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HOUSE OF CARDS

GOPEN RAI

● **Sonia Awale**

Right after Tihar, Nepalis will be preparing for yet another national festival – elections. Five years after 2017, the dominant feature this time is that Nepalis have to choose between two coalition clusters that are devoid of ideology and principle.

Despite some independent candidates, the election will most likely just reshuffle the deck of cards, since superannuated leaders have forged opportunistic alliances to guarantee that none of them lose.

Less than 10% of election hopefuls are women. This election is even less inclusive than in 2017. The PR system was supposed to bring under-represented communities to the fore, but parties nominated first lady Arzu Rana Deuba, and former Maoist house speaker accused of rape Krishna Bahadur Mahara. Ek Nath Dhakal whose Paribar Party is supported by Korea's Unification Church is top on the UML's PR list.

"Our parliamentary process has been subverted and distorted by politicians," said Surya Prasad Shrestha, former chief election

commissioner at a discussion in Patan on Wednesday. "A bad election can lead to the collapse of a democratic system itself. Voting is an exercise of one's conscience and that right should not be tampered."

In a democracy, an election should be a way of rewarding performance. It is supposed to weed out the inefficient and dishonest, and select the best managers to run the country for a given period.

A front page reportage this week in Nepal's most influential daily, *Kantipur*, pointed out that despite Sher Bahadur Deuba being prime minister for most of the past 25 years, his home district of Dadeldhura still ranks 50 out of 77 districts in human development, its average life expectancy is much lower than the national average.

It is such neglect, apathy and lack of accountability that elections are designed to rectify. But the ruling class has rigged the system with alliances and coalitions so that the same tried, tested and failed leaders get voted repeatedly.

The run-up to this election has been marked by make-up, break-

up politics. Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal has for the past decade swung like a pendulum to keep himself relevant. He is now allied with Deuba, but it is difficult to tell who is using whom -- and what kind of secret leadership deal they have post-polls.

Dahal is also once again chummy with former comrade-in-arms turned nemesis Baburam Bhattarai with whom he has swapped Gorkha-2 constituency in exchange for Maoist support for his daughter Manushi contesting from Kathmandu-7. There are indeed no

permanent friends or foes in politics.

"We need a credible election that reflects the will of the people. Democracy should be 'by' the people not 'buy' the people," quipped

advocate Dinesh Tripathi. "This is a choice-less, agenda-less election. We have coalitions and alliances with no common program. One party's chair is another party's candidate. This is anarchy, a farce, a fraud on the people, a hijacking of the public space."

At least a dozen of Nepal's richest men and businessmen are

standing for direct elections. When election wins are not determined by track record and party pledges, Nepal's governance and inclusive development will suffer for another five years. The only ray of hope is that independents make up 37% of candidates, and there are rebel candidates standing against their own party's nominees.

Nepalis will mark Tihar next week with all-night card games, but a month from now they will be gambling in elections for a better future. 🇳🇵

GAMBLING WITH OUR FUTURE
EDITORIAL PAGE 2

Nepali Times Wishes Readers Happy Tihar, Chhath and ढूँढ्या भिंतुना ११४३

Because of the holidays there will be no print edition of the paper on Friday 28 October. The next hard copy issue of *Nepali Times* will be on 4 November, 2021. Visit nepalitimes.com for daily updates and original multimedia content.

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HAPPY TIHAR

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KATHMANDU'S STREET-SMART DOGS

The festival celebrating our best friends should inspire more compassion towards all animals great and small

● Sonia Awale

It is that time of the year again when we Nepalis worship various members of the animal kingdom. Cows and crows, bulls and dogs — all have a day next week dedicated to them.

So it is ironic that the very evening they are worshipped (this year Kukur Tihar is on 24 October), we scare the bejesus out of dogs with firecrackers. Our furry friends are traumatised, some travelling great distances to escape the noise. There have been stories of dogs that never make it back to their homes.

“We have a really wrong practice going on here, we worship dogs in the morning and frighten them at night,” says animal rights activist Sneha Shrestha who works with Sneha's Care, which shelters homeless and abandoned animals from the streets of Kathmandu.

Shrestha has 14 rescue dogs in her shelter and says that every time there is a loud wedding party in the neighbourhood, they are terrified.

“Tihar is the worst because of the explosions of firecrackers, sometimes dogs which are out in the open without protection get heart attacks,” Shrestha adds.

Kukur Tihar is one of the most

unique festivals in the world, and international documentaries have been made on the Nepali reverence for dogs. It has inspired 'Kukur Tihar Mexico' the same week as in Nepal. The least we can do, therefore, is to be kind to the dogs we venerate.

The good news is that more Nepali families are now inclined towards keeping dogs and letting their children grow up with pets, instilling in them virtues of kindness and compassion towards all living beings from a young age.

However, the way Nepalis treat strays and community dogs can be very different from pets at home. Dogs on the streets do not necessarily belong to individuals, but are part of the communities that they guard in return for food and (sometimes) lodgings.

But there have been horrific incidences of animal cruelty towards community dogs, including poisoning by city authorities in the name of culling populations, or preventing the spread of rabies. Animal welfare groups estimate that there are over 100,000 dogs that live on the streets of Kathmandu Valley alone.

Families are now increasingly



buying pups from kennels as a status symbols, and an informal survey showed that Huskies have overtaken Golden Labs and German Sheperds in popularity. However, there are still very few who adopt rescued street dogs from shelters.

“Getting a dog is still very much tied with our vanity. If we are really looking to love them, the breed would not matter,” says Shrestha. “In fact, if we Nepalis claim to be proud of our heritage and ancestry, we should be

adopting more of our local breeds, they are not inferior to pure breeds in any way.”

Indeed, animal rights groups are promoting better treatment and welfare of strays and community dogs as well as providing them with

prabhu BANK



BYD launch

Cimex, authorised distributor of BYD Auto Industry, launched a showroom for the new BYD Atto 3 Electric SUV in Naxal. The Atto 3 comes with a blade battery technology and leading safety levels.

Swiss delegation

The head of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation Patricia Danzi visited Nepal this week to inspect development projects and discuss future cooperation. The delegation also included South Asia head Barbara Boni and visited Province 1 to assess Nepal's federal mechanism.

NPR USD

The Nepali rupee continued its steep fall against the US dollar, reaching its lowest level so far: NPR 133.14 to 1 USD. This follows a worldwide trend of a strong dollar, but for Nepal it follows the weakening INR which fell to 83.09 for 1 USD on Wednesday. With the US treasury keeping interest rates high, the trend is expected to continue.

Norway aid

The Director General of the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation Bård Vegar Solhjell visited Nepal and India this week, during which he met various government and civil society stakeholders. He also visited Norwegian-aided projects including Kathmandu University and Hydrolab, accompanied by Norwegian Ambassador Torun Dramdal.



Nepal Italy trade

Nepal-Italy Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NICCI) held a meeting to discuss investing in businesses in Nepal. Italian Ambassador Vincenzo De Luca announced a trade fair for Italian brands and products. NICCI plans to make Nepal a part of the 2030 Expo in Rome and the 2023 Milan Trade Fair.



Bosch Nepal

BSH Home Appliances have been launched in Nepal for the first time by Laxmi Electro Tech with products like refrigerators, washing machines, dryers, dishwashers and food processors at the Kathmandu store.

Daraz Club

Daraz Club allows customers to receive higher gems redemption, boosted rewards and vouchers. Customers will have to collect 2500 gems by the end of 2022 to join the club.



Norvic mental health

Norvic hospital brought clinical psychologist Ira Naeem to talk about integrating mental health into primary care and prioritising mental health with the same scale as physical healthy for a healthy body.



Global IME trees

Global IME Bank and Tribhuvan University collaborated to plant trees in the campus and Ayurvedic Hospital area to give the open space some greenery.



GOPEN RAI

loving families with the slogan: "Adopt, don't shop."

Animal shelters and welfare organisations as well as individual young rescuers have been crucial in spreading the message, primarily through social media. Influencers and celebrities with hundreds of thousands of followers could do more by adopting strays and setting a good example.

The Nepali street dog is now recognised as a breed of its own and its DNA has been traced to the first domesticated dog. A 2015 genetic

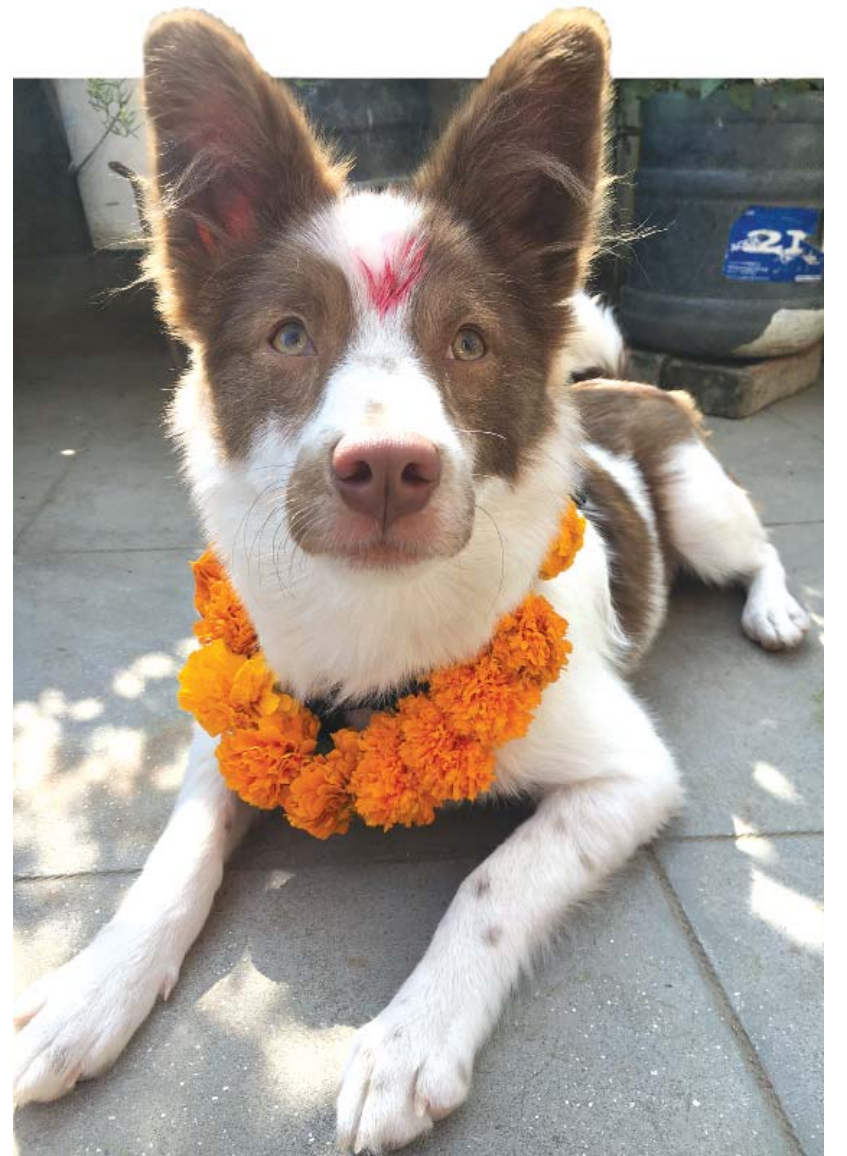
study published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* said there was strong evidence to show dogs were first domesticated in modern-day Nepal, Tibet, and Mongolia at least 15,000 years ago. They evolved from Eurasian grey wolves and moved with pre-historic human migration across Asia.

Local Nepali mixed breeds are exceptionally loyal and, because they are less prone to congenital diseases, are usually healthier and have longer lifespans than inbred

pure breeds. They are street-smart, obedient, and respond to rewards. Not surprisingly, therefore, there is an increasing demand for Nepali street dogs to be adopted abroad.

"Nepalis prefer pure breeds, but Westerners have recognised the value of these often unloved street dogs here," notes Lesley Mapstone of Temple Dog Rescue in Canada who supports animal welfare organisations in Nepal.

She adds: "Local Nepali breeds are unique and rare, they are friendlier because they already have



SONIAAWALE

a social structure, they are also more sociable and get along with people because they have grown up on the streets, and they are also already well trained. What's there not to love?"

Mapstone has been to Nepal nine times since 2017 and spends nearly half a year in the country helping to promote the adoption of several Nepali stray dogs, primarily to Canada. At the moment, however, there is a temporary ban on their transport due to irregular vaccination status.

Vaccination of dogs against rabies has long been neglected by municipalities and local governments. Animal welfare organisations like Sneha's Care, KAT Centre, and Street Dog Care are now helping municipalities like Lalitpur to spay and manage community dogs.

Rabies is a problem, but instead of vaccinating canines, towns across Nepal often resort to exterminating dogs when there is an outbreak.

"We are always ready to lend our technical expertise to the

government, but they are least bothered," reports Sneha Shrestha, recalling one time when she asked officials for 10,000 doses of rabies vaccines for the dogs, only to be given 500.

Nepal needs to increase domestic manufacture of anti-rabies vaccines if it is to meet the WHO target of eliminating rabies by 2030. But, says Shrestha, "At the current rate, it is looking impossible."

Perhaps it is not surprising that a government that neglects public health concerns of its human citizens would also treat animals so poorly. But the compassion a nation shows its animal population is often an indicator of how it treats its people.

Lesley Mapstone says: "For me, the most favourite part of Nepal are street dogs, aside from human Nepalis. My humble request to everyone: if you are really looking to get a dog, to love and protect them for life, adopt a local dog. And be kind to them."

She could have added: Be kind to them every day, not just on Kukur Tihar. 🇳🇵

Zombie Apocalypse Halloween Party

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KATHMANDU



One of the oldest Buddhist monasteries in Patan is I-Baha Bahi. Official records date it to 1418 CE, but its history goes back millennia.

The two-storey structure with a finial on top in Patan is located along the holy route of the annual Machhindranath chariot procession, and is also known as Rajashri Mahavihar or Singha Varna Mahavihar.

Guarded by two large stone lions at the entrance, the *vihar* retains much of its original mud, brick and wood structure, which was renovated in 1995 with support from the Nippon Institute of Technology of Japan.

Daily rituals are performed in the mornings and evenings by initiated members of the *sangha* who take turns every month. Rajashri Mahavihar also used to host the grand *Bahidyō Bwoyego* festival every year when sacred paintings, artefacts and statues of the gods used to be brought out for display during the holy month of Gunla in August.

But one day in 1970 when *sangha* members were busy preparing for the ritual, they discovered that the sacred treasury above the main shrine had been broken into the

night before, and the gods had been stolen. No written record existed of what was lost: there were only the memories of elders and caretakers.

The Jesuit scholar John K Locke in his 1985 book *Buddhist Monasteries of Nepal: Survey of Bahas and Bahis of Kathmandu Valley* writes: "The bahi originally had quite a collection of old wood and terracotta images but most of these have disappeared in the last ten years and what remains is thrown in a corner near the entrance, damaged and unattended."

Then, in 2015, a colour photograph was discovered. It was taken in 1969 by scholar Mary Slusser and published in her article *Conservation Notes on Some Nepalese Paintings* published in 2003.

In the picture, five large wooden sculptures can be seen, along with four empty pedestals. Two other pedestals that had small miniature sculptures which did not belong there originally were also in the photo.

This image was the starting point in our long saga of tracking down the sacred objects

stolen from the Rajashri Mahavihar in 1970: three *Nrityadevi* images, one Chintamani Lokeshwar, and one standing Tara.

We showed Slusser's photo to 84-year-old Saraswati Tamrakar who lives just behind the *vihar* in Patan. She told us: "The deities used to be displayed on the ground floor during Gunla and the corridors would be filled with different gods. It was a sight to see."

Using Slusser's *in situ* photograph, we at Lost Arts of Nepal began our investigation, scouring auction sales, private collections and museums across the globe.

Eventually, the Chintamani Lokeshwar (N°4, pictured above, right) was traced to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), but the picture in the database of the collection did not match the one in Slusser's photograph. The Lokeshwar in her picture held a tree branch with the proper-left hand while the deity in the museum's catalogue held it in its proper-right hand. The statue had been donated to LACMA by Anna Bing Arnold in 1984.

We thought the Lokeshwar in the photograph in Slusser's book and LACMA

could have been part of a pair. We posted the photograph online, titled 'Lost Twins' in March 2018 to get some response from the museum.

Photographs from the University of Michigan Archives taken in 1988 of the LACMA collection were then discovered. Among these was another picture of the same Lokeshwar which matched perfectly with Slusser's picture. The photograph on the museum website turned out to be a mirror image, and LACMA later corrected it on its website.

Meanwhile, the search for the three *Nrityadevi* took us to the Metropolitan Museum of Art (The Met) in New York. This is a rare and unique subject in Nepal's religious iconography, so it was easy to identify. One of the three from Slusser's photo was a perfect match for an image in The Met catalogue, complete with a broken proper-left hand (N°5). The statue came to The Met collection from the Zimmerman family in 2016.

Another *Nrityadevi* (N°3) was discovered



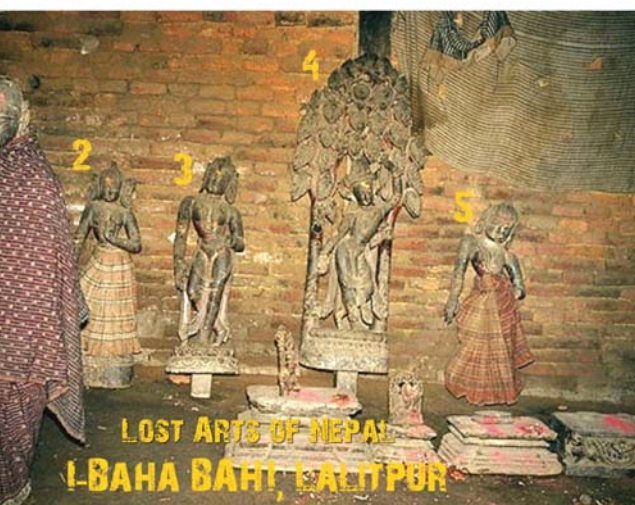


ALL PHOTOS: LOST ARTS OF NEPAL

FAITH STOLEN

Lost in Nepal, found in America

How Lost Arts of Nepal traced gods looted half-a-century ago from a 15th century monastery in Kathmandu to American museums



HOUSE OF THE MISSING GODS:

(Clockwise from top) The exterior of I-Baha Bahi in Patan, more popularly known as Rajashri Mahavihar.

Match made by Lost Arts with one of the two photographs taken by Mary Slusser at the vihar which she wrongfully attributed to Yampi Mahavihar near the northern Ashok Stupa in Patan.

Colour in situ photograph by Slusser of the three Nrityadevi, one Chintamani Lokeshwar and standing Tara with their matches in the collections of several US museums.

Amoghapasa Lokeshwar and Dipankar Buddhas on display in I-Baha Bahi.

vanished in the night. They would go to temples for morning worship, and the deity would be gone. The gods that were supposed to protect communities, needed protection themselves.

Over three decades, Kathmandu Valley was plundered, often with the connivance of local authorities, to meet the demand of art connoisseurs in the West. The gods that remain are still being stolen to this day. But, unlike Grecian or Roman antiquities, these were not museum pieces, but represented the faith, identity and way of life of a vibrant culture that lives today.

Many of the stolen objects were too big to be smuggled out in a suitcase. How could they have crossed borders, passed through customs and ended up in museums in America, Europe or Australia? It would not have been possible without the involvement of an organised art trafficking ring.

It was pure luck that Mary Slusser's photograph was found. All five artefacts in it have been now identified and tracked to museums in America. According to the Department of Archaeology, 93 stolen gods have been returned so far, but the work does not end there: the gods need to be returned to Nepal and reinstated to their original shrines.

Many stolen deities have been replaced with replicas, but for the communities it is not the same. They were a consecrated part of a much larger culture that lives and breathes, and their return can help us understand the legacy left by our ancestors.

One day, at I-Baha Bahi, the gods will all be on display again for the *Bahidy Bwoyegu* during the holy month of Gunla.

This piece was written by Lost Arts of Nepal, an anonymously-run social media campaign dedicated to locating and assisting in repatriation of stolen gods of Nepal from museums and collection abroad. Begun formally in August 2015 as an awareness initiative, Lost Arts have succeeded in locating over 50 stolen artefacts.

in 2019 when it was announced as an item for sale at the Bonham's Auction in New York. It had been acquired in New York in 1982 and was part of a private collection in Florida of an individual who had once served as a diplomat to Nepal. Their identity has been kept anonymous as they are willing to repatriate the statue to Nepal.

The standing Tara (N°1) was then located at the Art Institute of Chicago. This was a tough one to match, since in Slusser's photograph it was wrapped in ceremonial garb with only its head and unique facial expression visible. The statue was gifted by a prominent collector of Himalayan art, Marilyn B Alsdorf, to the Institute in 2014.

The Alsdorf collection had other stolen Nepali artefacts, and many of them still remain at the Art Institute, including the Taleju necklace dating back to the 12th century CE from Hanuman Dhoka, stolen 46 years ago.

The last remaining Nrityadevi (N°2) was

tracked to the Philadelphia Museum of Art. It had been purchased by the museum with the Stella Kramrisch Fund – named after another prominent scholar of Nepali art – in 2000.

Ever since the deities were stolen 52 years ago, Gunla at the I-Baha Bahi has been a forlorn affair, and *sangha* members feel orphaned. Chaturatna Shakya of Patan remembers another instance in the 1980s when a large gilt copper image of the main deity of the *vihar*, Ashobhya, was stolen from the sanctum sanctorum at midnight.

Another witness, Kanchha Shakya remembers, "There must have been more than 10 people. It was a heavy object, and the thieves had to drag it across the floor and down the steps to a waiting vehicle, leaving behind marks all along the way."

A police report was filed in the morning, but the culprits were never found. Instead, police interrogated *sangha* members, suspecting them of foul play, and to deter them from pursuing the matter. Many first-hand witnesses from the time have now died. Only stories and rumours remain, but a new

generation is eager to know the whereabouts of the gods of their ancestors, and want them returned.

Besides the photograph of the five statues from I-Baha Bahi, Slusser took two more photographs around the same period, wrongly attributing them to Yampi Mahavihar near the northern Ashok Stupa in Patan. The wooden fragments, multiple wooden pedestals, and broken limbs in the photos are actually from I-Baha Bahi.

When Nepal opened up to the outside world, and the first visitors started arriving, observation and curiosity about Kathmandu's 'exotic' culture eventually led to the objectification of spirituality. Statues of deities and sacred items that were still being actively worshipped were reduced to *objets d'art* on shopping lists.

It signified a sense of superiority, a status symbol for Western museums and individuals to hold stolen cultural relics from the far ends of the world.

In those days, people in Kathmandu Valley neighbourhoods would often wake up to the news of yet another god which had

EVENTS

Tihar

22 October: Tihar 2022 officially kicks off
23 October, Kag Tihar: As can happen often with lunar calendar, Kag Tihar is on the second day this year, celebrated with a puja for the bird of good tidings, the ubiquitous crow.



24 October, Kukur Tihar: A marigold garland for man's, woman's and everyone's best friend.

24 October, Laxmi Puja: Welcome Laxmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity, into your home in the evening by lighting lamps, decorating the house.

25 October, Gai Tihar: Worship beloved and revered cows and oxen with garlands and tika for goodness and fortune.

26 October, Mha Puja: The Newa community honours the physical body, while others pay homage to Gobardhan, an avatar of Lord Krishna.

26 October, Nhudaya Bhintuna: Welcome the year 1138 in the Newa Calendar.

27 October, Bhai Tika: Sisters and brothers worship each other to ward off Yama, the harbinger of death.

30 October, Chhath: Celebrated by the Maithili-speaking community of Nepal and India, Chhath lasts four days. On the third day, people worship the setting sun along rivers, lakes and ponds.

Maitidevi Jatra

Join the Maitidevi Jatra that starts every year on Kukur Tihar and goes on for four days. Follow the procession of the Ganesh, Bahirab and Panchkumari chariots to the temple.
 24 October onwards, Gyaneshwar, Maitidevi, Malgaun

MUSIC



Defiant Nepal Tour

Mark the dates: Defiant is coming on a Nepal tour this November. Call for details.
 5 November, 12pm onwards, Purple Haze Rock Bar, Thamel, (01) 5910126

Kathmandu Blues N Roots

This festival brings international and Nepali musicians on stage.
 22 October, 3pm-9.30pm, Hardik Fitness Club, Patan

Folkers

Join in for Tihar celebrations this week with The Folkers band and cultural dance.
 22 October, 7pm onwards, Moksh, Jhamsikhel

Sound Journey

Relax with the sound and vibrations of singing bowls, tingsha and gongs in the sound bath session.
 29 October, 5pm onwards, Kundalini Ayurveda, Bakhundol, 983031303



Music classes

Sign up to learn Bansuri, Madal, Tabla and Western instruments like Piano, Guitar, Drum, Bass, Saxophone and Violin at Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory. Call for more details.
 Gyan Mandala, Jhamsikhel, (01) 5443554, 9813556945

About Town

GETAWAY

Lake View Resort

Lake View, with its cosy huts featuring hand crafted wooden furniture, local stone exteriors and spectacular view, promises a perfect stay.
 Lake Side, Pokhara, (061) 461477/463854



Hotel Baha

Spend few days at this traditionally-built hotel. At the heart of Bhaktapur, surrounded by temples, the hotel offers a peaceful ambience, delicious food, and immerse yourself in the rich cultural heritage.
 Bhaktapur, (01) 6616810

Bandipur Safari Lodge

Explore the rich cultural heritage and wildlife Bandipur offers with the Bandipur Safari Lodge.
 Bandipur, 9449597880



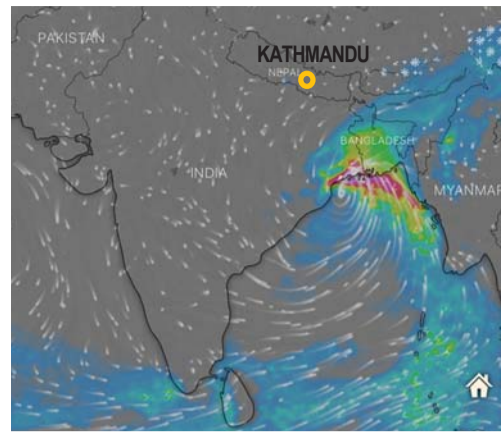
Dwarika Resort

From the appetising multi-national cuisine to the re-energising spa experience the Crystal salt therapy gives - Dwarika Resort is the perfect getaway.
 Dhulikhel, (11) 490612

Tiger Tops Tharu Lodge

Located 4km away from Chitwan National Park, get up close and personal with wildlife and the local Tharu culture at the lodge that integrates both.
 Kawasoti, Nawalparasi, (07) 8690721

WEEKEND WEATHER

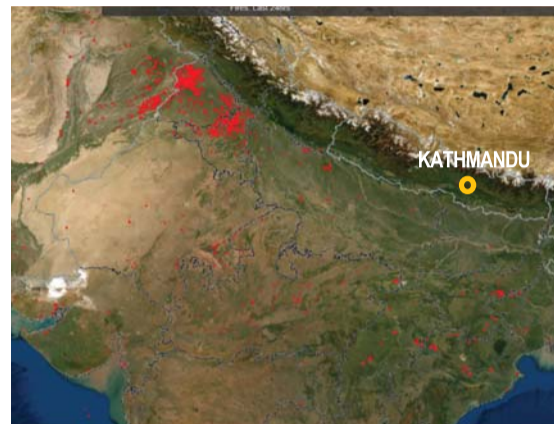


Cyclone Sitrang

The haze has set in as the prevailing wind shifts from west to southwest. It will still be sunny right through the weekend, with some passing high clouds. But there is Cyclone Sitrang that is expected to make landfall on the Odisha coast on 25 October (forecast map, left), which will change wind direction and, with any luck, it will mean clearer, crisper air again for Tihar. In its present trajectory, the periphery of this system will graze eastern Nepal and bring some thundery rain, but it should leave Kathmandu unscathed. Weekend minimum temperature in the city centre will drop to 13 degrees, lower on the higher outskirts.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
☀️ 25° 🌧️ 13°	☀️ 25° 🌧️ 13°	☀️ 27° 🌧️ 13°

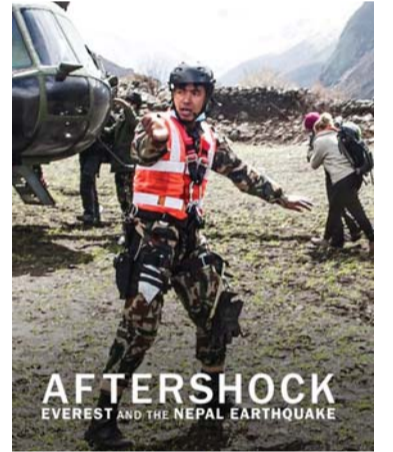
AIR QUALITY INDEX



Luckily, there is a strong breeze associated with the depression over the Bay of Bengal that is blowing away some of the suspended particles from inside the Ring Road. And since the wind is from the west, most of this pollution by mid-afternoon is hanging over Nagarkot and Dhulikhel. But as the temperature drops, there is also trans-border transportation of industrial emissions from the Indian plains. We are also keeping track of crop residue fires which are now spreading from Pakistani Punjab to Indian Punjab (NASA-FIRMS map, left), and the smoke from it is coming our way. Expect the smoke to get worse in Nepal in the coming weeks.

OUR PICK

Yet another addition to Netflix's collection of binge-worthy documentaries is *Aftershock: Everest and the Nepal Earthquake*, a docuseries on the devastating 2015 earthquake and its aftermath. Survivors' firsthand accounts and actual footage fuel this emotional and dramatic series produced for three seasons and directed by British filmmaker Ali Lambert. Puja Pant, a filmmaker and women's rights campaigner, is the documentary's Nepali producer, and Bishnu Kalpit and Bikil Santhama handle the cinematography, with all of the technicians being Nepalis. Filming locations include Kathmandu, Langtang and the Everest region. The first season is set to release on 6 October 2022.



DINING



Pho 99

Relish a wide range of Vietnamese food. The Vietnamese Chicken stew is perfect for cold evenings.
 11am-9pm, Jhamsikhel, 9803203119

Le Mirch

Enjoy the bold and savory Indian cuisine, subtly influenced by French fine-dining, at Le Mirch. Gluten-free options available.
 11am-12pm, Labim Mall, Pulchok, (01) 5527437



Kyubi's Kitchen

Noodles, dumplings and meals as seen in your favourite anime: look no further.
 12pm-8pm, Jhamsikhel, 9810298050



Kairos Café

Multi-cuisine from Italian to Spanish and English, Kairos is a popular spot among foodies. Great breakfast options available.
 7am-10pm, Jawalakhel, 9813493902

Kunga

Head to Kunga Hotel for Chinese cuisine. Go for the hotpot, peanut chicken and shredded potatoes.
 8am-9pm, Boudha, (01) 4915117

सम्पत्ति विवरण समयमै बुझाऔं,
जरिवानाबाट बचौं

- सार्वजनिक पद धारण गरेको व्यक्ति तथा राष्ट्रसेवकले आफ्नो व्यक्तिगत विवरण अद्यावधिक गरौं।
- आर्थिक वर्ष शुरू भएको साठी दिनभित्र आफ्नो सम्पत्ति विवरण तोकिएको निकायमा पेश गरौं।
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Till next year, adieu, Jazzmandu

After a week of jamming, the biggest jazz festival of the Himalaya bids a resounding farewell

The 18th edition of Surya Nepal Jazzmandu 2022 that began last week with a concert and competition for young music lovers at Malpi College performed one last jam session with a full festival line-up at the Yak & Yeti on 19 October.

Also on the first day, old and new friends warmed up with Nepal's roving ambassadors to the jazz world, Cadenza Collective, at Jazz Upstairs in Lazimpat for an evening of lively music followed by enthusiastic applause.

Visiting artists Jamie Baum Sextet from the USA, Jin Jim from Germany, Catia Werneck from Brazil and France, and Yumi Ito from Switzerland, played intimate session across four different venues in the Valley, offering the audience a different taste of the swing and blue notes, musical improvisations, and the rich polyrhythm.

Saturday 15 October was all about large stages and group revelries, as the musicians wowed crowds at the edge of Gokarna forest. The day showcased not just international artists, but also gave them something to take back and learn about Nepali music – in line with jazz's cross-cultural nature.

The Gokarna Resort also marked Jonisha Poudel's second performance after Jazzmandu 2019. "I was curious to see again how people responded to Eastern Classical music," she said. "The beats are different so it was a nice experience for us to experiment as well, and to see the crowd enjoy it."

This was followed by an



PHOTOS: SUMAN NEPALI

exuberant evening of Afro-funk and Brazilian jazz on 17 October at Aloft in Thamel and a magical confluence of Nepali classical and jazz, with the tabla attuned to the saxophone and the flute to the guitar on 18 October at Yalamaya Kendra in Patan.

"This place, Patan, has something more in spirituality, in the energy," observed Catia Werneck. "I have been halfway around the world but it is truly amazing to have a place here in Patan and to sing here. It's awesome."

On 19 October, the week-long extravaganza ended with all the performers coming together at the Yak & Yeti garden for a rousing evening of entertainment, and the festival bid adieu to its 18th edition and 20th year – until next time.

Samir Chhetri of Cadenza, also one of the organisers of Surya Nepal Jazzmandu 2022, noted that the turnout this year was consistent with previous years, but much bigger than the first Kathmandu Jazz Festival 20 years ago when only a handful of jazz musicians played in the country. Now, it is no longer an unfamiliar genre.

"The challenge was to bring the festival after a two-year-long Covid hiatus," Chhetri said, "but it has been rewarding to invite international musicians and continue the tradition."

Yumi Ito, who is in Nepal for the first time, echoed this sentiment. "The interaction between musicians from all over the world was a highlight of the festival," she said. "I wish it would go on forever." 🇳🇵

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Saving to save my sister

A Nepali driver in Saudi Arabia recounts his struggle to earn enough to care for his family



DIASPORA
DIARIES 16

This is the 16th instalment of *Diaspora Diaries*, a regular series in *Nepali Times* with stories of Nepalis living and working abroad.

I grew up in Dang, where they used to call me an *awara*. As I was not doing anything productive. No one wanted to invest in my future.

But one day my aunt offered to help me secure loans so I could migrate overseas for work. Even getting a passport felt like such a hassle back then, as I had to come to Kathmandu.

Within three months of applying through an agent in 2009, I got my visa for Saudi Arabia to work as a driver. After paying Rs90,000 borrowed at 36% interest, this village *awara* finally got on a plane to Saudi Arabia.

My salary was supposed to be 1,500 riyal (\$400) as per the contract, but I was paid only 1,300. I was supposed to work as a driver, but they sometimes made me wash dishes, sweep the floor or do other odd jobs.

One year just passed like that. When things did not improve, me and five other Nepalis who were also promised better paying driving



jobs decided to speak up for our rights. But the mid-level staff would not listen to us.

It was not about washing dishes or mopping floors being less dignified than driving, this was simply not what we had signed up for. I wrote letters to the owner of the company with just two requests: to let me work as a driver, or send

me home.

But the mid-level staff made sure that the letters did not reach the owner of the company. It was a futile exercise.

As time passed, I learnt more about the owner. One day I saw him in his car and ran towards it to express my grievances. I knew that he had a soft spot for Nepalis, and

the man listened to me intently.

By this time, I had already learnt Arabic so was able to communicate well. The five other Nepalis with me also spoke up. He was kind and assured us that our concerns would be addressed once he was back from a work trip to America.

Our supervisors, of course, did not take it well that we had bypassed them, and gone directly to the boss. They started torturing us mentally, and stopped paying even the salary that was lower than the contracted amount. They were rude to us, and made us miserable.

But as I said, I am the type that will fight for my rights. There was no other way to stop the mistreatment, so one morning at 4AM, the five other Nepalis and I locked all the gates of our company, trapping workers inside.

The supervisors called the police, and we were detained. It was only after a few weeks that the owner came, and set us free.

He listened to our concerns, and fired the supervisors. It turns out they were ripping him off, and also cheating us by taking a cut from our salaries. The supervisors were also expats, some with families in Saudi Arabia. Their visas were canceled, and they were deported.

The owner was on our side, and the reason he had a soft corner for Nepalis was that previous workers from Nepal had helped his company's business take off and expand internationally.

We finally felt listened to. Our salaries were restored to the contracted amount, and we finally got our driving licenses. As a full time heavy truck driver, I finally felt happy. Things are going to be better now.

For the next few years, I worked hard at the company, driving my food truck regularly to Qatar and UAE. We got an extra bonus of 300 riyal after each trip. My truck had a small rest room with a tiny kitchen. These were long drives, up to 4,000km roundtrip, and could take days. It would get boring on the endless highways, and we Nepali drivers would talk to each other on group calls. It was a way to pass the time, and also keep ourselves awake. When not chatting with other Nepali drivers, I would have the music on.

There were other allowances for heavy truck drivers, my monthly

salary was raised, and my savings were adding up.

My dream of buying land and building a house in Nepal was getting closer with every kilometre I drove. For a simple man like me, it was all I could ever ask for. I worked everyday, and tried to save every penny. This is me at a truck stop in Saudi Arabia (left). I prefer to keep my face blurred, but I can tell you I was smiling.

Life was good. Until everything changed.

My sister in Nepal, whom I had been taking care of, gave birth to a daughter. There was a complication, and the baby had to be put into intensive care soon after. I took care of their medical bills, but while the baby recovered, my sister's health deteriorated. She was only skin and bones and could not even hold the baby. The doctors in Nepal couldn't figure out what was wrong.

I stuck around in Saudi Arabia for another year, so I could keep sending money to pay for my sister's medical bills. During the long drives, I used to talk to my family about her health, and often could not hold back my tears. After a year, in 2018 I could not bear it any longer and returned to Nepal even though my company asked me to stay on.

I took my sister from Teaching Hospital to Bir Hospital to places in India for treatment. She was hospitalised for over a year and the medical bills kept adding up — one expensive test after another. All my savings from years of work in Saudi Arabia were used up.

Her husband, a teacher at a school with a modest salary, could not afford her medical bills. He is a doting husband, and was distraught by her condition. I had to step in to help, there was no one else.

This disproportionate responsibility of paying for my sister did not weigh on me that much. I had always looked after my little sister ever since we were children. She was my responsibility. My brother-in-law was doing as much as he could.

Eventually, my sister recovered, and although she is in much better health now she does have occasional relapses. She is still fragile, but most importantly, she is alive. She is with us.

I am sure we would have lost her, had I not been in Saudi Arabia, earning so I could pay for her medical treatment. What more could a brother ask for? She tells me I saved her life. It is true.

I am now a driver in a car rental company in Nepal, and earn just about enough to survive. I am still poor, and do not have any property in my name.

The other five drivers with whom I was in Saudi Arabia are also all back in Nepal, and have invested their savings in transport and agriculture businesses.

All my savings are gone, but I have no regrets. There is no remorse, because what could be more precious than my sister's life?

I am now trying to go overseas again to recoup my savings. I am still relatively young, and have another few years in me to work hard once more in the desert heat. It is the only way to break out of the poverty that has trapped me. 🇳🇵

Translated from a conversation with the author, who requested anonymity and wanted his face blurred in the photograph. *Diaspora Diaries* is a regular column 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.

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Pay FIFA worker fees, Qatar told

Human rights groups demand Qatar reimburse recruitment fees of Nepali and other migrant workers

Migrant workers paid exorbitant and illegal recruitment fees to make the 2022 World Cup in Qatar possible, but FIFA and Qatar have not agreed to reimburse them.

Many workers are in serious debt from paying unaffordable fees to recruiters in Nepal and in Qatar, borrowing at high interest rates, selling assets and depleting family savings so the world can watch the month-long football extravaganza 20 November-18 December.

"With 30 days left until the tournament, there is a slim window for FIFA and Qatari authorities to correct course and commit to remedy past abuses that have stained the 2022 World Cup," said Michael Page at Human Rights Watch (HRW). "The real legacy of this tournament will be families of thousands of migrant workers indebted after they died and who had their wages stolen uncompensated."

HRW interviewed more than 45 migrant workers from Bangladesh, India, Kenya, and Nepal, including seven families of deceased migrant workers, and also 26 recruiters from Bangladesh, India, and Nepal, contractors and Qatar-based recruitment companies.

Past investigations and research, including on behalf of Qatar's Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy, the body responsible for planning and delivering World Cup infrastructure, have indicated the pervasive

nature of recruitment fees that often take months, even years, of wages to pay, even though they are illegal in Qatar.

In 2017, the Supreme Committee introduced the Universal Reimbursement Scheme, requiring a contractor either to prove that workers did not pay any fees or to reimburse the worker. As of December 2021, \$21.96 million had been paid out of the committed \$28.4 million.

This initiative, while promising, is not mandatory even among contractors that operate projects affiliated with the Supreme Committee. It covers fewer than 50,000 workers, a fraction of the millions of migrant workers who are making the 2022 World Cup possible. HRW wants Qatar to consider scaling up the program as part of a wider effort to remedy abuses suffered by workers.

Qatari authorities have previously stated that the practice of charging high recruitment fees is largely outside Qatar's jurisdiction, but they have so far failed to address the role that Qatar-based businesses play in passing costs to recruiters that they know will be borne by workers.

While origin country recruitment agencies are notorious for charging workers illegal recruitment costs and fees, HRW found that businesses based in Qatar are contributing to recruitment fees by imposing costs on

recruiters that they know will be passed down to workers.

Employers in Qatar often refuse to pay recruiters in full or at all for their services, and sometimes even levy additional commissions on recruiters in exchange for job orders. Human resources staff of Qatar-based companies also required recruiters to pay for interview trips.

HRW and other migrant rights groups, labour unions, fan groups, abuse survivors initiated a campaign demanding that FIFA should establish a comprehensive program to provide remedy for all abuses related to the 2022 World Cup, including unexplained deaths, injuries, serial wage abuses, and exorbitant recruitment fees.

They want FIFA to reserve an amount at least equivalent to the \$440 million prize money provided to teams participating in the tournament. With a month before the 2022 World Cup tournament begins, however, FIFA and Qatar have failed to publicly commit to a remedy program.

"Qatar, businesses, and FIFA had a dozen years to tackle the scourge of illegal exorbitant recruitment costs, but with small exceptions have failed to do so," Page said. "Now the only way to fundamentally address the lost wages from recruitment fees is through a remedy fund for workers."

Qatar's estimated \$220 billion World Cup infrastructure construction bonanza, necessitated recruiting millions of migrant workers, many from Asian and African countries. Thousands of origin country-based recruiters facilitated placement of these workers. HRW also documented examples of migrant workers who did not pay recruitment fees. A migrant worker in Qatar currently on a short-term contract was recruited without any charge and reimbursed for his pre-departure PCR test: "If I had not come for free and had paid recruitment fees as is common for Indians, my first paycheck would be going to the local money lender back home, and not to my mother."

A Nepali worker in Qatar who paid a recruitment fee for his first contract but not for his second job said: "Even when the contracts are very similar in terms of wages or hours of work, you are in a much better place mentally when you don't have to pay recruitment fees. There was always a weight bothering me. Now I am free of all that tension." 🇳🇵

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● **Sahina Shrestha**
in Rupandehi

Karna Maya Pun could have been anything in her life: a landowner, a migrant worker in Korea, or an emigrant to the UK.

Perhaps even a nurse, or a teacher. Instead, she is a farmer in Nepal and has no regrets.

With her husband Jag Bahadur Paija, she runs the *Garar Ekikrit Pashupankshi Tatha Krishi Farm* in Tilottama, carving out a niche rearing organic fish and running a modern pig farm.

"It would have been easy for me to sell a plot of land or live abroad, but that isn't a life for me," says Karna Maya. "I want my children to learn that people should live by virtue of their own hard work, and the best way for them to do that is by seeing us do it."

Every morning, rain or shine, the couple wakes up at 4AM to tend to the 100 pigs in the farm and the three fish ponds. They have to clean the pig sty, fill troughs with leftovers, aerate the ponds, and feed the fish. Then, they check the fry in the fish nursery.

By the time all these chores are done, it is usually early afternoon. But for Karna Maya and Jag Bahadur, the workday is just beginning.

"I started tilling the soil at a very young age, and for a long time that is all I knew how to do," says Jag Bahadur, whose parents thought his time was better utilised in the field than in the classroom, so he never really studied seriously at school. For him, farming is a return to his roots.

Following the footsteps of the men in his family, he tried for the Indian army. And, although he was selected, he dropped out after finding the environment oppressive. "We had to obey orders and agree to everything, even if they said pigs can fly and fish climb trees. That was not the life for me, so I quit," he recalls.

In 1995, like many others from his village, he went to Qatar to seek his fortune. For the young man from the mountains of Myagdi, working outdoors in 48°C heat was difficult. He did not know the language, and it was hard to deal with management. He broke stones outdoors all day with his calloused hands.

One day, he found someone's folder with a wallet and documents. He took it to the office, where the staff was impressed by his honesty. He got a reward and was given an



Pigs fly and fish climb trees

This Nepali couple could have moved to the UK, but chose to stay back and run a thriving pig and fish farm



ANIMAL FARM:

Jag Bahadur Paija returned to Nepal after working in Korea for 12 years. He now runs a fish farm with his wife Karna Maya in Tilottama (above).

Earlier this year, the couple took out a loan to add pigs and build a modern sty in their farm (left).

opportunity to train as a driver for the managers.

"I was the only one who had two jobs in the company: an office boy and a driver. It was easier than having to do physical labour out in the heat," says Jag Bahadur.

After five years in Qatar, he returned to Nepal and married Karna Maya. Thirty-five days after the wedding, he was on a plane again. This time to Korea.

Karna Maya also had a difficult childhood in Myagdi. There was no school in her village, no road and

no hospital. Collecting fodder for the animals would take the whole day as she had to walk hours to fetch water.

"All we knew in the village was that men either went abroad to work or took the livestock up to high pastures in summer," recalls Karna Maya. "There wasn't much to do there."

One evening, Karna Maya's mother was returning home with a load of grass on her back when she fell off a cliff. By the time the villagers rescued and brought her

was not recognised: so, she started teaching.

Then, one day, she saw a stranger with a thick mustache in her village. She remembers joking about his looks with her cousins. Soon, that man became her husband and nine months later their daughter was born.

Karna Maya's in-laws wanted her to stay home and look after the family, but money was tight. So, in 1997, she flew to Korea for work. At Seoul airport, Nepali migrant workers were collected and taken to a warehouse, where representatives from their companies picked them up. "I cried when I saw this. It felt like the goat market where people came and picked up animals for slaughter," she remembers. "Some left in cars, others were silently led off by their employers."

Although she was in the same country as her husband, the couple lived and worked in different cities. Jag Bahadur was undocumented, so it was not possible for them to meet frequently. Karna Maya worked in Korea for four years before returning to Nepal. Two years later, Jag Bahadur followed suit.

"In Korea, I realised Nepalis went on a 'D3 visa', dirty, difficult and dangerous, especially if they were working illegally," says Karna Maya.



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farming, but, since they couldn't afford to hire workers, they dug the ponds and ferried pipes themselves.

Without experience they suffered initial setbacks, but today they earn Rs70,000 a month selling fish to markets in Bhairawa, Parasi and locally. Earlier this year, they added pigs to their farm and constructed a modern sty that ensures a cleaner environment and healthier animals. They have extrapolated a yearly income of Rs500,000 once the pigs are ready.

There are big plans: a biogas plant that uses pig slurry and farm waste, and buying a vehicle to ferry produce to market. They are also focusing on their children's education.

In August, their daughter Linda left to pursue higher education in the UK. And, while not busy with school, they involve their 10-year-old son Linus in the business so that he feels ownership of the farm and acquires skills to fall back on.

"Our previous generations taught us that our only option was to go abroad, but we want to teach our children that there are many opportunities here in Nepal," says Karna Maya.

"I will only go abroad for my daughter's graduation." Jag Bahadur says from nearby, "I won't go even then. It's too busy here in the farm." 🇳🇵

Jag Bahadur's father, a retired British Army Gurkha, and mother were preparing to settle in the UK. But the couple refused to go with them. "We are not well-educated and the most we could expect to do once we got there was wash dishes or work in someone's house. I felt like we could do better if we stayed back," says Karna Maya.

But having lived abroad for so long, they did not know anyone in Nepal and did not have enough capital or skill to start a business. Jag Bahadur once again

went abroad, this time to Abu Dhabi. His salary of Rs30,000 was barely enough to cover expenses at home.

Karna Maya opened a clothing store but, since she had to take care of the house and children, her shop remained closed during the peak hours. She called her husband back to Nepal and the two discussed their next move.

Jag Bahadur wanted to buy a twelve-wheeler truck and drive it around the country. Karna Maya

STRIKING ROOTS

and the family opposed the idea.

"There was a time when we did not even have Rs500 in our pockets. People looked at our house and land and refused to

believe we did not have money for daily expenses. Those were the most difficult days," says Jag Bahadur. Meanwhile, Jag Bahadur's parents in the UK kept asking the couple to relocate too. "They called me mad for staying on in Nepal, and accused me of making my

husband lose his mind as well," says Karna Maya.

Out of work and in desperate need of money, the two decided to use the land they had. Sitting idly at home was not an option, neither was selling land because they thought that would make them lazy. After considering the options, they dived into farming.

The first year they invested Rs100,000 to grow wheat and maize but after a whole year of working in the fields they made just Rs10,000 in profit. They decided to start fish



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TERMS & CONDITIONS APPLY

Holier than thou

Even as the entire nation gets ready for another week of holidays this month, we have to grudgingly accept that Tihar is a discriminatory festival in which some animals are treated more equally than others.

Only crows, cattle, pooches and half-elephants are deemed holy enough to be worshiped next week. Not fair. What about the rest of the animule kingdom? Why leave out pangolins? Is there any reason a gnu isn't god? How come crow is holier than vulture? The ancient Egyptians had feline goddesses, yet Catmandu's cats do not make the grade to be venerated. Who made these rules anyway?

Such politically incorrect speciesism has crept into other aspects of our everyday life. For example, during the monsoon it only 'rains cats and dogs', not trouts and salamanders. Only a bull is deemed worthy of being taken by the horns in a china shop. Mules are stigmatised as stubborn, whereas beavers are extolled as being eager.

And what really gets my goat every time Tihar comes around is that the psycho mutt who terrorises our neighbourhood and keeps us awake all night by barking at the Universe gets to be garlanded and fed treats on Monday even though he is such an ass whole.

I hereby, henceforth and hereinafter propose to form a political pressure group in the next Parliament to ensure a fairer and more inclusive Tihar under the new Constitution so that this country's canine elite is stripped of its divine right to monopolise being man's best friend forever.

As a start, we could begin by cleaning up the English language of all speciesist figures of speech so that no animal is demeaned or diminished, or its feelings hurt ever again. We should purge the language of all animal similes that belittle them, and find alternatives.

For example, when we say that current campaigning for elections in November is moving at a 'snail's pace', are we not being judgemental about the velocity of slug locomotion? Think of what an insult it is to stallions in general and Wolf Blitzer in particular when we say that delegates at the Baddie party convention were 'wolfing down the hors d'oeuvres'. And in describing coalition politics as a 'can of worms' we have to be sensitive about offending our age-old grassroots heritage of vermiculture.

Let us replace speciesist language with more politically correct formulations:

WRONG: Sher Bahadur Deuba's fifth term as prime minister is proof that you can't teach an old dog new tricks.

CORRECT: If Sher Bahadur Deuba is prime minister for a sixth time, we can be sure the country will go to the dogs. Yay!

WRONG: Only those candidates willing to lick the ass of the party president got tickets to contest elections this time.

CORRECT: The party president has been a visionary statesman for donkey's ears.

WRONG: The Finance Minister has set aside a lion's share of the budget in allocations that benefit his cronies.

CORRECT: Leopards are generally satisfied with the location of their spots and will not change them even if forced by the Supreme Court.



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