



## Female foeticide to football

From an unwanted daughter to Nepal's national footballer

● Srijana Singh Thakuri

My Dad wanted a son. I was the first daughter and after me came three younger sisters. My mother became pregnant three more times after that, all of them would have been girls.

They were all terminated at illegal ultrasound clinics where parents can learn the gender of their baby and opt for an abortion if it is a girl. I know now that the practice is called female foeticide and common in South Asia.

My parents kept trying, hoping a son would eventually come along. I was already old enough to notice the sadness and worry in my mother's eyes every time she found out she was carrying another girl.

My mother was blamed for being cursed. Why was I not enough? Why were we daughters not enough?

Eventually, our Dad abandoned us. One night, without a word, he disappeared, leaving us behind with a broken home, broken hearts, and a mob of debt collectors at our door at all hours of the day.

My mother's health deteriorated. I hardly saw her smile. I began to work as a cook at a bus station to try and ease her pain. We sold bananas, fruits, and tried our best to get by. I promised my mother through her tears that I would be just as good as a son that she and my father so desperately wanted.

I do not blame my Dad. Actually, I feel sorry for him. A victim of patriarchy, he never knew any different. Society had convinced him that girls are never worth the investment, that all they do is get married and go off to someone else's house, that families need sons to carry on the name and inherit ancestral property.

But the irony is that we had no land for anyone to inherit. We had nothing. While trying for a son our family had plummeted deeper into poverty, debt, and depression.

Eventually, things began to look up. I took an entrance exam for Kopila Valley School in Surkhet. The teachers came to know of my story, and by a stroke of luck I got one of the very few spots available to my age group. In the interview I explained that with a chance at education, I could help



LIFE STORY: Srijana Singh Thakuri in 2008 (left) as a student in Surkhet, and on 9 September at her national team debut in a match against Bangladesh in Kathmandu. Nepal won 2-1.

my mother care for my three little sisters, and help educate them too.

I tried to channel my sadness and anger into determination. I wanted to be the best at everything. Because of my Dad, I had something to prove. I became class captain. joined the girl's empowerment club. took traditional dance lessons.

I wrote poetry and participated in debate competitions. I checked out books from the library. I studied late into night and completed all my assignments to catch up with my classmates. I grabbed every opportunity that came my way.

One day there was an announcement that the school was starting the first-ever football team for girls. I showed up at that first practice on a dirt field without sneakers, sweat dripping down my forehead, ready to try something new. I had never seen a field before, watched a match, or even worn shorts.

In my village every square inch of land is used to grow food, and sports were for boys on fallow terraces between growing seasons. I never knew football was for me.

I showed up every day to practice with Coach Gopi. He treated me as he would boys, yelling at me but also encouraging me. I remember my first match and what it felt like, putting on a uniform, chasing the ball.

Over time I started to get good at football and our team began winning matches. I scored goals and was particularly strong at defence, head balls, and corner kicks. But I also kept up with my studies, and started to get noticed as a student

and an athlete.

I made it into bigger teams and got recruited for tournaments. Rumours then followed. People gossiped about me, saying I came home late or left early. I was selfish and I had my head in the clouds. It got worse when I got my periods, people telling me where I could go and where I could not, what I could do and what I could not.

I was going against how girls in my village were expected to behave: stay quiet, keep your head down, try not to get noticed, and when it is time, be marriageable.

I shook off criticism and kept my eyes on my dream, and graduated top of my class. I was eligible for scholarships, and enrolled in a college in Kathmandu. I kept playing football and showing up at tournaments, training all day and night.

My story is not unique. It is what happens when girls and women are given a chance.

I turned 20 when I made the final roster for Nepal's national women's football team. I signed a

contract and my name was in the newspapers. I am now officially a professional football player representing my country.

I have never felt so proud to be a daughter of Nepal even though there were times when I did not feel my country was proud of me.

I love putting on the red national jersey and walking into the stadium. I can still feel the thrill of kicking a ball, and a goal hitting the back of the net.

Swapping  
ambassadors  
midway  
EDITORIAL  
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I love football because it makes me feel free and strong and powerful. My next big dream is for the Nepal women's team to play in the World Cup or the Olympics.

After many years, my Dad came back to us. I would love to say that he had a big awakening and realised his mistakes, but that was not the case. Instead, he tried again for a son, and finally my little brother was born.

I love my baby brother and hope he will get to grow up watching me play, so that he will have a different vision of what girls are capable of.

My Dad got what he always wanted and I achieved my dreams. I called him when I made the team, and I know he was proud of me.

I do not have anything to prove to him anymore. My dreams are for other girls like me whose fathers only want sons. My dreams are for my sisters and my mother. But most of all, my dreams are for me.

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# Swapping ambassadors midway

The Nepali Congress and the UML were such fierce rivals in the 1990s that it was mandatory for one party to cancel and declare null and void all decisions made by the other. That tradition has not just carried on to this day, but has been honed into a fine art.

The most glaring example of this was the axe that fell last week on 12 of Nepal's ambassadors who were political appointments of K P Oli while prime minister. Among them were envoys to India, China, the United States, and Britain.

Among those being recalled are former finance minister Yubaraj Khatiwada in Washington DC, Mahendra Bahadur Pandey in Beijing, Lok Darshan Regmi in London, and Nilambar Acharya in New Delhi.

Oli rigged the system to reward loyalists, and the coalition government of Sher Bahadur Deuba did the same.

This is nothing new, of course, but it takes political vendetta to new levels. Deuba also needs these diplomatic postings to appease coalition partners who will not get powerful ministerial portfolios they were angling for. Two months after he took office, Deuba has not even been able to form a full government because of tussles within the coalition for key ministries.

Deuba appointed Narayan Khadka as foreign minister last week, only because someone had to lead the Nepal delegation to the United Nations General Assembly. It is clear that the recalled ambassadors will not be replaced with career diplomats, which is what should be the practice.

Four of the 22 ambassadors are being recalled at a critical foreign policy juncture for Nepal. Nilamber Acharya has been in Delhi through the turbulent Limpiyadhura dispute and his contacts in the Indian government would have been useful when so many bilateral issues are pending. Recalling our ambassador in China at this time sends the wrong message to Beijing as well.

Yubaraj Khatiwada was a staunch supporter of the American Millennium

Challenge Corporation (MCC) project when he was the finance minister under K P Oli. Despite regime change in Nepal, Prime Minister Deuba would have needed an MCC-backer in Washington while the clock ticks on the project's ratification by Parliament. Deuba has also removed Nepal's ambassador in London just before he goes to Glasgow in November to attend the Climate Summit.

Prime Minister Deuba may have thought he could mute criticism of his ambassadors recall because he also called back his mother-in-law Pratiba Rana from Tokyo. But her term had run out, and she was returning anyway.

Among the 12 ambassadors being recalled are three other women ambassadors who have played important roles during the Covid-19 crisis, ensuring the welfare of Nepalis abroad, mobilising aid for Nepal during the deadly second wave earlier this year, and projecting the country's image abroad.

Ambassador Sarmila Parajuli Dhakal in Oman has earned effusive praise from Nepali migrant workers in the Gulf not just for organising the repatriation of stranded Nepalis, but also bargaining with airlines for air fares even cheaper

than those negotiated by the government in Kathmandu.

Ambassador Anjan Shakya in Israel negotiated the agreement for 1,000 new caregiver jobs – most of them for Nepali women. She has been working on a Nepal-Israel agricultural cooperation agreement. Last year, Shakya was the first Asian

envoy in Tel Aviv to be named 'Ambassador of the Year' by the Ambassadors' Club of Israel.

Ambassador Dawa Phuti Sherpa in Spain mobilised one of the first relief flights in May to bring oxygen concentrators and cylinders, ventilators, and medical kits through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism. She was preparing for a post-Covid revival of tourism in Nepal.

A patriarchal state that is so self-obsessed that it cannot appreciate the role of these remarkable women ambassadors does not deserve respect from its citizens, nor from the international community.



Sarmila Parajuli Dhakal

Dawa Phuti Sherpa

Anjan Shakya

**A government so self-obsessed that it cannot appreciate the role of its women ambassadors does not deserve respect from its citizens.**

## New Editors



*Nepali Times* announces the appointment from 1 October of **Sahina Shrestha** as Editor Online, and **Sonia Awale** as Executive Editor. Shrestha (left) is a graduate of Kathmandu University and has a MA in Journalism from New York University. She has been a reporter at *Nepali Times* since 2013, and was head of Audience Engagement before taking up this new post.

Awale (right) got her Masters in Journalism from the University of Hong Kong, and has been a health and environment correspondent at *Nepali Times* since 2015.

She is now also in charge of the print edition. We congratulate both on their new appointments.

**Kunda Dixit**, Publisher



## 20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

### Still Missing

20 years ago this week, Kathmandu was gearing up for the third round of peace talks with the Maoists. Both sides set a precondition to further dialogue: the release of prisoners and information on those missing.

At that point, six years after the insurgency began, there were already 774 people listed as missing and over 2,000 people killed. Few would have guessed that the war would drag on for another four years and result in the death of 15,000 more Nepalis.

It has been 15 years since the end of the Maoist war and we have had 12 prime ministers in that period. The country promulgated a new constitution, it survived a major earthquake, then a five-months-long border blockade imposed by India, and is still reeling under the impact of two disastrous waves of the pandemic.

Yet, war crimes have gone unanswered and perpetrators remain unpunished. In fact, there are still over 1,300 people missing. But the two commissions formed to investigate gross human rights violations during the war have not done much to bring truth and justice to the families of those who disappeared.

Excerpts from the report about missing persons from issue #62/28 September-4 October 2001:

The human rights organisation INSEC says Maoists have abducted 547 people so far of which 107 are still missing and government has taken 227. The whereabouts of 130 are still unknown. There's someone else



who is keeping count: the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Geneva. Spokesman Darcy Christen told us his numbers are similar, adding: "It is a complicated issue and has to be addressed immediately if you are to be in a position to have credible talks."

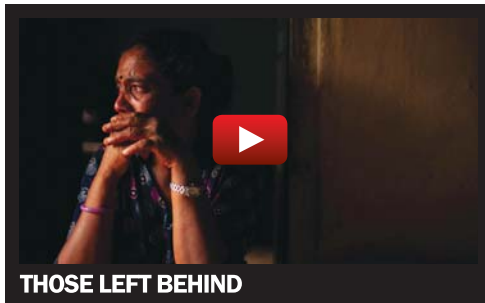
So, either the possible killings have to be admitted (and regretted) by both sides, or the whereabouts of those still missing made public. "There are people we have not seen on our subsequent visits," Christen added. "It will be a political decision for Kathmandu to say what happened to them." Maoists have a greater responsibility since they have said they respect the Geneva Conventions.

ICRC delegations have been visiting Nepali prisons since late 1998. Although they have no access to Maoist detention camps, the rebels have not disrupted their work. ICRC says its priority is to visit those under Maoist detention.

The ICRC has been trying to set up an office in Nepal since 1998 but does not have a "headquarters agreement" with government yet. Sources in the foreign ministry admit there have been delays and say that's because of "administrative problems." Unofficially, one reason for the delay was letting ICRC in would mean recognising the Maoist internal conflict. The official line until some months ago was that this was a "law and order problem".

From archives material of *Nepali Times* of the past 20 years, site search: [www.nepalitimes.com](http://www.nepalitimes.com)

## ONLINE PACKAGES



Over 1,200 children have become orphans in the wake of the pandemic in Nepal, the government is presented with the unique challenge of managing them. In Kavre, eight-year-old Bhuvan Kharel lost his father to Covid-19 this June. His mother now struggles to keep him in school. Watch the video and read the report on *pages 4-5*.

### MCC DEBATE

Rumour mongering is so prevalent in Nepal that it has now become a norm and people thrive in it ('Missing links in Nepal's MCC debate', Jeevan R Sharma and David Seddon, *nepalitimes.com*). When it comes to news, we only read sensational headlines, not in-depth analyses. It is tragic that we are so easily swayed by the empty nationalism of politicians who are using the MCC debate for their gains.

**Joes Ktm**

- I believe this has an underlying issue: Nepal's traditional and perhaps innate desire for isolation that has spanned its history since the unification, reinforced by the Rana Oligarchy and only really overturned in the post-Rana era as a knee-jerk reaction of doing the opposite of the past rather than as part of a clear vision of opening up as a means to an end.

**Marcus Cotton**

### VISA ON ARRIVAL

I wish the tourism sector will rebound and bring about prosperity for the people of Nepal once again ('Nepal reopening for tourists', Kautubh Dhital, *nepalitimes.com*).

**Abdoud Attieh**

- Let's hope for things to return to normal and we get to experience the adventure without the threat of Covid-19.

**Selbmar Adventures**

### TRIED, TESTED AND FAILED

Deubaji has not amassed any experience, only failures, and is proven inept ('Government in installments', #1080). Also, he amassed his superstition, and increased his belief in astrology, with decreasing self-confidence in governance. This shows in the way he blurts out offensive responses at reporters and people asking him difficult questions.

**Lal Bahadur**

### HARKA GURUNG

Thank you very much Jit *Dai* for writing about Dr Harka Gurung ('Remembering Harka Gurung', Jit Gurung, #1080). I vividly recall working with him when I used to be the editor of 'Tamu' - a yearly publication of Tamu Boudha Sewa Samiti.

**Chung Gurung**

- Nepal lost a visionary scholar, my humble obeisance to him.

**Govinda Thapa**

### DIRTY AIR

I do not understand why anyone would continue to live in Kathmandu ('Dirty Kathmandu air gets dirtier', Sonia Awale, *nepalitimes.com*). The air is horrible and as a tourist/trekker I spend as little time in the capital as possible.

**Roger Ray**

### ASS

I'm arriving via Underground with a Fake Passport as I'm an Old Smuggler with a Not-given Name incarnated as a Terrorist who doesn't know his Sex ('Filled your CCMC form?', The Ass, #1080). This form was made for me!

**Abhishek Man Shrestha**

- CCMC, please keep your form short for data and tracking. All tourists arriving do not have good knowledge of English.

**Swaran Thapa**

### RESTORING REST HOUSES

Kirtipur should revert to a traditional town instead of vying to be like any other modern city with no value ('Restoring rest houses to revive culture', Sahina Shrestha, *nepalitimes.com*). This will turn it into a tourist destination and benefit its residents.

**Desh Ratna**

- Many of these resting places in Kathmandu were also destroyed while widening the roads. Hats off to Kirtipur.

**Ramesh Shrestha**

- I felt a deep connection with the art and culture of the town when I lived there for a month.

**Nirajan Ghimire**

- Incredible work done by our mayor in reviving falchas.

**Rabindra Maharjan**

### MELAMCHI MIRAGE

The bigger the project, the bigger the kickback ('Still chasing the Melamchi mirage', Mukesh Pokhrel, #1080).

**J-wal Gurung**

### NEPALI PASSPORT

Same SOP I also followed over last 24 years will follow in the coming years ('Having a Nepali passport is no fun', Anjana Rajbhandary, *page 9*).

**Maheswar Rupakheti**

- And then those countries who refuse us visas talk about the world being a global village and we being global citizens.

**Sunit Rizal**

- The most painful thing is 'short-term' visa stamps. It wastes one page of the passport that is used for few days only.

**Manish Kumar**

## WHAT'S TRENDING

### Filled your CCMC form?

*The Ass*

Now that Covid-19 cases are going down, we must re-inject that sense of excitement to the Nepal holiday to promote tourism. And it starts right from the CCMC form, which the Ass has revamped keeping up with the country's image as an adventure destination. Check out the weekly Backside columns on *nepalitimes.com*

**f Most reached and shared on Facebook**

### Remembering Harka Gurung

*by Jit Gurung*

The Ghunsa helicopter crash dealt a heavy blow to Nepal's conservation movement, and in Harka Gurung, the nation lost a visionary multi-disciplinary scholar. A tribute to the foremost conservationist who advocated for social justice and political inclusion long before the others.

**t Most popular on Twitter**



### The Melamchi mirage

*by Mukesh Pokhrel*

Two months after a massive debris flow on the Melamchi River knocked out Nepal's most expensive water project, geologists investigating the disaster say the danger will remain for decades to come. Get the details in the report on our website and join the online discussion.

**💬 Most commented**



### Sino-Nepal relations in the 'post-Afghan' era

*by Bhaskar Koirala*

The American 'Rebalance to Asia' and 'AUKUS' partnership following the return of the Taliban is already having considerable impact on the course of Sino-Nepal relations. The MCC debate in Nepal must be seen in the context of Asia's restructured geopolitics, argues Bhaskar Koirala.

**🔍 Most visited online page**

## QUOTE TWEETS



**Nepali Times** @NepaliTimes  
Some water experts say that an expensive project like #Melamchi should never have been built in the first place, when cheaper alternatives to supply #water to #Kathmandu through reservoirs on the Valley rim to store monsoon water was possible.



**santosh aryal** @santosharyal9  
It is way past discussing that point now! The more we do the more we learn, so make the best and most out of it. It may not be too bad at all.



**Krishna Joshi** @krishna\_joshi01  
The intention was never to solve the problem but to have a cow they could milk perpetually. Simple as that.



**आशिष** @ashishmanipkr  
So sad to read this



**Nepali Times** @NepaliTimes  
Youth in #Kathmandu stage a protest demanding the tax on #menstrual products to be scrapped on Thursday. The government charges 15% customs duty and 13% VAT on sanitary pads. Photos: @MachamasiAmit / Nepali Times



**Rupen Pradhan** @rudepen  
This is criminal. Developed countries are offering free products/services for menstrual health/ hygiene and Nepal is still charging over 28% tax.



**Dr Mel Channon** @frostyallyear  
I love to see this! Young people leading the way fighting for #MenstrualJustice.



**Nepali Times** @NepaliTimes  
Activists have begun the process of repatriating a 700-year-old wooden carving of a flying gandharva stolen from Itum Bahal, Kathmandu, and a 17th century wooden frieze stolen from I Baha, Patan, both of which are at The Rubin Museum in New York.



**Dark** @darkguyindark  
Just like fossils are being stolen from museums of Brazil, our heritage is being taken away. These are just a few of those.

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# Helping Nepal's Covid

● **Anita Bhetwal**  
in Kavre

An estimated 1,200 children who lost their parents to the pandemic struggle to get by



Bhuvan Kharel and his father Yadav Kharel were inseparable but earlier this year the young boy lost his father to Covid-19.

Eight-year-old Bhuvan Kharel used to start his day with a glass of milk in bed brought to him by his father. Yadav Kharel would then prepare a lunch box for his son, drop him off at school and in the afternoon bring him back home.

Born to the Kharel couple in Panchkhal of Kavre district after 12 years of marriage, Yadav raised his son with care and affection. He used to carry the boy on his back to and from school every day. Bhuvan was equally attached to his Dad, they were inseparable.

But on 2 June 2020, Bhuvan lost his father to Covid-19. Since then, the boy has withdrawn from friends and stopped going outdoors. He has lost his appetite and rarely speaks. The fourth-grader at a school in Panchkhal was a class topper, but has now lost his enthusiasm for studies.

Bhuvan's mother Laxmi Kharel has had a hard time paying for the schooling of her son after the death of her husband.

"He used to revise his lessons every morning and evening with his



Bhuvan's mother Laxmi Kharel faces problems paying school fees of her son after the death of her husband.

dad. But without him, he has lost interest in everything," says Laxmi, who is yet to pay Rs250,000 in hospital bills and another Rs50,000 she borrowed for the last rites of her husband.

Yadav wanted to see his son grow up with a good education but Laxmi is now struggling with schooling Bhuvan with limited income. She says, "How can a single mother without an income give her son a better future?"



Anju Tamang, 12, takes care of her young brother day and night, she hasn't been able to open her text books for over a month.

ALLPHOTOS:MONIKADEUPALA

Bishnu Tamang died of Covid-19 at Dhulikhel Hospital in July, 18 days after giving birth to a son. Her husband Min Bahadur Tamang was then infected and in isolation. The couple's daughters Anju, 12, and Aarti, 10, have now taken it upon themselves to raise their newborn brother.

"My eldest gets up at 5 in the morning to feed and clothe her brother, washes his diapers and looks after him until he sleeps at night," says Min Bahadur. "Since getting Covid, I haven't been able to regain my health,

and my own parents are old. These two daughters do everything to take care of the family."

Anju, who is in 6th grade, has not been able to touch her books for months. When her mother was alive, she and her sister helped their mother. Now they have to do everything themselves, and there is no time for online classes.

Min Bahadur knows he has to send his daughters back to school, but he has lost his job as a driver. He says: "It will probably take over a year for me to pay off my Covid treatment costs, how will I educate my children?"



20-year-old Rajkumar BK is a sole guardian of three younger siblings after the death of his parents. First, his mother succumbed to Covid-19, then his father set himself on fire.

At 20, Rajkumar BK is already the sole guardian of three younger siblings. First, he lost his mother to Covid in August 2020, then his father earlier this year. "My father was depressed after my mother passed away. One day when no one was at home, he set himself on fire," recalls Rajkumar.

Unable to raise them all, Rajkumar left two older siblings in the care of a relative and got married at 20 to support his family. He exchanged his dreams of higher studies for cheap labour and now works at a handicraft shop in Lalitpur's Gwarko earning Rs12,000 a month.

His 16-years-old brother Shyam is undergoing training to repair mobile phones. Rajkumar is already deep in debt building the house after the fire from his father's suicide and his mother's hospital bills.

Adds Rajkumar: "I couldn't continue my studies, but I thought at least my siblings could go to school. But after losing also my father, I don't think I can do it anymore."

**prabhu BANK**

## Poor start to FY

Political strife has overshadowed the economy with a poor start to fiscal year 2021/22. Figures released by Nepal Rastra Bank for July-August 2021 show a drop in remittance by 18% to Rs76 billion, against the rise of 23% at the same time last year. Meanwhile, Nepal's import bill for goods in the same period amounted to Rs150 billion while export earning is down to Rs21 billion. The country's current account deficit is therefore Rs48 billion. Average inflation, which has been low for the past few years, is expected to hit 6% this fiscal year. Meanwhile the Asian Development Bank (ADB) had revised Nepal's economic growth rate down to 4.1% from 6.1%.



## Hector in Nepal

Paramount Motors, the authorised distributor of MG Motors Nepal has begun the booking of the HECTOR 2021 Shine Variant. The evolved SUV comes with 1.5 L Turbocharged Intercooled engine and is available in both MT and CVT variant.

## Citizens in Bandipur

Citizens Bank International Limited and Bandipur Mountain Resort have signed an MoU whereby Citizens Bank credit/debit card holders and the Bank's employees can get special discounts on different services in the resort.

## Vaccine trial

Sanofi and GSK have received approval for phase 3 clinical study in Nepal to assess the safety, efficacy and immunogenicity of



**International Vaccine Institute**

their Covid-19 vaccine candidate. The International Vaccine Institute (IVI) will conduct the clinical trial, and it expects to enroll 4,000 volunteers across three study sites in the country.

## ADB's leading partner

Nabil Bank has been recognised as the Leading Partner Bank in Nepal for 2021 by Asian Development Bank - Trade & Supply Chain Finance Program (TSCFP) for the second time in a



row. The Bank has 135 branches, 184 ATMs and more than 1,500 remit agents spread across the country.

## NCELL wins big

Ncell Axiata Limited has been awarded 'Most Socially Responsible Telecom Company', and its CEO Andy Chong has been named the 'Telecom CEO of the Year' at the Global Business Outlook (GBO) Awards 2021.

## Tata Offers

Tata Motors is set to launch the NRG hatchback under its 'New Forever' range at a starting price of Rs3.4 million and are available in Forest Green, Fire Red, Snow White and Cloudy Grey colors. "We are excited to be a part of this journey and we are looking forward to bringing more differentiated products to our customers in Nepal," says CEO of Siprodi Trading Rajan Babu Shrestha. Tata Motors is also organising a festive "Shubhakamana Service Camp" until October 6. Special discounts are on offer for genuine car parts including brake, battery and lubricants. Smart TVs, fridges and washing machines are also on offer as bumper prizes.



## Everest Fashion Runway

The Mt Everest Fashion Runway, after its highest ever fashion display in the world at Gokyo last week, is showcasing its Fall/Winter 2021 collection at Soaltee Crowne Plaza on 1 October. K Films and Kasa Nepal are partnering with Endemol Shine India to revive tourism and make Nepal a hub for sustainable fashion.

## Siddhartha and Zonta

Siddhartha Bank on September 23 handed over a check of Rs497,200 to Zonta Club of Kathmandu to support the latter's campaign to raise awareness about domestic violence.



## EPL

Bajaj Pulsar Everest Premier League (EPL) connected by Ncell 4G began on 25 September, featuring cricket stars such as Pakistani legend Shahid Afridi. EPL aims to tap cricketing talent and connect them with international players.

## DishHome's Spain offer

DishHome launched its 'Happy parva ko Happy Connection' scheme this week, whereby four new clients of DishHome connections will win a trip to Spain via a lucky draw. All new clients will also receive free season tickets for LaLiga worth Rs2,000. The offer is also valid across Prabhu TV, SimTV and DishHome Fibernet.



## Daraz Dashain

Daraz has introduced its annual 'DashainDhamaka' offer for free shipping, 20% off on online payment, mega vouchers worth Rs5,000. Also in offer is a chance to win products worth Rs50,000 at just Rs1 and a TVS Ntorq 125 scooter as bumper prize.





# orphans



Rupa Tamang does not have money to pay the annual premium for the insurance bought by her late husband Divindra who was a driver and wanted to see his daughter Rubina become a nurse.

Divindra Tamang died of Covid at Kathmandu Medical College in May. His two-and-a-half-year-old daughter Rubina still does not know that her father is gone. Every time she hears a car pass by, she rushes out of the house, looking for her father who was a driver.

“He always honked when he came back from work, so whenever she heard a horn, she thought he might have returned,” says Rubina’s mother Rupa, who had married Divindra only three years ago.

After their daughter was born, Divindra had bought insurance for Rs900,000 for Rubina’s higher studies, and wanted her to become a nurse. “It is time to pay the Rs25,000 annual premium, but after buying food and paying rent there is no money,” says Rupa.

Siblings Rupa, Susmita, Usha

and Rupak Sunar range in age from 3 to 15. They first lost their father to asthma and then mother to Covid in the last three years. With no one to take care of them, the children are now at the SOS Children’s Village in Kavre.

Over 11,000 Nepalis have lost their lives to Covid-19 since the outbreak began in January 2020, most of them in the age group 20-50, but there are also children under 18. Hundreds of children have become orphans in the wake of the pandemic.

There are no reliable statistics since the country does not have a proper child protection system at local government level. So far, data from only 32 out of 753 local

municipalities have been recorded, where 224 children have lost their parents, seven of them lost both fathers and mothers.

“The rescue, assistance and protection of children without parents couldn’t be done on time because of the lack of data,” says Milan Raj Dharel, executive director of the National Child Rights Council (NCRC). “We estimate that we are missing more than a thousand children who have lost their parents.”

The NCRC says it is paying for the support of orphaned children at the recommendation of the local levels. But local wards and village councils have not come forward with records of children despite written letters to do so, adds Dharel.

Losing parents at a young age has left the children mentally

vulnerable and at heightened risk of psychological illnesses. Bhuvan Kharel, 8, has taken to locking himself in his room and inflicting self-harm.

“He has four cuts on his hand,” says his worried mother, Laxmi. She is too busy taking care of the family’s needs to attend to her son.

“Children are often most affected by conflicts, epidemics, accidents, and their young minds are highly vulnerable, which in turn affects their personality development,” says psychiatrist Prasad Ojha. “The uneasiness they show in their behaviour when a family loses a member is called a neurotic disorder.”

Orphaned children feel alone, insecure, are scared and angry, and often unable to sleep and have panic attacks. Depending on their personality, some like to be alone while others become restless.

“The family should keep the children busy, play together, develop a routine and make them follow it,” says Arun Kunwar, a psychiatrist at Kanti Children’s Hospital in Kathmandu.

Child experts also recommend not telling children about financial stress in the family, or hiding the death of the parent. “If you lie to children, they will continue to wait for them causing further confusion and stress, which in turn can increase the risk of depression, running away, suicide attempts, and addiction,” adds Ojha.

The Act Relating to Children 2018 has a provision of a child rights committee at every province and local level in addition to a child welfare officer. It also stipulates establishing a child fund for immediate rescue, relief, rehabilitation of and compensation for children.

But less than 10% of local governments have abided by the Act, which means there are no



10-year-old Arati Tamang lost her mother to Covid-19 this year and since then she has had to take care of her family. Over 1,200 children have lost their parents to the pandemic.

reliable records about the condition and the number of orphans, homeless and needy children who need rescue and protection.

Last year, NCRC formulated an action plan to protect and manage the children who have lost their parents to Covid-19 and came up with two strategies: for the 800-900 of children with relatives to provide a social security allowance of Rs30,000, and to place children who have no one to care for them in shelters.

For this, the Council is re-examining and verifying the recorded 224 orphaned children from 32 local municipalities and is planning to construct 10 alternative care centres for them.

But despite the plan, the budget has not been allocated by the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens because it does not have a minister since Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba is yet to expand his Cabinet more than two months after taking office.

However, spokesperson Umesh Dhugana at the ministry says: “The program hasn’t stalled in lack of a minister. The cabinet will decide on the programs to ensure the protection and management of the children.” 🇳🇵

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SIPRADI





Located at 3,880m above sea level, this iconic hotel is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. Established by noted Japanese-Nepali entrepreneur and politician Taksashi Miyahara, Hotel Everest View put Nepal on the global map in the 1970s for high value tourism, offering world class lodging among the world's highest peaks.

Miyahara built his own airfield in Syangboche, so visitors could fly directly from Kathmandu in Pilatus Turbopropellers. The airfield now only gets helicopters, and the hotel is an important stopover for trekkers and mountaineers.

Hotel Everest View is now offering attractive holiday packages for domestic tourists and expats.

The most popular is the 'Get Close To Everest' 4 nights/5 days package that combines a flight to Lukla, a two-day trek up, hikes in the surrounding trails, and helicopter shuttle to Lukla to catch the flight to Kathmandu. The package costs Rs95,999 for Nepalis and Rs109,999 for residents, and is valid till early-November. All meals, stay in lodges along the way, and permits are included.

Visitors will do an easy first day trek from Lukla to Phakding, spend the night, and climb up to Namche Bazar the next day to acclimatise. The next day it is a two-

## Everest View Hotel Syangboche

hour hike to the hotel. Another day is spent sightseeing in Khumjung and Khunde, followed by a 15-minute helicopter shuttle back to Lukla, and on to Kathmandu on a regular flight.

There is also the 'Everest Wanderlust' 4 days/3 nights package which offers the same itinerary as the previous one. The only difference being that guests will spend the first night in Lukla acclimatising, then take a helicopter shuttle to the hotel the next morning, and back after three days to cut the trek time to Namche. This package costs Rs64,999 for Nepalis and Rs79,999 for expats, and includes one night in Lukla and all meals.

Hotel Everest View is also offering 'Helicopter Breakfast at the Roof of the World' which is a direct helicopter flight from Kathmandu to the hotel and back for breakfast on the terrace with an up-close view of Mt Everest. Price: Rs59,999 each for five passengers.

Rooms in this historic hotel offer a 360-degree view of Mt Everest, Lhotse, Ama Dablam, Thamserku, Kongde, and Khumbila. The hotel has supplementary oxygen available in case the view (and altitude!) takes your breath away.

+977 1 5412142  
info@hoteleverestview.com  
www.hoteleverestview.com

The Pavilions Himalayas is Nepal's leading eco-sustainable resort which operates two properties in Pokhara. It re-opened The Farm resort in July after the lockdown, and offers exciting getaway packages for Nepalis. Its Lakeview will also reopen for Dasain.

The Pavilions is a truly eco-sensitive luxury resort that sets aside a part of its revenue for the local community. It grows its own vegetables and has a farm with goats, free-ranging chicken, cows, and even paddy terraces. It collects rainwater, recycles it, composts biodegradables, and uses biogas in the kitchen. It also generates its own solar power. The hotel is plastic free (even has wooden toothbrushes), and all shampoo and soap are locally manufactured and chemical-free.

The 12 bungalows, built with local stones and slate roofs, were designed around the landscape's contours with minimal landfilling. The villas are situated among farm houses, interspersed with corn fields and vegetable patches, and alongside paths farmers use. Employees are from

## The Pavilions Himalayas Pokhara

nearby villages, and many would have otherwise migrated overseas for work.

The Lakeview satellite resort on the leafy southern slope of Phewa Lake has eight tented villas that mixes luxury with adventure. The glamping site offers stunning views of the lake, Machapuchre, and the Annapurnas beyond.

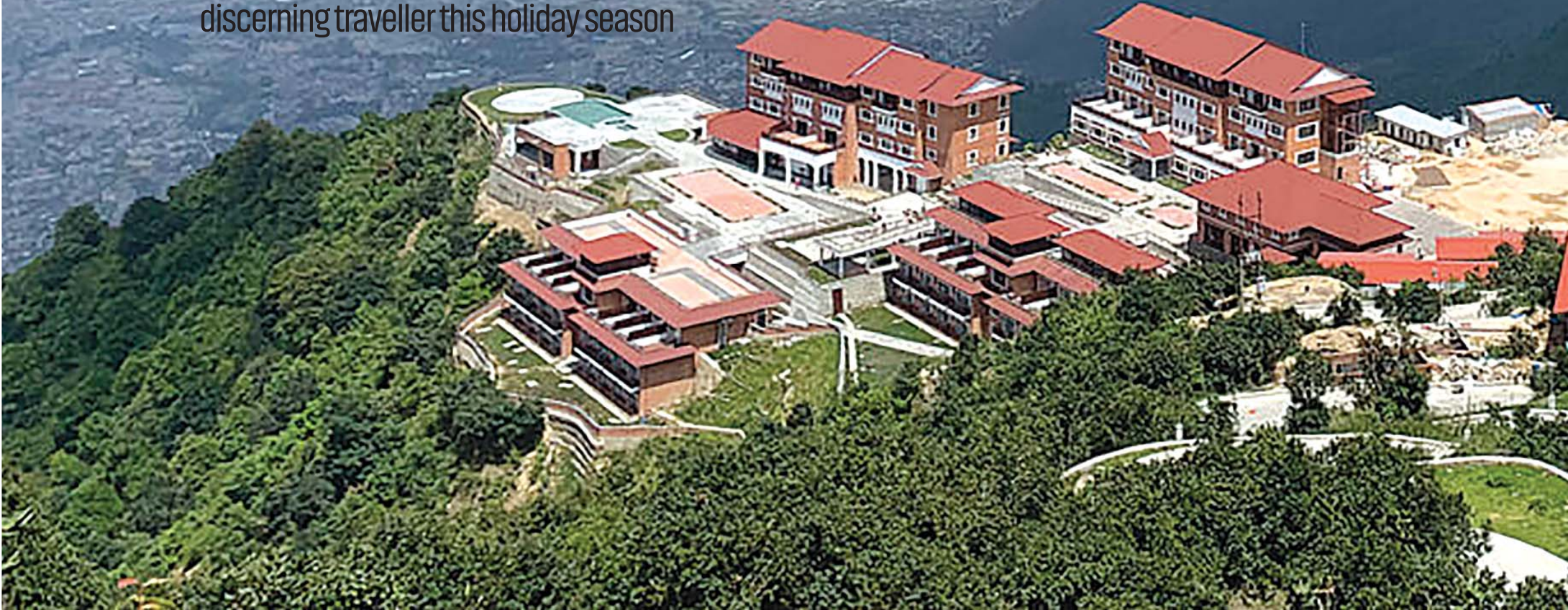
A 2 night/3 day package is offered to couples for Rs22,000 and to singles for Rs18,000, and includes breakfast. The Lakeview is Rs24,888 for couples and includes breakfast, dinner, and airport/boat transfers plus jungle walks.

+977 61 694379  
gm.himalayas@pavilionshotels.com  
www.pavilionshotels.com/himalayas



# TOP DASAIN DESTINATIONS

*Nepali Times* picks 6 eclectic getaways for the discerning traveller this holiday season







For a complete mind-body experience during this festival season there is nothing like Dwarika's Resort in Dhulikhel. A sister establishment of the award-winning Dwarika's Hotel, this hilltop resort an hour's drive east of Kathmandu is a destination to declutter the soul.

The resort combines intimate hospitality and emphasis on cultural heritage with sustainability and communion with nature. Guests are literally encouraged to get away from it all, disconnect, and detox. The activities at the hotel say it all: yoga retreat, Pranayati, meditation, and the Pancha Kosha Himalayan Spa. Also, the Himalayan Rock Salt Room contains more than 80 important minerals and 22 tons of salt crystals with healing properties, especially for those with respiratory issues. These facilities all come with the package.

## Dwarika's Resort Dhulikhel

The resort takes its inspiration from ancient Vedic scriptures, Buddhist medicine, and traditional Himalayan knowledge. The philosophy here is to respect nature and the self to maintain harmony between body, mind, spirit and earth for a peaceful, healthy, and balanced life.

The resort is a sanctuary where the visitor can sit out amidst lush post-monsoon forests and a vast backdrop of the Himalaya with views of Ganesh Himal, Langtang, Gauri Shankar. If you do not want to try too hard to engage in mindfulness exercises, just the locale of Dwarika's Resort is tranquil place to unwind this Dasain.

+977 11 490612, 490613  
sales@dwarikas.com  
www.dwarikas-dhulikhel.com

Meghauli Serai is a part of India's Taj Safari chain and offers its signature luxury accommodation on the fringes of Nepal's most famous national park. Getting away from it all takes on a new meaning in Meghauli, the tiny village that became famous because of the grass airfield that once served the legendary Tiger Tops.

You do not have to be a wildlife enthusiast to enjoy this jungle resort, it is a retreat even if you just soak in the solitude. But guests wanting to make the best of it can enjoy open jeep safaris, boat rides on the Rapti or guided jungle walks with wildlife guides. The area is home to 68 mammal species, gharial and crocodiles, and over 300 species of birds. The Lodge is offering 'Festivites in the Wild'

## Meghauli Serai Lodge Chitwan

package with boat safari, spa treatment and poolside dinners. Evenings are enchanting and guests can observe wildlife from the deck, sip cocktails and watch rhinos, tigers and crocodiles coming down to the river to cool off, while the simmering sun sets into the Rapti.

Meghauli Serai has all health protocols in place, and is offering Dasain package of 2 nights/3days for two guests at Rs70,000, and at its villa for Rs90,000.

+977 9801301951  
ms.sales@tajhotels.com  
www.meghaulisera.com



## The Terraces Lakhuri Lakhuri Bhanjyang

Perched on a high ridge below Pulchoki at 2,200m is Nepal's newest mountain resort. Located just an hour's drive from Kathmandu airport, and 10km from the Ring Road on the Valley's eastern rim, The Terraces fuses international sensibilities with the best of what Nepal has to offer: a sprawling vista of the Central Himalaya with the Valley below. The view is especially enchanting from the poolside dining area at night. Each room has a terrace balcony that commands a sweeping view. The Terraces is surrounded by a private forest that is home to hundreds of endemic plants, animal and bird species. And if that is not rejuvenating enough, the property offers a spa and wellness centre.

The location was spotted by Nepal's leading tourism pioneer Ang



Tshering Sherpa in the 1980s, and he was struck by the magic of the place -- so close to Kathmandu and yet a world away. The hotel is named after the scenic paddy terraces that descend to the valley floor like a staircase.

The facility was designed by an Australian architect to resemble a Himalayan fortress monastery,

or *dzong*. The interior is by an Italian designer and incorporates the best of East and West. The Terraces is popular for retreats and seminars with a meeting room for 200 people. To unwind, there are forest hikes along the ridge.

+977 9813252888  
info@terracesresort.com  
www.terracesresort.com

## Chandragiri Hills Resort Kathmandu

The Chandragiri Cable Car, now in operation after being closed during Covid, is not just a scenic ropeway ride. It is a good idea to combine the cable car ride up with a 2-night stay at the Chandragiri Hills Resort (pictured left) and add to that the many hill hikes. The resort is an excellent

weekend escape with expansive views of Kathmandu below, and the mountains beyond.

Chandragiri peak was the spot from where Prithvi Narayan Shah gazed down at the Valley 260 years ago and made up his mind to conquer it.

Chandragiri Hills Resort is an ideal Dasain-Tihar destination for the entire family. The cable car terminal is 30 min from the city centre, and in 15 minutes transports visitors to another world of crisp clean air and spectacular views.

Chandragiri's location amidst densely-forested mountains alive

with birds makes it a pleasant nature retreat. There is a health spa and an infinity pool, the buildings are named after the mountains visible from the hotel: Ganesh Himal, Gauri Shankar, Manaslu, and Sagarmatha. The rooms all have balconies that offer mountain views, the nearby forests, or the glittering lights of the city below.

The resort's festive season package for Rs8,999 per night includes up and down cable car ride, breakfast and discount on spa.

+977 9802084005  
info@chandragirihillsresort.com  
www.chandragirihillsresort.com



EVENTS



**Salsa Party**  
Dust up those dancing shoes and join Salsa Nepal's Fiesta Latina party for an evening of salsa dancing. Safety guidelines apply.  
*1 October, House of Karim's, 9801224223*

Space Apps challenge

Join over 26,000 coders, entrepreneurs, scientists, designers, storytellers, builders, artists, and technologists from nearly 150 countries for NASA's virtual Space Apps hackathon.  
*2-4 October*

Digital security workshop

Body & Data invites digital rights activists, artists, journalists and Madheshi women to apply for the 'Feminist Tech Exchange - Madhesh' Digital Security Workshop set to take place virtually from 24-17 October. Sign up at [https://bit.ly/FTXMadesh2021\\_Eng](https://bit.ly/FTXMadesh2021_Eng)  
*Application deadline: 5 October*

Qatari food festival

Enjoy scrumptious Qatari feast with a bird's eye view of Kathmandu Valley. Countdown the days to World Cup 2022 with some Karak or Arabic coffee.  
*2.30-4.30pm, 1 October, Chandragiri Hills Resort*



**Oktoberfest in Nepal**  
The Oktoberfest is the world's largest Volksfest held annually in Munich, Bavaria, Germany. It is back in Nepal. Enjoy beers, local and imported.  
*10am-8pm, 2 October, Siddhartha Hotel Boudha*


DINING



**Saigon Pho**  
Experience ultra-fresh flavours of Vietnamese dishes, prepared by Vietnamese chefs. Try the Tofu summer rolls and the cold noodles with BBQ pork. Look at the menu online for more.  
*Lazimpat (01)4443330*


PHOTO ARCHIVES

**Nature Picture Library**  
The Nature Picture Library provides access to more than 500,000 images and videos covering every aspect of the natural world's wild animals, plants, landscapes, environmental issues, marine life, pets and native peoples.



**Digital Archaeology**  
Look at historic photographs from Kathmandu, Patan, and Bhaktapur darbar squares, and watch 3D reconstructed videos of temples around Nepal. Visit the Digital Archaeology Foundation's website for more details.

**World Press Photo**  
Browse through the World Press Photo's (<https://www.worldpressphoto.org>) archive of powerful award-winning press photographs and photo stories from around the world.



**Nepal Picture Library**  
Look at archived photographs from throughout Nepal's history and learn the stories behind them at [www.nepalpicturelibrary.org](http://www.nepalpicturelibrary.org).

**Project Apollo Archive**  
The Project Apollo Archive on Flickr, created by photographer Kipp Teague, is an online repository of more than 16,000 digital images of NASA's manned lunar landing program from 1969 to 1972.

**Gelato**  
Nothing beats the humidity of the monsoon like ice cream. Get ice cream from the classic cookies and cream to apple cinnamon and every flavour in between.  
*Basantapur, (01)5524376*



**Overeazy**  
Who says breakfast foods are just for breakfast? Enjoy fluffy pancakes, refreshing smoothie bowls and healthy Buddha Bowls in the minimalistic setting of this newly opened all-day breakfast place.  
*Bansbari, 9803011679*



GETAWAY



**The Little House**  
A quaint stay in the middle of green rice fields, The Little House is a place where you can enjoy beautiful views, relaxing walks and scrumptious food.  
*Khokana, 9841370022*

Village Heritage and Resort


Located at the top of Rara Hill, this humble hotel offers one of the best views of the breathtaking lake and the spectacular forest of Rara National Park. In the summer, visitors can ride horses along the lake and go on scenic boat rides.  
*Rara, Mugu (01) 4000042*

Soaltee Westend Premier

Located in the green plains of Nepalganj, this expansive resort is one of Nepal's more energy efficient and eco-friendly getaways.  
*Nepalganj, (081) 551145*

Meghauri Serai

Leave your worries behind and set out for luxurious safari lodge at the heart of Chitwan National Park. Overlooking the Rapti River, the lodge not only offers scenic views but accommodation that integrates local culture and art.  
*Chitwan National Park, 980-1301969*



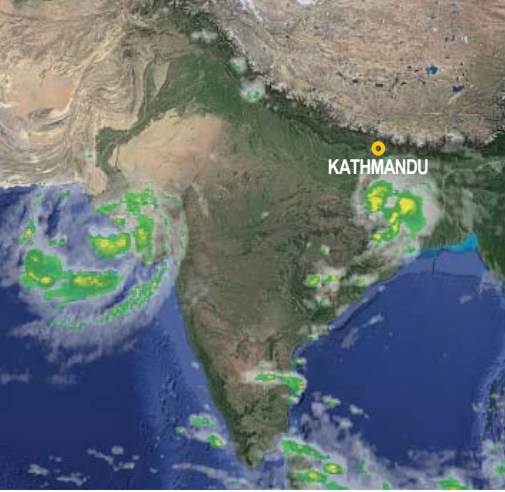
**Kalsee Ecolodge**  
This quaint collection of cottages in the midst of forest hills with a magnificent view of Annapurna and Machhapuchhre is located in Tanchok, a ridge 35km northwest of Pokhara off the Lumle Highway.  
*Kaski, 9851038873*






**Fuji Bakery**  
More shop than cafe, Fuji has set up a few tables and serves tea, Nescafe, and delicious sandwiches. Pick up Fuji's sandwich saviour, the Pullman, or browse through non-bread food products like organic coffee, honey, miso, white cheese and lapsi.  
*Patan (01) 5260678*

Pangra Express

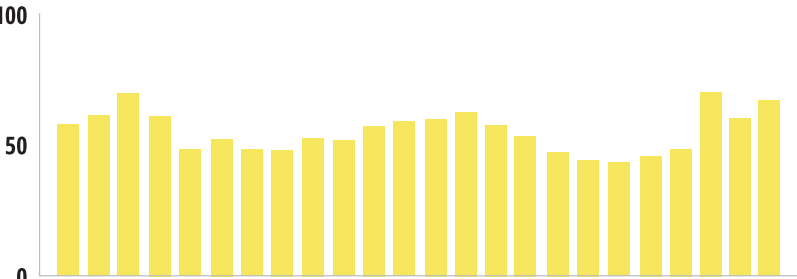
Experience the best of Nepali street and fast food from Pangra Express. Get the Classic Chicken momo, spicy vegetable noodles, Sha Phale Chicken, or go for the Dynamite momo.  
*Naxal, 9818453455*



As can be seen in this satellite weather map of South Asia taken on Thursday morning, there is big circulation that is moving westwards from Gujarat into the Arabian Sea. But what should concern us is yet another monsoonal trough entering Bihar. This system is trying to head west pushed along by a weakening monsoon, but is running into a newly assertive jet stream. This means it will hover over north India on the weekend, bringing wet weather to central Nepal.


FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
 27° 18°	 26° 18°	 26° 18°

AIR QUALITY INDEX



10AM 29 September to 9AM 30 September measured at US Embassy, Phora Darbar

The Air Quality Index (AQI) in Kathmandu is showing signs of things to come. Traffic is building up ahead of the holidays, emitting more hazardous suspended particulates and toxic gases into the air. And with the rains tapering off, the AQI level is rising alarmingly -- especially at rush hour. This is going to get worse. Our advice would be to avoid exercising or being out in the open along the streets during rush hour. Wear a double mask if you do.



**OUR PICK**

In, *The Valhalla Murders*, the eight-episode 2019 Icelandic police procedural television series, veteran detective Kata is assigned an investigation after a man is stabbed to death in Reykjavik. As more people, seemingly unrelated to one another, turn up dead, Kata joined by Icelandic expatriate Arnar Böðvarsson realise that the murders are connected to a photograph of a group of boys and a now-defunct boys' home known as Valhalla. The duo must identify all the boys in the picture before it's too late. Stars Nína Dögg Filippusdóttir, Björn Thors, Sigurður Skúlason, and Edda Björgvinsdóttir.

कोरोना लागेपछि  
न धुँदा जाने, न रुँदा जाने  
त्यसैले कोरोना लाग्नै नदिन  
मीडमाडमा नजाने





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# Having a Nepali passport is no fun

Every visa in a Nepali’s travel document hides hours of paperwork filled with anxiety and anticipation

Every time one of my foreign friends sees my Nepali passport, they are fascinated by the number of visas I have in it. They flip through the pages and say, “Your passport looks like so much fun!”



LIFE TIME  
Anjana Rajbhandary

What they do not know is that every visa on my passport has meant hours of paperwork filled with anxiety: my bank statement, proof of college or work, letters of invitation, hotel bookings, medical records, fee payment receipt from bank, and then the interview round.

Those privileged enough to be born in the West who can just get up and go to any country of their choice, whenever, will never understand that there is no such thing as spontaneous travel for us.

First, we cannot just buy a one-way ticket to anywhere, a return ticket is another requirement, and overstaying can mean being deported immediately or banned from the country.

A person just picking up a passport, rushing to the airport in a cab, buying a ticket over the counter, breezing past security check, and hopping into a plane just before the flight attendant closes the hatch – that only happens in movies.

Before I travelled internationally on my own, I thought everyone had to go through the same process, so I did not mind the extra work. I had



no idea about all the excruciating paperwork that was needed.

One of my first experiences as a citizen literally from the ‘third’ world was during a trip to Italy from Ireland with my American classmates. They all breezed through immigration at Rome, just showing the photo pages on their passports. I was pulled aside, while my friends looked on with concern, they could not understand why the trip was getting delayed because of me.

I had to hand the immigration officer a folder with my entire life history in it. He even wanted a letter from my school that said I was a student, and guaranteeing that I

would promptly return to Nepal before my visa expired.

My friends quizzed me later about my ordeal, and I told them this was SOP for Nepalis, and that I was used to it. They flipped through my passport, and found it so interesting that it was filled with colourful visa stickers and stamps from so many countries.

Whenever my friends ask me if I want to go somewhere on a whim, I cannot say yes because travelling anywhere means weeks (sometimes months) of careful planning, laboriously filling online visa application forms, and an in-person interrogation with some

stern looking person behind the glass. And even having a visa means more questions on arrival at the destination airport after an 18 hour flight.

And for a Nepali, especially a woman travelling alone, the hostile cross-examination starts even before we leave Nepal at Kathmandu airport immigration, with questions that are so irrelevant as to be a farce. There are horror stories of people with legitimate travel documents being harassed and prevented from leaving by our own country.

I have been fortunate enough to travel, see places and meet many people, and am looking forward to

doing more of it. However, it does not come without developing a thick skin, and being prepared to be treated degradingly like a third-class citizen from the third world every step of the way.

This is the reality of people in developing countries looking for a better chance at life, there are more hurdles than one can imagine. Most developed nations have become fortresses with moats and drawbridges -- those who do get to be allowed in are made to feel fortunate. This situation is only set to get worse -- just look at the images from under the bridge at the Mexican border, or Kabul airport.

Next time you see someone with a passport filled with stamps, try to look beyond just the exotic stickers to the untold hours of uncertainty and hope, and for the millions of people around the world whose hopes for a better life are never fulfilled.

Even with so much experience of international travel over the years, I have never quite got used to being made to feel unwelcome everywhere I go. But I have made up my mind that if I enjoy seeing the world, I will have to jump through those hoops first.

That is a part of life, and the accident of birth in a specific country comes with its challenges, we have no choice but to overcome them to get to do what we want. I am not whining – travel is fun, having a Nepali passport is not. 🇳🇵

*Anjana Rajbhandary writes this fortnightly Nepali Times column Life Time about mental health, physical health and socio-cultural issues.*

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# Beginning of the end of

FROM NALAPANI  
TO KALAPANI

Part 1

● Alisha Sijapati

**Nepali Times** reporter Alisha Sijapati spent a month in India, retracing the Gorkha expansion beyond the Mahakali River more than 200 years ago. The goal was to extend up to Kashmir a new unified Himalayan nation by annexing Kumaon, Garhwal, and Punjab.

The Gorkha Empire was on a warpath, and the British East India Company saw it as a threat to its own expansionist ambitions.

This five-part series looks back at the bravery of the Gorkhali troops under its legendary generals to defend the newly-conquered territory, but also the historical memory of an oppressive rule.

On 30 January 2015, Colonel M N Rai was killed in a firefight along the Line of Control between India and Pakistan in Jammu and Kashmir. When his body was brought to Delhi Cantonment for his cremation, his daughter Alka joined the crowd of mourners in crying out: “*Jai Mahakali, Ayo Gorkhali*”.

This ancient battle cry is now heard wherever soldiers from Nepal serve and fight: in India, Britain, Singapore, Brunei, Oman, and in their own country. It harks back to the forces under the command of the descendants of Nepal's founding king Prithvi Narayan Shah crossing the Mahakali River in their westward conquests.

Bahadur Shah was the prince regent in Kathmandu when his troops were on a blitzkrieg, moving rapidly across what is now the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh to the Sutlej River on the border with Punjab. The Gorkhalis held the territory for less than 25 years before finally being defeated in the Anglo-Nepal War of 1814-16.

The legacy of that occupation is still strong here: in Nepali soldiers still fighting and dying for India, in the collective memory of Gorkhali rule remembered mostly for its pillage and plunder, and in migrant workers from western Nepal who can be seen waiting for day jobs in hill stations today.

Nepal lost one-third of its territory to the East India Company after signing the Sugauli Treaty in 1816, but even before that, Nepali soldiers (mainly conscripts from Kumaon and Garhwal) started defecting to the British side after the fall of the Malaun Fort. And after the war, more Nepali soldiers were recruited into the Nusseeree Battalion, the first of many subsequent Gurkha brigades in the British Army, and later the Indian Army.

In the 1915 *Gurkhas: Handbooks for the Indian Army* written by Lieutenant-Colonel Eden Vansittart, 2nd/10th Gurkha Rifles and revised by Major B.U. Nicolay of



1st/4th Gurkha Rifles, the authors note: ‘After the war of 1816, Sir D. Ochterlony expressed an opinion confidentially to Lord Francis Hastings that the company’s soldiers then Hindustanis could never be brought to resist the stock of these energetic mountaineers on the ground.’

In fact, it was because David Ochterlony of the East India Company was so impressed by the fighting spirit of his enemy during the Anglo-Nepal war that he formed the first Nusseeree Battalion on 24 April 1815, which is now the 1st/1st Gurkha Rifles of the Indian Army, also called the Malaun Regiment. The Battalion was named after Ochterlony who was also known as Naseer Sahib, the title of ‘Naseer-ud-daulah’ conferred by Shah Alam II, the 17th Mughal emperor.

“For us of non-Nepali origins, to be a part of the Gorkha regiment was a badge of honour, particularly, holding the *khukri*. That’s how the world knows that we are Gorkhas,” retired Indian Army Major Vijay Singh Mankotia told *Nepali Times* in an interview in his comfortable home in Dharamshala. Mankotia was also a former union minister of Himachal Pradesh and recalls his fondness for the soldiers from Nepal.

Here in the mountains that were the farthest west that the Nepali forces had reached, the Gorkha connection is still so strong that till today even families who are

not descendants of the soldiers celebrate Dasain, Tihar, and other Nepali festivals. Mankotia himself keeps his connection with his army colleagues, and speaks affectionately about their camaraderie and friendship.

“I had always wanted to be part of the Gorkha regiment. From all the others, it was the 1/1 Gurkha Rifles that I was eager to enlist in because of its historic significance, and I was fortunate to have been selected. You don’t embrace the Gorkha, they embrace you,” says Mankotia.

Indeed, the continued presence of Nepali nationals in the Indian Army, the atrocities committed by the occupying Nepali forces in this part of India, the presence of so many migrant workers from Nepal here, right up to the current border dispute over Kalapani — all feed into the love-hate relationship between India and Nepal, and complicate bilateral relations to this day.

After India’s independence in 1947 and under a Tripartite Agreement between Britain, Nepal, and India, the original ten British Gurkha regiments consisting of 20 battalions before World War II were split between the British Army and the Indian Army.

Six Gurkha regiments were transferred to the post-independence Indian Army, while four remained with the British. It was decided that 1/1 Gurkha Rifles

(the Malaun Regiment) would go to India and the first British officers had to transfer or make a choice to join the Gurkha regiments, the 2nd, 6th, 7th, or 10th Gurkha Rifles.

The Indian Army prefers to call its regiments with Nepali soldiers ‘Gorkha’, while the British have always referred to them as ‘Gurkha’. The term is derived from the historic town in central Nepal ruled by the Shah kings, and does not denote an ethnic group. The Gorkha/Gurkha regiments used to consist mainly of Gurung, Magar, Rai, or Limbu recruits from Nepal, although that has now changed.

During the brief Gorkha occupation of Kumaon and Gharwal, Nepal was not yet called ‘Nepal’. Which is the reason why descendants of Nepali soldiers and even Indian Nepalis here usually refer to themselves as ‘Gorkhalis’, and those agitating for greater autonomy in Darjeeling call their territory ‘Gorkhaland’.

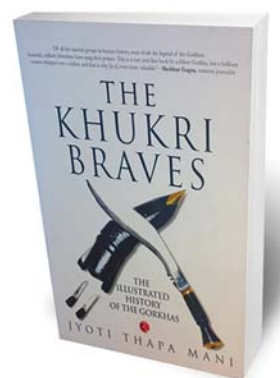
It was only after 1947 that Indian citizens were also allowed to join the Gorkha regiments. To this day, chiefs of the Nepal Army are honorary generals in the Indian Army, and vice versa. In 1953, King Tribhuvan was appointed the Honorary Colonel of the 1st Gurkha Rifles.

Jyoti Thapa Mani is herself a descendant of a warrior in the Gorkha army in 1790, and whose sons later served in the Malaun Regiment. Her great-

great-grandfather was in the ‘66th Ghoorkhas’ and her great-grandfather Kaluram Thapa belonged to the 1st Gurkha Rifles.

Thapa Mani is the author of *The Khukri Braves* that recounts extensively the history of the Gorkha conquests of which her ancestors were a part. She retraces their steps, and describes the battles of Nalapani, Khalanga, Jythuck, and Kangra – names that have been etched in modern Nepal’s history for the bravery of the soldiers who defended them against the East India Company.

“The Gorkhalis who stayed back after the Anglo-Nepal war like my forefathers associate themselves more with Gorkha, rather than being called Nepali, since ‘Nepal’ was not even a country’s name when the Gorkhalis crossed the



Author Jyoti Thapa Mani’s book *The Khukri Braves*.



# the Gorkha Empire

Kangra Fort in Dharamshala, Himachal Pradesh, India, as seen from Maharaja Sansar Chandra Museum. The battle for this fortress in 1815 was a decisive turning point in the history of Gorkha expansion. Kangra was the western-most reach of the Gorkha Empire.



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Mahakali River to annex the hill states, which are now part of India,” says Thapa Mani, who is a graphic designer and lives in New Delhi.

She took more than seven years to complete *The Khukri Braves*, and says it was part of her personal quest to retrace the history of her forebears. “At one point, people called me mad for my obsessive passion,” she laughs. “I have climbed places where only goats could go, but I was compelled by the need to find my family’s roots which are so intertwined with the history of Nepal and India.”

She travelled from one Gorkha fort to another in the Indian Himalaya north of Delhi. From the Mahakali River to Pithoragarh, Almora, Nainital, Haridwar, Khalanga, Dehradun, Mussoorie, Nahan along roads and trails that the Gorkha conquerors walked on – 1,000km away from Kathmandu across rugged mountains.

Following the same trails this monsoon, there are still many vivid reminders of the Gorkhali presence here. We start in Kangra Fort, and travel eastwards to Dharamshala, Shimla, Subathu, Nalapani, Dehradun, Nainital, and Almora; and every step of the way, we meet the descendants of Gorkha soldiers who are proud of their Nepali heritage: many still speak Nepali, and observe the festivals of their ancestors.

There are an estimated 60,000 members of Gorkha families in



At his home in Dharamshala, Major Vijay Singh Mankotia with his First Gorkha Rifles sword.

ALISHA SIJAPATI



Ravinder Rana shows a visitor a wall of photographs of prominent Indian Gorkha personalities.

Himachal Pradesh alone, with another 70,000 in Kumaon and Garhwal. But there are 3 million Nepali-speaking Indians, who live here and in Darjeeling, Sikkim, Assam, Meghalaya, and the northeastern states.

The contribution of many descendants of Gorkhalis continues to go unnoticed, and is not appreciated. This includes Ram Chand Thakur from the 1st Gorkha Rifles from Kangra in Himachal, a bandmaster who composed many martial songs, including the famous *Kadam Kadam Badaye Ja* which is sung in the Indian military.

Ravinder Rana, the chair of the Himachal Gorkhali Association in Dharamshala says that modern Indian descendants of Gorkhalis may not call themselves Nepali, but are proud of their heritage.

“The Gorkhalis in these regions speak Nepali, they breathe Nepali, they take pride in the fact that their ancestors were war heroes, that they were the Gorkhas,” explains Rana. “But there is also a sense that they belong to India now.”

The territorial dispute over the Kalapani region in Kumaon between India and Nepal flared up in 2020 after India built a road in what Nepal considers its land. The government of Prime Minister K P Oli stoked nationalist fervour in Kathmandu and retaliated by publishing a new official map of Nepal that included Lipulekh, Limpyadhura, and Kalapani within its borders.

As bilateral relations soured, and the Indian media turned hostile, and Indians of Nepali descent bore the brunt of the fallout, suddenly being seen by

other Indians as ‘foreigners’.

“In all the years that our ancestors have lived here, we have never faced any discrimination. Now, due to the border dispute and all the Nepali migrant workers flocking in for work, we have had to face prejudice from government officers in our own country,” says Rana. “This is especially disheartening for families who have lost their sons in the Indian Army defending India today.”

Rana says the animosity between Nepal and India on the border dispute has now become personal, and the governments of both countries should be mindful not to rock the boat. “We may be Gorkhalis, but we are Indians now. It is unfortunate that we still have to wait for our governments to validate us and our existence,” he adds.

There has always been an undercurrent of hostility towards people of Nepali descent here, and that has its roots in the historical memory of the atrocities of the Gorkha conquest more than 200 years ago. But it has been accentuated lately after the Kalapani dispute.

It surfaces unexpectedly in a chance conversation when a reporter mentions to an Indian Air Force pilot in a cafe in McLeodganj that she is from Nepal. The pilot’s previously affable demeanour changes abruptly, and he warns: “You Nepalis should not act too big for your boots and cross the border into our territory. You have become Chinese puppets.”

There are currently 28,000 Nepali nationals in the seven Gurkha regiments of the Indian

Army. These regiments have 39 battalions with a 50-60% representation from Nepal. Every year, some 2,000 Nepali youth are selected to join the Indian Army.

The Indian Army’s Gorkha troops are held in high regard, and tales of their bravery in battle either on the Pakistan or China border resonate with often-quoted remarks like this one by the former chief of the Indian Army Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw: “If a man says he is not afraid of dying, he is either lying or he’s a Gurkha.”

But with the border dispute, Nepalis and Gorkhalis here feel like they are regarded with new suspicion. When this reporter reached Almora to visit the oldest Gorkha fort in Kumaon which is now a part of the 13th Battalion of the Sikh Regiment, she was denied entry solely on grounds that she was a Nepali.

Although descendants of Gorkhalis here prefer not to be called ‘Nepali’, that is not the case in Darjeeling and Sikkim. The reason for that could be because those regions have more recent Nepali migrants, and were not militarily conquered by the Gorkha Empire.

“The threat of the Anglo-Nepal war never reached Darjeeling and Sikkim, which is why Nepalis there have a slightly different self-identity,” explains historian Dinesh Raj Panta in Kathmandu.

The demand for ‘Gorkhaland’ has dominated the politics of Darjeeling and Kalimpong for decades, and is an expression of a hankering for autonomy from the rule of West Bengal in faraway Kolkata. In fact, the name Gorkhaland appears more appropriate for Kumaon and Garhwal on the other side of Nepal, since that is where the real descendants of the Gorkhalis live.

While author Jyoti Thapa Mani and other Gorkhalis take pride in their ancestry, many in Kumaon, Garhwal, and Himachal do not acknowledge the conquest of their land by the invading Gorkha army.

Historian Shekhar Pathak in Nainital says that the very word ‘Gorkhali’ has become synonymous with oppression and cruelty in the local Garhwali and Kumaoni dialects.

“*Gorkhyo jaise banna hai?*” (You want to become like a Gorkhali?) is often used as a warning not to be too aggressive. Gorkhalis are referred to as *Gorkhyani*, *Gorkhyo*, or *Gorakhchayani*.

The brutality of the Gorkha conquerors is not as well known in Nepal, where it is glossed over in history books. But here it is a part of historic lore and legend, passed down over the generations in Garhwal and Kumaon.

However, Garhwali historian Shiva Dabrawal in his book, *Gorkhyani I and II*, says that even official Indian history books do not delve into the cruelty of Gorkha rule, and it has only been passed down orally.

In Kathmandu, Dinesh Raj Panta says: “Enough time has passed; we must revisit our past, our common history between India and Nepal, and discuss both the good and the bad sides of the conquest. As a general rule, nobody likes conquerors.”

## Accidents of history

The ultimate downfall of the Gorkha Empire was a given. The supply lines and communication with faraway Kathmandu were stretched to the limit, and it would take a month for even the fastest

military units to reach Kangra from Kathmandu on horseback.

But the history of the Gorkha conquest could have taken a dramatically different turn if the Nepali general (Bada Kaji) Amar Singh Thapa had not fallen into Katoch ruler Sansar Chand II’s trap and avoided the battle for Kangra Fort. This and other accidents of battle contributed to the eventual Gorkhali retreat despite early gains against the forces of the East India Company in 1815.

Sansar Chand II’s ploy did not just alert the powerful Khalsa Maharaja of Punjab Ranjit Singh and his troops, but also tipped the war in favour of the East India Company after the Gorkha army had reached its farthest point to the west.

Similarly, had Amar Singh Thapa not been weakened by infighting and rivalries within the court back in Kathmandu that interfered with his battle plans, the Anglo-Nepal War and the Kangra siege may have seen a different outcome.

After the death of Prithvi Narayan Shah, there was intense power struggle between members of the royal family, increasing the influence of courtiers from the Thapa, Pande, and Basnet clans, who themselves were also in competition for power. The differences stretched over the next few decades, weakening the kingdom, ultimately leading to the rise of Jung Bahadur Rana in 1847, and 104 years of the Rana rule in Nepal.

After Prithvi Narayan Shah, the Gorkha army was so encouraged by its rapid and relatively easy westward advance that it had become ambitious enough to see the possibility of the conquest of Kashmir. But the Sulej was a river too far.

The Gorkhali generals were first outsmarted by Sansar Chand II of Kangra, then Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Punjab, and eventually the East India Company which saw the expansionist Gorkha Empire as a threat to its own colonial project against the Mughal rule in India. The Company also needed control of the high Himalayan passes for access to Tibet and its riches.

The Anglo-Nepal war of 1814 was actually the second time Gorkhali troops had clashed with the East India Company. After the Malla king of Kathmandu sent an urgent message to Kolkata to ask for help to repel a Gorkha invasion of the Valley, the Company sent an expeditionary force in 1795. The British forces were repelled after the battle of Sindhuli Garhi, east of Kathmandu.

In 1804, when Amar Singh Thapa (father of Commander-General Bhimsen Thapa) took over Palpa, he expected rent from Butwal, which is near Gorakhpur. But by then the Nawab of Oudh had handed over Gorakhpur to the East India Company.

The generals of the East India Company warned the Gorkha kingdom to keep out of their land, which did not sit well with the rulers in Kathmandu. This eventually led Governor General Francis Hastings, also known as Lord Moira, to declare war against the Gorkha Empire, which led to the beginning of the end of the Gorkha rule over territorial conquests in the west. 🇳🇵

*This is the first of the five-part series. The next installment about the siege of Kangra Fort will appear in this space on 8 October 2021.*





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## Meddling with medals

Every year, Nepal honours people who have imparted yeoman's service to the nation so that things do not go from bad to worse. Thanks to the awardees, things are bound to get better day-by-day in this country.

However, the big story in Mandu Town last week was of journo refusing national medals conferred to them by Her Majesty the Prez. Methinks that was rude and ungrateful, the least the hacks could have done was to accept their decorations, pinned them on their pet dogs, and posted the videos on TikTok. Oh well, next time.

Some of you will remember reading about how Jang Bahadur during this visit to Great Britain in 1850 at first refused to accept the Most Honourable Order of the Bath and the Most Noble Order of the Garter because he thought it meant he would have to take a cold outdoor shower clad only in his socks. When he was later told that those were Great Britain's highest honours for gallantry, he accepted them from Queen Vic.

Similarly, we must arrest this trend of boycotting medals before it becomes a national crisis. The government of the day must quickly come up with a cunning plan to make sure these interior decorations are treated with the respect and honour they deserve.

Perhaps we can start by awarding next year's medals to the brother of the daughter-in-law of an ex-prime minister who went beyond the call of duty to be the PM's bagman. Who said we don't adhere to the rule of in-law in this country?

We must also decorate the incumbent prime minister who has strictly abided by the Constitution

to pass and scrap ordinances to ensure his stability. Only if we test the limits of how far we can go to violate the laws of the land, can we make the Constitution stronger.

Let's also decorate the Ward Chair who has built the most view towers in any rural municipality. The Mayor who has single-handedly mined all the sand from the Sun Kosi in the last fiscal year must also be recognised. And the Highest Award for Gallantry must go to he who broke all national and international records by being prime minister most frequently.

It is because of the courage, commitment and patriotism demonstrated by these yeomen and women that *The Rising Damp* reports that Nepalis are all bubbling with optimism. Don't know about you, but I have started seeing the glass as half-full, mainly because I have already quaffed the other half.

Everything looks upbeat under that silver lining in cloud cuckooland also because of the posthumous medals to the deceased for Lifetime Achievement in this year's Constitution Day National Honours List.

It is when we start recognising every Nepali who has tirelessly worked in this and previous incarnations for the betterment of this country that we will set an example for future incarnates.

**To Whom It May Concern:** If conferred the Quasi-National Service Medal (Third Class) in next year's Honours List, the Ass solemnly swears to accept it hole heartedly.



The Ass

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