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SONIA AWALE

# Mayoral airs

**A**s winter sets in and air quality deteriorates, most of Kathmandu Valley's 18 mayors gathered on Thursday in Patan to listen to experts and discuss a strategy to reduce air pollution.

The Mayors' Summit on Air Pollution heard from scientists that Kathmandu ranks 261 among the world's 3,000 most polluted cities. And that a third of the Valley's pollution is caused by vehicular emissions, 28% from road dust, 23% from garbage burning and 15% from brick kilns. In winter, local air quality is worsened by industrial pollution and crop burning smoke blown in from India.

"People are cursing us because we have not acted to reduce pollution, this forum gives us an opportunity for the Valley's municipalities to work together to address this public health menace collectively," said Lalitpur mayor Chiri Babu Maharjan (*pictured above, left sitting with Kathmandu Mayor Bidya Sundar Shakya*).

One of the Valley's most pro-active mayors, Madan Sundar Shrestha of Thimi has been building bicycle lanes and widening sidewalks, and advised

fellow mayors that there was now enough awareness, and they should move into implementing remedial measures. The Mayor's Forum will soon decide on steps to be taken to improve the Valley's air quality.

The Mayors' Summit was jointly organised by Kathmandu and Lalitpur Municipalities with Clean Energy Nepal and the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD). Bhusan Tuladhar of Clean Energy Nepal pointed out that 20% of Kathmandu's vehicles caused half the Valley's pollution, and urged national and local governments to improve fuel quality and enforce green emission stickers.


“It is time for the municipalities to act, and Kathmandu could learn from Mexico City which has curbed air pollution,” Tuladhar added.

Mexico's Ambassador to Nepal Melba Pria presented a checklist of measures undertaken after Mexico City was declared the most polluted city in the world in 1992, and used to have only eight days of good air quality in a year. By 2015, it had 248 days of good air.

Pria said the trick was to take measurable step-by-step approach to ensure clean fuel, introduce catalytic converters, efficient public transport, and move out industries. *(Interview, right. Video online.)*

"Mexico City and Kathmandu are both situated in bowl-shaped valleys, but Kathmandu is where Mexico City was 30 years ago. We can offer lessons on how to clean the air. Don't wait till the birds start falling dead from the sky, like what happened in Mexico City," Priya told Kathmandu Valley mavens.

The mayors discussed how policy changes to improve air quality like better fuel and vehicle standards were necessary to be passed by the national government, but other measures like pedestrianisation, bicycle lanes, and public transport could be municipality priorities. But it was vital to have the political will to remove air pollution and improve public health.

Said ICIMOD director General David Molden: "Our organisation is based in Kathmandu Valley, and our research into air pollution can make a difference if it is used by national and local governments for policy interventions." 

**Sonia Awale**

# Mexico City's lessons for Kathmandu

**Mexico's ambassador to Nepal**  
**Melba Pria spoke to *Nepali Times***  
**about what Kathmandu can learn from**  
**Mexico City about improving air quality.**

**Nepali Times:** You are based in Delhi and have set an example by riding an auto-rickshaw with a Mexican flag. How has that gone down?

**Melba Priá:** At first everyone was very surprised that an ambassador would choose a small vehicle like that. But then, millions of Indians use it every day. The first thing we have to do is change our behaviour to be less polluting. I'm just using a vehicle that is much better for the environment. After all, I lived in Mexico City that was once the most polluted in the world. We are still fighting against pollution, and cannot say we have won the battle.

**Kathmandu Valley and Mexico City have similar topography that traps pollution. How do you improve air quality when the source of pollution is so diverse?**

There is no one source. For many years, crop burning was rife in Mexico City. We have to re-educate the farmers, provide them with machinery, and the government has to help them. We have to look at the fuel we use. Our cars need to have catalytic converters. Industrial areas need to be far away from residential areas.



**How important was upgrading public transport in cleaning up Mexico City's air?**

There is no magical fix, that is what you have to understand in Nepal. But public transportation is very important. We limited the use of private vehicles, and this encouraged people to buy fewer cars but when they did they bought energy efficient ones. We also have bicycle and bus lanes, as well as a large underground metro system.

**You are here to attend a Summit of Kathmandu Valley Mayors, how important is political will?**

Two wills are very important: that of the leaders and that of the people. They have to push each other. Mayors need policies that go across from national to local levels, and it does not matter what party you are. The population has to be aware that it is a health hazard for us and our children, and you and I have to change our ways.



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GOING PLACES TOGETHER



# HARDWORKING STUDENTS

Nepal's Number 1 export has been its people. In feudal times, impoverished farmers fled indebtedness, poverty and discrimination and migrated to India by the tens of thousands. They settled in Sikkim, Assam, Kumaon and Garhwal in India and in southern Bhutan.

Today, a quarter of Nepal's population is working, studying or living abroad. The Nepali diaspora spans the globe, and Nepalis carry the passports of many countries. Among them are the uncoun­ted millions who go to India to work either seasonally, contract workers in Malaysia, the Gulf, Korea and Japan, or those who emigrate permanently.

The push factors are not always poverty, but an aspiration for better lives, livelihoods and a higher standard of living. Nepalis do not just migrate because they cannot find a job here, but because there is peer pressure to go out and seek their fortune. With the democratic changes of 1990, there was at last supposed to be accountable and efficient government that would ensure economic growth and job creation so that Nepalis would no longer be forced to leave. But democracy soon disintegrated into infighting, and the country plunged into a war. Not only did successive governments in the past 30 years fail to deliver, they actively encouraged Nepalis to migrate so there would be less pressure from the streets.

Migration let rulers off the hook because they have not had to worry about job creation at home, and the remittances overseas Nepalis send home officially and unofficially (estimated at anywhere between \$8-10 billion a year) is keeping the country afloat. It pays the country's petroleum import bill which has tripled in the past five years.

Despite tales of abuse and exploitation by employers, the real mistreatment and cruelty of Nepalis is by fellow-Nepalis. Recruitment agents fleece the most vulnerable, squeezing every rupee out of the most desperate. The state and its agencies are ruthless in the harassment of migrants, erecting obstacles every step of their way as they leave the country and on their return. Instead of being hailed as national heroes for propping up the national economy, they are treated like dirt.

More than 4 million Nepalis went abroad in search of work in the last 20 years, nearly all of them paid a hefty fee to manpower middlemen, and had to overcome unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles. A Centre

for Investigative Journalism report in August exposed how corrupt Malaysian and Nepali politicians and officials colluded to steal Rs 20,000 each from poor Nepali workers for over five years. Regime change in Malaysia and a can-do Labour Minister in Nepal are negotiating a government-to-government arrangement to bypass middlemen.

A scathing report by Amnesty International *Turning People into Profits: Abusive Recruitment, Trafficking and Forced Labour of Nepali Migrant Workers* lists instances of state collusion in directly defrauding its own people. The report said nearly 90% of overseas contract workers were forced to pay unnecessarily high fees to recruiters to get them jobs overseas, and most were heavily indebted as a result. Amnesty said such 'country-wide exploitation was flourishing under an often indifferent government'. Not indifferent. Greedy.

In this edition (page 14-15) we carry an investigation into student visas becoming the preferred way for young Nepali men and women to emigrate. In the past year alone, at least 60,000 Nepalis have left the country with one-way tickets on student visas. In all, they spent at least \$50 million in fees and other costs.

The number of students leaving for Asutralia has grown dramatically in the past three years, overtaking Japan. Both governments are aware of what is happening, and allow students to work about four hours a

day. The earnings mostly go to educational establishments within their own countries, and the students provide a cheap source of unskilled labour that their own nationals shun.

Japan is now tightening on student visas, and there are dire reports from Australia of Nepali students who cannot juggle study and work. Outmigration in any form: be it as overseas contract workers or as workers pretending to be students is not a sustainable way to run the country's economy.

There has to be a coherent long-term strategy to create jobs at home through vocational training and enforcing the minimum wage. In the shorter term, Nepalis going abroad have to be protected from rapacious fellow Nepalis preying on them, they need better orientation and job training, and the country should be willing to absorb them on their return and put their savings and experience to productive use.



GOPEN RAI

**Outmigration in any form is not a sustainable way to run the country's economy.**

## 10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

In the #422 issue of *Nepali Times* of 24-30 October 2008, we published a story about Maoist lawmaker Sarala Regmi's reaction to UML leader Bam Dev Gautam becoming Home Minister. Regmi had defeated Gautam in his Bardia constituency in elections, but the UML heavyweight went on to grab a powerful portfolio. Sound familiar?

Fast forward to 2018, Gautam is still trying to sneak into Parliament despite being defeated by a relatively unknown NC candidate in last year's elections. Pre-Dasain buzz was all about Gautam, and how he persuaded an MP from his own party to resign so he could contest a by-election and enter the House.

Gautam faced criticism within his own party which this week decided not to go through with the swap. Regmi, meanwhile, is with the Maoist Biplay faction that wants to resume the armed struggle. Here is what Regmi said in that story 10 years ago: *"A lot of people back in the district ask me what I think about the man I defeated being made the home minister ... We don't want a Bihar-style republic."*



## ONLINE PACKAGES



### BONDAGE BEYOND LIFE

Although the Haliya bonded labourers were declared 'free' ten years ago, many still continue to live in modern day slavery in Western Nepal. There could still be more than 25,000 bonded labourers in these districts. Follow our reporters to Baitadi where a village of undocumented Haliya voice their grievances. *Story: page 12-13.*



### NEPALI TIMES STUDIO

Watch Mexican Ambassador to Nepal Melba Pria in conversation with Kunda Dixit in Nepali Times Studio about how Mexico City adopted a successful strategy to clean up its notorious pollution. She said Nepal can also learn from Mexico's earthquake preparedness strategy. *Story: Page 1.*



### A NEW CHIMNEY

After taking a break for a year to rebrand and rebuild, The Chimney Restaurant at Hotel Yak & Yeti has recently opened its doors to international travellers as well as Nepalis. Go online to see what the new Chimney looks like and what kind of foods it has to offer. Fret not, the classics are still there. *Story: Page 12.*

### HIPPIES

The Vidhea I knew was a wonderful, kind hearted free spirit woman who did her own thing ...lived free, did no harm but took no shit ('Hippinis', Lucia de Vries, #931)! To me (and I am sure to a lot of folks out there) she pioneered many positive things ... the most important of all to teach young women not only to be smart but brave and that is a legacy not only in Nepal but any country in the planet. She inspired me to live in many better ways, taught to overcome adversity and, most importantly she was my beloved sister. I will always be proud of her.

**Naresh Rawel Shrestha**

■ What a deep, fun and happy time we had Trilo, between the 70's and 80's ('The Gangster of Love', Lucia de Vries, #931). Thanks for everything, you gave me a trusting perspective on the universe.

**Stig Legrand**

### DASAIN

Do Nepali men not see the irony that it is a festival celebrating goddesses ('Festivals of sisterhood', Sewa Bhattarai and Sabina Devkota, #931)? Depressing.

**Himali Upadhya**

■ Dasain is becoming more like festivals in the West. A celebration of consumer excess where peer pressure forces citizens to waste money on trivialities. Sad. There are wonderful aspects to the festivals celebrated in Nepal. I just hate to see the positive things within any culture being influenced by rampant capitalism.

**Alex Ferguson**

## WHAT'S TRENDING

### Same-sex marriage

by *Gopal Gartaula*  
Three transgender couples talk about how Nepal's new civil code has made it more difficult for them to live together with dignity. The new provision has not just denied the existence of transgender people, it also means same-sex couples cannot get married legally and live without fear. This story was read and shared by thousands on social media.

**Most reached and shared on Facebook**

**Most popular on Twitter**

### Bentleys in Basantapur

by *Michael Kabold*  
30 vintage cars in spectacular condition, including 1925 Bentleys, a 1955 Chevrolet, Datsuns, Mercedes Benzes and Porsches arrived at Kathmandu's ancient Darbar Square for a unique photo-op – highlighting Nepal's potential as a destination for high-end adventure tourism. Visit *nepalitimes.com* for more photos in this package that was the most visited story over the holidays.

**Most visited online page**



### Hippinies

by *Lucia de Vries*  
Vidhea Shrestha, a rare Nepali hippini and German actress Petra Vogt led unique, bohemian lives in the 1970s Kathmandu. Their unconventional story is a part of Photo Kathmandu's hippie era exhibition on display in Jochhen (Freak Street) until 16 November.

**Most commented**

## QUOTE TWEETS

**Nepali Times @nepalitimes**  
Sale of alcohol shoots up during Dasain, and people indulge in binge drinking. Which is why patients with Holiday Heart Syndrome, a condition with abnormal and high heartbeat due to excessive drinking, crowd hospitals this time of the year.

**Rita Thapa @bheribas**  
Alcohol is a dangerous addictive psychoactive drug leading to vicious cycle of alcoholism, damaging multiple organs with disabled life with increasing poverty & domestic violence. Let Durga Bhawani empower all of us to make Nepal a Alcohol Free Prosperous Country!

**Nepali Times @nepalitimes**  
In an interview with Nepali Times, Finance minister Yubaraj Khatriwada plays down rifts with Western donor agencies, or that Nepal does not want assistance for 'soft' sectors like human rights or democracy.

**Dpak Paudyal @DpakPoudyal**  
Some positive symptoms. Political stability and good governance are two important/ fundamental issues here. Keep doing good job and push for more policy reforms and implementations.

**Nepali Times @nepalitimes**  
On the eve of #NationalComingOutDay, three transgender couples share how Nepal's new civil code has made it more difficult for them to live in dignity. Gopal Gartaula reports.

**lexlimbu @lexlimbu**  
Thanks for bringing this story @nepalitimes

Times

Weekly Internet Poll #932

Q. Are our fetivals patriarchal?

Total votes: 141

Yes: **55%**

No: **32%**

Can't say: **13%**

Weekly Internet Poll #932

To vote go to: [www.nepalitimes.com](http://www.nepalitimes.com)

Q. Can Nepal turn its 20% public vehicles into battery-operated ones by 2020?



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# Dollar Laxmi

The fall of NPR vis-à-vis USD is a bonanza for Nepal's remittance-driven economy

During the upcoming festival of lights called Tihar in Nepal and Diwali in India, families will take the opportunity to make an inventory of their nett worth and store jewelry and cash back into a safe deposit box. then they will set off firecrackers.

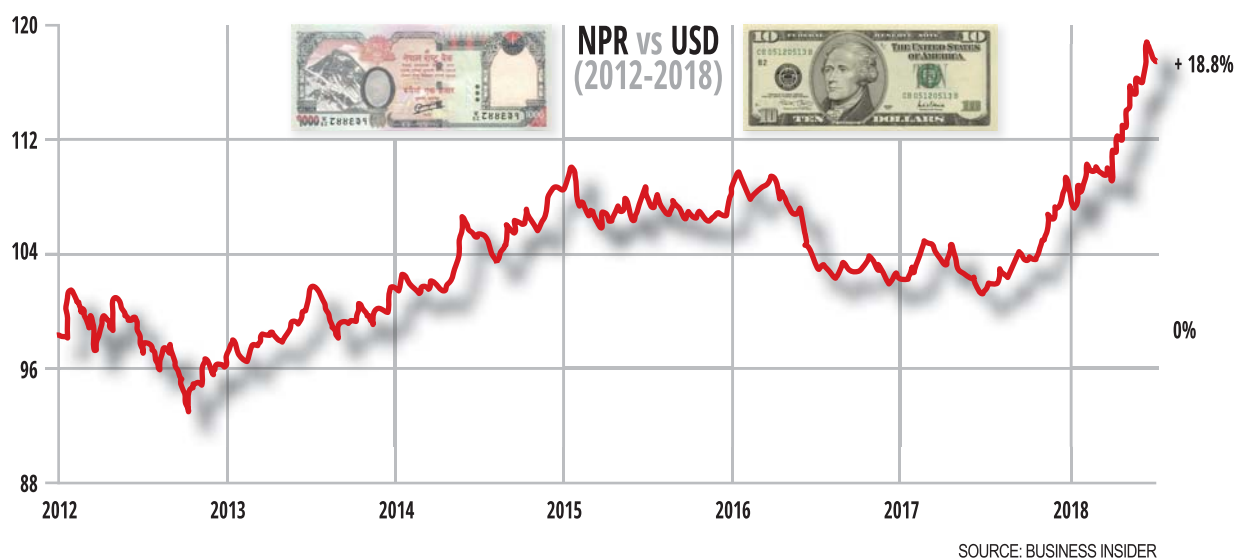


**1/2 FULL**  
Anil Chitrakar

The big day of Laxmi Puja this year is on 7 November, when people will worship the goddess and welcome her home in the hope that she will ensure prosperity in the coming year.

Many Nepalis invest in gold or property, and this year everyone will be happy that the value of both have gone up. If you have saved in paper money, a thousand rupee note sadly is now worth only Rs930 in terms of purchasing power.

Last year, the US dollar was at Rs104, this week it is at nearly Rs120. Economists will tell us that the Nepali rupee is pegged to the Indian currency since 1956, and hence when its value falls the Nepali rupee also falls.



India needs to import a lot of oil which is getting more expensive because the US sanctions on Iran and Venezuela, thus decreasing global supply.

There has also been a slowdown in India's economic growth rate, and the US economy is doing well because American companies are bringing home profits from money invested abroad. All this is impacting Nepal via India.

There was a time when Nepalis

calculated their wealth in number of elephants (Gajalaxmi), number of cows and piles of manure (Gobardhan). Today, the cost of the dollar is a concern, just as it is to buy wine, electronics, cars, or to spend holidays abroad. One in four Nepalis is living abroad, and they send home hard currency, which means the festival of Laxmi Puja will see greater spending than before. This is why despite the Nepali economy having tanked, spending power is high.

For tourists visiting Nepal, everything will seem cheaper, but hotel rooms, air tickets, tour packages are all priced in dollars and therefore should really make no difference. Tourists are going to be irritated that entrance fees to Nepal's conservation areas have gone up since they got on their flights to Nepal.

Ideally for those exporting goods and getting paid in US dollars, the situation is rosy, unless you have component inputs like

oil, machine parts, ingredients that have US dollar price tags.

While everyone complains that everything is getting more expensive, few blame the political parties for the state of the economy. Even fewer ask the Central Bank to "do something". Should the Nepali currency be un-pegged or should we set a new peg-rate to the Indian currency? Do we need to close the Nepal-India border before we do that? The regulators in China get accused of devaluing their currency to help exports, should Nepal use this opportunity to boost exports?

Decisions like these require sound market information which we seem to lack. We rely on tables and indices made by donors and multilateral agencies. One thing we can be sure of is that there will be a seminar on the topic of the falling rupee after Laxmi Puja. Experts will present their views and proceedings will be recorded. Bureaucrats will line up to go on foreign-funded fact-finding junkets to study the impact of currency drops on national economies.

Actually, the falling value of the Nepali currency against the US dollar is an advantage for Nepalis who depend on remittances, or for those who want to produce and export. It is a really bad deal for those who depend on imports, or those sending children to study abroad. For those earning in dollars and spending in Nepali rupees, things could not be better. For the poor who have no money this whole discussion is mute. 🇳🇵

**Anil Chitrakar** is President of Siddharth.

# Nepal Telecom, or go?

Ramesh Kumar

Nepal Telecom (NTC) is losing market share so rapidly to private rivals that many have begun to compare it with Janakpur Cigarette Factory, the Soviet-era public sector enterprise that was allowed to go bust.

The cigarette manufacturer dominated Nepal's tobacco market for two decades, but bled slowly to death because of corruption, mismanagement and politicisation after democratisation in 1990. Today, the factory premises have been converted into the headquarters of the Province 2 government.

Just as Janakpur Cigarette Factory rapidly lost market share to private tobacco companies in the 1990s, NTC is following the same pattern, and falling behind the aggressive growth of Ncell owned by the Malaysia-based Axiata group.

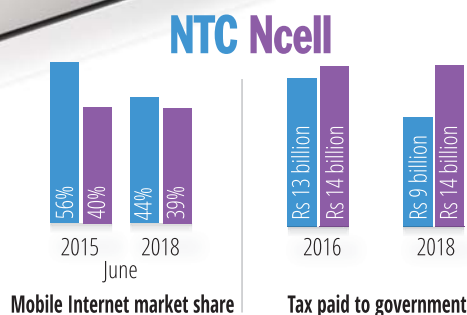
NTC was the unchallenged leader in the country's fast-growing telecommunications sector when most users used cell phones for voice calls. But market dynamics began to change with the shift towards mobile data, and most cell phone users spending more for the Internet rather than voice calls.

Three years ago, NTC held 56% share of the country's internet data market, with Ncell (at that time owned by Telia-Sonera) holding 40%. Today, NTC's internet market share has shrunk to 44%. Ncell too has lost its internet



market share, but not as much as NTC.

NTC's income dipped slightly to Rs39 billion this year from Rs40 billion last year, largely due to a fall in income from international voice calls. The company has lost 28% of its earnings from international calls in just three years because of inroads by Internet-based messaging apps.



SOURCE: NEPAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS AUTHORITY/  
INLAND REVENUE DEPARTMENT

Nepal Telecom's assistant spokesperson Shobhan Adhikari justifies the slowdown in income from international calls, arguing this is now the trend worldwide. "It is not just us," he said.

But there are other trends that show NTC's decline from being the country's largest tax-paying company till a few years ago. Ncell is now paying more in taxes than NTC, with more than Rs14 billion in each of the last three fiscal years. NTC's tax total went down to Rs9 billion, compared to Rs13 billion three years ago.

To make matters worse, NTC is currently rocked by a corruption case with its first female executive head sacked following an ugly legal tussle. The anti-corruption watchdog CIAA is investigating the company for initiating a process to award a multi-billion dollar 4G service network installation contract to a Chinese company, which reportedly quoted a much higher price than the estimate. There is also an argument that spending billions in expanding the 4G service would be a waste of resources because the world is moving towards 5G. The controversy has delayed NTC's expansion plans for its 4G service beyond the Kathmandu Valley and Pokhara.

When Nepal Telecom launched 4G service in the valley in 2016, Ncell was not allowed to upgrade its service for failing to clear its capital gains tax. But Ncell secured a license to launch 4G service last year, and it has already expanded to 21 cities. NTC is lagging far behind.

A former top manager of Nepal Telecom says: "The State-owned company is not collapsing any time soon, but its downfall has definitely begun." 🇳🇵



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Ankara to Rome again

Turkish Airlines, which launched its first service to Italy in 1959 with an inaugural Ankara-Rome flight, has re-launched its



operation between the two countries' capitals after a 60 year break. The flights will be operated on Mondays and Thursdays in both directions starting from 7 January 2019.

New choppers

Simrik Air has inducted two new Airbus A535 B3e helicopters, one of which landed in Kathmandu last week while the second



is scheduled to arrive by February 2019. Powered by a single Turbomeca Arriel 2D turbine engine, the AS 350 B3e (H-125) offers increased reliability, reduced maintenance cost and high versatility for a range of missions.

More flights to paradise

Qatar Airways will be flying to the tropical island Maldives three times a day starting



from 28 October. The new service to Malé is a five-hour flight from Doha, and will be operated by A330-300 and A320-200 aircraft, totaling the number of weekly flights to 21.

Mutton craze

Kathmandu residents bought nearly 55,000 goats during the Dasain festival in Kathmandu Valley, according to Nepal Livestock Traders Association. Of the total, 21,000 were locally reared goats while 34,000 were imported from India to meet the demand. Last Dasain, only 45,000 goats were sold in the Valley.

Fly to Chongqing

Himalaya Airlines has started flights to its first destination in China, Chongqing last week. The joint venture company with Tibet Airlines is the only operator connecting



Kathmandu with the Chinese city. The airline operates one weekly flight scheduled to depart for Chongqing Jiangbei International Airport at 4:55pm and arrive at Tribhuvan International Airport at 1:55am.

Feminist prints



PHOTO KATHMANDU/CHEME DORJE

This year's Photo Kathmandu has a unique multi-chapter exhibition titled *The Public Life of Women: A Feminist Memory Project* which displays archival images collected by Nepal Picture Library showcasing women of this country.

Exhibited outdoors at Patan Darbar Square, the pictures show Nepali women gradually moving beyond the confines of the household to public life, breaking away from social norms to be involved in street demonstrations, taking jobs, becoming public figures.

"It took six months to curate this exhibition on the history of the women's struggle in Nepal, and it will continue," says organiser Nayantara Gurung Kakshapati. "The response has been overwhelming, not just from families that offered photographs, but also from visitors."

The first part of the Feminist Memory Project titled 'Women of

suicide in full bridal wear after her husband was killed during the anti-monarchy revolt in 1962. Many of these are unknown and unnamed personalities from the past who have remained in the shadows because of a male-dominated historiography.

The second part is 'Stepping out into the World' displayed in Dhaugal which showcases Nepali women on trips abroad, wearing saris and carrying quaint handbags. 'Reading Under the Candlelight' explores experiences of Nepali women in public education.

Patan's Rashika Maharjan sees the exhibits every day on her way to work, and says: "The images are powerful, and passing them repeatedly in a public space drives home the important role Nepali women have played in our history."

Another exhibit has recreated in Nagbahal the study of novelist Parijat where she wrote her

famous books, and where Nepali intellectuals used to gather.

Nepal Picture Library is a photographic archive that has contributed to the study of Nepali photography and to explore the issues of memory,

identity and history. **Monika Deupala**

Go online for full Photo Gallery.

*The Public Life of Women: A Feminist Memory Project*  
Photo Kathmandu 2018  
<http://www.photoktm.com/>

12 October-16 November, 11am-7pm, Mangal Bazar, Patan



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Premkali Chaudhary, a leader in the Karjahi peasant revolt.  
Photo: Premkali Chaudhary / Nepal Picture Library

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PHOTO KATHMANDU

## Sewa Bhattarai

Inside a darkened room at the Chhaya Centre, eight screens switch on simultaneously to depict images of sexual violence in the Subcontinent – from the India-Pakistan partition till the present day. The stories are searing in their intensity: of daughters who hear their elders planning to burn them alive so rapists will not catch them, of women paraded naked through a village and raped for refusing to have sex, of sticks and knives inserted into vaginas.

Why are women so often singled out for abuse in conflict? And why do these stories vanish after wars end? Filmmaker Amar Kanwar (*pictured, right*) explores these questions through testimonies like: “Night fell, and they kept raping the women, they did not care about killing us at all.”

At first glance, these may seem to be abuse by fighting men, but many of the atrocities were perpetrated by fellow-villagers during the Partition. Kanwar



shows us that no one community has a monopoly on cruelty, and sometimes they are carried out by neighbours, as happened with Muslims killing fellow Muslims in the Bangladesh liberation war.

The statistics are numbing: 75,000 women raped during the Partition, 150,000 during the Bangladesh war – and those were just the ones counted. No matter

what a war is about, it is the women who are first engulfed by brutality.

“There is a sense of macho-ness associated with conquering women of another culture,” explains Kanwar. “Victory has always been defined by the subjugation of women, and violating enemy women is a matter of pride. My work depicts this toxic masculinity.”

Kanwar does not just examine the price women pay for the wars men fight, but also how the crimes are resisted and remembered. We watch the story of a mother who weaves her murdered daughter’s courage into a shawl – the red background standing for rebellion, the ant-like patterns for her relentless pursuit of justice.

The female body itself becomes a symbol of dignity and protest. Theatre artist Sabitri Heisnam enacts a real-life drama in which Draupadi, an indigenous woman, refuses to be clothed after being raped by police, shaming the rapists with her nudity. Heisnam has been performing the play for decades, but in 2004 real life mothers in Manipur also protested naked in support of a woman murdered after rape.

Kanwar’s film is from 2007, but is relevant today as an epidemic of rape sweeps the Subcontinent and #MeToo gathers velocity on the Internet. The woman’s body continues to signify honour and humiliation, political disputes and caste wars are still settled by physically humiliating women. The film does not offer solutions,

## PHOTO KATHMANDU

but links us to the past so we can contemplate present day violence of violation.

Women through history have been trapped between honour and shame. A look back at this history may help us understand man’s inhumanity to woman, so it is not repeated in future. This is an overwhelming installation, and the most searing in this year’s Photo Kathmandu festival.

Kanwar says he projected eight separate screens at once because it is important to see what happened in history and what is happening today simultaneously.

He adds: “I hope it will help us understand what women go through during any conflict.”

The Lightning Testimonies  
by Amar Kanwar  
Photo Kathmandu 2018  
11AM – 7 PM  
6th floor Chhaya Centre, Thamel  
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Nick's Cousins  
[USA]

Nick's cousins plays Avant-Garde Jazz with a rock punch, aggressive and exploratory, with a strong sense of melody. Their music is mostly written by the saxophone player Matty Harris. They are excited to be in Nepal, to see the homeland of their drummer Kismat Shrestha, and for lots of momos...

**The essence of jazz:** "Jazz is freedom, a musical adventure without boundaries. There are many incredible artists creating new ways to present musical ideas in current times. There is a great variety of experimental music, and we appreciate and learn from everything we hear."

PRATIK SINGH



Eduardo Mendonca  
[Brazil]



DACH  
[Austria]

Mendonca's originals are a blend of Brazilian rhythms, but he also plays Brazilian standard tunes, and music from other parts of the world with a Brazilian twang. He hopes to increase his affection and respect for Nepali culture, and to recharge his soul with love and gratitude.

**The roots of jazz:** "Jazz takes me to African-American music as a root. It is the African diaspora flourishing in New Orleans and expanding to the world. It is a bridge that connects people by ignoring divides. Jazz is attention, creativity, movement, and FUN!"

DACH members come from diverse backgrounds: Western Classical, Jazz, Austrian & Ukrainian Folk, Balkan, Indian Classical Music. Their jazz is nourished by European roots. They like to never perform a music the same way twice. They hope to make people smile, cry, and bang their heads to music.

**What jazz is today:** "Jazz is a worldwide phenomenon with innovative people pushing possibilities forward. Sometimes the different scenes do not mix, but it is a (not too) big family that we are proud to be a part of. Sadly, it lacks female players, missing a huge creative potential."



Adrien Brandeis  
Quintet [France]

Adrien Brandeis started his musical career in 2010 and created his quintet in 2015, revelling in various influences like Cuban, Brazilian, Caribbean, and African music. It is the band's first time in Nepal, and the members are excited to discover a new culture and incorporate new elements in their playing.

**What jazz means:** "Jazz means liberty, because of the improvisation, and because you can express yourself differently every day, depending your mood. Jazz also means sharing, because it is so interactive between the musician and audience."



Dave Feusi & Groove Gang  
[Switzerland]

Groove gang plays a mixture of Jazz, Funk, Soul and World Music. For its members, jazz has many faces which can reach out to people who do not care about stylistic definitions. They look forward to seeing different angles of life in Nepal, and to give lots of love and music for their heart.

**The legacy of jazz:** "Jazz was created more than one hundred years ago and still lives in our hearts and souls. In history, it was always a great source of inspiration for a conscious crowd. Today jazz is even more important, as an alternative to superficial mainstream. Jazz is alive!"

# Kathmandu, and all that jazz...

bands will be performing in various venues across Kathmandu from 1-6 November: DACH, Nick's

also has a distinctive identity. "Jazz is popular because it

Nepali jazz unique. Meanwhile, Jazzmandu infuses new styles and trends every year into the local jazz



# JAZZ MANDU 2018

## CONCERT FOR SCHOOL STUDENTS

12-1:30 PM, 1 November

Alliance Francaise, Jhamsikhel

Entry by invitation only

Jazzmandu kicks off with a free concert playing great music for young minds. The Concert for School Students continues Jazzmandu's long tradition of promoting music education and cross-cultural understanding. Interested schools and individual students can request invitations by writing to info@jazzmandu.org. Seating is limited. Gates open at 11:30 am, please be seated by 11:50 am.

## GROOVIN AT UPSTAIRS

7-9 PM, 1 November

Jazz Upstairs, Lazimpat

Ticket: Rs 600

Cadenza Collective gather new and old friends for an explosive jam at the heart of jazz in Nepal, Jazz Upstairs. Gates open at 6 pm. A ticket does not guarantee a seat

## VALLEY JAMS

7-9 PM, 2 November

Moksh, Jhamsikhel



When the Jazzmandu music festival was first held in Kathmandu in 2002, very few in Nepal had heard of jazz. The annual festival turns 16 this year, and will once again entertain music lovers between the Dasain and Tihar festivals. This year, six international



Rabin Lal Shrestha Duo

Veteran classical musician Rabin Lal Shrestha will be playing the tabla, and will be joined by Jeevan Ale on the flute. Shrestha has been a constant feature of Jazzmandu since its inception, and this time, a couple of other classical musicians are joining him as well.

**Classical music in Nepal:** “There is the impression that classical music is not very popular. However, there is always a constant stream of students who want to learn. In Jazzmandu, classical, jazz, folk, all come together, and the audience appreciates the variety.”

The band that started Jazzmandu brought world class jazz to Nepal, while helping elevate a new generation of jazz musicians to world standards. The band recently released its sixth album *Back to the Roots*, representing how far jazz has come in Nepal.

**Jazz in Nepal:** “Back when we started playing jazz in Kathmandu’s first jazz club *Jazz Upstairs*, other bands were only playing rock and metal, or doing covers. *Jazz Upstairs* was small but our dreams were big. Here we are today, still going strong 16 years later!”

Cadenza Collective



improvisation, it sounds different in each place,” explains Samir Chhetri, one of the festival organisers and member of Cadenza, Nepal’s first jazz band. “In jazz there are no rules and there is much improvisation. It is more like a conversation.”

Indeed, Nepali jazz has many elements from traditional and folk Nepali music, from instruments to melodies, making



Cynthia Abraham [France]

Cynthia Abraham will be playing with Matthias Pascaud. They both play jazz along with other music like soul, rock, electro, etc. They are attracted to jazz’s freedom, and its common repertoire that allows you to play with anyone that speaks the same language.

Strength of jazz. “Jazz is a very demanding music but offers a multitude of possibilities. Modern jazz allows a mix between ‘traditional’ jazz and other styles, creating endless possibilities. It is a mixture of styles, but also sounds: instrumentation, sound texture, electronic machines, etc.”



scene. It does not just bring in outside musicians, but also showcases Nepal’s best jazz so that it is a two-way exchange. Four Nepali bands will be performing this year: Cadenza which also organises the festival, Abhishek and Maria who teach and perform jazz in Nepal, Project Sarangi that aims to revive traditional Nepali music, and Rabin Lal Shrestha duo for a dash of melodious Eastern Classical. 🇳🇵

Project Sarangi is on a mission to revive traditional Nepali instruments by giving classes on traditional instruments and experimenting with these instruments in their compositions. Ten musicians with sarangis will perform a fusion of western and eastern music at Jazzmandu.



Project Sarangi

Folk instruments: “Appreciation for folk music should be inculcated from a young age, so we reach out to schoolchildren. Nepali instruments need to be preserved, and for that they need to expand beyond traditional music. We need to experiment and transform them.”



Project Sarangi is on a mission to revive traditional Nepali instruments by giving classes on traditional instruments and experimenting with these instruments in their compositions. Ten musicians with sarangis will perform a fusion of western and eastern music at Jazzmandu.



Abhishek and Maria

Abhishek Bhadra and Maria Sajardo teach at the Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory. Jazz for them is not just a genre, but an entire language with its own vast academic and intellectual history that you can apply anywhere. They will be playing original compositions at Jazzmandu

**Why jazz?:** “Jazz is very versatile, which is the reason for its growing attraction in Nepal. After learning jazz, people apply it in rock music and other areas. Today there are more opportunities to perform jazz in many festivals, and event companies and hotels ask for it.”



**Jazz Upstairs, Lazimpat House of Music, Thamel**  
**Manny’s Eatery and Tapas Bar, Jawalakhel**  
**Ticket: Rs 600**  
Gates open at 6 pm and close at 7 pm. Seating is limited.

**JAZZ BAZAAR**  
**2:30-10 PM, 3 November**  
**Gokarna Forest Resort**  
**Ticket: Rs 1,400**

Get away from the hustle and bustle of Kathmandu and be surrounded by the lush, serene Gokarna Forest Resort to enjoy a marathon of jazz and traditional Nepali folk and classical music. Gates open at 1.30 pm and close at 7 pm. Seating is limited. A ticket does not guarantee a seat.

No outside food or beverages allowed. No pets allowed. Free shuttle buses to Gokarna will depart every hour from 1 pm to 4 pm from outside Hotel Marco Polo in Kamal Pokhari, and will stop for pick-ups outside the Hyatt Regency gate in Boudha. Return shuttles will be available between 10 pm and 11 pm, with drop-offs at Boudha and Kamal Pokhari. Seats are limited.

Anyone arriving by bicycle will receive a 25% discount on a ticket.

## SOUNDS OF LATIN JAZZ

**7-9 PM, 4 November**  
**Dhokaima Cafe, Patan**  
**Ticket: Rs 1,600**

Experience the vibrant sounds of Brazilian rhythms and Latin jazz in the relaxed ambience of the Yala Maya courtyard. Gates open at 6 pm and close at 8 pm. Seating is limited.

## JAZZMANDU MASTERCLASSES

**11 AM - 1:30 PM, 5 November**  
**Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, Jhamsikhel – Vocal & Instrumental Workshops**  
**FREE ENTRY (limited seating)**

The Jazzmandu master classes are an opportunity for music students & jazz enthusiasts to interact with visiting musicians, share their experience and stories and learn techniques and tips on various instruments and vocals. Seating is limited and not guaranteed.

## JAZZ AT THE TEMPLE HOUSE

**6:30 - 8:30 PM, 5 November**  
**Kantipur Temple House (Jyatha, Thamel)**  
**Ticket: Rs 1,600**

An evening of Nepali classical music fused with jazz in a rich and soulful ambience. International musicians share their musical ideas and energies with Nepal’s top classical musicians and Cadenza Collective.

Gates open at 5.30 pm and close at 7pm. Please be seated by 5.45 pm.

Seating is limited. A ticket does not guarantee a seat.

## JAZZMANDU FINALE

**5:30 - 10 PM, 6 November**  
**Hotel Yak & Yeti, Durbar Marg**  
**Ticket: Rs 1,400**

The Finale BIG JAM when musicians from different bands come together on one stage to light up the festivities creating a high-energy, improvised musical treat.

Gates open at 4.30 pm and close at 8pm. Seating is limited.







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Times

Nothing

Western Nepal's liberated slaves find that freedom is complicated

**Sewa Bhattarai**  
in Baitadi

Ten years after the government finally abolished bonded debt labour, tens of thousands of Haliyas in western Nepal continue to suffer from this form of modern-day slavery.

A person became a Haliya if the family could not pay back money borrowed from loan sharks at exorbitant interest rates. They were forced to work for free to pay back the debt, but many spent their whole lives in slavery because the interest kept piling up. The loan was then passed down to the next generation.

Even though the practice is now banned, activists say that there are about 25,000 still working as bonded labourers in some of the most remote and underserved districts of western Nepal.

Parmaram Tiruwa of Tirgaun of Baitadi was not on the list of about 17,000 Haliya who were 'freed', and today makes a living breaking stones by the roadside and working for his employer for a minimum wage.

Parmaram and Janaki Tiruwa of Tirgaun, Baitadi.

# A new Chimney

Many Hotel Yak & Yeti frequenters were saddened when the Chimney Restaurant founded by the legendary Boris Lissanevitch was closed last year. They missed Boris' famous signature dishes like Goulash and Fondue and the extraordinary copper chimney that was the centerpiece of his restaurant. But the wait is over, The Chimney is back with a fresh look and even fresher menu.

Yak & Yeti decided to recreate and rebrand The Chimney as a place where the old meets the new: up-scale and high fashion, yet casual and comfortable.

"After serving international guests, expats and diplomats for a long time, the management wanted to turn things around and welcome Nepalis as well," explains the hotel's Food and Beverage Director Manish Goyal. "To share the celebrated history of the restaurant with young crowd we are introducing an ambience that is familiar to them and a place for friends to hangout."

The new outdoor lounge has chic furniture that invites guests to relax, and enjoy lunch and evening snacks in the winter sun. When it gets chillier, they can either ask for a blanket or move inside where the historical copper chimney makes things warm and cosy.

Boris' designer dishes like Smoked Becketti, Chicken a la Kiev, and the flaming Baked Alaskan Sagarmatha are still there, but there is an international menu, prepared by Executive Chef Sagar Singh Rawat, main chef Sunil Tamang and their team.

The menu infuses fresh ingredients and herbs from the hotel's own garden to create fusion dishes like Pork sausage with gundruk ko achar, Methi thepla tacos, and even Chicken chhoila, Makai sandheko and Samayabaji.

The bar has eliminated plastic straws and stirrers with copper ones and done away with bottled syrups and preservatives. The Miracle (beetroot and carrot juice with whisky and honey), Carrot Colada (white rum, coconut water and homemade carrot puree) and other drinks are simple and authentic.

"Our goal is to present a modern menu that is also good for the environment. It is inspired by waste reduction and creative thinking," says manager Ron Sonar.

But the bottom line of The Chimney's transformation is the price: they have been slashed and are much less than levels at other star hotels. Combining great food with affordable prices and a history makes the new Chimney as good as, if not better than, the old one.

**Sikuma Rai**

**MUST TRY:**  
**Salad:** Crunchy beetroot and pear salad (Rs500)  
**Cocktail:** The Miracle (Rs650)  
**Soup:** Cream of potato (Rs500)  
**Tapas:** BBQ chicken wings (Rs750)  
**Main:** Chicken a la Kiev (Rs1,700)

12-10:30pm, The Chimney Restaurant, Hotel Yak and Yeti, Darbar Marg, (01) 4248999



# to lose but their chains



BIKRAM RAI

“There was serious under-counting while identifying Haliya, and since the government only counts those with official IDs, there has to be another data collection

drive urgently,” says Rajuram Bhul, former president of Federation of National Haliya Liberation Societies. The government admits there may have been omissions, but

is not inclined to do anything about it for now. “There may be people missing in our list but we are first resettling those identified as Haliya in the first phase. We do not want to take both processes forward simultaneously,” says Gopal Giri who heads the Settlement Management Department in Kathmandu.

But even those identified as Haliya in the first count are not happy with their resettlement packages to build homes. Half of them are still waiting for compensation. The government has set the unrealistic target of resettling all remaining Haliya by the end of this fiscal year, but few are convinced.

Those who got compensation packages of Rs150,000-500,000 say the amount was insufficient to get them started in life. Ram Bahadur Parki of Dadeldhura is well known because he was the first Haliya to be freed 10 years ago.

“It is good to have my own place to live in, but with the money the government gave, I could only afford this barren land,” lamented Parki, who is luckier than most because he has a salaried job with the Federation.

The government says it is concentrating on providing land,

not livelihoods for freed Haliya, but this threatens their health, education, employment and very survival. Matadevi Damai of Dipayal received seeds, hen, sewing machine and tailoring training from various charities, but life is still a struggle.

Sabitri Bhul in Sanfebagar of Achham has two sons, one of whom sends money home from India, while another studied to be an agriculture technician, but is jobless. She asks: “What is the use of education, if nobody trusts us?”

Then there are reports of some Haliya lapsing back into debt slavery, and going back to work for their old masters out of sheer desperation.

“Much progress has been made in the past ten years but it is very slow, and one reason could be because they are Dalit,” says Hari Shreepaili, former CA member and coordinator of the Committee on Haliya Rehabilitation. “

Indeed, up to 94% of Haliya are Dalit, and caste discrimination adds another layer of injustice to their lives. Back in Baitadi, Basanti Tiruwa automatically splashes her feet and drinks water from a tap set aside for Dalits, and does not touch a tap meant for the ‘upper’ castes. “In this village, there have

always been two springs: one for the Dalits and one for the others. Even today we are not allowed to touch the other water source,” Tiruwa explains.

Among Tirgaun’s 20 families, only one person has passed Grade 10. Most make a living through wage labour, and the village suffers from water scarcity. Tea shops in the bazar still do not buy their milk, victims of rape are overwhelmingly Dalit and the perpetrators from outside the community. The town has always had two temples: both called Jagannath, and even the temple of the Dalits looks dilapidated.

Says Dalit rights activist Karan Dayal: “We should evaluate the resettlement packages already handed out, and the next phase of identifying the remaining Haliya needs to start immediately.”



Though the haliya system has been officially abolished in Nepal, haliyas continue to suffer. Many continue to work for their old masters in lack of livelihood options. Follow our reporters to Baitadi where a village of unrecognised haliyas live in poverty and fight caste-based discrimination on a daily basis.

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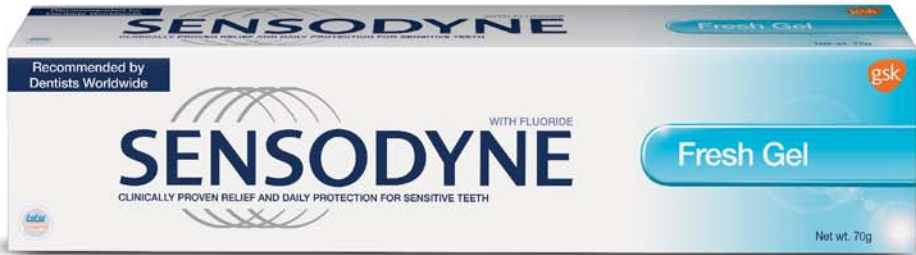
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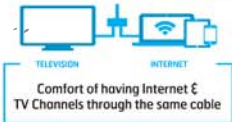
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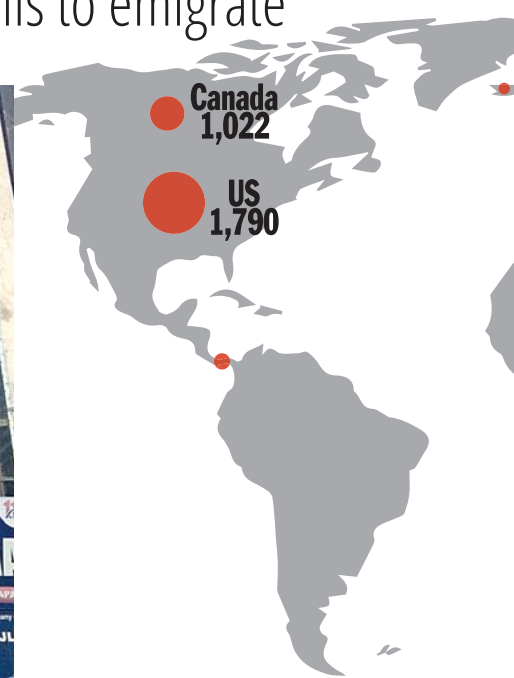


# Migration Certificates

Student visas are now the preferred method for young Nepalis to emigrate



PRAKRITI KANDEL



Kajol Rai is in Japan, and says most Nepal students there work more and study less. "They come here mostly to earn money," she wrote in an email interview.

Dil B Lama's parents in Hetauda sold family property to pay an education consultancy in Kathmandu Rs1.5 million to fix him a student visa. Lama, 20, says it is an investment in his future. He hopes to work part-time to pay the fees at a little-known accountancy college in Sydney.

"I don't think I am coming back," Lama tells us frankly, "the student visa is the only way to leave Nepal."

Student visas have become an easy avenue for young Nepalis to enter Australia or Japan, because unlike work visas, they do not require the presentation of tangible skill sets. Students can work as cashiers, janitors, waiters, or even Uber drivers while studying. Often, they can convert the student visas to work permits.

The number of Nepalis in Japan has grown ten-fold in the last ten years to 90,000 with most of the increase due to new student arrivals. In 2008, there were less than 1,000 Nepalis on student visas in Japan, this year it has jumped to 25,000. (See box, right)

"The Japan government does not want to open the main door for unskilled labour migration, so Nepalis are allowed to come in through the back door to fulfill the need for cheap labour to make up for Japan's shrinking workforce," Masako Tanaka, professor at Tokyo's Sophia University who has studied Nepali labour migration, told this newspaper last year.

Language is still an issue in Japan, which is why Australia has now become the #1 destination for migrating students. Shreeram Twanabasu has been in Japan for nine years, and explains: "Living in Japan is expensive, so students will not be able to afford costs without working. And after starting to work, it becomes difficult to continue studies."

It is peer pressure and ease of acquiring student visas that has convinced young Nepalis to apply to study abroad. Most say they were attracted by glamorous Facebook posts of classmates or relatives. But once they get there, many find things are not so rosy.

"People do not want to talk about the hard work and struggle on Facebook, and they post pictures of the occasional outings that makes it seem like life here

## Prakriti Kandel

'Broad Study' has entered the Nepali lexicon. Student out-migration now rivals the medical education industry, overseas contract work, and tourism as the fastest growing sector of Nepal's economy.

Labour migration to India, West Asia and the Gulf, and the remittance Nepali workers send home from there gets most public attention, overshadowing the growing number of Nepalis going to Australia, Japan and Europe to study.

As Western countries tighten immigration policies, student visas have become the preferred method for young Nepalis to emigrate. Some host countries have left that door deliberately ajar as a way to control and calibrate the import of cheap labour for menial jobs their own nationals do not want to do.

Most young Nepalis who line up at 'education consultancies' in Kathmandu these days are waiting for a one-way ticket out of Nepal. In a *Nepali Times* survey this month, most of those leaving on student visas freely admitted that their intention is to emigrate. Last year, Australia was the top destination, followed by Japan, European countries and the US (see illustration).

Suresh Khadka from Dhangadi is applying to go to Australia because his brother who went there three years ago, has convinced him that studying in Australia will help him become more independent, mature and skilled.

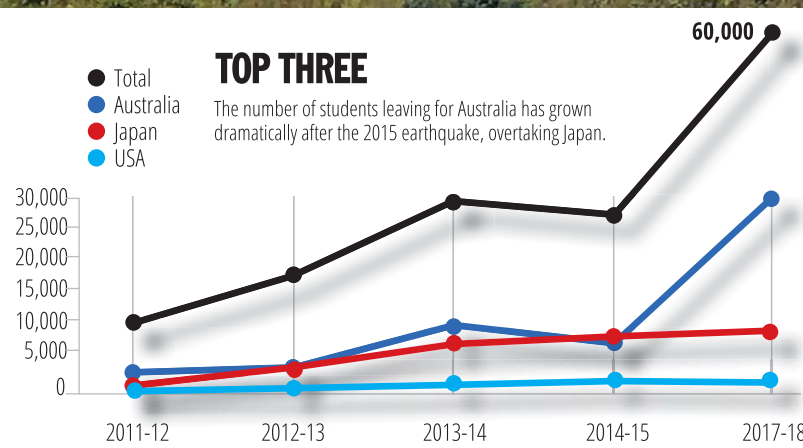
Suraj Sinjali is leaving to study culinary arts in Australia,



KUNDA DIXIT

and says he wants better education and experience: "I explored some institutions in Nepal, but found Australia much more attractive."

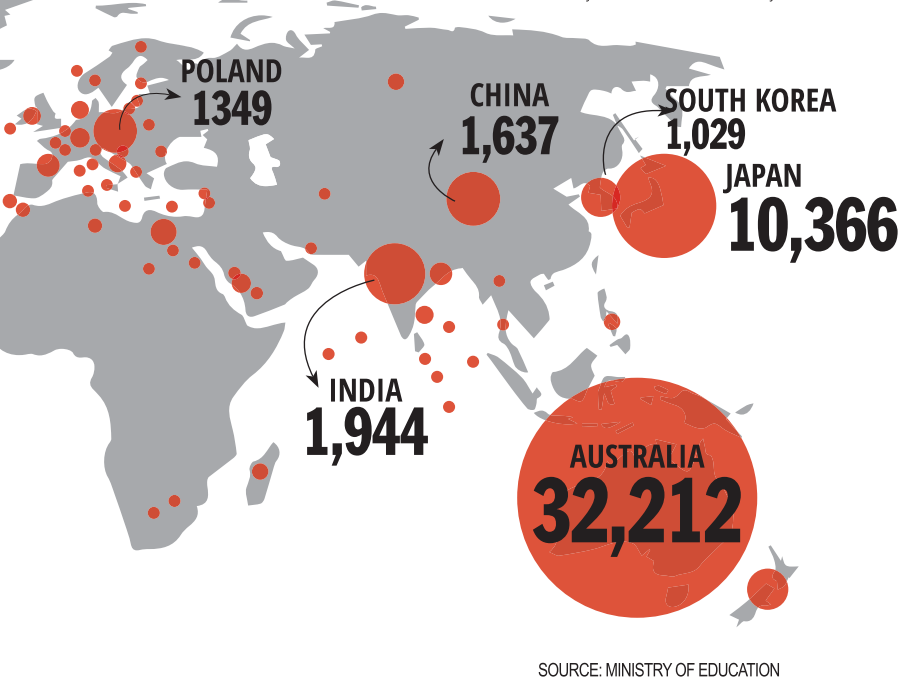
Pujyata Karmacharya is studying economics in Australia, and says facilities and level of instruction are much better there. Having studied migration herself, she adds that the main attraction for most Nepalis is that students are allowed to work 20 hours a week, and stay on with post-study work permits to gain experience.





# Top Destinations

The number of Nepali students who took 'no-objection' certificates from the Ministry of Education to study abroad last year, and the countries they went to.



SOURCE: MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

is very prosperous,” says Sugam Suwal who has been in Australia four years. “Australia is difficult and requires exceptional self motivation.”

Nearly 5,000 students went to Europe last year, and the highest number to Poland. Although many students went on government scholarships, and are attracted by the high quality of education in Europe, most are there with the intention of emigrating. There are also jobs which need to be filled in the shrinking work force of most European countries.

“If Nepalis receive degrees from good universities, they can compete for jobs like any other European,” says Anshu Adhikari who did her

thesis on migration from Hungary’s Central European University.

But most European schools do not offer scholarships, and students find managing costs and attending college very difficult leading to a high dropout rate. With limited skills, young Nepalis end up as cooks or farmhands. Despite this, earnings are better and Nepali student migrants in Europe prefer to stay on.

Besides the brain drain and the billions Nepalis spend to pay for their school fees abroad, the growing out-migration is an indicator of the disillusionment of Nepal’s aspirational youth with the state of the country’s education, development and future. 🇳🇵

# The Returnees

Not all Nepali students who go abroad to study end up staying there, and many working after their studies still nurse a dream of coming back to their home country.

Some return because of family, others because they miss the more relaxed lifestyle in Nepal. Others are motivated by giving back to society in Nepal, and say they prefer to contribute to the motherland than being a cog in the wheel abroad. Lately, there has been a steady stream of students returning because of tighter immigration rules that make it difficult to get residency abroad.

Ashutosh Tiwari, who studied at Harvard University and came back to Nepal in the 1990s says that his primary reason for returning was to be with family.

“I had other cousins who had gone abroad to study and had come back to Nepal, so I had someone to look up to,” recalls Tiwari, adding that staying abroad was not as popular as now. The Nepali diaspora has grown, and this has made it easier for others to stay.

Atulya Pandey's (pictured, above) return was the denial of his B-1 visa in the US, a story that made it to the *New York Times* front page. But Pandey took advantage of this for worldwide expansion of Page Vamp, a New York based company he co-founded with fellow University of Pennsylvania graduates Fred Wang and Vincent Sanchez-Gomez.

But with youths disenchanted with the political and economic state of Nepal, the pull force may not be strong enough to convince young Nepalis to return, especially when there are limited job opportunities.

Sugam Suwal in Australia says he has a dream to start a construction company back in Nepal but adds: “The situation in Nepal does not really make it possible for us to take the risk.”

# New laws in Japan

The number of young Nepalis migrating to Japan is likely to increase further if the country’s plans to allow more foreigners to make up for a decline in its workforce ahead of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics goes ahead.

However, the Japan government is also planning to reduce its informal visa quota for cooks and students in favour of five-year work permits for blue collar workers. This is after reports of misuse of the visas by foreigners, as well as exploitation of students by employers.

Nepalis have been migrating to Japan on visas for chefs, students, dependents or trainees, and the number of Nepalis in Japan is crossing 90,000. The Japanese Department of Justice had been lenient on visas in the past because it wanted a legal loophole for cheap labour.

Fewer applicants in Kathmandu for student and professional visas are being approved compared to previously. Prospective students pay Rs1.3 million to educational consultancies to fix their admissions and visas, but there has been a marked drop in the student visa approvals by the embassy. Those on student visas are allowed to work for 28 hours a week, and many pay their college fees with their earnings.



KUNDA DIXIT

Nepali students work at night and go to schools in the daytime, with many reportedly falling asleep at their desks. Others drop out of school because they find the language barrier difficult. There have also been cases of some genuine students returning to Nepal, or going on to Australia because they find the quality of instruction not as expected.

Besides the demand for the Olympics, Japan needs more workers in the service industry, agriculture, transport and as care givers because of its aging population, with a third of the population above 60, and 70,000 Japanese older than 100.

Under the plan, which has been opposed by Japan’s rightwing parties, five-year work permits will be given to foreigners in specific professions and they will not be allowed to bring

dependents. It will require all migrant workers to learn Japanese before arriving.

There are now 1.3 million foreign workers in Japan, double the figure five years ago. The number of Nepalis has grown ten fold in the past ten years mainly because of the increase in the number of students and dependents. This is a visa loophole that allows small and medium enterprises in Japan to source cheap low-skilled labour.

The new rules will come into effect next April if it is approved by Parliament and will change the process through which Nepalis are going to Japan to work on student visas. With 21,500 students, Nepal is ranked third among countries with the highest number of nationals on student visas after China and Vietnam.

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# Kathmandu Top 10 City

Because of the holidays, many vitally important items of news had to be consigned to the dustbin of history because we skipped an issue last week. We repost below one story that fell between the cracks:

**Kathmandu Voted Top 10 City**  
ATLANTA – Lonely Planet and CNN have voted Kathmandu Number 5 among Top 10 cities to visit in 2019. (I am not making this up. Google it.) Finally a piece of good news to warm our cockles as winter sets in.

But, as long-term residents of Kathmandu, we were surprised to be ranked fifth. We should have been Numero Uno. Look at all our achievements:

- Nepal posted a 4.6% growth rate in the last fiscal year. Everything grew: the deficit, the concentration of particles below 2.5 microns at Phora, the size of potholes on the Jorpati Road, and according to a news item this week in a prestigious national daily 'The Illegal Flesh Trade Mushroomed'. (Or was it 'The Illegal Mushroom Trade Fleshed Out'.) Whatever. Either way there was a 4.6% growth.
- We made it to the Lonely Planet list because Kathmandu offers free mud baths. Just stand on the road divider in Balkhu and wait for a 20 ton truck to rumble over the puddles, and as a premium spa customer, you

will be covered from nose to toe in therapeutic clay that used to be a part of Kathmandu Valley's prehistoric lake bed.

- Government officials in Nepal's capital are the most relaxed in the world. They never do today what can be done the day after tomorrow.
- Nepal Telecom has some of the lowest tariffs in the world. My bill last month was zero. I couldn't actually make any calls because the network was always busy.
- The word "no" doesn't exist in the Nepali vocabulary. We will not refuse anything, even if we do not need it. As long as it is free.
- Visit Nepal: We Have No Secrets. In fact, it is no secret that secret talks are going on in secret at a secret venue to topple the government.
- Nepal is also the most transparent nation on Earth. We don't even try to hide bribery any more.
- Kathmandu people are the most hygienic in the world because they keep all their orifices squeaky clean by spitting, and picking their ears and noses in public. Our friendly neighbourhood taxi driver has an ear canal that is spotless. However, the same cannot be said of the inside of his cab which has mushrooms growing out of the dashboard.



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