their standards.

What are the implications of this deal?

This agreement will greatly benefit the workers. It will make their lives easier and more comfortable. It will also help Nepal to improve its image as a reliable source of workers.

How about female domestic workers who cannot come home because of the ban?

We have already signed agreements with the UAE and Mauritius to allow Nepali workers to work in those countries. We are also negotiating with other countries to allow for more flexibility in the work conditions.

What other reforms are you working on?

We are working on several other reforms, such as improving the visa system and ensuring better working conditions. We are also working on ways to increase the wages of Nepali workers abroad.

I hope that these reforms will help improve the lives of our workers and ensure their safety and rights.

How are you planning to monitor the implementation of these reforms?

We are working closely with the Ministry of Labour and Social Security to ensure that these reforms are implemented properly. We are also working with the National Centre for Employment of Migrant Workers to monitor the implementation of these reforms.

In summary, the agreement with Malaysia is a major step forward in ensuring the welfare of Nepali workers abroad. We are committed to implementing these reforms and ensuring that our workers are treated fairly and with respect.
rules for migrant labour

Nepal allows female domestics to come home for Dasain

Ambika is a Nepali domestic in Beirut who has not been able to return to Nepal to see her three children for four years. The reason: a Parliamentary committee’s ban on Nepalis working as domestics in West Asia because abuse by employers.

The ban left thousands of women like Ambika stranded overseas because they feared they would not be allowed to return to their jobs if they went back to Nepal for holidays. Some who had to return for family emergencies had no option but to pay middlemen up to Rs200,000 to smuggle them back to Lebanon through India.

This week, the Nepal Government decided to allow stranded women to come home for the upcoming Dasain festival to see their families, after which they can return to their employers in West Asia. Current domestic workers in that region can also renew their approval to legally return to the same employers.

There are 35,000 Nepali maids in Lebanon, 5,000 in Jordan and thousands more in other Gulf countries. Many continue to bypass the ban, travelling overland to India and flying from there. Ambika said on the phone she was thrilled that she could come home, but there have been so many false alarms that she is still cautious.

“We are waiting for some Nepalis we know to go and return. I may not make it to Nepal in time for Dasain,” she said. Stories of Nepali domestic workers who have started receiving labour renewals are floating around on social media, but that is not enough to assuage Ambika’s fears.

Other women in Lebanon are also taking a wait-and-see approach, letting holder women take the lead and return safely before they decide to go.

“I have not yet told my children I am returning home soon. I do not want to raise their expectations too high,” says Ambika. “Last Dasain there were rumours of the ban being lifted, and they were so excited. I do not want to disappoint them.”

She is one of the many domestic workers who had been torn between holding on to their jobs or holding their children against. Many Nepali domestic workers send money home so their children can attend school and eat properly.

The impact of the ban is especially felt during festivals or personal emergencies, when domestic workers are torn between saving a job and meeting their loved ones, often for the last time.

“This is too good to be true,” exclaimed Dhanu, another domestic worker in Lebanon, who could not return to Nepal for her father’s funeral.

The domestic work sector has been contentious for migrant workers from Nepal, and a series of partial and blanket bans have been implemented. This has had unintended consequences for current domestic workers who have had favourable migration experiences. The stories of stranded migrants spurred the Ministry of Labour, and Social Security to request the parliamentary committee to reconsider the ban. (See interview)

“I have been home only once in nine years,” says Sundari, another domestic worker in Lebanon. “The last time I was making plans to return home for a two-month vacation when we heard about the ban. I was crushed because I had already started dreaming of being with my family.”

Sundari hopes it will not happen again, and that this winter she can really go home. She is grateful to the government and everyone who lobbied to have the ban lifted. She bought on the phone: “Better late than never.”

It is uncertain when and if the larger ban on new domestic workers going to West Asian countries will also be lifted. But for now, this Dasain will finally see thousands of reunions in families across Nepal.
Miss Guided

As surely as night follows day (or is it the other way around?) it is now that time of year again when we celebrate the season of beauty contests. From now till Diwali just about every venue in the city is booked for knockout tournaments in various categories to select young men, women, or both, who are most qualified to be Mister Donal, Miss Schmidt, Miss Nepal, Miss Teen and Miss Guided.

One gala pageant last week saw the crowning of Miss Teen Kunz in all her resplendent glory. And just as the other contestants would not be disheartened, there were also awards for Miss Photogenic, Best Hair and Thickest Dandurad categories.

As expected, competition was keen, as indicated by theriot that broke out over the counting process for online votes. Awards were then also given to Mr. & Mrs. Tad Fu, Mister Hat Pat, and Miss Mana Mina. In order to introduce gender parity to these pageants, various organizers this year have also encouraged members of the opposite sex to participate in the mayhem.

We are now in possession of the calendar of events for the rest of the season, and it looks like a busy next few months of pageant-hopping for tea-uttas in the beauty beat.

Master and Miss Infant Nepal 2019
Mister: “Catch ‘em Young!”
Date: September 23-27
Venue: Press Club, Girha Maternity Hospital Main Auditorium, Thapathali
Criteria: Only babies who have their umbilical cords already cut are eligible. Newborns will be required to take part in the elimination rounds which include the Kooch-koo-ko Round, Crawling-Around Round, Disposable Diaper Round, Breast-feeding Round, Burning Round and the Woo-woo and Poo-poo Rounds. Judges will evaluate participants on the basis of noise, poise, color, motor functions and response to questions in the Interview Round. Sample question: “What kind of world are you being brought into by your parents?”

Mister Unfair and Ugly Nepal Street Pageant, 2076 BS
Slogan: “We Do Not Believe in Pale Complexion”
Date: and Time: Daily 10am-6pm
Venue: Multi-Grand Mandala
Prohibited Zone: Categories: Mr. Brickhead, Mr. Young Turk, Cutest Assent in the Tyre-Burning Round, Mr. Water Cannon, Most Authentic Whipping in the Tenz Gas Round.

Politically-Incorrect Pageant 2019
Grade: “Mother and Motherland Are Dearer Than Heaven”
Venue: Background-the-Stages
Procedure: Winners will not be selected on merit basis but nominated by a clique of shadowy political appointees.
Categories: Miss Malignant-Charlatan, Miss Impunity, Miss Latent Talent, Mr. & Mrs. Kleptocracy, The Right Honourable Mr. Ex-Convict, Misses Willful Defaulter, Miss Thighland and Mr. Cutest Ass.
Activities: Participants will be eliminated in the Musical Chairs Round during which winners will be allowed to sit for a brief period on chairs before they are unceremoniously unsaddled.