



Apply now.

Apply now.



AMIT MACHAMASI

## All eyes on 2023

If it was clear that the UML convention last month was actually the party's first election rally, it is even more evident during this week's Nepali Congress (NC) jamboree in Kathmandu.

In his opening remarks to the NC's 14<sup>th</sup> general convention, party leader and Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba had urged delegates to bury differences, and focus on the 2023 elections.

His predecessor KP Oli had said the same thing two weeks before in Chitwan, directing UML cadre to mobilise for a majority in polls.

At its own convention last week, the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) positioned itself for elections by pushing an anti-secular, monarchist platform (*pictured*), and overhauled its leadership by electing Rajendra Lingden.

Pushpa Kamal Dahal's CPN (Maoist Center), the third-largest party in Parliament and NC's coalition partner, is set to hold its own national conference next month with full focus on elections.

All four parties are using publicity surrounding their conventions to kick-start their party machinery for 2023. It is as if they suddenly woke up from slumber,

after party infighting that had paralysed them, sapping morale.

For the past three years, the UML and Maoist Centre were too preoccupied with their internal power struggles to pay attention to what voters might be thinking. The NC was not even playing opposition politics. And the Covid crisis gave everyone the excuse to do nothing much.

That is why the conventions have been a way to energise the parties, galvanise voters, make up for lost time so parties can throw campaigning into high gear during 2022. "The conventions were mini elections," admits the UML's Krishna Pokhrel. "They were rehearsals for the real thing, and allowed the parties to streamline themselves for the election."

However, except for the RPP, the three main parties have retained their tried, tested and failed leaders. Five-time prime minister Deuba was re-elected party chair, as was Oli, and most certainly Pushpa Kamal Dahal will also get to head his Maoist Centre.

"The conventions were an opportunity for the parties to rebrand themselves, but they have not seized it," says political analyst

Puranjan Acharya.

Indeed, the country's sinking economy, the Covid crisis and the urgent need for socio-economic reform were not even uttered in the party conclaves, which were obsessed with leadership contests and electoral alliances.

Deuba's NC presides over the coalition government made up of Dahal's MC, Madhav Kumar Nepal's newly-minted Unified Socialists, Upendra Yadav's Janata Samajbadi Party (JSP), and the Rastriya Janamorchha.

Dahal and Nepal need the NC's grassroots base, and have warned Deuba not to break the coalition, which is teetering due to differences over the MCC, which Parliament is due to ratify. Deuba's NC supports the \$500 million American infrastructure project, but Dahal and Nepal are opposed.

The UML's Oli strongly backed the MCC while he was in power, but now sees it as a useful tool to chip away at the unity of the governing coalition.

"The Nepali Congress has no plans to form an alliance with anyone in 2023," says the party's general secretary candidate Gagan Thapa, "we will sweep the polls

with a majority by ourselves."

Indeed, the NC has benefited from left disunity and wants to deploy its new young supporters to rally voters in 2023.

Meanwhile, the main priority in polls for Dahal and Nepal is to weaken the UML and emerge as the second party with an electoral alliance if possible — proving accurate the theory that Communists see the party immediately to their left as more of a threat than those on the right.

**Mukesh Pokhrel**



INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS DAY

The Days of International Migration EDITORIAL PAGE 2

Interview with former ambassador to Qatar PAGE 5

World Cup fouls PAGE 10-11

Nepalis return to Korea PAGE 10



Now available on App Store



Sell Your Phone Without Leaving Your Home!



# The sizzling.

The new TUCSON is here.

Price Starting From

Rs. 89,96,000

Laxmi InterContinental Pvt. Ltd.  
(An ISO 9001:2015 Certified Company) an entity of Laxmi Group Nepal

HYUNDAI



# The Days of International Migration

International Migrants Day on 18 December is a fitting time to take another long hard look at the migrant labour that sustains Nepal's economy. Remittances from overseas workers make up nearly a quarter of Nepal's GDP, placing it seventh among countries most dependant on migrants.

As our Migration Package in this issue shows, this economic mainstay was impacted by the Covid-19 crisis. Nepalis lost their jobs and were stranded abroad, their repatriation was chaotic, others were trapped in Nepal (*see pages 5, 10-11*).

This year, the closed doors have partially re-opened, but migrant workers have to navigate complicated, costly and confusing requirements in Nepal and at their destinations. Despite this, overseas employment is showing signs of recovery. In October-November 55,000 Nepalis took labour approvals, the majority to go to the Gulf countries. In the whole of 2020, only 7,797 permits were issued.

Malaysia is taking foreign workers again, mainly in agriculture and manufacturing. Korea bound workers have started flying out after being completely closed for the past two years (*see page 10*).

Despite reasons to be optimistic, uncertainties remain. The market is recovering but because of new strains of the virus, there is still a fear that things may unravel again.

In August, thousands of workers waited all night at Teku Hospital to get their vaccination cards certified. This issue has been largely sorted out, but new variant related restrictions have come up. Some 1,000 Israel-bound caregivers are waiting impatiently because they cannot get booster shots that they need to fly to Tel Aviv.

Paying lip service to migrant workers is not enough. As we said last year on International Migrants Day in this space, their contribution in keeping this country afloat is too important.

Covid-19 has disrupted outmigration by creating administrative hurdles, uncertainty and curtailed demand.

The main hurdle is political apathy. There have been five labour ministers in the past two years, and they have set the bar very low for proactive initiatives. They were either AWOL when workers were stranded, or left immediately after being

appointed. When workers had to stand in line for a night and day just for a piece of paper there was no one paying attention.

While it is too early to judge, the newly appointed Minister for Labour, Employment and Social Security Krishna Kumar Shrestha is showing some interest. The government is set to renew the labour agreement with Qatar which was signed in 2005 (*see page 10-11*).

But past experience has shown that we need proof of the pudding. There is a ritualistic approach to labour agreements: the signing itself is seen as an end and not the beginning for bilateral cooperation.

But proactive engagement must not mean unnecessary hurdles for migrants, of which there are plenty. Why the unnecessary delays by Nepal's embassies in the job demand attestation process without which employers cannot hire workers? The ban on domestic

workers in the name of 'protection' has still not been lifted despite public outcry.

The government was quick to recall ambassadors from key destination countries

including those who were performing well, without sending replacements (*see interview, page 5*).

If you cannot help, at least do not harm should be the motto for Nepal's

policymakers.

Every muddle and mistake affects large numbers of migrants and their families. Case in point is the Qatar police recruitment fiasco because of which 200 high paying jobs for Nepalis went to waste. Such cancellations not only harm migrants and their families but also future job openings.

Qatar will be under the spotlight in 2022 because of the FIFA World Cup in November-December (*page 10-11*). This marks the end of an era for Nepali workers who were indispensable in Qatar's construction boom.

Nepalis were dying in Qatar but Nepalis were also dying to work in Qatar, and therein lies the conundrum. The next International

Migrants Day on 18 December 2022 is also the finals of the World Cup at the Lusail Stadium in Doha that Nepali workers helped construct. There is a wall at the stadium to honour the migrant workers.

Both 18 December and the wall may feel like empty displays of gratitude unless accompanied by concrete action that actually make a difference to the workers they intend to honour.



Every day should be December 18, the International Migrants Day



## 20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

### In the Line of Fire



His Majesty's Government of Nepal declared a state of emergency in November 2001 following the end of four-month Maoist-government ceasefire and the attacks on Royal Nepal Army bases. It was a time of great fear and uncertainty.

This was perhaps most palpable in long-distance bus journeys where passengers had to go through over a dozen checkpoints along the highways including body searches. There was also always a risk of an ambush, and every other person was suspicious of the other.

This report about one such trip in Dang's Ghorahi depicts the terror that Nepalis went through every day as the conflict escalated. Excerpts from page 1 story from issue #72 14-20 December 20 years ago this week:

The bus journey to Ghorahi in Dang district took much longer than usual. Over a dozen checkpoints had sprung up along the highway west of Narayanghat. In addition, mobile paramilitary checkpoints also sprang out of nowhere. Most of the checking is routine. Security officials step into the vehicle and check your belongings. But there are also those that require you to step out and line up for a body search.

It feels like you're entering a war zone as you reach Bhalubang, the point where you officially enter the mid-west. You get a thorough frisking: bags are opened, diaries are read and telephone books scanned. You are asked where you are headed and why. The person sitting next to you in the bus may not want to have a casual conversation. There is apprehension in the air.

When I reached Ghorahi on 7 December, this usually busy highway junction looked like a ghost town. It was undergoing its 13th night of dusk-to-dawn curfew that began even before the state of emergency was declared on 26 November. (Elsewhere in the region, an unofficial curfew is in place after sundown, as nobody ventures outdoors in any case.)

Ghorahi is the site of the 23 November rebel attack which effectively ended the four-month-old government-Maoist ceasefire. Several government offices were plundered and weapons looted from the military barracks. But signs of the conflict can be seen even before you reach Ghorahi. The roadside is lined by stumps of trees felled by the rebels as roadblocks.

Every now and then the dusty stillness is shattered by the heavy roar of rotors as helicopters ferry supplies and troops to the frontlines in Salyan and Rolpa districts. Schools are slowly opening their doors but bewilderment is written in the faces of students-a suppressed fear that echoes, like the sound of gunfire you can hear almost every night. The unseen scars are deeper still.

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

## ONLINE PACKAGES



ECO-FRIENDLY PRAYER FLAGS

This weekend, Boudhanath Stupa in Kathmandu is getting a green makeover, prayer flags made from synthetic material will be replaced by biodegradable ones. Meet the brains behind the initiative, Ang Dolma Sherpa of Utpala Crafts who aims to reduce waste, pollution and the impact of the climate crisis with eco-friendly *lung ta* and *khada*. Story: *page 4*.

### LABOUR MIGRATION

Instead of sending skilled workers overseas, how about starting skill-based training here ('Nepal must now send skilled workers to Qatar,' *page 5*)?

Gauri Rimal

• Surely you want the skilled workers here? Oh, but there are no investors, and no jobs.

Shirin Barakzai

• Youth labour is our primary export ('Booster lack strands Israel-bound Nepalis', [nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com)). Rather than create jobs in Nepal, the authorities here are happy to assist the flight of our youths. It is a sad state of affairs.

Kyu Yeti

### NEPALI COINS

Excellent article on Nepali coins, well researched ('Losing loose change in Nepal', Ashish Dhakal, #1089).

Shaguni Singh Shakya

• It is really an assault on our history and culture that we discontinued minting coins that our ancestors started almost two thousand years ago, and were even used as currency beyond our borders.

Lal Bahadur

• New coins of various denominations must be issued to avoid inconvenience, especially in rural areas. The decision to issue only Re1 and Rs2 coins since 2066 BS was a big mistake.

Pabitra Saha

### BHUTANESE PRISONERS

Well done *Nepali Times* for keeping the focus on this ('Political prisoners languish in Bhutan's jails', Devendra Bhattarai, [nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com))! Lest we forget!

Sam Cowan

• While the rest of the world keeps going ga-ga over Bhutan's Gross National Happiness...

Shyamal Krishna Shrestha

• The governments of both the countries, Nepal and Bhutan should sit together to discuss the issue of the political prisoners and refugees. The Bhutanese government should do right by its people and take them back home immediately.

Krishna Kumar Limboo

• This has been long ignored by the world community and should be brought to the fore, not the Bhutanese upper-class speech on the gross happiness index ('Bhutan's refugees between hope and despair', Tek Nath Rizal, [nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com)).

Leif Bjellin

• You take pride in calling yourself a carbon-neutral country, but have a very dark history of human rights violations.

Bishnu Adi

### KHOTANG PEANUT BUTTER

Oh, Khotang penut butter has also landed in the Netherlands ('Made in Nepal peanut butter in Japan', Sonia Awale, #1089). It was a souvenir for my children.

Marleen Fischer Verbrugge

• This is a piece of encouraging news for young entrepreneurs.

Tito Mitho

• This story made me tear up. Thank you very much Ms Naka for your noble deed. This is what we need in Nepal today. You are a source of inspiration for all of us.

Karunakar Nepali

• Great story of persistence driven by a desire to help a remote community.

Niall Kavanagh

• Impressive article! I am a consumer of this product. Her partner Sabita Maharjan has an even more interesting story with this initiative. She was a young fashion designer working with Denim in Japan before she became an entrepreneur.

Prakash Amatya.

### LOVE THY BODY

Love your body, no matter what, external situations may bring changes to the body, but it is still our body ('Too fat or too thin, but never quite right', Anjana Rajbhandary, [nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com)). Others' superficial comments don't help us. Bodies change, they gain weight, they lose weight but never stop loving yourself. I'm so proud you reached your goal, and spread body positivity.

Karisma Regmi

### PUBLIC TOILETS

The real question here is how long will they be able to maintain these model public toilets ('Toilet-trained in Nepal', Aryan Sitaula, [nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com)).

Bhumi Limbu

• Let's evaluate use of these toilets after two months to see if they can run sustainably. Too early to celebrate.

Jan Petersen

Times.com

## WHAT'S TRENDING



### Made in Nepal peanut butter in Japan

by Sonia Awale

An up-and-coming business venture led by a Japanese social entrepreneur is set to put Khotang district on the world map for its premium natural peanut butter. Read this exclusive story and watch the video at [nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com)

Most reached and shared on Facebook

### Free Bhutan's political prisoners

by Tek Nath Rizal

"The political system of Bhutan has changed from an autocratic to democratic setup, three elections have taken place since the declaration of democracy in 2007, yet the people who asked for democratic changes in the old system are still in prison." A reminder from a Bhutanese pro-democracy leader about ethnic cleansing that the world forgot.

Most popular on Twitter



### Coining a new history for Nepal

by Ashish Dhakal

As per the 1556 treaty Mahendra Malla signed with Tibet, the coins minted in Nepal with silver from Tibet would be used there as well, allowing Kathmandu Valley's trade, art and culture to spread and flourish. What else can our coins tell us about our history and economy? Read to find out in this longread online.

Most commented



### Is democracy too expensive for women leaders?

by Laxmi Basnet

Heavy election expenses deter women candidates from running for office in the 2023 elections. Full story and discussion on our website.

Most visited online page

## QUOTE TWEETS



**Nepali Times** @NepaliTimes  
#Nepal's richest who used to bankroll parties from the sidelines in exchange for personal, professional and policy favours, have decided it makes more sense to enter #politics themselves.



**Prabhesh Devkota** @pulchowk3  
I guess this was always the route set by capitalism.



**Nepali Times** @NepaliTimes  
The Nutmeg Curse is an eye-opener. The writer is not preaching to the converted here, he provides even skeptics and deniers with a holistic history of global #capitalism and its model of perpetual growth that underpins the current #climatecrisis.



**Mieke** @mieke2  
Please don't miss this book & its review in @NepaliTimes.



**Nepali Times** @NepaliTimes  
The Business of #Politics. Funding from business tycoons lubricates #Nepal's #democracy, and undermines it. Ramesh Kumar reports:



**Krishna Joshi** @krishna\_joshi01  
As they say, there is no free lunch!



**Nepali Times** @NepaliTimes  
Heavy #election expenses deter #women candidates from running for office in the 2023 elections. Laxmi Basnet reports:



**Humanity, Neutrality, Impartiality!** @subhash521260  
Democracy is expensive in poor countries of Asia and Africa only when there is a compromise in rule of law.



A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER 

# TIME TO MEET AGAIN: TORONTO

Have a healthy journey with all precautions taken down to the smallest detail for your in-flight safety.



**TURKISH AIRLINES**

CANADA



# Let's only buy bio-degradable prayer flags

Buddhist prayers for virtuousness and compassion are getting a green makeover in Nepal

● Ashish Dhakal

Long lines of multi-coloured prayer flags dangle from Buddhist stupas, they are strung up on Himalayan summits by mountaineers, and they flutter noisily at pilgrimage sites.

At Kathmandu's Boudha shrine, the prayer flags stream down in four directions from the top, adding to the sacred ambience under the ever-watchful eyes of the Buddha.

On 18 December, however, the stupa is getting a green makeover that will not be immediately visible to visitors — prayer flags made from synthetic material will be replaced by biodegradable ones.

Called *Lung ta* (Tibetan for 'Wind horse') prayer flags are essential at Buddhist shrines across the Himalaya from Ladakh to Bhutan. Activists are launching a campaign to replace them with more eco-friendly alternatives as expressions of faith and spirituality.

For Ang Dolma Sherpa, founder of Utpala Crafts in Kathmandu, this has been the culmination of a five year campaign to spread the acceptance of the biodegradable prayer flags and *khada* she initiated.

"It all started with 15 Buddhist leaders from around the world, including the Dalai Lama, signing the Buddhist Climate Change Statement to World Leaders at COP21 in 2015," she says. "I was convinced small-scale initiatives like these can also help address pollution and climate change."

The idea germinated in 2016 with *khada*, the traditional ceremonial scarves used in almost every occasion, from birth to weddings, graduations, arrivals, departures and even funerals.



KUNDA DIXIT

"Growing up in a Buddhist family, we used to have heaps upon heaps of *khada* collecting in our house, and once every month we used to sit and separate the old ones from the new to throw or recycle," recalls Ang Dolma.

Even then, massive amounts of *khada* went to waste. "When I was

younger, I didn't really care about it," she says, "but when my father died in a car accident in 2011, I noticed during the funeral just how much of it was thrown away."

In the past, *khada* used to be made of cloth, and sometimes silk, but this changed with the introduction of synthetic materials,



Ang Dolma Sherpa

such as polyester and nylon. And since *khada* used in funerals cannot be recycled, these are either burnt or thrown away, creating greenhouse gases, pollution and garbage.

"I wanted to do the right thing," Ang Dolma says. "Buddhism also teaches us to reduce waste and take care of our planet, and so my mother and I decided to make our own biodegradable *khada*."

But it was difficult to find a manufacturer at first. In 2019, Ang Dolma proposed biodegradable *khada* to Idea Studio, a platform that enables young entrepreneurs with innovative business ideas addressing local social-economic and environmental issues.

It was during the incubation at Idea Studio that she felt like she was on the right path. "Talking to other young people had a positive impact on me," she says. "Many of us had similar views regarding environmental conservation, and I was encouraged."

Later, she was awarded as a top 'Ideator' for her pitch because of its originality and sustainability and she set up Utpala Crafts last year.

But as she had no background in

business, she found a partner in a friend who shared her philosophy. "To me, what's important is upholding the ethos of the business, you have to be very patient to make that profit," she says.

*Khada* have a huge market and are used by people across communities and religions, in celebrations and sorrow. However, most are not manufactured in Nepal but imported from India and China.

"Which is why I wanted to be involved myself," says Ang Dolma, whose Utpala Craft does not have a factory but manufactures the flags and scarves locally in Lalitpur's Lubhu. The stitching and design are done by women by Ang Dolma's neighbours in Patan, where Sherpa currently resides and her network is expanding with the demand.

"We are trying to export to Germany as well, but the idea is to create awareness and interest in Nepal first," says Ang Dolma. "Rather than branching out, I hope people in Bhutan or Ladakh are also inspired to manufacture their own biodegradable prayer flags."

Currently, the *khada* and prayer flags are available in white with symbols and prayers printed on them in water-based black ink, recalling the traditional designs. Natural ink is also being planned as the business grows. *Khada* made of 100% natural fibres is priced at Rs290 and Tencel cotton at Rs160.

Boudha is a prominent centre of Buddhism in the Subcontinent and attracts thousands of visitors and pilgrims every day. And Dolma hopes that the introduction of biodegradable prayer flags there will spread the word and encourage communities across the Himalaya to be more responsible. 🇳🇵

## prabhu BANK

### Economic downturn

Latest Rastra Bank figures show that Nepal's foreign currency reserves continued to plummet in the past month, while the trade gap widened. Hard currency reserves fell by \$510 million to \$10.47 billion in one month — this is equivalent to only six months of imports. The falling reserve is affecting imports, and indirectly government revenue from tax. Nepal's trade deficit increased to Rs150.3 billion in October-November, doubling from Rs73.1 billion the previous month. Remittance from Nepali workers abroad declined by 7.6% to Rs312.14 billion in October-November, and had fallen by the same amount the previous month. So far this fiscal year, Nepal exported only Rs6.5 billion worth of goods, while it imports have gone up to Rs82.1 billion.



### Sanima's new branch

Sanima Bank opened its Balambu branch in Kathmandu this week which was jointly inaugurated by Chairman Tuk Prasad Poudel and brand ambassador duo Madan Krishna Shrestha and Hari Bamsha Acharya.

### Nepal-Korea polytechnic

Nepal and Korea have signed an agreement worth \$8.6 million to establish a polytechnic institute for construction workforce development in Province 2. The seven-year project will be implemented by KOICA and the CTEVT at its model polytechnic institute in Bardibas, Mohattrai district.



### Toyota Raize

United Traders Syndicate has launched the Toyota Raize, a compact SUV with 200mm of ground clearance, 4.9m turning radius, 369 litre of boot space. The SUV is priced between Rs6.6-8.6 million and is available in 4 variants: 1.2L and 1.0L with manual and automatic transmission

### Honda winners

Syakar Trading has announced seven lucky winners of its "Dashain-Tihar Yojana 7 with Honda" scheme. Rabina Chaudhary, Ram Prakash Yadav, Anina Manandhar, Jamuna Mudbhari, Vin Prasad Kafle and Tara Thapa won Rs100,000 each while the bumper prize winner Sabitra Shrestha received Rs1.5 million. All Honda customers also got a 7% discount on spare parts for seven years and nine bonus service coupons for up to seven years.

### Jasmine Paints

Jasmine Paints of the Manakamana Group has ventured into a strategic partnership with Nepali storyteller Saigrace Pokharel. Based in Barcelona, Pokharel has 100,000 subscribers on YouTube with content focusing largely on social issues and human values.

### Worldlink with Khalti

WorldLink has introduced 600 Mbps internet, the fastest Internet package launched in Nepal so far. The company has announced that WorldLink's Internet speed will now be at least 150 Mbps, which users can afford at Rs 4,400 per year.

### StanChart AGM

Standard Chartered in its 35th Annual General Meeting recorded operating and net profits of Rs2.01 billion and Rs1.40 billion respectively in 2020/21. The AGM approved payment of cash dividends of 3.06% and bonus shares of 10% to the shareholders. The bank posted a growth of



26% on its risk assets to reach Rs72.95 billion, deposits declined marginally by 3.30% to Rs 95.99 billion.

### New outlet

Baskin Robbins has launched a new outlet in Thamel with 31 different flavors, two of them new, raspberry sorbet and Morning Mystery. The ice cream chain had previously introduced Bright Choices, a lineup of better-for-you options, which includes scoops as light, reduced-fat, no added sugar and dairy-free ice cream flavors.



### OHCT Fellowship

Funded by the O'Hea family, the OHCT Fellowship by the British College designed for undergrads will give one student starting in 2022 full scholarship that will cover full tuition, university registration, and exam fees for the full four years of the course. Applications open until 25 December.



### Japanese cosmetics

Japanese cosmetic brands MEISHOKU and MOMOTANI owned by Momotani Juntankan Ltd have launched their skincare and beauty products in Nepal in partnership with Laughing Yeti Trading. The store under the name KIREI COSME Japan was inaugurated in New Baneswor, Kathmandu.

### IME gifts vans

IME Motors, in association with Ashok Leyland, has handed over mortuary vans to Lalitpur municipality, Armed Police Force, Surkhet Hospital, Kanchanpur municipality, and other governmental institutions.



### Global IME's 15th AGM

The 15th Annual General Meeting of Global IME Bank Limited this week concluded that the bank will endorse 13.5% dividends for the fiscal year, pay 10% bonus share and 3.5% cash dividend from the total profits. The bank has earned Rs4.16 billion in profit excluding tax, collected more than Rs274 billion in deposits and invested over Rs270 billion in loans.







# Centennial of Nepal-Britain Hunting Diplomacy

Nepal's Rana ruler hosted British royalty on a hunting expedition in Chitwan to lobby for a treaty

● Tom Robertson

On 14 December 1921 – exactly 100 years ago – Edward, the Prince of Wales, heir to the British throne, arrived in Chitwan to start a week of ‘shooting big game’ in the Tarai jungle with Nepal’s long-time ruler, Chandra Shamsher Rana.

Exactly 10 years earlier, in December 1911, Edward’s father George V had hunted in Chitwan, just a few days after being crowned Emperor of India. In 1876, Edward’s grandfather Edward VII, then the Prince of Wales, had stalked tigers in Suklaphanta with Jung Bahadur Rana.

Many books and articles appeared about these hunts, mostly celebratory accounts by British authors writing for British audiences. To today’s readers, these accounts make for “rather depressing reading,” as one conservationist recently put it, as they are little more than “a record of who shot and killed what and when.”

A century later, it is a good time to glance back at these extravagant bi-national killing sprees – and to probe into what they meant for the two countries and many actors involved.

These were no simple hunting and camping trips. The tradition dated back at least to Jung Bahadur’s early reign in the 1850s. They were choreographed displays of wealth, power, and manliness – sometimes, as in 1921, mixed with important diplomatic negotiations.

## Miles from Civilisation

The scale was enormous. The Tarai hunts organised by the Ranas always displayed a lot of what William O’Connor, the British Resident in Nepal at the time, described as ‘Oriental magnificence’ – a show of hundreds of elephants, thousands of camp followers, and limitless forests ‘swarming with wild beasts.’

The 1921 hunt was no different. Because of ‘the colossal scale on which it was carried out,’ wrote Bernard Ellison, an old India hand and the official naturalist of the shoot, the Prince of Wales’s 1921 expedition ‘is to be ranked among the greatest in the annals of big game shooting in India.’

The British camp was just two miles from the rail station at Bikna Thori. It was a ‘delightful spectacle’ according to Ellison: ‘a mass of creamy white tents, shaded by giant forest trees, flanked by and over-looking the river.’ Beyond the river ‘lay a great tract of forest land, and still further in the distance

the snow-capped peaks of the Himalayas.’ And on all other sides: ‘jungle of the thickest kind.’

The tents, arranged in a crescent facing the distant Himalayan peaks, housed 49 European guests, including a young Louis Mountbatten, the man who as Britain’s last viceroy in South Asia in the late 1940s, would oversee the partition of India and Pakistan. Another 250 Indians stayed nearby.

The British entourage included colonial and military officials, secretaries, and members of the press. This was a hunt, but there was business to be done, too.

There was no shortage of luxury. Electric lights lit up the tents, and leopard skin carpets blanketed their floors. A writing table fashioned from rhino hoofs, horn, and hide added extra elegance to the Prince of Wales’s tent. Each night, musical concerts sweetened the air. In case anyone needed even more imperial sport, a polo field was built just across the border in India, a short drive away.

Hunting in Nepal, the British Resident noted a few years later, is for people ‘who don’t mind roughing it a bit now and then.’ Chandra Shamsher enjoyed his own lavish camp just a few minutes from the British.

Prince Edward and his compatriots ate well. On 14 December, for instance, according to the menu for dinner that evening, written in French, the guests dined on Saumon a la Grande Duc (salmon), Suprême de Poulet Mascotte (chicken), Selle d’Agneau (lamb), Perdreaux Sur Canapés (partridge), and other delicacies.

We know about this meal today because Ellison’s account of the hunt featured it. Maybe this is not unusual, the equivalent of a social media post of the day’s exciting meal. But what did it mean that the British authors celebrated Nepali Ranas serving French cooked salmon to their British royal guests in the jungles of lowland Asia? It seems a clue to a larger story.

The book gives some help. ‘This dinner,’ it says, ‘was served in the impenetrable jungles of the Nepal Tarai, miles away from any civilisation.’

South Asia may be a danger-filled, impenetrable jungle, far from civilisation, it seems to be saying, but Britain’s Rana friends in Nepal know what they are doing. Some may accuse them of being autocratic reactionaries resistant to reforms, but clearly



BERNARD ELLISON

THE STAFF OF H.R.H. THE PRINCE OF WALES  
on his Indian Tour at the Shooting Camp in the Jungles of Nepal, December, 1921.

they are capable and sophisticated partners in Britain’s civilising mission. Just look at the elegant fish they serve.

## A Wall of Elephants

Another indispensable part of the show were elephants. Lots of elephants: 423 to be exact. That might seem like a lot but, by Tarai hunting standards, it’s actually not. When Edward’s grandfather visited in 1876, to get across the Mahakali River from India into Nepal, he and his escorts rode on 700 elephants. In 1911, no fewer than 600 elephants helped George V tromp through Chitwan looking for tigers.

Tiger hunting in Nepal could not happen without the *Elephas maximus*. No better method has been devised before or since to move around the Tarai’s watery wilds and tall-grass terrain. And without elephants, Nepal’s ring method of hunting was not possible.

In 1921, the shooting took place near the Rapti River. Overnight, buffalo calves were staked down as bait, to lure in tigers. The next day *khobar* would arrive in camp of a kill, elephants would be dispatched to form a big ring around the killer cat, and then there would be ‘the arrival of the guns’ – the arrival of the Prince of Wales and his fellow sportsmen with high-powered rifles. Then as many as two hundred elephants – a ‘wall of elephants, side by side’ – would slowly tighten the circle, looking for the elusive striped beast.

‘This is not as simple a matter as might be thought,’ the British journalist Perceval Landon, who was in Chitwan in 1921, noted. Sensing peril, the tiger hides motionless in the dense tall grass, not revealing himself until almost crushed underfoot. ‘When this occurs,’ Landon explains, ‘there is often some confusion, the elephant’s trumpeting of fright being taken up by his companions.’

No moment in the entire operation is more dangerous. Tigers can jump up and rip through human flesh. A second unsuspected tiger may bound out. But a bigger danger may have come not from cornered animal but from confused hunters: in the chaos of the moment, hunters sometimes shot across the circle toward each other.

To us today, the number killed (‘bagged’) in these hunts seems extraordinary. In 1911, King George himself shot and killed 21 tigers, 10 rhinoceroses and two bears. His whole party killed 39 tigers, 18 rhinos and four bears.

In 1921, the ‘bag’ was a bit more modest: 18 tigers, eight rhinos, two bears and two leopards. And actually, the Prince said he was most proud not of his tiger kills but another quarry: while hiking one day he came across and shot a 10-foot 3-inch king cobra.

So many dead bodies could make the camp unpleasant. ‘At times,’ the naturalist Ellison pointed out, ‘when we had five or six disarticulated rhinos, together with numerous tigers and an odd

bear in different stages of skinning, the stench was very bad.’

The long-term environmental costs were less than might be imagined. The hunts were surely bloody affairs, but ultimately not that damaging for wildlife. Conservationists generally agree that the tiger and rhino populations recovered from these hunts in a few years. A greater threat, in their view, was the loss of habitat.

Why did the British care so much about killing tigers? The meanings of the hunt change over time. In their early days in India, in fact, as historian John MacKenzie has noted, the British did not actually do that much hunting in India. But in later years, especially after the 1857 Mutiny, hunting took on new urgency: they were seen as



The road from the Royal Shooting Camp at Bikna Thori is marked in red. At different places. On the extreme left of the map is Kasra, where His Majesty

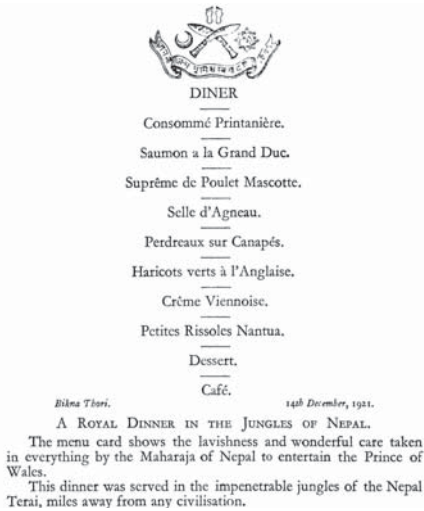




**LICENSE TO KILL:**  
Juddha Shamsher and his wall of tiger and leopard pelts and crocodile skins in Chitwan circa 1939 (*left*).

Prime Minister Chandra Shamsher Rana with King George V during a 1911 hunting expedition in the Tarai (*above*). Ten years later, he hosted Prince Edward on another epic hunt in Chitwan.

Lavish dinner menu in Chitwan for the British royal guest included Saumon a la Grande Duc (*right*).



**Front row sitting** (1) Grandson of the Maharaja of Nepal. (2) General Sir Kaiser (H.H.'s Third son). (3) Admiral Halsey. (4) H.H.'s Sixth Son. (5) H.H.'s Seventh Son. (6) Colonel O'Connor (British Envoy to the Court of Nepal). (7) H.R.H. the Prince of Wales. (8) H.H. the Maharaja of Nepal. (9) The Earl of Cromer. (10) Brother of the Maharaja. (11) Sir G. De Montmorency. (12) Colonel Worgan. (13 and 14) Armed A.D.C.'s attached to H.R.H.'s Staff.  
**Second row standing**: (15) H.H.'s Fifth Son. (16) H.H.'s Fourth Son. (17) H.H.'s Second son. (18) H.H.'s Eldest Son. (19) Captain Villiers.  
**Back row**: (20) The Hon. Bruce Ogilvy. (21) The Hon. Piers Legh. (22) Colonel Molesworth. (23) Mr. Petrie. (24) Colonel Harvey. (25) Colonel O'Kinealy. (26) Captain Poynder. (27) Sir G. Thomas. (28) Commander Newport. (29) Lord Louis Mountbatten. (30) Captain Metcalfe. (31) Mr. Metcalfe. (32) Mr. Ellison. (33) Captain Dudley North. (34) Lieutenant Armstrong.

a way to help British sharpen their skills with guns and horses.

British men in India, one military official wrote at the time, had to be 'roused from their beds of luxury and ease' and kept from a 'thousand temptations', 'injurious pursuits', and 'effeminate pleasures'. By the end of the 19th century, MacKenzie notes, the British 'hunting and shooting craze' approached a ritualistic 'cult'.

The British developed 'a special hunting relationship' with three animals in particular: the elephant, the pig (in pig-sticking), and the tiger. 'Every right-thinking Englishman,' MacKenzie notes, 'wished to possess a tiger skin.'

At the height of British power around the world, big game shooting became rich fodder for a

set of stories the British liked to tell themselves about themselves – and about their empire.

No one was more central to this imperial story than the British royals. Written accounts praised their impeccable character and unmatched sportsmanship. A report of the 1876 hunt celebrated the 'skill and adroitness' of the Prince of Wales in the face of danger.

This showed something about him and his relations with his subjects: 'The manner in which His Royal Highness comported himself in the jungle largely increased the admiration with which the natives regarded him'.

The narrative had changed a little by 1921. After World War I, Britons needed a different kind of royal hero. Writing about the 1921 hunt, the British Resident O'Connor highlighted that in the hunt His Royal Highness asked for no special favouritism. He should be treated like everyone else. At another point, O'Connor pointed out, Edward even helped to push a car stuck in the mud.

O'Connor also told a story of the Prince one day coming across an ordinary British soldier on a work detail. His Royal Highness went out of his way to meet the man, and discovered they had both served in the war in the same part of France. This bonding moment, O'Connor emphasised, showed that the Prince's 'sympathy and understanding were very genuine and human.' The hunts also allowed British officials a chance

to size up the Ranas. Chandra, the naturalist Ellison noted, 'impressed one immediately by his character, brimming over with good nature and kindness.'

#### Rana Diplomacy

We know less about what the hunts meant to the Ranas, except that it was important on many levels. Hunting was a rite of passage for Rana youth. On the 1921 hunt, one of Chandra's sons, though only eight years old, shot his first tiger.

But the hunt, as anthropologist Piers Locke writes in an exhibit at the Chitwan Tharu Culture Museum outside Sauraha, also 'served several political purposes'. It 'demonstrated the leadership skills of Chandra Shumshar and allowed elites to show off their strength and virility. It showed the ruler's concern for local people by helping to rid their land of crop-destroying pests and dangerous predators.'

And not least, Locke explains, 'it provided a forum for diplomacy.'

Ten years earlier, Chandra had used the visit of George V to follow up on a request he had made on his recent trip to London for formal recognition of Nepal's sovereignty and permission to import and manufacture weapons.

Nepalis had always maintained complete independence, but British officials had wavered, speaking of Nepal as more independent than the Indian princely states, but not as fully independent as Afghanistan. Chandra pushed for a formal British acknowledgement of

Nepal's full independence. In 1911, he didn't get it.

But by 1921, the situation had changed. In World War I, over 100,000 Nepali men had helped the British, serving in India and in Europe, 14,000 had been wounded, 10,000 never returned home. During the hunting expedition, Nepali and British officials reached a new understanding about Nepali independence, as Thomas Cox explains in an article in the *Journal of South Asian Studies*. They formalised things two years later in the Treaty of Friendship. Nepal would get weapons and a formal acknowledgment of its independence.

After the hunt, the Prince of Wales sent a note to Chandra Shamsher. He thanked the Rana leader for the meticulous planning and preparations that had made his hunt so successful. He also thanked Chandra once again for the great assistance Nepal had given Great Britain during the war.

#### 'Under the Conditions that Prevail'

None of this – the 'Oriental magnificence', the roads, the crescent of tents facing the mountains, the rhino writing table, the fine French meals, the 423 elephants, Nepal's famous ring method, the 18 tigers shot – was possible without the work, skill, and knowledge of thousands of ordinary Nepalis, particularly the Tharu and other indigenous groups.

We do not hear much about them. We catch a glimpse in a photo here and there: Tharu *mahouts* on top of elephants. Guides and beaters in the tall grass as a ring is being formed. Animal skinner.

We can read a few lines in the British accounts, especially about the *mahouts* and *shikaris*, who were a little more visible. In 1876, a tiger leapt up and clawed two *mahouts*. That year two *mahouts* were wounded by careless shooters.

The British sometimes applauded the skill of their Tharu helpers. 'If he knows that the man behind him shoots straight,' wrote a British Resident Girdlestone in the 1880s, the Tharu *mahout* 'will never flinch before a tiger or let his elephant do so either.' To William O'Connor, the British Resident, 'the Nepalese *mahouts* and *shikaris* are masters of their profession, as keen as mustard, and utterly fearless'.

Much of the work happened long before the hunt began – roads built, grains collected, elephants guided from their stables (*hattisar*) across the Tarai. During the 1911 shoot, Chandra Shamsher's camp

had housing for 12,000 "followers". For just the elephants, there were 2,000 additional attendants. In 1921, 36 miles of road were cleared for motor cars, and 32 miles of telephone lines were put up.

The most challenging work may have been done by the jungle "beaters". Pointing to the roads and telephones, Perceval Landon applauded the 'skilful vigour planning of camps' by the Ranas. But 'above all' what impressed him was the 'slow concentration within the desired territory of the great game' of the Tarai.

'An army of beaters,' he explained, 'is employed for weeks and even months before the opening of the sport in driving before them the beasts that infest the warm, damp, rich jungles of lower Nepal.'

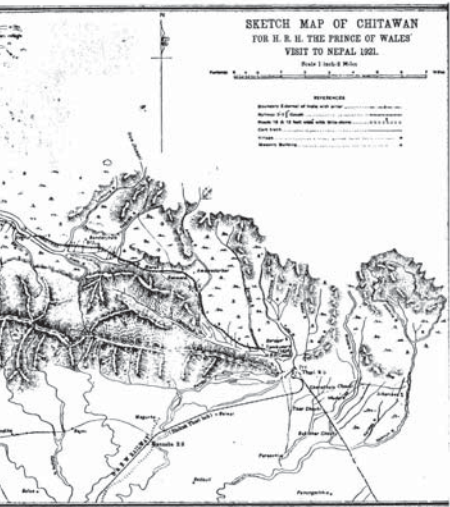
This meant walking in a line of hundreds through the jungle, scaring animals – rhino, wild elephants, tigers, leopards, bears, wild boar – from great distances away toward the hunting zone. It was a tremendous task, carried out mostly by Tharu. 'Under the close and searching activity of these long lines the jungle is combed out with a care that is possible only in such a country as Nepal and under the conditions that prevail there,' Landon writes.

'The conditions that prevail there' was a euphemism Landon used for Nepal's autocratic rule mixed with a lot of forced labour.

Despite the malaria that kept outsiders away much of the year, the work that went into Rana hunting excursions shows that Chitwan's Tharu did not live lives of isolation, untouched and independent from the rest of society, as many of today's tourist brochures romantically imagine. At some times of year they had to prepare for the big Rana hunts, at other times they had to raise funds for the state tax collectors.

Some defenders of the Ranas like to point to the way they maintained and strengthened Nepal's independence through their adroit diplomacy. If that is so, they did so with the help of a lot of ordinary Nepalis who they often disdained – the Gurkha men (and families) who gave their lives in World War I and the Tharu men and women who made possible the magnificent Tarai hunts, as in the visit of the Prince of Wales to Chitwan exactly 100 years ago this week. 🇳🇵

**Tom Robertson, PhD**, is a historian. He taught in Nepal's government schools as a Peace Corps volunteer in Khotang from 1993-1995.



At different places on this route most of the beats mentioned in this narrative took His Majesty King George V, stayed when he shot in Nepal in 1911.



EVENTS



Art exhibition

Windhorse Gallery's latest exhibition 'Whistle Blowers' will be Nepali artist Bharat Rai's first solo showcase. 18 December-17 January, 10am-6pm, Windhorse Gallery, 9823494957

Christmas Cards

Join Kathmandu Art House's Christmas card making session for kids and make it a family event. Call for more information. 22 December, 2pm-4pm, Fee: Rs1500, Kathmandu Guest House House, 9802020484



Jijibisha

Watch Mandala Theatre's play *Jijibisha* written by Somnath Khanal and directed by Rajan Khatiwada, which is now on the theatre's YouTube channel.

Film SouthAsia submissions

Send in non-fiction films made after 1 January 2019 for Film SouthAsia, to be held in April 2022. Films entered must thematically reflect Southasian people, culture, lifestyle and adventure to environment, economy, politics and history Submission deadline: 31 December

Labim Bazaar

From fresh produce to crafts by local businesses, there's something for everyone at the weekly market at Labim. Safety guidelines apply. Saturdays, 9 am, Labim Mall

Installation art

Check out 'Nepali Art - Beyond the border' exhibition featuring artists including Amrit Karki, Bidhata KC, Jupiter Pradhan, Kapil Mani Dixit, Manish Lal Shrestha, Nabendra Limbu, Pratima Thakali, Rabindra Shrestha and more. Until 17 December, Taragaon Museum, Bouddha

MUSIC

Untitled Musical Eve

Untitled Nepal's *Untitled Musical Eve* will feature musicians including Safic Hop, Satish, Khusbu and Oasis Thapa. 17 December, Around the Corner



KJC Concert

The KJC Christmas Concert will kick off its end-of-the-year celebrations with its lineup of student performances and a choir. 18 December, 3pm, Moksh

Weekend shows

Stop by Beers n' Cheers and catch a range of tunes from the band kidsandheroes on Friday, or listen to the band Topi with guest artist Bimal Khawas on Saturday. Ticket details on Facebook. 17&18 December, Beers n' Cheers



Adrian Pradhan Collective

Start the weekend with drinks and music at The Urban Hub, where Adrian Pradhan Collective will perform live. 17 December, 4pm, The Urban Hub



Sabin Rai & Pharaoh

Sabin Rai & Pharaoh will be live this weekend at Beatz & Barz. See ticket details on Facebook. 18 December, 4pm, Beatz & Barz

GETAWAY



Evergreen Eco-Lodge

Evergreen Eco-lodge is a rustic stay in Chitwan. Unwind in one of the wooden tree-house cabins with thatched straw roofs and enjoy the tranquility of the dense forestry. Sauraha, 9827284448



The Terraces Lakhuri

Perched on a high ridge below Pulchoki at 2,200m and located just an hour's drive from Kathmandu airport, 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. Lakhuri Bhanjyang, 9813252888

Club Himalaya

Escape to this cosy mountain resort with breathtaking views away from the bustle of the city for the weekend. Nagarkot, 9801321201, 9801321203



The Old Inn

The bed and breakfast place offers a cozy getaway with a scenic view of Annapurna, Langtang and beyond. With its traditional Newa architecture, the timber and brick designs are reminiscent of old Kathmandu houses. Bandipur (01) 4422617

Hotel Fireside

Hotel Fireside in Kalinchok, a quiet, picturesque village in Dolakha, makes for a comforting refuge. Enjoy the stunning Himalayan vista, beautiful gardens, comfortable rooms and soul-warming Nepali food. Kuri Village, Kalinchok, 9841958696

WEEKEND WEATHER



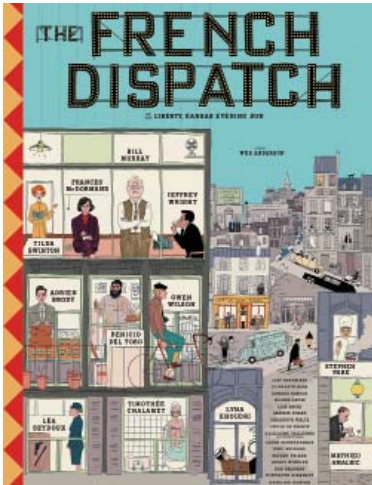
There is a westerly system moving into northwestern Nepal which will bring flurries of new snow to higher elevations, but it will dissipate by the time it reaches the Gandaki divide. Both the maximum and minimum temperatures will continue to slide into the weekend, with near freezing conditions early morning in the outskirts of Kathmandu. Misty and smoggy mornings will give way to sunny afternoons, but the mercury is going to stay in the 17-19°C range in the Valley. No major system on the horizon and this trend will continue into early next week.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
19° 3°	19° 3°	17° 3°

AIR QUALITY INDEX



The Air Quality Index (AQI) in Kathmandu Valley will remain in the 150-200 Unhealthy Red Zone in the coming days. Stagnant night air will be trapped at ground level in the Valley, and this will collect all the soot and smoke from vehicular emissions as well as open garbage burning. Best to skip morning walks for now, outdoor exercises will be safer towards afternoon when the breeze picks up to blow away some of the suspended particulates. There is also a plume of Indo-Gangetic smog headed our way which will worsen AQI.



OUR PICK

*The French Dispatch* is the latest by Wes Anderson and brings to life three stories from the final issue of a fictional American magazine *Liberty, Kansas Evening Sun* published in the fictional French town of Ennui-sur-Blasé. A love letter to journalists everywhere, the film features Anderson's signature aesthetic with sharp, witty dialogues and electric performances. Wildly eccentric and funny, the segments follow an unstable, incarcerated artist, the historic student-led May 68 protests, and the kidnapping of a police commissioner's son. The ensemble is led by Bill Murray, Tilda Swinton, Benicio del Toro, Léa Seydoux, Saoirse Ronan, Jeffery Wright, Frances McDormand, Stephen Park, Timothée Chalamet, Owen Wilson and Elisabeth Moss.

DINING



Pangra Express

Experience the best of street food and fast food from Pangra Express. Get the Classic Chicken momo, Hero Sausage and Shaphale Chicken, or go for the Dynamite momo. Naxal, 9818453455

Fuji Bakery

More shop than café, Fuji has set up a few tables and serves tea, Nescafé, 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



Fire and Ice

Fire and Ice offers genuine Neapolitan pizza and dozens of variants to choose from. Try the paesana, a combination of mozzarella, spinach, courgette and bacon, and the Spaghetti Pomodoro with homemade tomato sauce. Thamel (01)5350210

Buingal

With a variety of both vegetarian and non-vegetarian options, Buingal has something for everyone. Give the piro aloo, fish nuggets and chicken sandeko a try. Maitidevi (01) 4421393



अब  
मासिक हिमाल  
१ पुसदेखि बजारमा ।

हिमाल खबरपत्रिका  
नपदी सुखै छैन !

हिमालमिडिया प्रा. लि.  
पाटनढोका, ललितपुर







WORLD LINK  
**PHOTON**  
SPEED • COVERAGE • EXPERIENCE  
**600**

High speed in every corner

INTRODUCING  
**600**  
Mbps



For More Information

Dial: 01-5970050 | 9801523050

[www.worldlink.com.np](http://www.worldlink.com.np) | [facebook.com/wlink.np](https://facebook.com/wlink.np)

Online  
Payment Partner





# Human rights referees blow

FIFA World Cup 2022 spotlights poor labour conditions for workers from Nepal and other countries

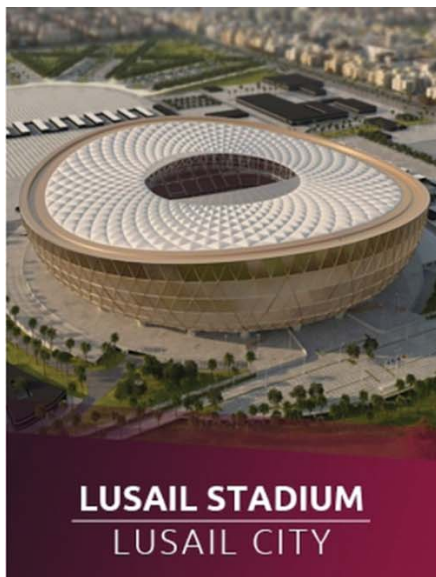
● Kunda Dixit

Exactly a year from now on 18 December 2022, the world will be glued to the media watching the final game of the World Cup live from Qatar. December 18 will also be International Migrants Day.

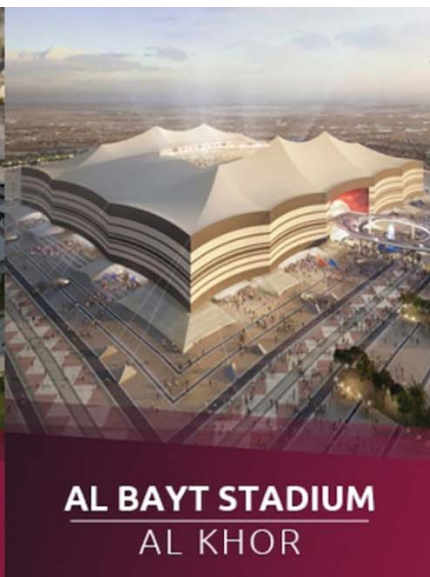
For Nepalis, the 2022 World Cup is personal. The eight stadiums in Qatar where the games will be held are built on the blood, sweat and tears of thousands of migrant workers, including from Nepal.

“There is lots of excitement in Doha with the FIFA Arab Cup that is going on,” says Ram, a Nepali construction worker from Dang who worked on the impressive Lusail Stadium where the finals will be played on 18 December next year. “It seems these structures have come up virtually overnight, it is unbelievable. But I have come to realise it is all about money.”

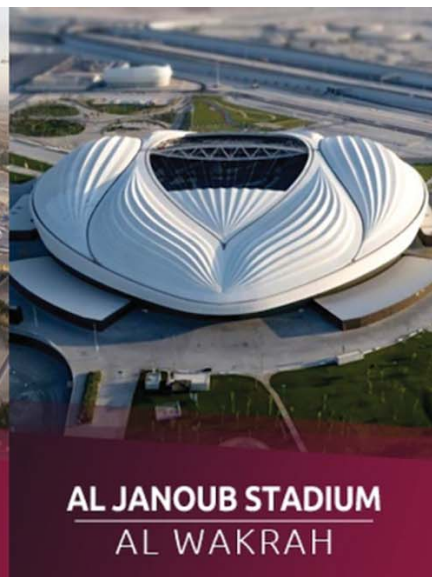
Ram himself makes \$274 per month. Although it is a raise from the \$206 he earned when he first started four years ago, he had to pay \$1,000 to a recruiter in Nepal



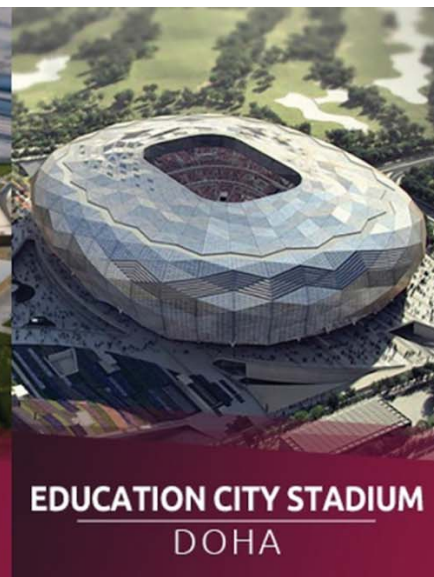
**LUSAIL STADIUM**  
LUSAIL CITY



**AL BAYT STADIUM**  
AL KHOR



**AL JANOUB STADIUM**  
AL WAKRAH



**EDUCATION CITY STADIUM**  
DOHA

for the job. There are hundreds of thousands of Nepalis like Ram, the unknown builders of the impressive infrastructure. Lusail Stadium does have a wall full of photographs of some of the workers who helped build the stadium.

But Ram and migrants from other countries may have perhaps felt a deeper sense of pride to be associated with the World Cup had they been treated with more dignity, paid on time and in conditions free of exploitation and abuse.

In an online media briefing on Wednesday organised by Human Rights Watch (HRW), researchers said that although labour laws are relatively better in Qatar, things

have not improved much on the ground, and there is pushback from construction contractors working on World Cup infrastructure.

“Qatar’s legal framework is better than other countries in the region, but the condition at the sites is still bad. If they want to be a role model as they claim, much more needs to be done to protect workers rights,” said May Romanos of Amnesty International.

Qatar won the bid to host the World Cup a decade ago and has been on a

massive construction spree. After international media spotlight, in 2018 it promised to reform labour conditions, but there are still reports of unpaid wages, high recruitment costs, poor living conditions, and deaths.

At least 30 migrant workers have died at World Cup sites, rights group say, 18 of them unexplained. In Kathmandu, the coffins arrived on flights from Doha, and the same planes take more migrant workers to Qatar.

‘Died in his sleep’

(सुत्ता सुत्दै मर्ने) has become a colloquial Nepali term and the fatalities are attributed to ‘natural causes’. Mostly, there is nothing natural about them – they were a result of overwork, heat stroke and official apathy.

Nepali workers were dying in Qatar, but they were also dying to work in Qatar. And therein was the conundrum. The money they earned building stadiums in Qatar helped them build homes for their families back in Nepal.

“At least 70% of the deaths are unexplained which is not acceptable, especially in a country with such an advanced health system,” said Nicholas McGeehan



**INTERNATIONAL  
MIGRANTS DAY**

## Long wait over, Nepalis return to Korea

When Aakash KC flew to Kathmandu from Seoul in February 2020, he was looking forward to a three-month break in Nepal from his job in South Korea.

Little did he know that he would be stranded for almost two agonising years in Nepal due to the pandemic. KC finally flew back to Seoul on Monday after months of uncertainty because of confusing information on Covid, and flip-flopping rules.

“As per Korean law, I had to come to Nepal for three months before resuming with the same employer for another five years,” KC said as he prepared to leave.

KC is part of the much-coveted Employment Permit Scheme (EPS), a government-to-government partnership between Nepal and Korea to supply workers, and is luckier than most other Nepali migrants because he had an employer who waited to have him back.

Aakash KC had to renew his Certificate for Confirmation of Visa Issuance (CCVI) multiple times with help from his Korean employer. He said: “I felt anxious when co-workers from Sri Lanka had returned to their jobs in Korea whereas my future was uncertain.”

KC’s employer was not just patient, he even sent him financial help during the early months of the pandemic. It is a testament to the hard work and trust that Nepali workers like KC have built with their Korean employers, that they are willing to do that.

KC did not look for any other options during the past two years, although he was tempted to prepare for Nepal’s civil service exams. He has retained his language skills, and, earlier this week, was excited about returning to Korea.

To be sure, not everyone is as lucky as KC. Sunita Gurung worked on a farm in Korea, and received her CCVI for continued employment. But her employer cancelled because the process dragged on for too long, leaving her heartbroken and helpless.

“I understand why he did that,” Gurung said. “How long can an employer wait when I could not confirm when I could return?”

For over 10,000 other Nepalis who passed the competitive Korean language and skills exams, the pandemic has been a roller coaster

Stranded by Covid restrictions for two years, Nepali workers rejoining jobs in South Korea



Aakash KC finally flew to Korea on 13 December to rejoin his job after being stranded in Nepal for two years.

AAKASH KC

ride. They were too far along the process to let go of lucrative job opportunities in Korea that guarantees high wages and a secure future.

The workers saw the Gulf and Malaysia opening up after the lockdowns, and could not understand why Korea was still closed. Some workers were under pressure from their families to take up whatever overseas job was available.

“When my family saw others from the community headed to Gulf, they asked why I could not do the same. They don’t understand,” said one worker.

All the uncertainty and false alarms over the past year and a half has taken a toll on the mental health of aspirants for Korea. The lack of clear information also means confusion

about whether the delay was due to Covid-19 restrictions in Nepal or Korea, vaccine status, or the result of insufficient diplomatic lobbying by the Nepal government.

It has not helped that for almost three years, there has not been a Nepali ambassador in Seoul. Junior embassy staff do not have the same access and influence as an ambassador, and the country’s labour diplomacy has suffered as a result.

“We knew it was due to public health concerns and the Korea government was using similar criteria to all EPS partner countries to assess whether to allow workers or not, but our government was also not being proactive,” said Aakash KC who took to the streets earlier this year to put pressure on the Nepal

government to lobby with the Koreans.

The EPS Struggle Committee met government officials, including all five labour ministers in the past two years. A running joke within the Struggle Committee was that one labour minister who lasted only a few days in office earlier this year asked the members who had gone to appeal to him: “What is EPS?”

The South Koreans had set three criteria for the corridors to resume: the presence of direct, regular flights to Incheon, all migrants buy Covid-19 insurance, and workers pay for ten-day quarantines on arrival in Korea. All these criteria were met, and despite the added cost to the workers, Nepalis finally started flying to Korea in October.

Trilok Pant was among the first lot that went to Korea in October after spending 22 months here. “There was so much excitement among the 48 Nepalis who were on that first flight,” he said on the phone from Korea. “Work has started in full swing now.”

Like KC, Pant was also lucky to have a kind employer who sent him money during the pandemic, and waited for him as he renewed his CCVI four times because each only had six-month validity.

“On my first day out of quarantine, he took us out for dinner,” Pant recalled. “It was a happy reunion.”

In the 22 months that he was stranded in Nepal, Pant did not do any work because of the uncertainty about Korea. But Korean employers, too, have faced problems because their workers could not get back. Nepalis mostly are on jobs that locals will not do, especially not for the salaries of migrant workers.

“Nepalis have a reputation for hard work and honesty, which worked to our advantage this time as our employers waited for us patiently amid all the uncertainty and inconvenience,” Pant added.

For now, only a small proportion of those waiting have been able to rejoin jobs, and the Koreans appear to opening up cautiously to see if there is a Covid surge. Only if all goes well in the coming months will more workers be let in. And there are thousands of Nepalis waiting to fly out. 🇳🇵



# Whistle on World Cup fouls



of the rights group FairSquare. “Being a migrant worker in Qatar today is really bad for your health, and can kill you.”

Rameshwar is from Sarlahi district and works as an electrician in Qatar. He supports a Brazilian football team, works at a labour supply company. Like many other Nepali workers, he is worried that he will be sent home in 2022 before the FIFA games begin.

“They will keep maintenance workers, and might send everyone else back,” he said on the phone from Doha. “I am worried I will lose my job. How will I provide for my family after I return?”

To be sure, Qatar cannot

be singled out for blame. The exploitation of workers by recruiters and harassment by officials starts back in Nepal, even before workers leave home.

At a time when construction for the World Cup was in full swing in Qatar, the ambassadorial post in Doha was vacant from 2013-17 when migrant abuses, including sudden deaths of Nepali workers, were at their peak and getting worldwide attention.

Then, Prime Minister Deuba’s government recalled Narad Nath Bharadwaj without naming his replacement, at a time when the need for labour diplomacy

in Doha was most critical (*see interview, page 5*).

And this year, Nepal and Qatar bungled a lucrative employment deal to supply the Qatar Police with 200 Nepalis. They would have earned Rs180,000 a month, excluding overtime pay and end-of-service benefits. Unscrupulous recruiters and officials knew that desperate Nepalis would pay under the table. But things got so messy that all 200 job orders were canceled.

“Everyone wanted a piece of the pie until there was no pie left for anyone,” said one activist.

Nepal has also failed to fulfil its promise of reintegrating workers

who had to return due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Schemes like the Prime Minister’s Employment Program introduced with much fanfare have failed to deliver.

There are reports that Qatar could send back many construction workers, including Nepalis, on extended leave before the games begin in the stadiums and facilities the workers themselves built.

“Even if they let me stay, I cannot afford the tickets to go watch the games in the stadium,” said Rameshwar. “I will watch it on tv.”

There will be many Nepalis in the hospitality sector who will look after players and visitors in

Qatar during the World Cup, and workers are hopeful that there will be future projects they can engage in.

But international rights watchdogs say the world’s attention is going to wane once the games are over, and the media glare shifts. They say not a single worker died during construction of stadiums in London for the 2012 Olympics, and there is no reason why Qatar with its resources could not adhere to similar safety standards.

“Despite Qatar’s PR offensive and sportswash, there is an urgent need for real and durable reforms because workers continue to suffer wage abuse, employers avoid accountability, complaints are ignored,” said Hiba Zayadin of Human Rights Watch.

Meanwhile, back in Nepal, politicians are already in election mode (*see page 1*), and will be too preoccupied with their campaigns during 2022 to care for migrant welfare. There are already lofty claims about how, if elected, they will curb migration and create jobs back home.

Most Nepalis have heard all that before, and the trust deficit is so high that out-migration to Qatar and elsewhere seems like the more reliable – and for many, the only – alternative.

Activists say the government must immediately ensure that Nepal’s embassies in destination countries for migrants are adequately staffed and funded.

It should also diversify out-migration towards better, higher paying jobs, and use bilateral labour agreements like the 2005 one with Qatar that is currently being renewed, for better worker protection. 🇳🇵

**TATA MOTORS**  
Connecting Aspirations

**ALL-NEW H5**

POWER OF 170 PS & FUN OF AUTOMATIC

6 SPEED AUTOMATIC TRANSMISSION

ESP TERRAIN RESPONSE MODES

PANORAMIC SUNROOF

BASED ON LAND ROVER'S LEGENDARY D8 PLATFORM







ACCA

Think Ahead

RETHINKING  
SUSTAINABLE  
BUSINESS

Creating impactful  
value for future generations  
yourfuture@accaglobal.com

License to analyse

As a newspaper of record it is our job here to report on the ongoing party conventions by sticking to the factions — and not allow facts to get in the way of our analysis.

We journalists swear by our sacred code of conduct: “@#%&#!” We believe that at the end of the day, the ugly truth will prevail no matter what, and we have to let the potato chips fall where they may.

We take our adversarial role very seriously to comfort the afflicted and afflict the uncomfortable, hold government to account, and publish all the hearsay, no matter how trivial. We will print handouts in exchange for handouts. But that does not mean that we just take the money and run, we keep our end of the bargain. We will not think twice about saying what a great guy the Prime Minister is. We will think only once.

Luckily, Nepal’s Constitution gives us complete freedom not just to kick ass, but also to kiss ass, as well as lick ass. That is why our media is the envy of other countries in the region. But we must not rest on our laurels. Nepal’s journalists must strive to be self-reliant, self-righteous, and self-censor. The Ministry of Disinformation and Sycophancy henceforth requires all those desirous of pursuing a journalism career to pass a license test to practice the profession. You have 1 hour to complete this exam. Good luck.

JOURNALISM  
LICENSE  
EXAMINATIONS

- OBJECTIVE QUESTIONS**  
What is the world’s second oldest profession?  
☐ Hunting-Gathering  
☐ Smuggling  
☐ Adultery  
☐ Prostitution
- In which media does propaganda masquerade as news?**  
☐ State media  
☐ Non-state media  
☐ Lapdog Media  
☐ All of the above
- If a politician offers you an envelope, do you:**  
☐ Take envelope and run  
☐ Ask for another envelope and run  
☐ Take cash, return envelope and run  
☐ Deduct VAT and give receipt
- ‘Off the record’ means:**  
☐ Something to do with the Guinness Book  
☐ Copying music from vinyl discs  
☐ Agreeing not to reveal source, but doing it anyway  
☐ Using an imaginary quote

- What kind of event qualifies as ‘Breaking News’?**  
☐ Talking heads breaking each others’ skulls  
☐ Broadcasting a headline live on deadline with byline  
☐ A lead that bleeds
- A source takes you out to lunch, and waiter brings the bill. Do you:**  
☐ Slip off to the loo  
☐ Pretend to talk on the phone  
☐ Reach for back pocket and say “Shoot, forgot wallet at home”  
☐ Shout “Aftershock!” and run
- NOT SO OBJECTIVE QUESTIONS**  
Write an essay on three of the following subjects:  
**1** Press freedom means singing hosannas of those in power.  
**2** We shouldn’t blame the messengers, we should lock them up.  
**3** Good thing more than 45 per cent of Nepalis can’t read or write otherwise the public may actually believe what the media is saying.  
**4** How does press freedom in Nepal compare with, say, DPRK?



SUBARU

YEAR  
END  
OFFER

7 lakhs  
DISCOUNT

1 Lakh kilometer  
or  
3 years  
Warranty

1 year comprehensive  
insurance

Finance and exchange  
available

Vijay Motors Pvt. Ltd. | Bhagawati Bahal, Naxal | Kathmandu, Nepal  
Tel: 4433205 | Mobile: 9801059060, 9801026542  
Email: sales1@vmpl.com.np | URL: www.subaru.com.np