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POSTS BY NEPALI SOLDIERS ON TIKTOK

RENT-A-SOLDIER

Nepalis desperate to make a better living have historically served in foreign armies, but rarely do they fight on opposing sides as is happening now in the Russia-Ukraine war.

Nepali soldiers who defected to the British side in 1815 during the Anglo-Nepal War did fight against their own country. The history of recruitment into the British and Indian armies is more than two centuries old, and to this day Nepalis serve in the Indian Army which is often engaged in border skirmishes with two friendly neighbours, Pakistan and China.

Given the tradition of Gurkha recruitment, it was perhaps natural that Nepalis would find themselves on both sides of the frontlines in eastern Ukraine.

For many of the Nepalis studying and working in Ukraine, the country was a stopover in their quest to get to Western Europe. Russia's invasion in February 2022 offered a chance as the borders with Poland and Slovakia were opened for refugees fleeing the war.

But some Nepalis remained, and a handful joined the Ukrainian Army as the country mobilised men between 18-60. Within two weeks of the conflict, a video circulated on social media of a Nepali man claiming to be defending against the Russian invasion because Ukraine had given him food, shelter, and work. Another 63-year-old Nepali father also decided to stay to fight because he did not want to leave his conscripted Ukrainian son behind. Kiev created the

International Legion of Territorial Defence of Ukraine, a military unit of foreign fighters in its reserve forces. Thousands of volunteers from across the world signed up.

But as the war of attrition rages on, both Russia and Ukraine have suffered heavy casualties. Some 200,000 Russian and 100,000 Ukrainian soldiers have been killed or injured in the past 18 months of fighting. Many of those casualties have been in the Battle of Bakhmut where there are Nepali soldiers on both sides.

Desperate for infantry, Moscow drafted citizens and had relaxed immigration rules and signed a decree so they could earn lucrative salaries and become Russian citizens. Nepalis based in Russia jumped at the opportunity to earn more, and eventually, so did Nepalis back home who started flying out to Moscow on tourist and student visas.

There are more Nepalis fighting for Russia than Ukraine, but no one has an exact count. The only

proof are individual posts on social media (pictured above), and calls from the frontlines to fellow Nepalis in Russia or to families back home in Nepal. Most Nepalis who are on the trenches of eastern Ukraine are not too bothered about which side in the war is right. It is mostly about earning enough to provide for families back home by whatever means necessary.

That the youth would rather fight and die for someone else's country, one in which Nepal has no real stake, is proof of the desperation of Nepalis for meaningful jobs, and lack of opportunities back home.

Things have not gone as promised. Those able to get in touch with relatives in Nepal have said that foreign fighters are sent to the frontlines without adequate training and that they have not been paid the Rs400,000 per month they were promised.

They have realised that the realities of war are much different and want to return home. Says a Nepali student in Russia whose husband is on the Ukraine front: "Everyone is terrified, but there is no way to come back because that would be tantamount to desertion."

The Nepal Embassy in Moscow has not been of much help and has advised relatives the Nepali recruits should serve out their one-year contracts.

Despite its policy of neutrality, Nepal has sided with the majority of nations to condemn Russia's occupation of Ukraine. The question now is: how will the fact that its nationals are fighting in Ukraine affect Nepal's foreign policy position and standing on the global stage. 🇳🇵

Afghanistan
evacuation
two years after
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Nepalis in the
Russian Army
want to quit
PAGE 5

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False equivalence

The issue erupted on social media after I posted in anger on Facebook against Tribhuvan University's (TU) Curriculum Development Centre (CDC).

I had applied for recognition in Nepal of my MPhil and PhD from the University of Cambridge for an equivalence certificate, which are required for jobs in Nepal.



GUEST EDITORIAL
Aastha Dahal

My files remained unprocessed for almost two years. They had first asked for online submission of degree certificates, transcripts, course syllabus, copies of visas, stamps in passports at the Nepali and London airports, copies of thesis, supervisor's CV, PhD viva reports and a Rs5,000 fee.

A green 'completed' button indicated I fulfilled the submission procedure. Then they asked that I submit all these documents in a printed file, yet they refused to accept my hardcopy files on grounds that they could not guarantee its safe-keeping.

I heard nothing from the CDC for over a year. A month ago, I made a second attempt to submit my paper-based files. Perhaps because a TU staff accompanied me this time, my submission was accepted, documents checked and a receipt issued.

But two weeks later I got a call from the CDC. The person called me by a different name, shouted at me for not paying the required processing fees of Rs4,000 for the MPhil degree (I had just paid Rs1,000 as directed by the online portal), said I was to redeposit Rs4,000 and would lose the Rs1,000 I had paid earlier.

Out of anger at the lateness, the rudeness and extortion I posted that I no longer wanted an equivalence 'that came at the cost of my human dignity'.

What followed was astonishing. My post got shared through national and international networks of Nepalis. Hundreds spoke up about their own struggles with equivalence, including facing misbehaviour at the CDC.

A CDC victim and Harvard post-doctoral researcher Jitendra Shrestha even coined a hashtag, #tu_cdc_scam. The Nepali press and tv gave the issue wide coverage and MPs raised the issue in Parliament.

Laxman Kafle and Nasir Ahmad, current PhD students at MIT and the National University of Singapore respectively, were told they did not spend enough time physically in Tsinghua University in China during their Master's program.

They had actually been forced to return to

Nepal because China shut down due to Covid. Jitendra Shrestha's Master's in Microbiology was deemed unacceptable for his PhD in Cancer Biology and Drug Development under the Department of Pharmacy.

Prajwal Raj Gyawali's Master's in Law and Economics under the Erasmus program was deemed to contain insufficient credits for Nepal's standards. The CDC halves all European course credits without real justification.

Barsha Dharel, who is currently pursuing her degree at Columbia University, was told she did not take an English course worth 100 marks during undergrad at Delhi University.

Many applicants were victims of retrospective application of ad-hoc decisions made by the CDC to disqualify certain foreign universities from being recognised when its own regulatory procedures bar decisions from being applied retrospectively.

The response from TU Vice Chancellor Dharma Kanta Baskota and CDC Director Paras Nath Yadav were unaligned and contradictory. While Baskota accepted that the equivalency mechanism is dysfunctional, Yadav summarily blamed all unsuccessful applicants for failing to fulfil the procedure.

TU has systematically prevented foreign graduates from entering Nepali public and private service for decades. Highly trained people have left the country in frustration, the losses of skills, talent, ideas and knowledge to Nepal is immeasurable.

The refusal to grant equivalency to degrees from universities around the world is a dismissal of the reputation of global academies and centres of learning. Surely, universities internationally would object to this as they do not impose the same arbitrary procedures

to recognise TU degrees. Many governments provide Nepali students scholarships to study at their universities such as Fulbright, Chevening, AUSAID, or Erasmus. Most of these awards bind Nepali students to return to Nepal upon completion of their studies.

Duke University trained Fulbright scholar and environmental lawyer Jony Mainaly has abandoned her ambition to enter the TU academia because her equivalence has been pending for years.

The powers of equivalence should be taken out of TU and given to an independent body under the guidance of a pragmatic policy that facilitates the retention of knowledge and skills in Nepal.

We have no illusions that propelling systemic changes in deeply broken structures are going to be hard. But, we have to fight these battles from all quarters inside and outside Nepal.

Aastha Dahal is a Kathmandu-based lawyer.

Tribhuvan University gives Nepali graduates of foreign universities the runaround.



ONLINE PACKAGES



ON THE FRONTLINES

A Nepali returnee from Russia, whose friends joined the Russian army and now want to come back, speaks on camera to tell other Nepalis that the pay is not as promised, there is no training, and the war is brutal. Watch the video on our YouTube channel.



TUMBLING TRI-CHANDRA

Established in 1918 by Prime Minister Chandra Shumsher Rana during the reign of King Tribhuvan, Nepal's oldest college Tri-Chandra is falling apart and has been silently awaiting restoration since the 2015 earthquake. Watch the video and read a feature on another one of the crumbling Rana-era buildings, Sri Mahal, on page 6-7.

AGNIPATH

It is Nepal's dilemma to fight for other nations, shed blood, tears and sweat not for their motherland but for other's land since time immemorial ('In the Line of Fire', Editorial, #1174).

Shyam Basnet

■ India and Nepal's governments must reach a consensus and immediately start recruiting Nepali youths into the Indian Army.

Pisa Kachi

■ Good. This means no Nepali blood will be spilled for the Indian cause.

Nitish Raj Pathak

EQUIVALENCY

This is nothing short of laughable, regressive and ludicrous ('False equivalence in Nepal Academia', Guest Editorial, Online and #1175). Tribhuvan University, which cannot even conduct its own academic calendar on time and is riddled with inefficiency, politics, corruption and mediocrity, is not going to recognise certificates by leading universities of the world? Another example of the typical Nepali bureaucratic mindset of rent-seeking.

Shyamal Krishna Shrestha

■ TU, a university in Nepal that is beset with problems all the time, believes that its educational standards are higher than that of universities abroad, including ones with centuries of history of scholarship.

Dorje Gurung

KTM FLOOD

There is more rain in the forecast ('Kathmandu's Polycrisis', Sonia Awale, #1174). Has the Mayor of Kathmandu given a press briefing on flood preparedness? Do we know his plan for providing relief to people who have lost their homes? He and his team need to come out and give a briefing.

Agnostic Girl

DIASPORA DIARIES

The powerfully-narrated, poignant story of Mohan Pandey ('Nepali bonds with a racing camel in Qatar, Mohan Pandey', #1174) is the story of present-day Nepal. There is a lack of opportunity even for the talented, resourceful and resilient individual Nepalis, and the State just idly stands by.

Buddha Basnyat

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING



False equivalence in academia

by *Aastha Dahal*

Tribhuvan University's equivalence certificate requirement has systematically prevented foreign graduates from entering Nepali public and private service for decades. Highly trained people have left the country in frustration, the loss of skills, talent, ideas and knowledge to Nepal is immeasurable. Read the guest editorial online and on this page.



Most reached and shared on Facebook

Kathmandu's Polycrisis

by *Sonia Awale*

With just 90mm of rain in 24 hours, Kathmandu Valley's waterways overflowed last week, submerging the banks. While rainfall patterns have changed, the main reason for the flood is that we have constricted the rivers and streams by building on the floodplain. Read story on our website.



Most popular on Twitter

Nepali recruitment into Indian Army paused

by *Jibraj Chalise and Durga Rana Magar*

The selection process for Gorkha soldiers into the Indian military was halted after India introduced its Agnipath scheme in 2022. Former soldiers say the military reform will no longer be attractive to Nepalis. Join the discussion online.



Most commented

Ex-guerrilla's revolution in rural Nepal

by *Bhadra Sharma*

As a former company commander of the Maoist militia, Niraka Gharti Magar used to raid banks and government offices. Today, her Prem Dhaka Udyog is not just a successful business, but also provides income to hundreds of women in Rukum. Visit nepalitimes.com to read the profile.



Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Recruitment of Nepalis into Indian Army paused Agnipath scheme would no longer make it attractive for Gorkha soldiers to join the Indian military. Jibraj Chalise and Durga Rana Magar report:



Bibek Jang Karki @Jangiz_

It is time to move on & forget about the Gurkha recruitment in Indian Army.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

A flash flood caused by a landslide dam burst has destroyed 10 houses, a police post and transmission lines in Kagbeni. A landslide after torrential rain blocked the Tiri Khola stream which burst on Sunday night, unleashing a debris flow into the Kag Khola. Photos: RSS



Raz Tuladhar @raztuladhar

The dynamic interplay of natural forces revealed as Tiri Khola's torrential overflow met Kag Khola. An opportunity to study the ecological responses to such events and reinforce our commitment to sustainable resilience. #FloodEcology #NaturalForces #ResilienceResearch"



TTeacher @TaraTeacher1

Heartbreaking. Kagbeni is a truly special place and to see it in such a terrible way is devastating.

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Secularism debate

Twenty years ago this week, Prakash A Raj analysed if Nepal should be a secular state. He argued that Hinduism is more tolerant than any other religion, and was evolving to correct the historical injustices against Dalits and women.

Two decades since, Hinduism has been weaponised for political and other gains. We have next-door India where the BJP has used religion for populist support. Some of this is already beginning to spread into the Nepal tarai in a volatile mix of politics and faith.

Excerpts of the article published in Nepali Times on issue #158 15-21 August 2003:

Hinduism is in many respects a 'secular' religion. Unlike some of the others, it does not claim that it is the only path to salvation. It does not claim that non-Hindus will go to hell. Hindus and Muslims have lived peacefully in Nepal for hundreds of years and there have been fewer religious riots in this Hindu kingdom than in the secular republic of India. Further, Hinduism does not divide the world into believers



and non-believers and does not include the concept of jihad or fatwa. A huge mosque was constructed next to the royal palace in this Hindu kingdom in the past decade, replacing a smaller one.

... The mass murders and genocides in Europe were perpetrated in

western 'civilisation', no such organised slaughter has ever occurred in the name of religion here. There were separate churches for blacks and whites in the US south till 100 years ago. Social mores change, cultural relations evolve. This is not to excuse discrimination and injustice in our society, only to say that Nepal as a kingdom and Hinduism as a religion do not have a monopoly on social ostracism.

For archived material of Nepali Times of the past 20 years, site search: www.nepalitimes.com

1,000 WORDS



HIMAL KHABAR

ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MEN: Nepali Congress president Sher Bahadur Deuba (centre) at a parliamentary party meeting on Monday demanded that the scandal involving 100kg of smuggled gold be handled by the Central Investigation Bureau (CIB). The opposition UML has been obstructing Parliament, demanding an independent investigation committee.



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Editor Online: **Sahina Shrestha** Executive Editor: **Sonia Awale** Layout: **Kiran Maharjan**
Publisher: **Kunda Dixit, Himalmedia Pvt Ltd** | Patan Dhoka, Lalitpur | GPO Box 7251 Kathmandu
editors@nepalitimes.com | www.nepalitimes.com | www.himalmedia.com | Tel: +977 1 5005601-08 Fax: +977 1 5005518

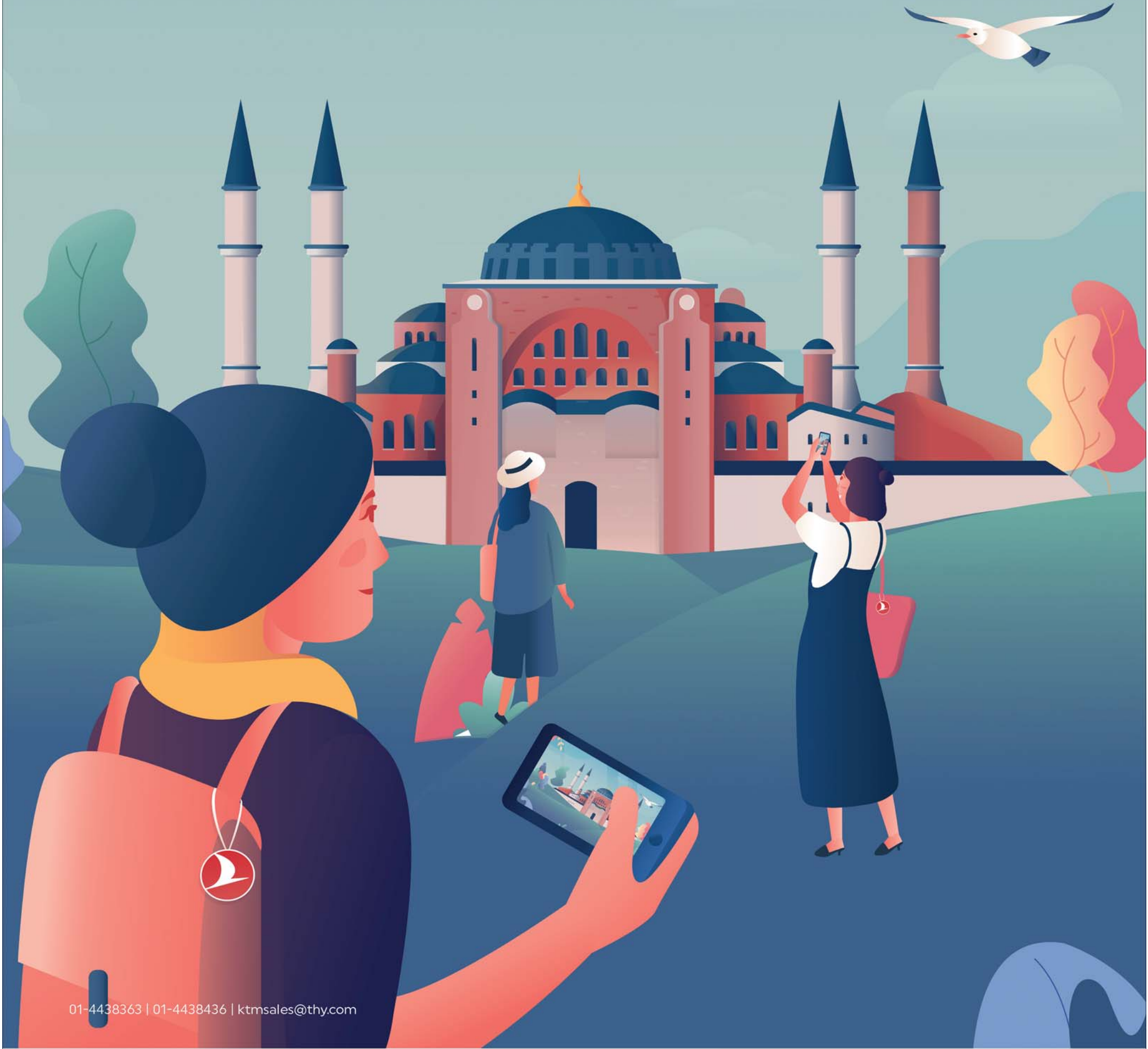




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Afghanistan evacuation two years after

Lessons from the chaotic Taliban takeover in August 2021 for Nepali workers in future hotspots

■ **Prajesh Aryal and Jenna Mae Biedscheid**

Two years since Nepali workers were evacuated from Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover, it is important to remember the experience of the evacuees, and how they can shape the future of labour out-migration from Nepal, especially in countries with conflict like Ukraine.

Work in Afghanistan was different from other destination countries. Migration there tends to be less researched and have more legal ambiguity due to complicated permit policies and multiple periods throughout the war when work in Afghanistan was banned by the Nepal government.

Migrant workers often had to go through recruitment agencies that connected them to the employer in Afghanistan, but there was also a lot of irregular migration through labour brokers.

According to the Department of Foreign Employment, some 12,500 Nepali migrant workers had received first-time labour permits since 2021 for Afghanistan. This number does not accurately represent the true number of people who have migrated there for work.

Nepalis were hired for many different positions in support of foreign government operations in Afghanistan. Although, partly due to the Gurkha legacy, they were predominantly hired as security guards to protect compounds and embassies.

At the beginning of the war, security companies in Afghanistan exclusively hired retirees of the Nepal and Indian Army who already had combat experience and training, so they were well-prepared to work in a country in conflict. Ex-soldiers



AIR MOBILITY COMMAND / WIKIMEDIA

of the Nepal Army actually saw action during the Maoist conflict.

Guards interviewed by the authors who had served in both the Nepal and Indian Army explained that pension was not enough to live off of. One guard said, “खान मात्रै पुग्छ” (It's only enough for food). Another stated, “पेन्सनले थाम्न सक्दैन” (You can't live off the pension). Going to Afghanistan meant giving their families an otherwise

unaffordable life. The salary came with risks. There were frequent and unexpected bombings, and no freedom of movement outside workplaces.

As the Taliban took over, Nepali security guards were not formally informed by their employers about the country's changing situation. Many had to make their own inferences from watching the news, speaking with locals and

coworkers, and witnessing changing operations at their workplace. They were told only hours or days before their evacuation that their job was suddenly coming to an end.

Except for those working at the US Embassy in Kabul, all of the guards interviewed reported being the last to leave their workplace. Some were terrified, others were more worried about losing their employment and income abruptly than making it back to Nepal safely. Almost all of the guards lost their luggage in the process. Only some received compensation.

Some guards were dissatisfied with the evacuation, and organised a Facebook group to advocate for their needs, eventually filing a formal complaint at the Foreign Affairs ministry with three demands. First was to find new employment in Nepal or in another country. The other two demands were for compensation for both their lost income and luggage.

The guards who filed the complaint said the Ministry of Foreign Affairs never followed up with them. Bibek, one of the guards, said: “We need support in the form of employment ... because we need to look after our families... At present, many of us are past the age to find fresh employment. We feel really victimised.” Another evacuee explained that they are worried about their children's future.

In a press release, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that an intra-agency task force had been formed to expedite the repatriation of Nepalis from Afghanistan and that it coordinated with other governments, international agencies and the Private Recruitment Agencies (PRAs) involved in sending Nepalis to Afghanistan to arrange repatriation flights. By 31 August 2021, 833 Nepali migrant

workers were flown out.

Despite this, the evacuees explained that there was no Nepal government presence throughout the process. They were largely evacuated by their companies, leaving their safety and well-being in the hands of private business owners with no background in human rights. Anurag Devkota, human rights lawyer at the Law and Policy Forum for Social Justice (LAPSOJ) in Kathmandu, explains that without accurate data on migrant workers abroad, the government struggles to effectively repatriate migrant workers in crises. A robust database on the number of migrant workers abroad is especially important in countries such as Afghanistan, where Nepal does not have diplomatic missions to assist in communicating with workers and coordinating repatriations, he adds.

Despite the Nepal government's efforts to regulate employment and support workers in Afghanistan, including bans on irregular migration, workers will always find a way to go, especially when there is no similar opportunity available to them in Nepal and their pension is not enough to support their families.

Instead of placing Nepali workers' well-being in the hands of private companies, their rights should be upheld by a government who shows up for them in times of crisis. There are lessons to be learnt from the Afghanistan evacuations.

The Foreign Employment Welfare Fund can be used when an immediate need for repatriation arises. It is important to call upon, strengthen and reinforce the protective mechanisms already in place to minimise the damage of future crises on workers abroad. 🇳🇵

Prajesh Aryal is a Kathmandu-based researcher and Jenna Mae Biedscheid is a Fulbright Nepal Scholar.



NMB BANK
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Indian independence

The Indian Embassy in Kathmandu marked the country's 77th Independence Day on 15 August amidst a function in which Ambassador Navin Srivastav unfurled the Indian banner and greeted the Indian diaspora in Nepal.

Ncell stations

Ncell has installed 338 more base transceiver stations during the last fiscal year, along with 338 new towers, expanding 4G coverage to 55 rural areas. The company currently operates over 4,000 4G BTS sites across the country to ensure access to high-speed mobile internet. Meanwhile, the service provider rejected recent media reports that it had been compromising customers' confidential information.

Nepathya in Japan

Nepathya is seeing record concert attendance of Nepalis in its concert tour of Japan despite a typhoon. The band has been performing a medley of its greatest hits and engaged the audience with messages about the Nepali diaspora.



Turkish profits

Turkish Airlines finished the second quarter of 2023 with a net profit of \$635 million. The airline's total revenue



increased by 13.5% compared to the same period last year to reach \$5.1 billion. Inversely, cargo revenues decreased by 44% year-over-year to \$600 million.

Golyan case study

Golyan Group will host the finals of its ongoing case study competition, The Case Challenge, Chapter One, on 20 August at The Hyatt Place, Kathmandu. Students from KUSOM, TBC, and PBS will compete in the final round to solve real-life problems in the agricultural industry. Upcoming instalments will include the chapters manufacturing, tourism, and industry.

Nabil Loan

Nabil Bank introduced its Nabil Dhukka Ghar Karja, a new housing loan scheme that offers stable and affordable rates for a 20-year period with two fixed interest options of 10.99% for 7 years and 11.99% for 10 years. The scheme also includes free credit card issuance of up to Rs200,000.

BYD's NEV

Chinese electric vehicle manufacturer BYD produced its 5 millionth new energy vehicle (NEV), the DENZA N7, on 9 August. In a decade, the company has expanded its electric public transport solutions to more than 400 cities across more than 70 countries.

New Samsung phones

Samsung has introduced its Galaxy Z Flip5 and Galaxy Z Fold5 smartphones in Nepal. The new models feature flex mode, larger screen and pocketability. The Galaxy



Z Flip5 costs Rs139,999, while the Galaxy Z Fold5 starts at Rs226,999. Buyers can pre-order the phones and get benefits up to Rs25,000 as well as 0% interest EMI options.

Signature relaunch

Signature has unveiled refreshed bottles, packaging, and flavours for its Signature Premier and Signature Rare whiskeys, now available in sizes of 1 litre, 750ml, 375ml and 180ml. Nepal Liquors introduced the products while showcasing its beverage range including Antiquity Blue, Royal Challenge, and Smirnoff Vodka.

GIBL discount

Global IME Bank will offer up to 15% discounts to customers using Global Smart QR Code payment at Metro Mart stores in the Kathmandu Valley. Discounts are available through the Global Smart Plus app.

Century for MG

Paramount Motors, the sole distributor of MG Motors in Nepal, celebrated the MG's 100th anniversary with an exchange offer, per which customers can trade in their old vehicle for a new MG ZS EV at select dealerships in Banepa, Narayangadhi, Dhangadhi, Dang, Butwal, Bhairahawa, Birtamod, Janakpur, Pokhara, Birgunj, and Biratnagar. The offer is valid until 10 September.

FoneTAG

Everest Bank has partnered with Fonepay to launch FoneTAG, Nepal's first offline digital payment solution that enables customers to make merchant payments using NFC tags or



Customer-Presented QR codes (CPQR codes) without internet access. The service supports transactions up to Rs5,000 and is accessible to customers through Everest's mobile banking app.

WINE, WOMEN AND SONG

Bishnu Shumsher Rana, the Nepali prince who was a cultural rebel in search of personal freedom

■ Daniel W Edwards

There are at least three accounts of why Bishnu Shumsher Rana had to leave Nepal. In the first, news reached the ears of his father, the Prime Minister, that Bishnu had committed a cardinal sin in Calcutta by eating beef. Family disapproval ultimately led Bishnu to depart Nepal. Another credible report was that Bishnu was suffering from leucoderma that results in white patches on the skin. Bishnu got word the Prime Minister was using this as a pretext to send him into exile, so he quietly left for Calcutta, then on to England. Another reason could be what was cited in Nepal Under the Ranas, a book by Adrian Sever:

‘Young, wealthy and English-educated, Vishnu Shamsher found the conservative and austere atmosphere of the Rana court intolerable. He secreted his money out of Nepal, obtained a passport by fraudulent means and then, in violation of all caste restrictions, slipped out of the country and set sail from Bombay for the high life of Europe, mailing his resignation from the Roll of Succession back to the Prime Minister along the way. Bhim Shamsher was so upset by the whole affair that Bal Kumari [Bishnu’s mother] thought it prudent to move to Calcutta.’

Kaiser Shumsher, older brother of Bishnu, noted in his diary that Shankar Shumsher came to Kaiser’s home on 16 April 1931, ‘and we talked about BH’ (Babu Hazur referring to Bishnu). Another person present (identified by initials only) ‘remarked his going was the greatest blot on the family

to which I (Kaiser) could not help remarking he (Bishnu) had lost Nepal but gained the world’. On the 21st, letters arrived from Bishnu, and as Kaiser read them, ‘tears streamed down my cheeks in spite of myself’. Bishnu’s property in Nepal had been confiscated.

Bishnu wrote postcards home from Aden and Macedonia. Kaiser records in his diary that Prime Minister Bhim said he had heard that Bishnu had left Nepal with 72 lakh Indian rupees, which today would be nearly \$2 million. In early May 1931, Prime Minister Bhim wrote to ask a British official ‘to help (Bishnu)’. Later that month, his brothers received Bishnu’s letters from Marseilles. From there, Bishnu made his way to England, where his wife soon joined him. On 17 August 1931, Bishnu’s only known child, Pitamber, was born in London.

Now freed from the constraints of Nepali society, and with a wife who, like many Nepali women of her time, turned a blind eye to the escapades of her husband, Bishnu was ‘free’ to pursue a life of ‘wine, women and song’.

Bishnu left Southampton for America in July 1933 accompanied by brother-in-law, Raja Jai Prithivi Bahadur Singh, son of the Bajhang Raja and husband of Chandra Shumsher’s oldest daughter. Singh was educated in India and became a founder and editor of Nepal’s first newspaper, the Gorkhapatra. He published a book on humanism in Nepali in 1913 and advocated educational and social reforms that displeased Chandra Shumsher.

Jai Prithivi left Nepal in 1916, first settling in Nainital and later in Bangalore, where he established the Humanistic Club. He was invited to Chicago to address the Second World Parliament of Religion meeting in August 1933 and visit Chicagos’ World’s Fair Exhibition. Bishnu Shumsher and Jai Prithivi sailed together on the Bremen and reached New York on 26 July 1933. We will recognise Bishnu Shumsher as the second Nepali to set foot on American soil. (The first, Padma Sundar Malla, had reached San Francisco from Yokohama in 1917 and studied at the University of Illinois.) Bishnu returned to London after a few weeks in America.

Bishnu’s first American girlfriend was Mary Dorothy Rambo, or Sandra Rambeau as she later called herself. She was beautiful, blonde and lucky. Unable to get a stage role on Broadway, Sandra seized an opportunity to see the world (and perhaps a wealthy husband in the process). Sandra signed on as a member of the ‘Midnight Follies’ at a salary of \$75 per month. Follies shows usually involved scantily-clad women dancing on a nightclub stage before men seated below, eating and drinking. It was at London’s Dorchester Hotel that Sandra met Bishnu Shumsher in the autumn of 1933. It was a whirlwind romance, and after Sandra had returned to California, papers across America breathlessly announced that a California girl



Prime Minister Chandra Sumsher with his eight sons including Bishnu Shumsher (second from left).



Bishnu Shumsher with his wife, Rani Urmila.

MADAN PURASKAR PUSTAKALAYA

was soon to marry a ‘Prince of India’, third-in-line to become the Maharaja of Nepal, confusing the King of Nepal with the Rana Prime Minister. Sandra said she and ‘Bish’ planned to reside outside India until the prince succeeded to the throne of Nepal. She showed photos of herself with the prince to her family and stated she would sail to France, then go to Genoa, where she would meet her fiancé. They would then marry in London. After marriage, she wanted to live in Paris, but Bishnu insisted on a suburb of London. When questioned further about her prince, Sandra said: ‘It was a case of love at first sight, for he proposed to me a week after our first meeting. My romance with the prince, which started in London, will thrive in London, despite the fact that the prince has a wife in Nepal. As far as his being married is concerned, Indian princes usually have several wives.’ One article noted that Prince Bishnu was ‘fabulously wealthy’ and had ‘\$3 million of his own in

gold and is heir to the royal family’s bulging treasure chests’. American readers must have marvelled at this ordinary American showgirl becoming the Maharani of Nepal. Confident of her future, Sandra sailed from Los Angeles in February 1934. Bishnu issued a statement in India that he was going to Genoa to meet the Princess of Nepal (his wife) and their child and accompany them to London for the season. Upon arriving at Genoa, Sandra checked into the same hotel where Bishnu’s wife and child were staying, but said that did not ‘disturb her’. We do not know the details of what happened when Bishnu arrived in Genoa. Did Bishnu inform her that the Nepal government had pressured him not to marry her? There was no marriage, and the British, ‘upset at the idea of an American chorus girl’s becoming a princess of strategic Nepal’ refused to issue her an Indian visa. Sandra continued to exert her seductive charms on rich and famous men. Prince George, the youngest son of King George of



Sandra Rambo, Bishnu Shumsher’s first American girlfriend.



Bishnu Shumsher and Sandra Rambo in 1933.

England, was also smitten with Sandra. He saw her perform at a seaside resort in southwest France, sent her love letters, and gave her a ring of diamonds and rubies. The King sternly intervened, and George soon married a Greek princess. Bishnu’s wandering eye continued to wander. This time it was ‘ravishing’ Edith Roark, also a Folies Bergere dancer, who attracted the ardent attentions of Prince Ibrahim of Egypt. While Edith claimed her two rivals ‘became violently jealous of each other’, Sandra did not stand idly by, because she still liked Bishnu. Sandra confronted Edith in a hotel lobby in England. ‘There were screeches and hair-pulling and harsh, peppery epithets.’ Prince Bishnu continued to provide reporters with good copy: ‘Prince Bishnu of Nepal ... reported that his subjects used to present him with the equivalent of his weight in gold on all his birthdays. He told us that it began on his first birthday. “Were you weighed in the nude?” the prince was asked. “No, I wore a diaper” he said, “not only for the sake of modesty, but also for the added weight”.’

A palace fit for a prince

Once a symbol of the opulence of the Rana era, Bishnu Shumsher’s palace is in ruins

■ Asmita Khadka

Prime Minister Chandra Shumsher Rana commissioned three palaces in Patan for three of his sons: Bishnu, Shankar and Madan. Although less grand than his own Singha Darbar, Sri Mahal, Harihar

Bhawan and Sri Darbar of the sons were palatial stucco structures that emulated the royal grandeur of Victorian British architecture. They stood in stark contrast to the densely-packed two-storey brick and tile roof homes of Patan, and were designed and built by Kishor Narasingh and Kumar Narasingh Rana, the era’s foremost palace architects. Construction of Sri Mahal and Sri Darbar started within weeks of each other in 1919 and lasted two years. The structure was made of bricks with lime and clay mortar, plastered with lime mixed with sand and water.



The impressive west facade of Bishnu Shumsher Rana’s Sri Mahal palace in 1930 in a photo, mistakenly identified as ‘Sri Durbar’, taken by the British. The building was handed over to the government in 1960, and the same facade today after damage in the 2015 earthquake.





Sandra Rambo was pursued by Prince George of England after Bishnu Shumsher broke things off with her.



Edith Roark, a dancer in Paris' Folies Bergere.



Bishnu Shumsher struck up a friendship with Patricia Wilder, a nightclub performer in New York.

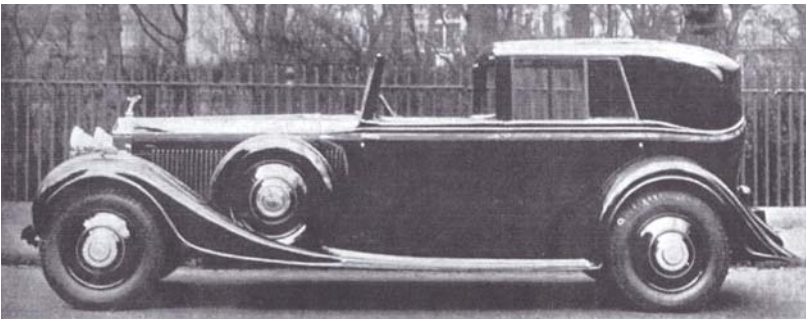
In 1935 Bishnu purchased a Rolls Royce in London, the same year that a portrait of ‘Princess of Bishnu of Nepal’ was painted and exhibited at an art show held at the Royal Institute Galleries in Piccadilly.

Bishnu returned to America in October 1938 on the Queen Mary. With him was Hatim Attari, a merchant in London, originally from Swat, now in Pakistan. Attari functioned as a lawyer-secretary to Bishnu and was the executor of Bishnu’s estate in 1946.

At a dinner Bishnu gave for fifteen guests at New York’s Waldorf Astoria Hotel, ‘pearls and emeralds were passed out as dinner favors’. Bishnu left New York in late November and returned to England on the ship Normandie.

World War II broke out in 1939, and Bishnu decided to seek safety in America unaccompanied by his wife or child, but with Attari.

Soon, ‘Prince Bishnu’ began appearing in newspaper columns written by two nationally famous gossip writers, Walter Winchell and



The Rolls Royce bought by Bishnu Shumsher in London in 1935.



American actress Jean Carmen, who was courted by Bishnu Shumsher, performing on stage.

Dorothy Kilgallen. Bishnu began courting another American actress:

‘Prince Bishnu of Nepal, India, and Jean Carmen of Man Who Came to Dinner. Sends her orchids every night and diamond brooches to pin them with.’

Appropriately, Jean had played a ‘gold digger’ in the 1938 Three Stooges’ comedy Healthy, Wealthy and Dumb. She was blonde, blue-eyed and 26 years old when Bishnu met her at a Broadway theater.

Three months later, a society column reported: ‘Prince Bishnu of Nepal, India, wants to return there, but can’t get a visa for Stephanie Markin, former show gal in American Jubilee. She’s his Girl Friday at the Hotel Madison.’ He and Stephanie broke up, but readers were reassured in April that ‘Prince Bishnu and his dream girl, Stephanie, have reconciled.’

One writer described Stephanie as ‘a tall, beautiful, flaming-tressed Venus and former showgirl’. The reason why Stephanie wanted to reconcile was clear: ‘Stephanie Markin is wearing the biggest diamond [New York] has seen in years. They say Prince Bishnu is changing his will, making her an heir.’

In May of 1941 this interesting news tidbit appeared:

‘Prince Bishnu of Nepal, reputedly such a solid spender, can’t move from his (New York) hotel to Oyster Bay—because he’s out of funds. The lad who’s been showering so much champagne on the gals about town can’t pay his own rent, because his money hasn’t come through from England.’

This led another paper to comment sarcastically: ‘the light-headed moths who flutter around Prince Bishnu don’t know that he is just a remittance man.’

Marooned in New York during a hot 1941 summer, Bishnu continued to frequent nightclubs. He struck up a friendship with the 27-year-old showgirl Honeychile Wilder. Patricia Wilder came from Georgia and had ‘taken New York by storm’ when she arrived there in 1934.

One reason Bishnu may have appealed to the young nightclub

performers was that he apparently was not a loud and boastful suitor. He was a good listener as one columnist noted: ‘Prince Bishnu of Nepal is the best audience in town for glamor girls, because he always listens very attentively and rarely says anything himself.’

By July 1941, Bishnu’s drinking was impairing his health:

‘Playboy Prince Bishnu’s doctors allow him to gallivant only two days a week now; the other five days he must spend at a Westchester [New York] rest home.’

That September, readers of society pages came upon this startling news:

‘Prince Bishnu of Nepal, Broadway’s most eccentric playboy, has left the country with the aid of the British Government—and you should see the process servers he left behind him! Playboy Prince Bishnu, who cut such a swath among the local gold-diggers when he was playing the Broadway beat, has been ‘quarantined’ in Nassau indefinitely by order of the British foreign office.’

October’s news was that ‘local creditors still are whistling for their money, despite British Government assurances they would be paid. (Prince Bishnu) owes one New York hotel \$4,500.’

Finally in November, it was stated that ‘the British government has paid all the bills run up by Prince Bishnu of Nepal at the Madison, so now His Highness can have his 32 trunks that were being held.’

In 1931 Bishnu Shumsher had gone voluntarily into exile from Nepal. Now ten years later, he had been exiled involuntarily from the United States.

Nepal’s Minister in London, Singha Shumsher, was necessarily involved with his younger brother’s activities. Singha was the middleman relaying funds to Bishnu in America. Singha may have felt that Bishnu’s reckless spending habits had to be brought under control and that his escapades did not reflect well upon the Rana family and Nepal’s image. He also knew that Bishnu’s health had taken a turn for the worse.



Aircraft carrying the body of Bishnu Shumsher from the Bahamas to Banaras after landing at Babatpur airfield in 1946.

MADAN PURASKAR PUSTAKALAYA

What was to be done with ‘Major General’ Bishnu? London was still under bombardment by the Nazis, so his return there was not advisable. Commercial flights and ocean travel to India were restricted due to the war.

The Bahamas in 1941 was governed by the Duke of Windsor, formerly King Edward VIII, the closest British colony to America. Nassau had a warm climate, good medical facilities and undoubtedly a few raunchy nightclubs. So the British government ordered Bishnu Shumsher to leave New York and stay in Nassau ‘indefinitely’.

In April 1942, gossip columnist Dorothy Kilgallen wrote that Prince Bishnu was very ill in a Nassau hospital. He was calling New York three times a day to chat with old friends. In March 1943, the scoop was that Bishnu wanted to return to the US from Nassau, but British authorities would not allow it.

Documents in the British Library show that in 1944, England’s Board of Inland Revenue was investigating Bishnu’s shady if not illegal business activities:

‘It appears that through the operations of a multiplicity of companies engaged in the whisky trade, in diamond trafficking, exploiting of patents, etc., (Bishnu and Attari) have defrauded the Inland Revenue of sums estimated at a total of over 500,000 pounds—on whiskey alone 450,000 pounds. Prince Bishnu supplies the capital, Attari, the brains. The affairs of the several companies are intricately interwoven, and the joint or separate responsibility of Bishnu and Attari in all of them is difficult to determine.’

Once Inland Revenue had prepared its case, a diplomat recommended it would be best to discuss with the Nepali Minister the desirability of effecting a settlement out of court, so as to avoid publicity and a politically undesirable scandal. How much the Nepal government had to pay to settle this case is not known.

In June 1944, a paper noted: ‘Prince Bishnu is flying from Nassau to Canada to consult physicians.’ Two months later Bishnu had moved to Newfoundland ‘for his health’, but that autumn he returned to Nassau.

A Nassau paper reported this news in February 1946:

‘Prince Bishnu Shamsher, 39, son of the late Maharajah of Nepal, was found dead in bed (February 4). The cause of his death is under investigation.

When a nurse saw him at 4 a.m. he was apparently well and ordered breakfast for 8 a.m. Prince Bishnu who lived in Nassau for four and a half years directed in his will his body be sent to Miami for cremation and the ashes sent to his secretary, Hatim Attari, in London for shipment to India.

Government doctors said they are satisfied Prince Bishnu died of natural causes. It was learned however that sections of the intestines and brain may be sent to a laboratory in the United States for further tests.’

Dr. H.A. Quackenbush, Bishnu’s personal physician, testified before a coroner’s jury that the prince was a chronic alcoholic and subject to alcoholic fits.

News of Bishnu’s death quickly reached Nepal. Kaiser Shumsher noted in his diary: ‘Singha Shumsher was trying to get Bishnu’s body from Nassau to London and Benares as desired by his mother.’ On 6 March, Kaiser and Prime Minister Padma Shumsher planned to have a plane return Bishnu’s body to India.

Bishnu’s body was brought back to Banaras, and a procession carried his casket through the streets to a ghat by the river. There, Bishnu Shumsher was cremated.

The Nepal government paid expenses to fly his body to Banaras, just as his Rana kin had helped defray his expenses while he was living the life of a prince in England and America. Ironically, the ashes of the man who had rebelled against the strictures of the Hindu way of life were scattered in the sacred Ganges River.

In November 1938, an American Psychologist, commenting on the Sandra Rambeau saga, wrote an article entitled, ‘Why the British Princes Fall for the American Girls’. Substituting ‘Prince Bishnu’ for the British princes he referred to, the similarities between the upbringing and lives of British royalty and Nepal’s Prince Bishnu are clear. Excerpts from this 1938 article:

‘The stricter the discipline, the harder this adjustment is, and the stronger is our desire to rebel against it. But there probably is no child who is disciplined as rigidly as the one who is born into a palace. From babyhood such a child is hemmed in by a system of “court etiquette” which forbids the display of almost any normal feeling.’

This observation seems still valid: Prince Harry, son of King Charles, marrying American actress Meghan Markle. Bishnu Shumsher never could have met young women like Sandra Rambeau and Patricia Wilder in Nepal, and continued to pursue similarly vivacious American showgirls until he was exiled to Nassau.

The author thanks Himalaya SJB Rana and Lok Bhakta Rana for the information on Bishnu Shumsher. Subodh Rana has written about Bishnu’s life in Nepal on his blog. Go online for a longer version of this article.



PHOTOS: MADAN PURASKAR PUSTAKALAYA AND ASMITA KHADKA

the British historian Perceval Landon who was commissioned by the Ranas earthquake that has not been repaired.

Records show that Chandra Shumsher himself spent a night at one of the palaces and decided to bequeath it to his junior queen, Balkumari Devi and his elder son Bishnu Shumsher. But when his youngest son Madan was born, Balkumari started living with the child on the eastern side at Sri Darbar.

Chandra Shumsher died in 1929, and Bhim Shumsher became Prime Minister. Chandra’s relatives and courtiers fell into disfavour, and Bishnu left for India and on to Britain, never again to live in the Sri Mahal.

In 1947, India gained independence and the Rana era came to an end in 1951. Bishnu Shumsher died in the Bahamas in 1946, and Madan Shumsher died in 1955 after which his widow Jagadamba Devi bought Sri Mahal from Bishnu Shumsher’s son Pitamber.

She then gifted it in 1960 to the

government of BP Koirala to set up an agriculture college.

But within a few days of the handover, King Mahendra staged his coup and BP Koirala was first imprisoned in the very palace that his government had just taken possession of. The agriculture college was never established, and the former palace became the office of the Ministry of Local Government.

Sri Darbar was demolished by Madan Shumsher’s sons in the 1970s, and Sri Mahal suffered major structural damage in the 2015 earthquake. In the eight years since, the building has deteriorated further. Today it stands as a haunting reminder of the past with vegetation growing out of its crumbling walls.

Nearby Harihar Bhawan, which Chandra Shumsher built for his son Shankar

Shumsher, was also badly damaged.

Sri Mahal itself is now 104 years old, and has become a heritage building. Yet, the Department of Archaeology says it lacks detailed study and necessary documentation to preserve the structure despite a budgetary allocation of Rs500 million this year. The Department cannot seem to decide whether to demolish, rebuild or repair.

Sri Mahal and Harihar Bhawan remain one of the few remaining Rana-era palaces that had been repurposed as government offices. Reconstructing them in the original style would preserve not just the buildings, but be a reminder of an important era of Nepali history. 🇳🇵

A longer Nepali version of this article appears in Himal Khabar.

EVENTS



Asia U20 Rugby

The Asia Rugby U20 Men's and Women's Sevens hosted by Nepal will see participants from seven men's teams and four women's teams. Be part of the cheers this weekend. 19-20 August, Dasharath Rangasala

Photo Walk

Join the photo walk and photography competition organised by Kathmandu Photographer's Association on the occasion of the 184th World Photography Day. 19 August, 8am, Bhaktapur Durbar Square, 9841205792



Pop-up show

Beyond the Hangers is set to unveil the latest in fashion and style during its Pop-up event, showcasing meticulously curated designers and designs. 20 August–21 August, Hotel Yak and Yeti

Art Exhibition

Pooja Duwal's upcoming solo exhibition The Stranger Is A Friend is a reflection of everyday life and pays homage to the Newar gallis and choks the artist grew up in. 19 August-17 September, Takpa Gallery, Lazimpat



TechHour

Celebrating Nepali Women in Tech: a Tech Meetup is aimed at fostering networking, collaboration, and empowerment among women and marginalised communities in tech. 19 August, 3pm, Ullens School, Khumaltar

DINING



Mamagoto

Enjoy maki rolls, satays, dumplings, ramen and more—all with a side of cocktails-- at this Pan-Asian restaurant that serves a variety of Asian fusion dishes. Panipokhari (01) 4446299

MUSIC

The Square Band

Grab some drinks and get ready to groove and rock the night away with The Square Band, which is set perform live this weekend. 20 August, Beers N' Cheers



Hip Hop Fest

Some of hip hop's well known talents including Dong, Bishesh, Martin and more will come together to create an unforgettable urban music experience this weekend. 18 August, Club Fahrenheit, 9818016413



Shilpa Rao

Listen to Shilpa Rao's soul-stirring melodies and immerse in a musical evening. Call for more details. 25 August, Privé Nepal, 9840891584



Krur

Unleash your inner metalhead as Krur takes the stage to celebrate the ferocity of Death Metal music. 19 August, Beers N' Cheers, Jhamsikhel

Music Room

Learn various western musical instruments and vocals at Music Room affiliated with the Rock School of London. Bhatbhateni, Naxal, 981856982



Achaar Ghar

Nothing beats a home-cooked meal at Achaar Ghar with its assortment of pickles prepared from recipes that have been passed down from generations. Pulchok (01) 5541952

Bluenote Coffee

Choose from a variety of beverages, sandwiches and ice-creams that Bluenote Coffee has to offer. Stop by on evenings for draft beer and live music. Lazimpat, 9818137771

About Town

GETAWAY



Hotel Mountain Top

With the alluring vistas of Phewa Lake and the snow-capped mountains, this hotel is a must-go. Sip drinks and enjoy Nepali cuisine atop The Altitude Bar, and stay in rooms reminiscent of the clean white and light blues of Santorini. Lakeside Road, Pokhara (61) 461779

Evergreen Eco-Lodge

At Evergreen Eco-Lodge, unwind in one of the rustic wooden tree-house cabins with thatched straw roofs and enjoy the tranquility of the dense surrounding forestry. Sauraha, 9845693879



Dalai-La Boutique Hotel

Step out of Kathmandu's chaos and into peace and serenity. Decorated with historic artefacts over 50 years old, Dalai-La is an attraction in itself. Thamel (01) 4701436

Borderlands Eco Resort

Eco-adventures await in the wild nature of Borderlands Eco Resort. Get away for the weekend and be a daredevil. Sindhupalchok, 9801025111



Soaltee Westend Premier

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

Edamame Xtravaganza

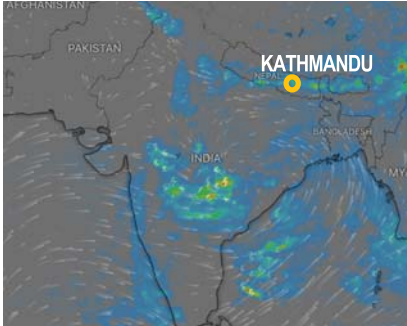
Visit Edamame and learn to cook with executive chef Bishnu Magar. Limited seating available. Call 24 hours ahead to book seats. 17-19 August, Rs15,000, Kathmandu Marriott, 9801971643



Sam's One Tree

The murals of this eatery have appeared in the background of many social media posts and stories. Customers rave about the lively atmosphere, tempting sizzlers and quick service. Darbar Marg (01) 4222636

WEEKEND WEATHER



FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
 29° 20°	 29° 21°	 27° 21°	 25° 20°	 25° 20°

More rains

Another monsoon pulse with a low pressure circulation is moving across northern India from the Bay of Bengal. This will mean mainly overcast skies over the next few days with heavy showers in places and occasional spells of sunshine. The total precipitation has been normal for this time of year, although there could be more microbursts like the one in Muktinath this week that triggered a landslide dammed river burst.

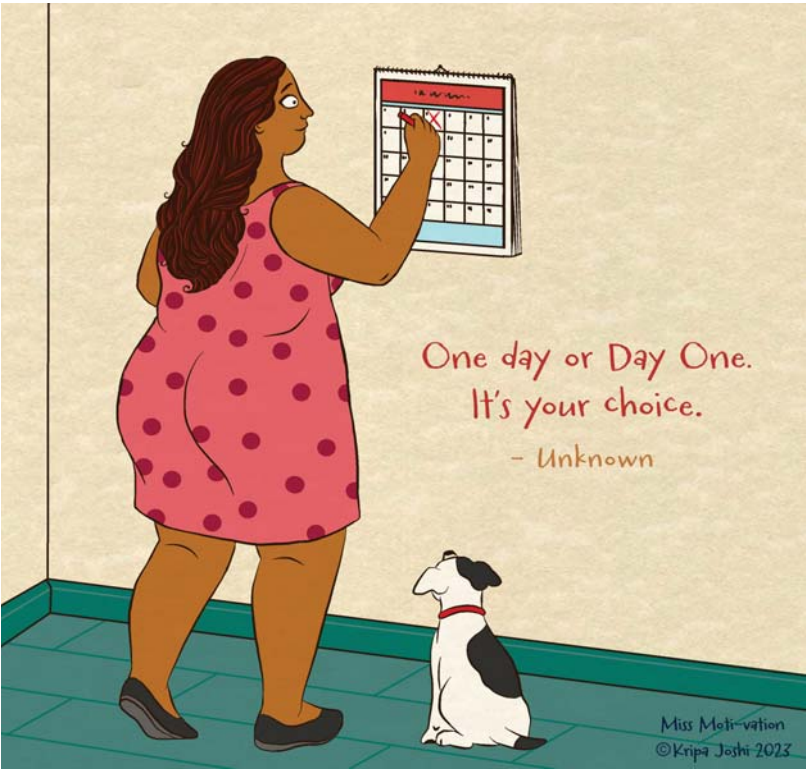
OUR PICK

In Poker Face, the ten-part crime-drama series created by Rian Johnson, cocktail worker Charlie Cale—who has the extraordinary ability to detect lies—is forced to go on the run after she is involved in a homicide investigation at the casino in which she works. As she hits the road with her beat-up car, Charlie encounters a new mystery and a new cast of characters at every stop she makes, which she cannot help but investigate. Meanwhile, her casino boss is hot on her heels. Stars Natasha Lyonne as Charlie Cale.



MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



सर्पदंश (सर्पको टोकाइ) बाट बच्न...

- घर वरिपरि सर्प लुक्न सक्ने सम्भावित स्थानको खोजी गरी त्यस्ता ठाउँहरूको व्यवस्थापन गरौं ।
- घर वरिपरि सफा राखौं, प्वालहरू टालौं ।
- खुला स्थानमा शौच नगरौं ।
- खाली खुट्टा नहिँडौं, जुत्ता वा गम्बुट लगाऔं, लड्डी लिएर हिँडौं ।
- सम्भव भएसम्म खाटमा सुतौं ।
- सुत्दा झुलको अनिवार्य प्रयोग गरौं ।
- सुत्ने वेलामा ओछ्यान राम्ररी हेरौं ।
- राती हिँड्दा टर्चको प्रयोग गरौं ।
- पराल, दाउरा आदि निकाल्दा होशियारी अपनाऔं ।



नेपाल सरकार
विज्ञापन बोर्ड

■ **Swosti Rajbhandari Kayastha** in Patna

Centuries-old tradition of cultural exchange between northern India and Kathmandu Valley got continuity recently with Nepal Art Council exhibiting ancient and contemporary art at the Bihar Museum Biennale in Patna.

Kathmandu Valley, the Mithila Kingdom and Buddhist sacred sites of Bihar have an intertwined history that is reflected in close affinity of their culture and art. Which could be why the 205 artworks by 68 Nepali artists in the Patna biennale have been so popular among visitors here.

The arts of Nepal with their multi-fold expressions have blended engineering with art to create structures that incorporate all forms of art holistically.

The skill and practice were initially passed down through family traditions, but in time influenced many more than just the core practicing community.

Nepal got another opportunity to showcase its art in the largest display outside the country in Patna with an exhibition titled 'Nepal, Where the Gods Reside'.

The focus of the exhibition was the centrally placed colourful Pancha Buddha and Asta Mangala



SWOSTI RAJBHANDARI KAYASTHA

floor Mandala. Many visitors bent down to touch the mandala, thinking it to be a painting.

The interest and appreciation of the visitors, established artists and curators from India and abroad was immense. Alka Pande, the chief curator of the Biennale said the Nepal exhibition was a 'show-stopper'.

This exhibition encompassed a wide range of genres reflecting

Nepali creativity throughout history right to the present day. Artistic production in Nepal is a living heritage, where creators draw inspiration from spiritual, philosophical traditions and iconographic sources before giving free rein to their imagination.

These artworks through their intricate detail evoke a sense of sacred beauty and serve various purposes, including veneration,

repoussé techniques, filigree with semi-precious stone inlay, and ceramics.

In the last decade, Nepali art has got an international reach. Many artists have settled abroad and made a name for themselves. Others exhibit their works worldwide. NAC itself has taken Nepali art to three editions of the India Art Fair, and in 2019 it co-curated 'Nepal Art Now' with 100 works at the Weltmuseum, Vienna. This exhibition was equally popular and was extended for two more months.

The city of Patna has a College of Art and Craft established in 1939, and its streets are replete with traditional Madhubani art as well as thematic contemporary drawings and paintings, mostly providing social messages related to environment conservation.

This second edition of the Bihar Museum Biennale 2023 was inaugurated by Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on 7 August and had exhibits from Thailand, Panama, Costa Rica, Italy, Russia and from other Indian museums as well.

The foundation day of Bihar Museum coincided with the inauguration and showcased the folk art of Padma Shree-awarded artists from Bihar and launched 'Together We Art', an exhibition of G20 member and guest countries. The exhibition will be in Patna till 7 October. The world class Bihar Museum is the largest museum of central and South-Asia, and the first post-colonial state museum of India, showcasing historical artefacts from the early civilisation up to 1764 as well as folk and contemporary art forms. 🇳🇵

Swosti Rajbhandari Kayastha is Curator of the Nepal Art Council.

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SIPRADI

Why are autism cases rising

A worrying increase in autism among younger Nepalis means more support for patients and caregivers

■ **Yugottam Koirala**

In 2014, when Surendra Bajracharya was conducting an autism screening camp in Doti, he came across the most unusual case he had seen till then and since. A 46-year-old man had been carried by his brother in a doko basket on his back all the way from his home in the village.

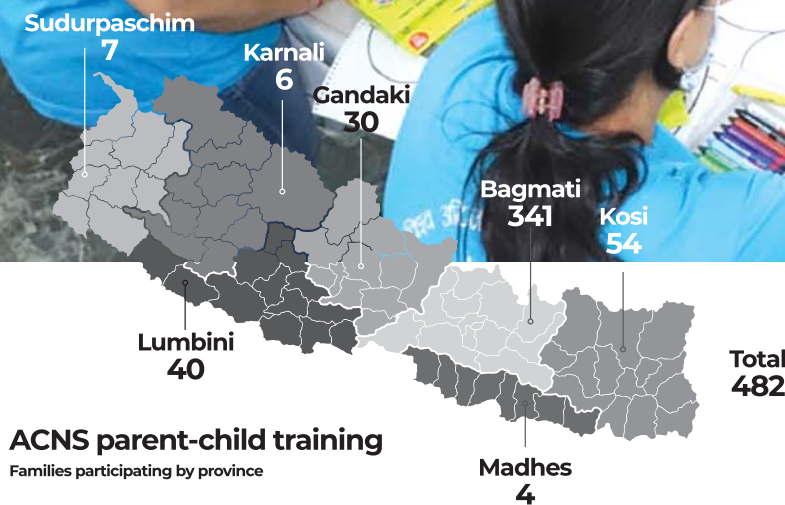
The patient had spent his childhood tied up on a leash due to his impulsive behaviour, unusual mood reaction and fits. He had never learnt to move on his own.

“He could not speak or walk. We first thought he had cerebral palsy,” recalls Bajracharya. “But after examining him we felt his symptoms matched those of people with autism.”

The patient and his brother were orphaned at a young age, and it was the brother who was his guardian and nurse all his life. There was no other support system in the family or community.

As the head of Autism Care Nepal Society (ACNS), Surendra Bajracharya has seen everything from a parent dying by suicide due to being overwhelmed by his autistic child to children being caged in attics and enduring social ostracisation because of their condition.

But of late, there has been growing awareness in Nepal about autism. In the last decade, ACNS has seen a steady rise in the total diagnoses from just 11 in 2008 to



over 300 in 2022. This does not necessarily mean an increase in incidence, but is a good indicator of greater awareness and concern about autism among parents and the public.

However, the increase in cases

of autism have also been linked to unhealthy dietary practices, especially junk food by the mother during pregnancy.

Following the Covid-19 pandemic, doctors are also reporting an unusually high

Nepal gears up for HPV vaccination

Immunisation to prevent cervical cancer awaiting approval from global vaccine alliance

■ **Marty Logan**

As Dipak Subedi was organising a vaccination programme against the human papillomavirus (HPV) in Chitwan's Bharatpur he was getting phone calls from neighbouring districts asking if he had extra doses available. People were willing to travel for hours to get their girls vaccinated against HPV, which causes cervical cancer, the deadliest form of cancer for women in Nepal.

Callers had heard about the campaign, which started in 2022, after the city posted the news on Facebook, says Subedi, senior public health officer and chief of the Bharatpur public health promotion section. Unfortunately, he had no extra doses.

“With such demand, if the HPV vaccine was to be included in our regular vaccination programme, we could get more than 90% coverage,” he adds.

Most people approached for this article who were connected to the Bharatpur campaign, or to previous small-scale pilot projects in Nepal, noted similar high demand. In recent years the Nepal Government has pledged repeatedly to provide the HPV vaccine for national distribution but has yet to do so.

Earlier this month a national campaign moved a step closer when the child health and immunisation section of the health department submitted a request to the global vaccine alliance GAVI for 1.6 million doses. The response should be known by September. If positive, vaccination could start in 2024.



MARTY LOGAN

Cervical cancer is the fourth most common form of cancer among women globally and the leading cause of cancer-related deaths for women in 36 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The World Health Organisation (WHO) reported recently that 604,000 new cases of cervical cancer were reported globally in 2020 and that 342,000 women died from the disease – a staggering 90% of the new cases and deaths occurred in low and middle-income countries.

HPV is the virus that causes most cases of cervical cancer and

is responsible for the majority of sexually transmitted infections of the reproductive system. The HPV vaccine has been shown to prevent up to 90% of HPV-related cancers and pre-cancerous injuries. WHO says that eradicating cervical cancer will require vaccinating 90% of all girls worldwide by the age of 15.

The burden of the disease in Asia is high. According to the Lancet, China and India alone accounted for 40% of global cervical deaths in 2020. In Nepal, there were an estimated 14.2 cases per 100,000 women in 2020, versus

the WHO target for 2030 of less than 4. The disease kills about 1,500 women in the country each year, reports the HPV Information Centre.

In 2020, researchers predicted that without any intervention, a total of 170,600 women in Nepal would die from cervical cancer by 2070 and 318,855 by 2120. But according to the UN Population Fund, HPV vaccination could prevent nearly 38,737 cervical cancer deaths in Nepal by 2070, and 165,115 by 2120.

About 400-500 new cases are

diagnosed at the BP Koirala Cancer Hospital in Bharatpur alone every year, says Asmita Rana, the head of the hospital's department of cancer prevention control and research.

Rana is managing the vaccination campaign in Bharatpur and two other municipalities, distributing 12,500 doses to girls ages 11-13, two doses each. While the first phase was a big success, the second one has faltered, she says.

That is mainly because phase one was implemented at schools and health facilities at the community level by municipal staff. Phase two was centred around the hospital, meaning that caregivers such as school officials and/or parents had to transport children to and from the facility.

“What it has taught us is to conduct all the phases through schools next time to ensure participation,” says Rana. “That would be a more appropriate way to follow up with those girls... rather than at the health facilities.”

The second learning is raising awareness ahead of time, adds Rana. “From my experience I can say that if we do an awareness programme ahead of time — tell them something about the vaccine, about HPV, and the effectiveness of the vaccine for preventing cancer, then they will be quite positive and participating.”

Even if people are initially sceptical, when parents learn that the vaccine prevents their daughters from getting cervical cancer in the future and is free of cost, most are convinced, she further explains.

The vaccine is also available



The barefoot doctor of Rolpa

Japanese surgeon makes it his life's mission to serve in Nepal's remotest district

■ Pinki Sris Rana

Pratikshya Roka Magar was a sickly baby ever since she was born in a faraway village in Rukum district. As years went by, the girl's spine started to bend.

Her mother Namrata Roka had given up hope that her daughter would ever get better when she heard about a Japanese doctor who was conducting a mobile health camp in the village.

Pratikshya was seven years old in 2013 when Japanese physician Ryukichi Ishida examined her, and diagnosed a rare case of spinal scoliosis that ultimately affects the lungs and heart. Now 17, Pratikshya has undergone six major operations in which two rods were inserted to straighten her spine.

The Japanese benefactor has since been supporting her and the family financially, and checks up on Pratikshya routinely.

"He is like god for us," says a grateful Namrata.

Pratikshya is not the only one who has received Ishida's healing touch in these mountains where the health system is still rudimentary, and the ravages of the Maoist conflict still linger.

During voluntary work with tuberculosis control while walking through Nepal's remotest districts in 1968 as a 21-year-old medical student, Ryukichi Ishida made a promise that he would return one day to serve the people of this country. Back in Japan, while heading the



SUMAN NEPALI

orthopaedic department at Osaka's Ueda-Shimotanabe Hospital, he constantly felt the tug of Nepal.

In 2006, he left his family and a satisfying job to fulfil his pledge to return to Nepal. A question that had

nagged him all those years was why medical care around the world, including in Japan and Nepal, was not more equitable.

Ishida was inspired by his physician father who also ran a clinic in the most underserved part of Japan. He has travelled through Dolakha, Jumla, Jajarkot, Rukum and Rolpa, conducting free medical camps carrying just a backpack — just like when he trekked through Nepal as an idealistic student all those years ago.

He has been working at Rolpa's Jaljala Health Post since 2011, a

place so remote that even Nepali health workers are reluctant to be posted there. The facility has since been turned into a hospital and research centre and is in the process of becoming a 15 bedded municipality hospital.

The hospital has Nepali staff, but none of them stay more than a year. "The only thing constant here is Dr Ishida and his commitment to serve the people," says Ajay Magar of the Jhumluwang Village Foundation, a non-profit that conducts health camps in collaboration with Ishida.

Besides treating patients, Ishida has also supported locals like Sahanshila Buda Magar who is the first female MBBS graduate from Thawang thanks to a scholarship he provided.

Sahanshila, 27, got her degree from Changsha Medical University in China, and is undergoing a three-month training at Patan Hospital. She plans to go back home and work at the Jaljala Hospital.

Ishida says the staffing challenges of remote area facilities in places like Rolpa can only be met by producing their own crop of young doctors with a commitment to the place they belong.

Despite his years of experience as an orthopaedic surgeon, Ishida believes in integrating modern medical practices with traditional healing, especially for bone-setting and birthing.

The only reward Ishida has for his work is the respect and affection of Thawang's people. Villagers refer to him simply as "हाम्रो डाक्टर" (our doctor) — indicating they have ownership over a surgeon who they consider to be rightfully theirs.

That same recognition is not reflected in the way the Nepali state regards Ishida. Now 76, and increasingly frail, Ishida has applied unsuccessfully for honorary Nepali citizenship. His visa requires Ishida to make frequent expensive trips back to Japan, and says he no longer wants to go back and forth.

When he is away on his visa run, Rolpa's villagers count the days for Ishida's return so they can be treated. The surgeon does not take a salary, lives frugally and depends on the Jaljala Hospital for food and lodging.

"I was born in Kobe, but I want to die here in Thawang," says the soft-spoken Ishida. "This is my home now." 🇳🇵

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