



SUMAN NEPALI

President's precedent

● Shristi Karki

President Bidya Devi Bhandari failed to authenticate an amendment bill to Nepal's Citizenship Act by deadline on Tuesday 20 September, rendering it null and void. The bill had passed back and forth between Parliament and President's office, before its rejection by a ceremonial head of state. It is seen by most experts as an unconstitutional move, and retaliation for Parliament's refusal to deliberate her 15-point request for review.

It is also proof of the deep polarisation ahead of elections between President Bhandari, who is close to the opposition UML, and the government. Passage of the bill would have been popular with the Tarai vote bank for the 5-party governing coalition, while the UML will hope to cash in on the opposition to the bill among many voters in the mountains.

Understandably, coalition members were unified in their denouncement of the President allowing the bill to lapse after Parliament was already dissolved ahead of elections.

'This unconstitutional move by the President is a gross insult to Nepal's federal Parliament elected by the people,' reads a statement co-signed by leaders of four parties in government. The fifth coalition partner, Rastriya Janamorcha, did not sign, with its chief Chitra Bahadur KC casting strong reservations.

In an unprecedented move, the Maoist-appointed Vice-president Nanda Bahadur Pun also condemned President Bhandari's failure to certify the amendment. Interestingly, Maoist leader Narayankaji Shrestha wanted to have it both ways, tweeting: 'The president does not have the right to go against the Constitution, but we agree with a lot of the points she has raised about the bill.'

The amendment would have allowed hundreds of thousands of Nepalis, especially in the Tarai, to finally obtain citizenship papers. But many activists had said the bill's restrictions on citizenship for children born to single mothers, and the process of obtaining naturalised citizenship were discriminatory towards women.

Former Law Minister Nilambar Acharya said that the Citizenship Bill was too sensitive

and nuanced for knee-jerk, one-sided reaction.

"The fact is that the House of Representatives passed the amendment bill without deliberating the President's 15-point request for clarification," Acharya said. "And should a Parliament that is about to reach its term take decisions on issues of long-term national interest? The new Parliament should have been entrusted with that."

Indeed, the bill has already become an election issue. Student wings affiliated with coalition parties took to the streets in protest (pictured) burning effigies of the President, while unions affiliated with the UML rallied with placards that read 'salute to the President who stands up for the nation and nationalism'.

With citizenship becoming a battle for populist vote-gathering, the row has overshadowed moves by the governing coalition which also went against constitutional values. The closed list of proportional representation (PR) candidates presented Monday included the Prime Minister's wife, Arzoo Deuba, former NC minister Bimalendra Nidhi and Maoist former speaker Krishna Bahadur Mahara.

The PR system is actually meant to ensure that communities on the socio-political fringes get represented in decision-making. But the candidates on the list have perpetuated the status quoist, transactional, and nepotistic nature of Nepali politics. 🇳🇵

RULE OF THE LAWLESS
EDITORIAL
PAGE 2

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Rule of the lawless

Monday 19 September marked the seventh anniversary of the promulgation of the Constitution, and it came just two days after the first Parliament elected under the federal system was dissolved to pave the way for elections on 20 November.

This is a good time to take stock of those five years of Parliament and seven years of the Constitution. Spoiler alert: the report cards on both are not good.

The 2015 Constitution was finally finalised after two elections to Constituent Assemblies, and was itself an outcome of the armed struggle waged by the Maoist party from 1996-2006. The very fact that 17,000 Nepalis were killed for the monarchy to be abolished should have made the new secular, federal, democratic republic worth dying for.

swept that election, and the two parties united in 2018 to form the Nepal Communist Party (NCP). There was hope at last that with its strong majority and an egalitarian agenda (at least in theory) the Communists would work for the welfare of the people.

It took barely a year for those hopes to be dashed. The power struggle between the two NCP alpha males brought down the government, and split the party.

Oli tried twice to dissolve Parliament in violation of Constitutional provisions, and was struck down both times by the Supreme Court under Chief Justice Chandra SJB Rana. It is a supreme irony that even as the country marked Constitution Day, the Chief Justice is under semi-house arrest.

Rana was not known for unblemished integrity, but had disallowed Oli's dissolution



RATNA SHRESTHA / RSS

Alas, the past seven years have proven otherwise.

The Constitution was fast-tracked after the 2015 earthquake, and Nepali Congress-led coalition made up for the fact that it was AWOL by hurriedly passing the Constitution. There was violence in the Tarai, and New Delhi expressed its displeasure by enforcing a border blockade on quake-ravaged Nepal for six months.

A Constitution is a rulebook for governance. It is by definition work in progress, and needs to be tweaked to respond to changing aspirations and mores. But the past seven years have shown that the ones who made the rules think they were made to be bent and broken. Following the rule in Nepal is an exception, rather than the rule. It is the rule of the lawless.

So, the President refuses to endorse a Citizenship Bill passed by both Houses, and the Prime Minister uses PR provisions to nominate his wife as candidate. In the last five years, we have seen serial violations of the Constitution by all sides.

There were some progressive provisions in the Constitution that mandated greater participation of women, the excluded and indigenous groups in the 2017 elections. The electoral alliance of the UML and the Maoists

Following the rules in Nepal is an exception, rather than the rule

of Parliament. In the end, his staunchest defender has turned out to be the very same K P Oli who was ousted by Rana's verdict.

The practice of distributing appointments among short-term allies (*bhag-banda*) has been the curse of Nepali politics for decades. In 2017, Oli and Dahal divided up between themselves constitutional appointments. The division of the spoils got even more extreme since the present coalition came to power as all five members had to be appeased.

Neither Parliament nor the Constitution have met the people's expectations for better governance, equity and justice because both were held hostage by inter- and intra-party feuds which were played out in Parliament where protagonists blatantly violated the Constitution to gain the upper hand. Ordinances were weaponised as ordinances.

The Constitution was supposed to devolve power to local bodies, they have instead led to misuse of power at the grassroots. It was meant to decentralise decision-making, but decentralised corruption instead.

The November elections can change all this, but only if voters oust the six elderly gentlemen who have monopolised, misruled and abused power for decades, and elect those who safeguard the Constitution.

ONLINE PACKAGES



This week, we are marking International Week of the Deaf. Watch this short silent film to better understand the deaf community, their special needs and the Nepali sign language. For exclusive multimedia content, subscribe to our YouTube channel.



Solid waste management has been the concern of Kathmandu for the past several months. But we have not even begun to think about e-waste made up of electronic items like computers, mobiles, batteries which has become a serious health hazard in Nepal. Not only is it difficult to recycle and resell, but India and China have also banned e-waste imports. Watch video on our website.

RAILWAY FEASIBILITY

When developing countries step towards progress, developed countries talk about environmental impact ('Nepal and China to study trans-Himalayan railway', Ramesh Bhushal, pages 6-7). Developed countries send all their waste to Asian countries, they pursue Asian countries for cheap labour that causes environmental damage in the region. It is almost like the rules are not for developed countries. Yes, we all are worried about the environment, but who is most responsible for the damage?

Ramesh Rai

- China could not possibly care less about the environment.

Greg McCann

- A separate monorail would be less disruptive than a wide track one, it is resilient and less disruptive in case of quakes.

Nathan Hagen

- The government can't even pave the Mahankhal road in Boudha. What chance is there that it can run a railway safely?

Shirin Barakzai

- Of course they will not consider the environmental impact, it's China and our foolish ministers.

Chris Kunwar

- Hope to see this dream become a reality soon.

Art DS

CONSTITUTION DAY

It seems Nepal is stuck in a non-stop revolving election cycle with the same old familiar faces fighting to retain power ('Rule of the lawless', Editorial, page 2). Lost in the election process are actual productive changes that are good for the people. But the leaders don't care for the people. It is about time the Nepali people rise up and elect new, younger, and hopefully less corrupt leaders. It can hardly get worse.

Roger Ray

- Just guessing, the 6 elderly gentlemen are: KPO, PKD, SBD, MKN, BRB & UY? That leaves many other side actors who aided and benefitted from the loot go unscathed. All of them should be held accountable.

Santosh Aryal

MONSOON

Bold step to manage rains and drought together with land use planning seems to be only the viable solution ('More monstrous monsoons, Nicole McCloskey', #1129). But this is not policy priority.

Namindra Dahal

- How can Nepal prepare for such calamities? Look at the plight of the rivers in Kathmandu. They have been constricted between so-called corridors, and reduced to trickles of sewage. There is no system for draining rainwater, and the natural ones like Banganga in Baneshwor have been paved over. The only hope is a monstrous monsoon washing away all these unnatural, unplanned structures. And what they are doing to the Chure will result in huge mud and rockslides will bury nearby cities.

Lal Bahadur

- Valuable and insightful thoughts on the importance of local governance and government responsibility to avoid worsening the likely impact of climate change on vulnerable local communities ('Climate change only one factor in Pakistan flood', #1129). #Nepal #ClimateCrisis #GoN #federalism

Keith D. Leslie

- The case is similar in Nepal too. Find out who lives in climate risk prone areas knowing that the occurrence of flood, landslide is inevitable and most importantly why. Find the answers and time to move away from flaky attitudes and superficial work to real action.

Lhamo Y Sherpa

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING

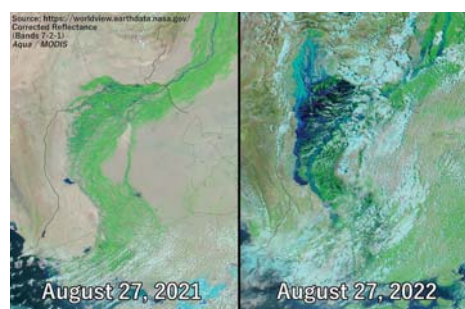


VVVVIPS

by Ass

As a survivor of a three-hour traffic jam during the visit of Li Zhusu, Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of China, The Ass has some advice for the next time Nepal welcomes another VVVVIP.

f Most reached and shared on Facebook



More monstrous monsoons

Editorial

It is convenient for governments to put all the blame on climate change for all water-induced disasters. But the human and economic toll of floods is magnified by drainage obstruction, poorly planned infrastructure, and river extraction. Visit nepalitimes for details.

Most popular on Twitter



Trans-Himalayan railway

by Ramesh Bhushal

China is to start a feasibility study for the Tibet-Nepal Railway through the Himalaya, but there are concerns about environmental impact and Nepal's lack of capacity. Story on pages 6-7

Most commented



Queen Elizabeth, the Gurkhas and Everest

by Kunda Dixit

Queen Elizabeth II had a soft spot for Nepal, since news of the first-ever ascent of Mt Everest got to London on the morning of her coronation in 1953. She visited Nepal twice. Full story online.

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

"No other country can play the role Nepal has to play in the Himalayan region on #ClimateCrisis— Nepal should stand up and take charge of the knowledge, discussion, and concern. It can change Nepal's image, make it an intellectual leader in the world."



Sujeev Shakya @sujeevshakya

This was probably the best session at @kanconclave. Great to have this in English in another publication



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Future #flood risk can be reduced if there is better preparedness and proper planning. Otherwise what happened in Pakistan is sure to repeat itself many times in the #Himalaya the impact of the #climate emergency being felt even more acutely.



marty Logan @martydlogan

When #climate change collides with poor governance. Efforts cannot be solely reactive, resources must also go to proactive planning



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

As a survivor of a three-hour traffic jam at Tin Kuney on Tuesday, The Ass (@YourHindness) has some advice for the next time #Nepaldecides to invite another Very, Very, Very Impotent Person (VVVIP) as a state guest. Check them out:



i am u @dipeshrisal

Good to know that The Ass has not lost its bite. Something tells me this is still the original Ass. "Much Maligned Movement"

Adulterated Governance

Fuel adulteration might not be as big of a problem as in the past but increasing petroleum imports is. It is depleting Nepal's foreign reserves, but more importantly vehicle emissions are reducing average expectancy by as much as 7 years.

Reducing the import bill by just 10% would save at least Rs21 billion a year. A switch to electric public transport and battery vehicles will also promote domestic clean energy from hydropower while improving air quality and public health.

Excerpt from an editorial on fuel adulteration and corruption published on Nepali Times 20 years ago this week on issue #112 20-26 September 2002:



politicians.

Leave aside for now that the adulteration has serious health hazards: suspended particulates cause respiratory infections and asthma, the benzene and toluene in emissions are carcinogens.

Let's just look at what it does to the health of the nation: Nepal Oil Corporation sells some Rs 12 billion worth of fuel every year. Based on a conservative average of 50 percent adulteration, we are looking at a Rs 6 billion loss to the exchequer.

Corruption is like fish: it rots

from the head down. And we will know this country has been cleansed when ordinary citizens can go about their daily lives without being asked to cheat, bribe, or lie to get the simplest things done. And will also, ultimately, be the test of our democracy.

From archive material of *Nepali Times* of the past 20 years, site search: www.nepalitimes.com

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Inoculation against misinformation

As Nepal's elections near, fact-checking, media literacy and monitoring can foster trust in public institutions

● Deepak Adhikari

In June, inside a crowded auditorium of the Oslo Met University in Norway, YouTube's Brandon Feldman was fielding questions from fact-checkers from around the world.

Feldman had just finished a "fireside chat" with Baybars Orsek, the director of the International Fact-checking Network (IFCN), when he was bombarded with questions from the audience.

To the applause of fellow fact-checkers, one speaker after another exposed YouTube's failure to stop the spread of false information on the platform.

A participant from Pakistan's *Soch Factcheck* said he came across a flood of potentially fatal false claims on YouTube. Others exposed videos with hate speech that went unchecked. Feldman promised reform, but it was too little, too late to appease fact-checkers.

I was in Oslo for the annual Global Fact 9 Summit, the first in-person conference in three years with nearly 500 participants from 69 nations.

I clicked through our own *South Asia Check* and showed articles debunking conspiracy theories around Covid-19.

In one session, employees of TikTok, a short-video platform that is becoming increasingly popular in Nepal, spoke about how they were tackling information disorder on the



platform. There was a session on automated fact-checking. At another panel, a Meta speaker noted that Facebook does not moderate political content.

After a week of this, I was a little overwhelmed by the work that lay ahead back in Nepal which is having federal and provincial elections on 20 November. If the local election in May was any indication, this one too would be fought on social media platforms.

Balen Shah and Sunita Dangol, who ran for mayor and deputy mayor of Kathmandu in May were the targets of rumours and false information. Disinformation actors aim to delegitimise candidates or attack rivals with propaganda. The objective is to influence, if not manipulate, public discourse.

With easy access to the Internet, more Nepalis are getting news and entertainment through their mobiles. This will inevitably lead to a proliferation of falsehood because social media algorithms promote clicks that are designed to

attract users, and keep them on the platform.

Both Facebook and TikTok have features that help content go viral. During significant news events, such as elections, people unknowingly share false information (also called misinformation) with significant impact on the integrity of the electoral process.

Fact-checking, supporting media literacy initiatives, and media monitoring during elections can all contribute to fostering trust in public institutions.

One of the reasons we started *NepalCheck.Org* as the elections approached was to combat misinformation. But it is difficult to distinguish fact from fake, truth from trolls, and most importantly, to expose public officials who are lying. The fact-check report must be supported by reliable, authoritative evidence.

How do we do it? The same tools that help spread misinformation and disinformation can also be employed to identify and debunk false claims.

We conduct keyword searches on Google to verify information. Finding problematic online content requires constant social media monitoring. Since the news is the main source of false information, fact-checkers must be up to date on current affairs.

Online search skills are also crucial. But there is a catch: you have to keep refining your searches and building on what you find in order to identify the origin of a misleading photo or video.

Since fact-checking started in the US in the early 2000s, a lot has changed. It picked up steam during the 2016 US presidential elections. Recent international events, such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war, have demonstrated how you can find the truth by utilising information that is publicly available. It has prompted the creation of novel tactics such as open-source intelligence, which assesses data from readily available sources using more

sophisticated technologies to combat misinformation.

Despite the rise in popularity of fact-checking, the pervasiveness of viral disinformation makes it appear like an intractable challenge. A quote often attributed to American author Mark Twain succinctly captures the situation: "A lie can travel halfway around the world while truth is putting on its shoes."

In my two and a half years as a fact-checking editor, I have occasionally felt like I am up against powerful fake news factories. Only a small portion of online misinformation and disinformation can be fact-checked.

New studies in 'inoculation theory', have given me hope for a better future. Researchers from the universities of Bristol and Cambridge in the UK found that users can more effectively battle misinformation and disinformation if they are aware of the techniques used to distribute it.

A total of 30,000 participants watched video clips to become more familiar with manipulative strategies, including employing polarising and emotional language. The study advocated immunising people against the tactics of misinformation and disinformation, drawing on the psychological concept of 'inoculation'.

Exposure to less harmful disinformation can aid in the development of a person's defences against propaganda and misleading claims, much like a vaccine does.

As we progressively recover from the Covid-19 pandemic thanks to the vaccine, let us hope that a new vaccination will be an effective tool against the 'infodemic'. 🇳🇵

Deepak Adhikari is the editor of *NepalCheck.Org*, a new bilingual fact-checking platform in Nepal. He was the editor of *South Asia Check* from March 2020 to July 2022.

prabhu BANK

Indo-Nepal ties

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba has asked Indonesian Ambassador Heru Hartanto Subolo for the archipelago nation to invest in Nepal's hydropower and tourism as



well as establish a residential embassy in the country. The ambassador was in Nepal to promote a trade expo in Indonesia. The Indonesian government is also said to be pushing visa on arrival for Nepali tourists.

JICA Aid

JICA this week announced a Rs2.05 billion grant to rehabilitate the oldest irrigation system in Nepal, Chandranahar. The Japanese aid agency has also agreed to Rs14 billion concessional loan for Reliable Power Network, the First Yen Loan Project for Transmission and Distribution System Improvement in Nepal.



Turkish in IATA

Four representatives from Turkish Airlines have been appointed to IATA's Advisory Councils. Kerem Kiziltunc, Chief Corporate Development and IT Officer, Turhan Ozen, Chief Cargo Officer, Berkant Kolcu, SVP Legal and Compliance and Ozlem Salihoglu, SVP International Relations and Alliances have been appointed to Digital Transformation Advisory Council, Cargo Advisory Council, Legal Advisory Council and Industry Affairs Advisory Council respectively.



Turkish Airlines Chairman of the Board Ahmet Bola says this will strengthen the carrier's profile on the global aviation sector.

Samsung Offer

Samsung has announced a Dasain-Tihar scheme with 30% cashback on purchase of selected products including tvs, refrigerators and washing machines. Some offers include a 25% discount on 5 in 1 convertible refrigerator, 22% off on washing machines, 20% cashback on the AO ecobubble washer dryer and 30% on Samsung's Crystal 4k tv.



Tata Discount

Saptakoshi Suppliers under Siprati has launched a Dasain offer wherein customers get special discounts on Tata parts. There is also a buy one get one offer for Tata genuine oil, clutch plates, pressure plates, brake linings and grease in addition to 45% discount on filters.

CNI women summit

The Confederation of Nepalese Industries Women Leadership Forum will be hosting the 'Women Leadership Summit' in January 2023 in presence



of experts, policy makers and representatives from economy, arts, sports, cinema, environment and social activism. Registration for participation is open at www.wls2023.com.

BYD e6 in Nepal

The Chinese electric car maker BYD is promoting its e6 electric SUV, which it says has the longest range of any battery powered car in Nepal. It has a range of 522km on a single charge, which means it can go to Bhiarawa and back from Kathmandu. It is powered by a Blade battery, and has a CN95 HEPA filter to protect occupants from air pollution.



"BYD e6 is the Range it provides 500+ km, I no longer have range anxiety, I can travel to my day to day location and even outside the valley without any anxiety," says a customer, Soham Dhakal of Vianet Communications. "Besides, you will feel instant change after you start driving an EV, the quiteness, low maintainence and cost effectiveness."



New Honda

Hero Honda has launched Hero Super Splendor in Nepal which comes with a 125cc engine and improved fuel efficiency starting at Rs266,000.



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Nepal and China to study

China is to start a feasibility study for the trans-Himalayan Tibet-Nepal Railway, but there are environmental and technical questions

● Ramesh Bhushal

On 10 August, China announced that it will start a feasibility study for the ambitious Tibet-Nepal Railway project within a year. Beijing assured visiting Nepali foreign minister Narayan Khadka that it would also bear the \$118 million cost of the study.

The proposed 170km railway, part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) will link Kerung (Gyirong) in Tibet to Kathmandu, entering Nepal in Rasuwa district. The plan is to eventually extend the railway to India.

The project will cost \$5.5 billion: equal to the entire annual state revenue of Nepal. Although only one-third of the total length of the track would fall on the Nepal side, this stretch would account for almost half of the cost due to difficult geology and climate.

"The feasibility study will do two important things: first it will determine the route, including tunnels and bridges. And then the type of railway that needs to be built — high speed or slow," explained Paribesh Parajuli, an engineer who worked as a consultant at the Department of Railways until 2019.

Experts say the feasibility study could be a defining move for the Tibet-Nepal Railway, which has been on hold for years with Nepal reluctant to pay for the study, and China reticent about funding it.

In late 2018, China prepared a pre-feasibility study of the railway for Nepal and estimated the total cost of the 72.5km section

in Nepal at \$2.75 billion. The report, which is not yet publicly available, suggested it was an extremely difficult project because of the terrain gradient, but not impossible.

"Technically this will be one of the world's most difficult feats of railway engineering since it needs to descend from 4,500m on the Tibetan Plateau cut through the Himalaya to Kathmandu at 1,200m.

"But China has the technological prowess, as they have already built railways at even higher altitudes in Tibet," said Aman Chitrakar, spokesperson for Nepal's Department of Railways.

The 2018 pre-feasibility study was carried out by a Chinese team since Nepal lacks the expertise in railway engineering, and the same is expected with the feasibility study.

"It's their money and their expertise will be key, but we hope to be consulted," Chitrakar said.

Some worry about Nepal's lack of ability to even review technical reports. The department established a decade ago is dominated by road engineers, and runs only a 52km railway line in the plains connecting Bijapur and Janakpur to the Indian border, built with Indian assistance.

"It was OK to rely fully on the Chinese for a pre-feasibility study as it was more of a kind of survey, but the feasibility study is a key project document. If it's going to be implemented Nepal must have serious eyes on it," said Parajuli, one of Nepal's few railway engineers.

In 2018 — the same year as the pre-feasibility study — Nepal's Department of Railways and China Railway signed an agreement during a visit by visiting Foreign Minister Wang Yi without the Department of Railways in Kathmandu even being informed by the Foreign Ministry.

"We heard that our government had signed a MoU on the technical aspects of the railway project during Wang Yi's visit, and now we hear from the media that a feasibility study will be carried out,



but we have no idea about these agreements," said Chitrakar.

In 2020, China's former ambassador to Nepal Qiu Guohong wrote in a Nepali newspaper: 'Our great leader Mao Zedong was the one who sowed the seeds of the Nepal-China railway dream. During King Birendra Shah's visit to China in 1973, Mao had mentioned Qinghai-Tibet railway. Even during that time Mao had thought about linking Tibet railway to Kathmandu in Nepal as he was a visionary.'

In 2016, China signed a transit

and transport agreement when Nepal's prime minister K P Oli visited Beijing in the aftermath of a border blockade imposed by India because New Delhi disagreed with clauses in Nepal's new Constitution.

Two years later, the railway was a key agenda item when China's President Xi Jinping visited Nepal. Wang Yi reiterated China's interest in the railway project in March this year, and it is four months later that the announcement about the feasibility study was made.

Besides geological challenges, there are also geopolitical hurdles.

India has been suspicious about the China-Nepal railway. Unlike Nepal, India is not a BRI signatory, and Sino-Indian relations are strained over their border disputes.

Former ambassador Qiu wrote in 2020: 'It is both China and Nepal's responsibility to convince India on the railway's importance to link India and China and its mutual benefit for the region as Nepal is ... links mainland China and the South Asian subcontinent. So, if we can connect China's railway network with India's railway network then this could be an important transit



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trans-Himalayan railway



NABIN BARAL / THE THIRD POLE



LIU KUN / THE THIRD POLE

DREAM TRAIN: (clockwise) Dozens of trucks carrying imported Chinese goods cross the Bhoté Kosi into Nepal.
The first passenger train from Lhasa enters Xigaze in August 2014. If built, the Tibet-Nepal Railway will link Kathmandu to Xigaze via Kerung (Gyirong).
Map showing the proposed alignment of the new Kerung-Kathmandu railway.



GOOGLE EARTH/ MAP: KIRAN MAHARJAN

point for the region.’
In recent weeks, the cross-border railway project has been covered by Chinese media and elicited responses on Weibo. It has been cited as an important geopolitical project for China.
A commentary piece published by *Caijing Magazine’s* WeChat channel suggested that a rail link through Nepal to India could both ‘enhance China-India economic bonds when geopolitical tensions are at ease ... and increase China’s strategic manoeuvring space when tensions are on the rise’.

Speaking at a webinar organised by the New Delhi-based Institute of Chinese Studies, Constantino Xavier, a foreign policy and security expert at the Centre for Social and Economic Progress think tank said: “Greater Chinese influence in Nepal is not a bilateral or regional issue but a global one. India should be able to calculate its relations with global powers rather than just looking to Nepal-China relations or China’s presence in Nepal.”
The ecological impact of the proposed rail line is not being discussed in Nepal, and nothing has been said about what China’s 2021 green development guidelines might mean for the project. Some experts say this is due to the Nepal government’s inability to work with the Chinese team.
“Any trans-Himalayan project of this scale will have serious environmental impact and there should be more concern around the fragile geology of the region,” said Basanta Raj Adhikari at the Centre for Disaster Studies at Tribhuvan

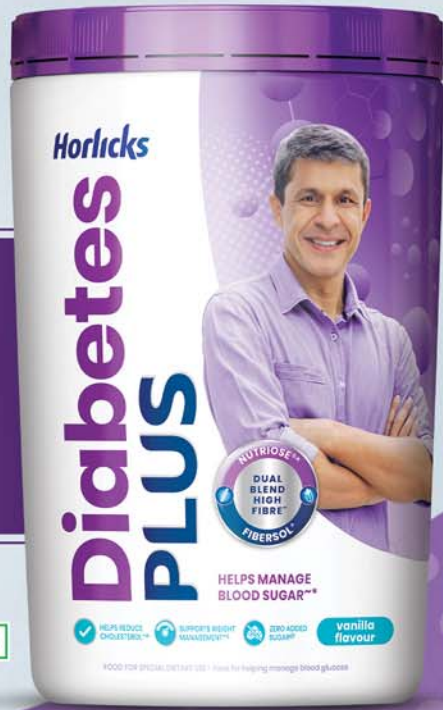
University.
He says the project also needs to factor in seismic risk since the track will pass through the main central thrust – a geologically weak zone in the Himalaya.
In fact, there have been some concerns in China over the ecological impact of the railway. Says one comment on *Caijing Magazine’s* WeChat channel: ‘At a time when we are enduring extreme heat, many are concerned with the railway’s ecological impact on the world’s water tower. Railway maintenance is going to be very challenging in the Himalayan region. International relationships also depend on how we choose to act. Be cautious.’
Nepal has a huge trade deficit with China, and Beijing is encouraging Nepal to export more to its market. From 1 September, 98% of Nepali products were eligible for zero-tariff exports to China.
‘This will support the Nepalese side to make good use of this policy dividend to expand exports to China,’ stated a communiqué after the meeting of the two foreign ministers in Qingdao last August.
Nepal imported goods worth \$1.7 billion from China between mid-July 2021 and mid-April 2022, but Nepal’s exports to China were worth just \$5 million in this period.

“The cross-border railway project, if eventually built, would surely augur well for Nepal’s economy, as the landlocked country’s transport connectivity with China currently relies on a few land ports that can’t operate amid heavy snow or geological disasters,” Long Xingchun, of the Chengdu Institute of World Affairs, told the *Global Times*.
The only functional Nepal-China cross-border road crossing in Rasuwa Gadi, northwest of Kathmandu, had been closed since the Covid-19 pandemic, and was only partially opened last week after the visit of Li Zhanshu, Chair of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress of China. 🇨🇳

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*Journal of Diabetes and Metabolism; 2020 Feb; 11(2):841. **As per WHO/FAO 2004 Guidelines. NUTRIOSE® is a registered trademark of Roquette Frères. ^Nutriose® and FIBERSOL -2 are trade name for Wheat fibre dextrin & Corn fibre dextrin respectively. Horlicks Diabetes Plus is not intended to replace any existing medication. It is a nutritional beverage meant to be consumed as a part of balance daily diet and exercise. @Sucrose. 'CONTAINS NATURALLY OCCURRING SUGARS'. Creative Visualization.

● Claire Burket

Much of Kathmandu’s centuries-old architectural heritage was destroyed in 45 seconds on a Saturday afternoon in 2015. Many of the temples built by the Malla kings in 16th and 17th century in the three Darbar Squares of Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Patan, collapsed. But in the aftermath of the 2015 earthquake, the Patan Darbar Square stood out as a model of the conservation effort. Immediately after the earthquake, local volunteers gathered to collect and protect the remnants of the temples, cordoning off the premises and keeping the struts, columns and pillars safe in the Patan Museum courtyard. Led by the Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT) in cooperation with the Department of Archaeology the quadrangle palace complex is being restored piece by

piece with care and patience. “I don’t view the earthquake as only a negative,” reflects Rohit Ranjitkar, director of KVPT, the non-profit that has worked in the Valley for three decades. “Before the earthquake, a lot of people did not value the heritage here. But when the temples collapsed, they suddenly had no place to worship. They recognised the historical and religious value of their shrines. The earthquake brought both the intangible and tangible heritage together.” Restoration of a number of temples is still on-going. But as the national priorities have shifted and building costs increased after the pandemic, the process has slowed down. 🇳🇵

 nepalitimes.com
More photos online



Rohit Ranjitkar of the Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust.

Krishna Mandir

The three-storey, square stone shikhara temple withstood the 2015 earthquake but the base, corner stones and other elements had been disintegrating and the stone columns were out of alignment following insufficient repairs after the previous quakes. For the small team of Nepali architects, engineers and stone masons of KVPT, designing a way to shore up the building and replace four bearing corner stones on the second story, which houses a shiva lingam, was a steep learning curve. Repair required lifting stones weighing up to 700kg to 5m above

the square and then removing and replacing the damaged corner stones. Surya Bahadur Ranjitkar and his father Asha Bahadur Ranjitkar were an integral part of the team that restored the Krishna Mandir. The conservation process lasted three years. On the second floor of Krishna Mandir, Surya Bahadur carved and replaced base stones, spending days climbing up and down a heavy scaffold. “I was scared because the stones were so large and heavy, but I wore a helmet and could do it using a chain pulley,” he recounts.



Indra Kaji Shilpakar works on a wooden strut of a temple.

Meet some of the people who worked to r

The Priestess

For hundreds of years, the relatives of Bandana Jha, 35 performed daily ritual puja at the temples in the square. When a priest who had performed puja for the Harishankar temple could not carry on, she and her mother-in-law took over. Every day starting at 4AM, Jha goes to the various temples in the neighbourhood. After completing the rituals at Krishna temple in the southern end of the square, she makes her way to Hari Shankar temple. She opens the door to the inner sanctum after cleaning off the dust

and popsicle sticks in form of it. In the center of the sanctum stands the impressive statue of Hari Shankar. The right half of the image, Shiva, is flanked by a smaller Uma Parvati, while the left half, Vishnu, is accompanied by Laxmi. It has been so well-repaired one can scarcely see the damage, but a replica image rests on a stone block below it. “God is in both”, she says, “but the old one is imperfect for worship.” She washes both the statues with water and lights an oil lamp, assembling rice, black sesame, unhusked grains of barley, red and

yellow powder, and orange and red petals. She scatters the petals and grains on the feet and then the heads of each image, marking the feet, navel, arms and head with vermilion powder. She rings the bell and recites the chants. Jha offers sweets and fruits and lights the incense. She ritually washes her face with the smoke, a blessing from the gods, and bows her head to the feet of each statue. She then returns home to make tea and have a meal with her mother-in-law, satisfied that the gods are fed and cared for till the next day.



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ING PATAN

ALL PHOTOS: THOMAS KELLY

to restore Patan after the 2015 earthquake

Harishankar Mandir

The Harishankar temple survived the earthquakes of 1809, 1833 and 1934, but the three-tiered shrine built in 1706 collapsed almost completely in 2015. The rebuilding involved sorting, documenting and repairing 2,000 parts. In 2017, the first storey temple ambulatory including columns, capitals and beams was test-assembled in KVPT's workshop, then disassembled and reassembled on the original plinth. In 2018 the second storey woodwork was installed and in 2019 the third storey was completed. 16 truckloads of yellow

mud topped by overlapping clay *jhingati* tiles were used to cover the roofs. Finally, metalsmiths Babu Ratna and Binod repaired and re-gilded the roof pinnacle. The reconstruction spanned four years and used 90% of the original recovered materials while improving seismic strength. The image of Harishankar was damaged diagonally at the waist during the earthquake. Local engineers, craftsmen and a team from University of Applied Arts, Vienna helped repair the one and a half-meter tall, eight armed manifestation of Vishnu (Hari) and

Shiva (Shankar), that stood in the sanctum of the temple. But local customs dictate that a broken statue cannot be worshipped. So it was Amar Shakya, master stone carver, who carefully sculpted out a replica with the help of a photograph. The temple priest gave the new statue life during a *homa* puja, a ritual of regeneration. Both the original and the new god reside together to receive worshippers in the temple's sanctum. Says Shakya: "I've looked hard at everything and it has inspired me in my profession."

Repoussé carvers

Brothers Rajendra and Rabindra Shakya learned metal work from their family when they were only children. Rabindra then went on to an arts university to continue his training. In their workshop, composed mostly of a series of metal sheds, images of deities and buddhas destined for monasteries all around the world are under creation. Their work involves drawing a design to a sheet of metal, setting it in pitch and hammering from

the backside (repoussé) and then setting it in pitch again before carving details with chisels. It is not sure yet if the next generation of this family will continue their metalwork tradition, but since four years the brothers have been training three boys of the Tamang ethnicity, all in their early twenties. "That these boys are interested to learn is so important for the future, or else our profession will not continue," says Rajendra.



A younger generation of artisans in Patan are preserving the repoussé craft.

Vishveshwara Mandir

Consecrated in 1627, the roofs of both the storeys of Vishveshwara Temple collapsed due to rain in 1989. The carved wooden columns on the temples first storey create what scholar Niels Gutschow calls a "virtual forest of sturdy pillars". In 2015, it was this timber structure that saved the temple when its brick walls collapsed. Now the brick masonry has been rebuilt and the precious columns have a steel skeleton to take the load. "Conserving doesn't mean you have to build from scratch," says Rohit Ranjitkar, who is critical of quick rebuilding efforts that take place without research and investigation. "People don't want to reuse old pieces. Most people don't understand the importance of saving material, the importance of things that are old." Unique to Newa brick construction is the use of *daci apa* brick, a type of exterior veneer brick that tapers towards the back, with the front face showing almost no

mortar. Behind it is an interior layer of low-fired brick called *ma apa*, and a core of rubble brick fills in the space between these outer and inner layers. Few people today retain the ancient skill of bricklaying. Bishwo Ram Suwal, 53, is a master mason who has worked with KVPT for 14 years. When he saw the square after the earthquake, the salvaged bricks carefully stacked in piles around the collapsed temples, he knew that although the task of rebuilding was daunting, it could be done. With collapsed temples, he simply started with the foundation and built upwards. Much harder was to repair walls that still stood but were fragile. In the process of repairing walls he came up with new ideas, such as a system of interlocking outer and inner bricks to make the walls more resilient long term. Says Suwal, "We are lucky to have the chance to work on these monuments, as they are the gift from our ancestors. In working on them we see their skill."



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EVENTS



Aerial Yoga Workshop
Head over for a fun aerial yoga workshop by Avata Wellness Center and build balance and strength.
24 September, 9.30-11.30am, Rs1,800, Gairidhara, (01) 4446358

Kid's Carnival
Accompany your children for a weekend of fun games, food and drinks as well as pottery at the Dashain edition of the Kid's Carnival.
24 September, 11am-5pm, Kyampa the Social Hub, Sanepa

The Labour of Making
Brenna K. Murphy will be presenting a short artist talk highlighting both old and new works at Siddhartha Art Gallery.
23 September, 3pm, Baber Mahal Revisited

INVITATION

Ink & Cello

Spiritual ink paintings & Bach Cello Suites

Jerome Edou
Franck Bernede

Taragaon Museum
Hyatt compound

Two days only
Friday Sept 30th-17:00 to 19:00
Saturday Oct 1st - 13:00 to 19:00

For info : Jerome 9801051006

Ink & Cello
'Ink & Cello' exhibition with artists Jerome Edou and Franck Bernede will feature spiritual ink paintings and Bach cello suites.
30Sept-1Oct, 5-7pm/1-7pm, Taragaon Musuem, 9801051006

DINING



Lhakpa's Chulo
Lhakpa's Chulo offers a variety of delicious Nepali and Continental cuisines. Might want to try their spinach and cheese momos, Thai red curry and even Chicken Parmigiana.
Jhamsikhel, (01)5542986

MUSIC

The Elements
Catch up with The Elements at Uptown this week and enjoy great food and beverages. Call to reserve seats.
24 September, 7pm onwards, (01) 5409070



Musical Night
Artists Jindabaad, Rachana Dahal and Try-Tone will be performing at Beers N' Cheers next week. Book tickets now.
30 September, 5pm onwards, (01) 5524860

Sunday Blues
Chill out with friends and live music from The Kathmandu Killers and Jaire Ganit this Sunday. Call for details.
25 September, 7pm onwards, Rs400-600, Beers N' Cheers, (01) 5524860



Music Classes
From bansuri, madal and tabla to piano, guitar, drum, bass, saxophone and violin, you can learn to play them all at Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory. Call for more details.
(01)5443554, 9813556945

Dasain Music Fest
Dasain Music festival will feature artists and bands including Neetesh Jung Kunwar, The Elements, Bartika Eam Rai, Swoopna Suman. Get tickets from Esewa, Khalti or Ticket Sansar.
1 October, Dashrath Rangashala, Tripureswor



Tasneem King's Kitchen
From slow-cooked Dum Biryani to traditional 10-course Bohra Thalis, Tasneem is a place that brings foodies all over together.
Jhamsikhel, 9801121212

The Chocolate Room
Enter a world of chocolate cupcakes, decadent brownies and chocolate of every size and shape. Between the chocolate, try the Peri Peri fries and milk shake.
Jhamsikhel, 9851056096

GETAWAY

The Little House
A quaint stay in the middle of green rice fields, The Little House stands for beautiful views, relaxing walks and scrumptious food.
Khokana, 9841370022

Royal Mustang
Set in the backdrop of glittering white mountains, a field of flowers and typically clear skies, Royal Mustang Resort stands like a mirage amidst Nepal's arid lands.
Lo Manthang, 9746707045



Temple Tree Resort & Spa
A peaceful place to stay, complete with a swimming pool, massage parlour and sauna. One will find it hard to leave once everything is done and said.
Gaurighat, Pokhara, (61)465819

Namo Buddha Resort
Made in traditional Newa style and surrounded by lush greenery, the resort is an oasis of peace and tranquility, offering spectacular views of the Himalayas on clear days.
Namo Buddha, Phulbari, 9851106802



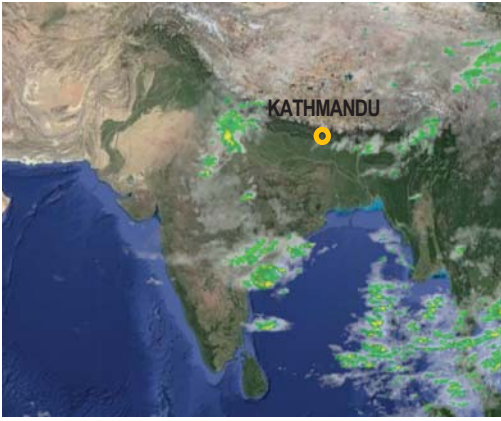
Sapana Village Resort
Experience the rich Tharu and Chepang culture, marvel at the beauty of the lush national park, witness elephants lumbering through the forests and getaway to the heart of Sauraha.
Sauraha, Chitwan, (56) 580308

Red Mud Coffee
The perfect place to grab some coffee, sandwiches and one of the best chicken sizzlers with friends.
Thapathali, (01) 4483697



Sam's One Tree Cafe
For lively atmosphere, tempting sizzlers and quick service, be sure to visit this café. Its murals have also made it to numerous social media posts and stories.
Darbar Marg, (01) 4222636

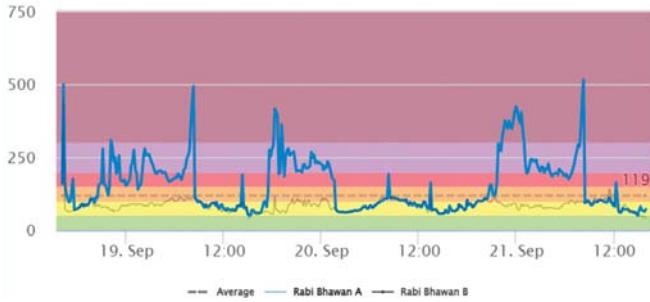
WEEKEND WEATHER



Nearing the end
We are now in the third week of September, and from the looks of the pressure charts for the north of the Subcontinent, the monsoon will be off and on till 5 October. The showers will not be as heavy or widespread, but it does look like the jet stream is taking its time to move southwards to chase the monsoon front back to the Bay of Bengal where it came from. Expect afternoon buildup with localised thunderstorms, though. There may also be destructive downpours in areas where the monsoon is blocked by fresh westerlies, as happened in Achham last week.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
27° 19°	27° 19°	26° 18°

AIR QUALITY INDEX



The Air Quality Index for Kathmandu Valley continues to show the pattern we have observed throughout the monsoon with high concentrations of particulates along the Ring Road, especially on the western side where there is the heaviest traffic with heavy vehicles. The fresh afternoon breeze does clear the pollutants from the city centre, and we are already seeing signs of early morning poor AQI at surface level. The purpleair.com graphs above shows Rabi Bhavan registering a hazardous >500 AQI on Wednesday morning.

OUR PICK



With production for season 4 of the Emmy award winning satirical black comedy-drama underway, catch up with billionaire Logan Roy and his four children as they backstab and betray each other for piece of the family's media business. Power, politics, money is at play in 'Succession' starring Brian Cox, Jeremy Strong, Alan Ruck, Sarah Snook and Kieran Culkin.

बाढीपहिरोबाट जोगिन

- जथाभावी सडक निर्माण र वन विनाशले बाढीपहिरो निम्त्याउछ।
 - वृक्षारोपण गरौं, वनजंगल जोगाऔं, बाढीपहिरो नियन्त्रण गरौं।
 - पहिरोको जोखिम भएका क्षेत्र तथा नदी किनारमा रुख, बाँस, निगालोजस्ता भु-क्षय रोक्ने खालका विरुवा रोपौं र संरक्षण गरौं।
 - आफ्नो बस्ती तथा समुदायको रक्षा गरौं।
 - बाढी तथा पहिरो गएको सूचना तल्लो तटीय क्षेत्रमा दिऔं।
- आफु पनि बचौं अरुलाई पनि बचाऔं।



नेपाल सरकार
विज्ञापन बोर्ड

#SERIOUSABOUTBEER

WE PUT SERIOUS HOURS IN
YOUR HAPPY HOUR.

Drink responsibly

This is the 14th instalment of **Diaspora Diaries**, a regular series in *Nepali Times* with stories of Nepalis living and working abroad.

I went to Qatar in 2003 with a singular goal — to earn enough so I could be well established when I returned to Nepal.

For someone from my background, that was an ambitious goal, since I had grown up with nothing. I lost my mother when I was three years old. Three of my siblings were scattered across families after my father remarried.

My maternal grandmother who lived in Okhaldhunga took me in, and I was told that she picked me because my face closely resembled my mother's. Perhaps it gave her some semblance of having her daughter close by.

Later, I was sent to stay with my uncle in Kathmandu. Their son was very young, and I could take care of him while also attending school there. You could call it a win-win situation.

Or at least that was how all the adults justified this move to themselves. Deep inside, though, a part of me still hurts because I know that I never had anyone to really call my own who was looking out for me selflessly.

After finishing my SLC, I took diploma training in automobile maintenance. With this course, my ultimate goal was to get a job abroad. And before long in 2003, at age 19, I found myself on a plane to Qatar for my first real job. I would spend the next nine years there.

I worked at a store selling automobile parts, and was lucky because it was an indoor job, with AC. Even when I spent a few minutes outside, whether it was to install a car part, or to walk the short distance from where the company bus dropped us off to my room, I would be drenched in sweat.

I was grateful I did not have to work outdoors in that desert heat. I had heard of other workers in labour intensive jobs outside, who toiled in the scorching heat,



destroyed their health and used up all their savings after returning just to pay medical bills.

My singular focus was to earn. So I worked hard, did not take more than one day off a month. I took all the overtime I could, even in the evenings or weekends. Earning more was like being addicted to drugs. I pushed myself to work harder so I could meet my savings target.

When I first went to Qatar, my basic salary was 700 riyal and by the time I left, it was 2,500 riyal. I was happy. Back then I used to feel lucky for being paid for overtime, but I had not realised that I was being ripped off. Overtime hours, as per the law, require you to be paid higher than your normal wages, which I was not. No one told me about this rule.

There were 12 people in my room when I first started out, all sleeping on triple decker beds. I am glad I did not have the upper bunk because my roommate used to

complain how it always felt like there was an earthquake every time someone below him moved even slightly.

As I moved up in my job, I had fewer roommates. In retrospect, we would be so tired after a long day at work that we would just pass out and be oblivious to the fact that we were in a crowded room with a dozen people, or be put off by the lack of hygiene and privacy.

I tried not to be bothered by the inconvenience because I wanted to go back to Nepal the minute I had earned enough. Qatar was never home, and I never tried to make it one either.

I did not join diaspora groups, I did not travel around much, and I kept my circle small. A local customer who had tried to haggle about the cost of a motor part once rudely reminded me, “Your only identity, proof of existence here is your passport. If we destroy it, you are non-existent.”



The worldliness of an overtime worker

"Abroad, my sole focus was to earn enough. Here in Nepal, I think beyond myself in my work."

That threat still rings in my ears. They tried to use their power over us to keep us in our place. My only consolation was that this was a transient sacrifice that would pay in the long run.

And it did get me to a better place. Back in the 2000s property prices in Kathmandu were cheaper. I put all my money in land, and that value has now multiplied 30 times. There is a crop of us early migrant workers who really lucked out investing in land in Kathmandu.

Others who did not prioritise savings, were unable to save due to their personal finances, or those who chose to put their money in the bank, did not benefit much. The newer ones do not have the same option as I did, since land prices in Kathmandu have soared. So, I do consider myself lucky as I have managed to break out of the poverty that I was born into, and my children will now be all right.

Aside from investing in land, I also tried to start a motorcycle workshop, a tomato farm and a furniture store. But these businesses failed for one reason or another.

My last resort has been to take a loan to buy a car, and drive people



DIASPORA
DIARIES 14

around based on referrals and contacts with car rental companies. This has been surprisingly more lucrative than anything else I have ventured.

It is different working in Nepal, since there

is a greater sense of pride in my job. I like telling tourists whom I drive around about Nepal, and give them a good experience — not just so I get a good referral, but also because I want them to have a good impression about my country.

Working in Nepal, I think beyond myself. In a foreign land, my narrow focus was to just earn and leave as soon as I could. Nothing else mattered, there was no sense of attachment to the place.

Perhaps that is why, when I left Qatar after spending nine long years after being sure that I could finally make it on my own in Nepal, I did so without remorse or nostalgia. 🇳🇵

Translated from a conversation in Nepali.

Diaspora Diaries is a regular column in Nepali Times providing a platform for Nepalis to share their experiences of living, working, studying abroad. Authentic and original entries can be sent to editors@nepalitimes.com with 'Diaspora Diaries in the subject line.

“Pay Qatar’s World Cup workers”

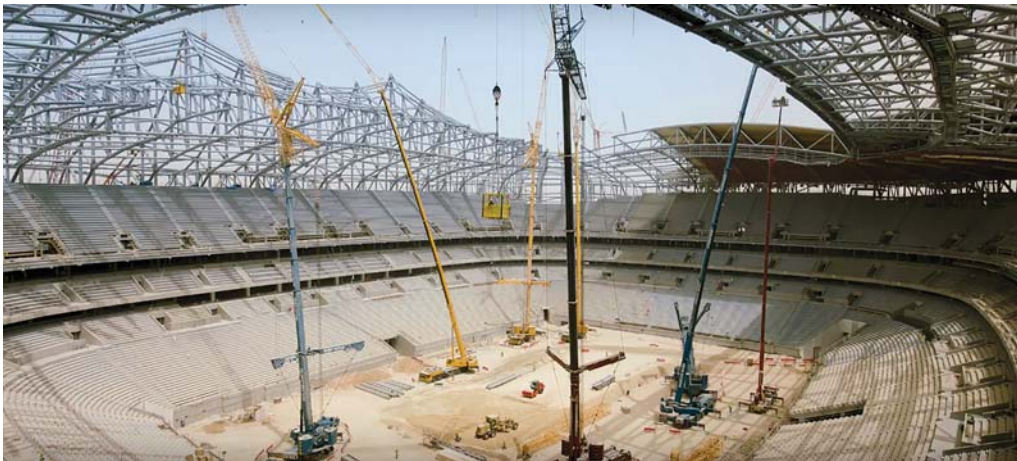
With two-month to go for the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar, human rights groups have urged FIFA’s sponsors to compensate workers involved in building stadiums and other infrastructure.

The eight stadiums where the games will be held are built with the blood, sweat and tears of tens of thousands of migrant workers, including from Nepal. Many migrants have suffered injuries or lost lives to unexplained causes, and many more have been victims of wage theft and illegal recruitment fees.

On 20 September, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and FairSquare called on all of FIFA’s corporate partners and sponsors of the World Cup to press the football association and the Qatari government to compensate migrant workers and their families who suffered while preparing for the tournament.

This call, uniting players, fans, workers and activists, comes as a new global opinion poll shows that 66% of those surveyed, and 72% of those likely to watch at least one World Cup match, said that corporate partners and sponsors should publicly call on FIFA to compensate workers.

The poll was commissioned by Amnesty International, carried out by YouGov, and surveyed 17,477 adults in 15 countries including Argentina, Germany, Kenya,



Mexico, Morocco, UK and the USA.

Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and FairSquare wrote to FIFA’s 14 corporate partners and World Cup Sponsors in July, urging them to call on the football body to compensate workers whose wages were stolen, who were injured, and to families of those who died building stadiums and hotels, roads and the metro rail necessary for the world’s largest sporting event.

Four partners — ABInBev/Budweiser, Adidas, Coca-Cola and McDonald’s — have stated their support for financial

compensation and to explore how best to build upon the progress being made in Qatar to further expand access to effective remedies for migrant workers.

The other ten, including Visa, Hyundai-Kia and Qatar Airways, have offered no public support and have not responded to written requests to discuss tournament-related abuses, despite their policies to respect human rights and environmental, social, and governance standards in their operations and business relationships, says the statement.

“Brands buy rights to sponsor the World Cup because they want to be associated

with joy, fair competition and spectacular human achievement on the playing field — not rampant wage theft and the deaths of workers who made the World Cup possible,” says Minky Worden, director of global initiatives at Human Rights Watch (HRW).

But with only two months until the tournament, she adds sponsors should use their considerable leverage to press FIFA and Qatari authorities to fulfill their human rights responsibilities. FIFA has not yet committed to remedy abuses maintaining that it is still considering the proposal.

Compensation can have far-reaching benefits to migrant workers and their families. To this effect, rights groups are calling on FIFA and Qatar to reserve an amount at least equivalent to the US\$440 million prize money provided to teams participating in the tournament that can be invested to compensate workers and to improve their protections.

“There is nothing Qatar nor FIFA could ever do to make up for the loss of a loved one,” says Nick McGeehan, a founding director of FairSquare, which investigates migrant labour abuses. “But financial compensation to struggling families for migrant worker deaths could provide some financial respite and potentially reduce lasting harm.” 🇳🇵



PHOTOS: SUMAN NEPALI



COSPLAYING IN K'MANDU

Fan conventions give Nepali pop culture enthusiasts space to express themselves

● Shristi Karki

Suki Manandhar grew up watching anime and cartoons and reading manga whenever she could get her hands on them. *Pokemon*, *Digimon*, *Dragon Ball Z*, *Haibane Renmei* brought her joy and comfort. Back then, Manandhar wished she could dress like the characters she saw on screen. She would sometimes engage in ‘closet cosplay’, making costumes and dressing like anime characters and sharing those with fellow anime fans in online forums. “The stuff that was said to have been targeted towards children

addressed issues like mental health, what it means to have important people in your life and for them to leave,” says Manandhar. “I had no idea what they meant when I was a child, but I appreciate them more when I watch them now.” Cosplay, a portmanteau of costume and play, is an art form in which artists dress and accessorise as characters from across pop culture — anime, cartoons, comic books, video games, and other sources from tv and movies. Although masquerade balls, carnivals and pageants where people dressed up in costumes have been commonplace since the 15th century, cosplay in mainstream media and art emerged out of fan

culture through science fiction conventions in the 20th century. Rohit Shrestha started watching anime when he was in 8th grade, began cosplaying in 2014, and is among the earliest cosplayers in Nepal. He is now one of the organisers of Otaku Jatra, Nepal’s largest pop culture convention which was held on 17 September this year. Back in 2013, Shrestha and like-minded enthusiasts used to get together and hang out every Saturday at the anime store owned and operated by fellow anime fan Wataru Oikawa Shrestha. Realising that there was a growing community of pop culture fans in Nepal, their collective Otaku Club joined hands with another

collective, Otaku Next — which used to publish its Nepali manga magazine— to host a small-scale pop culture events which made its way into smaller pop-up events, fanart and cosplay competitions, and exhibitions. In 2014, when she heard about the Otaku event, Suki Manandhar made her own costume and went as Taiga from the anime *Toradora!*. The 26-year-old communications officer has been to many conventions since but recalls dressing up as Mikasa Ackerman from *Attack on Titan* as one of her most memorable cosplays. Depending on the characters, she spends as much as five months creating intricate costumes. Kriti Chamling Rai began cosplaying in 2016 after she and her friends visited the Otaku Store, where they met organisers who informed them of an upcoming convention. She started with characters that did not require complex props or detailed costumes, deciding to go as Tenten from *Naruto*. Rai’s cosplay as Saber from the Japanese visual novel *Fate/stay the night*, which she worked on for three months would win her the 2nd prize at Comic Con Nepal 2017 and take her to New Delhi to represent the country. Back in Nepal, Otaku Jatra finally hosted a large-scale convention — a jatra— in 2017. It has now branched out to India and approached content creators across South Asia to participate in events in Nepal with the plan to turn the country into a mecca for pop culture fans in the Subcontinent. “We have mountaineering and adventure tourism. Why not pop-culture tourism?” says Rohit Shrestha. “It’s going to take a long time to get there, but it’s a hustle.” The collective is also looking into ways to expand its digital platform in order to help artists and

content creators make their hobbies profitable. Conventions like Otaku Jatra have also provided them with a space to showcase their work — be it cosplay itself, animation, or other forms of art. Additionally, the collective hopes to expand Nepali pop culture itself. One of its most recent undertakings is the ‘Jataverse’, a digital universe through which they plan to introduce and incorporate characters from Nepali folklore and mythology — like the Yeti, *Pisach*, and *Kichkandi* — into their artform. In 2017, Otaku Jatra took their display of cosplay to Nyatapola, which people mistook for Gaijatra. But the history of Gaijatra —which can be considered a form of cosplay, muses Shrestha — might make it easier for Nepalis to reconcile with an art form like cosplay because there is already a similar history of dressing up and expressing oneself through costumes in Nepal. But all of this has to be done in a culturally sensitive manner, Shrestha adds. The cosplay community across the world also has had to confront racism, misogyny, harassment, and homophobia. In Nepal, cosplayers say they have faced sexism and body shaming, as well as some degree of ignorance and active pushback when artists have tried to speak out. “Cosplay is not consent,” Shrestha says, echoing the phrase meant to convey the anti-harassment policy at the New York Comic Con in 2014 that later led to a larger movement against the harassment of female cosplayers within the global cosplay community. Says Suki Manandhar: “This is a community where you can be anything regardless of who you are. I have met a lot of people who have chosen to be kind, understand consent, and stand up for each other.” 🇳🇵

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PEAK CLIMBING SEASON

Pandemic backlog and Netflix help revive autumn mountaineering season in Nepal

A record number of climbers are attempting Nepal's Himalayan peaks this autumn, and the renewed interest is due to a two year backlog of expeditions cancelled during the pandemic as well as two Netflix films.

Many first-time mountaineers and trekkers appear to have been drawn to climb in Nepal after watching the globally popular Netflix documentary *14 Peaks: Nothing Is Impossible*, which follows Nims Purja's ascent of the world's highest 8,000m peaks. Also popular was the French language animation, *Le sommet des dieux*, about a fictional Japanese climber on Everest searching for Mallory.

Purja climbed 14 eight-thousanders in Nepal, Pakistan and China in 2019 within a span of 6 months and 6 days, smashing the previous record by a South Korean climber of over 7 years.

However, the ex-British Gurkha

commando's climb of Manaslu has been questioned because he supposedly only reached a fore-peak, although Purja did return to stand on the true summit last autumn. Most climbers have stopped a few metres short of the main peak because of its dangerous knife-edge ridge (*see box*).

Purja is back on Manaslu this season and hurt himself

while trying to take off on his paraglider on Monday. He was flown by helicopter to hospital in Kathmandu for x-rays and has returned to the mountain.

Manaslu, at 8,163m, is by far the most popular mountain this season in the Nepal Himalaya, with over 400 climbing permits issued. There are another 400 Nepali high-altitude guides from over 15

expeditions on the mountain.

Most expeditions helicopter to Samagaon and trek up to Base Camp located on a broad moraine at 5,850m. This has raised concern that the lodges along the Budi Gandaki trail, that were hit by the pandemic collapse of tourism, have not been able to benefit from the revival of trekking and mountaineering.

The reason for Manaslu's popularity is that the route to the top is not technical, except for the last bit to the true summit and avalanche risk between Camp 2 and 3. Which is why it is the preferred 'acclimatisation peak' for those preparing to climb Mt Everest. Cho Oyu (8,201m) used to be the other eight-thousander popular for acclimatisation, but its easier



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