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LABOUR MINISTRY

CLOSED DOOR: Labour ministers and delegates from 12 labour-exporting Asian countries meet in Kathmandu on Thursday (above) while 100m away Mohan Gurung waits all day at the Labour Department for his Labour permit.



OM ASTHARAI

Labour pain

Ministers and delegates from 12 labour-exporting countries in Asia and six destination countries are gathered in Kathmandu this week for a conference of the Colombo Process currently chaired by Nepal.

But while officials at the Soaltee Crowne Plaza Hotel huddled in closed-door meetings to discuss making migration easier and cheaper, barely 100m away, Mohan Gurung was at the end of a long, slow-moving queue at the

Department of Labour's Tahachal office to renew his documents.

"I don't think I will get to the counter before the office closes, which means I will have to come tomorrow and pay for another night at the hotel," said Gurung.

The hassles for migrant workers like Gurung start in their home countries: a rent-seeking state, unfriendly bureaucracy, extraction by recruiters,

harrassment at immigration. When they get to the host country, most are not paid promised wages or amenities, housemaids are often abused, and there is no compensation for injuries or death.

The Colombo Process is a platform for labour-sending countries like Nepal to share best practices, like the agreement it recently signed with Malaysia to clean up the system.

**BARGAINING
POWER
EDITORIAL
PAGE 2**

The Kathmandu Declaration on Friday will allow labour exporting countries in Asia to cooperate rather than compete, and improve their bargaining position.

"We want to push for a common understanding among labour-sending countries to help each other's citizens stranded in any corner of the world," Labour Minister Gokarna Bista told *Nepali Times* in an interview (page 15).

Also outside the conference venue, at the Labour Department, is 26-year-old migrant worker Rabin Karki from Khotang. He has been waiting all day to renew his Malaysia labour permit. He came home for holidays, having been away from family so long, and he does not want to go back.

Says Karki: "If there were jobs here, I would stay. But we face hassles and confusion everywhere here, even to leave the country."

The migrant labour sector has been dominated by a nexus of unscrupulous recruiters, greedy officials and an uncaring state, but Nepal's recent agreement with Malaysia is an effort to set things right. It is hailed as a model for other countries, and Bangladesh is trying to negotiate a similar agreement with Malaysia for its own workers.

But Minister Gokarna Bista admits it will be challenging: "Those who have been exploiting poor migrant workers probably want to foil this agreement, but I am sure it will be implemented because it reflects the common interests of Nepal and Malaysia, and both are strongly committed to it."

Om Astha Rai



INTERVIEW
**LABOUR MINISTER
GOKARNA BISTA**
PAGE 15

**PAYING AN ARM
AND A LEG**

Migrant workers are becoming disabled to enable Nepal's economy

BY **OM ASTHA RAI**
PAGE 14-15



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BARGAINING POWER

An estimated 2.5 million Asians every year migrate under work contracts to other countries in the region and beyond. Labour-sending countries have tended to compete with each other rather than cooperate, thus decreasing the bargaining power of their nationals. However, the desperation of people seeking employment and the greed of recruiters have often left workers vulnerable to exploitation and deception.

In 2003, 12 Asian labour-exporting countries got together with help from the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the Swiss government to set up the Colombo Process to manage contractual overseas employment. As the current chairing country, Nepal is hosting a ministerial meeting in Kathmandu this week to monitor progress on the protection of migrant workers, optimising the benefits of overseas migration by coordinating responses, and enhancing the impact of remittances.

The Colombo Process is too important to be just another regional talkshop. Our economies are too reliant on remittances to be bogged down in more hazy commitments and pious platitudes.

The meeting is happening in Kathmandu just after Nepal signed an MoU with Malaysia to streamline migration, and to minimise the role of middlemen who were fleecing desperate workers. A recent investigation on this issue by the Centre for Investigative Journalism – Nepal and carried by this newspaper prompted the new regime in Kuala Lumpur to work with Nepal's own Minister for Labour, Gokarna Bista, to hammer out a deal.

As with everything else in Nepal, however, the proof of the pudding will be in the implementation. The migration mafia has tentacles in the bureaucracy and executive, and will be reluctant to give up the lucrative loot of desperate Nepalis. Before sender nations chart out ways to cooperate with each other and negotiate jointly with destination states, they first need to clean up their own house.

The Nepal-Malaysia deal sets a precedent, and is a testament to how sending countries should put their foot down by having a moratorium on workers if necessary until the injustices are addressed. It showed that perhaps by being complacent and not raising our demands clearly, we are missing out on even low hanging fruit that destination countries are readily willing to address. This should not be a race to the bottom. Labour exporters can magnify their bargaining power if they cooperate to strategise, and stop being fearful of a loss of quotas.

South Asian workers fill essential job categories, and even though receiving countries will not admit it, their economies

depend on imported labour. Our countries need champions who look beyond vested interests at the common good, as we saw with the Nepal-Malaysia deal.

The dozen members of the Colombo Process have a lot in common. One migrant worker in the Gulf told us: "Here, it does not matter which nationality or ethnic group we are, we are all treated the same." In Kuala Lumpur, undocumented workers are rounded up together, regardless of nationality. One of them said: "We were crammed in a room full of Bangladeshis, Indians, Indonesians and Nepalis." Female migrant workers have similar experience when arriving at the recruiter's office in the destination country: "We were women from Sri Lanka, Philippines, India, Nepal and Bangladesh, all waiting for our employers to show up."

Most migrants have been lured with tantalising dream jobs by merchants, paid agents in home countries exorbitant fees. They have often arrived at the destination to be paid much less than promised. These shared experiences should guide cross-border cooperation within the Colombo Process by boosting their bargaining power with destination countries on minimum wage, facilities and rights.

Competition for lower wages and minimum facilities victimise workers. It is a buyer's market and workers end up paying more to book a spot with a broker, agents engage in visa trading at the cost of the migrant, and countries fear losing demand quotas for workers.

This should not be a zero sum game, and our governments must put protection of nationals on high priority. After all,

they are migrating because of our collective failure to provide meaningful employment at home.

Sending countries could collaborate to increase their presence in destination countries outside the capital where missions are usually centered. One country's loss in demand due to a ban, should not be seen as another country's gain

– especially when it comes to female workers. No matter their nationality, women from many of our countries are exposed to the same vulnerability. Many migrant workers who are wounded are put on a plane and sent back (*as we report on page 14-15*), they should get better treatment from their employers and the host government. The Kathmandu meeting should agree on action points on these thematic areas.

This is an apt time to push the Colombo Process into higher gear because of greater attention on destination countries with the adoption of the Global Compact on Migration. In addition, FIFA 2022 in Qatar, the 2020 Olympics in Japan and other global events have put receiving countries with labour shortages under the international spotlight, and increased pressure to clean up their act.



Labour exporting countries must put the protection of their nationals on high priority. After all, they are migrating because of our collective failure to give them meaningful employment at home.

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Ten years ago this week in issue #424 of 7-14 November 2008, the *Nepali Times* editorial was once more giving unsolicited advice to politicians to get their act together. It would take another eight years for them to do so. Excerpt:

'Among all the challenges before us in the constitution drafting process, perhaps the most daunting will be the lack of political cooperation between the parties. The democratic alliance of 2006 finally broke down after the NC decided to stay in the opposition after its election defeat. But the UML-Maoist marriage of convenience is also rocky, and there is no love lost among other members of the coalition. The Maoists themselves are not even bothering to hide their internal strife, and are playing it out in the full glare of media.

The NC has refused to agree to full integration of the PLA into the national army, demanded the YCL be disbanded, a return of all confiscated property and adherence to the rule of law. There is also the larger concern about the Maoists' commitment to pluralistic democracy. The Maoist leadership may be inclined to strike a deal, but is prevented from doing so by its own rank and file.



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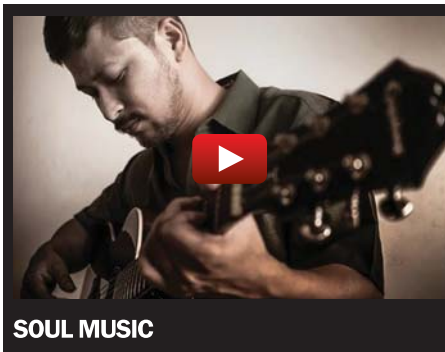
LOSING LIMBS

Watch video describing the hardships of Nepali migrants who returned maimed from overseas. What can be done to reduce injuries, and rehabilitate them? *Story: Page 14-15.*



MEXICO'S KUKUR TIHAR

Mexican activists were so inspired by Nepal's Kukur Tihar dog festival, they transplanted it to Mexico. Watch video by Más que un amigo of Tihar in Mexico City. *Story: Page 6.*



SOUL MUSIC

Nepali artists Bipul Chettri and Laure fuse a Nepali touch into the Stay Open originally recorded by American producer and DJ Diplo and Danish singer MØ. *Story: Page 7.*

#METOO

It is high time women in Nepal also come out of their shells to speak out against the violence and discrimination they are facing either at work or in the confines of home ('#TheyToo', Sewa Bhattarai, #933).

Chitra Thakuri Pradhan

■ How easy it was for Sandip to make a 'joke' about how he could 'feel' (Reema) right there on the stage and he actually proceeded to hug her. These seemingly harmless 'jokes' contribute to bigger problems that women face every day.

Deeksha Dahal

WWI

This article does nothing to help UK-Nepali relations. In the UK there is, and will always be love and great respect for Nepal ('They Shall Not Grow Old', Sewa Bhattarai, #933) especially for the Gurkha soldier.

Alan Roadnight

■ Great review and the points are well taken. Also worth reminding people how Nepal doesn't recognise the sacrifice and struggle of its people.

Daniel Lak

■ I have not seen Peter Jackson's film, and I am not going to speculate why Gurkhas do not appear in the film. It will be enough for me if the film helps to give me a better understanding of the horrors of war and how we can prevent such conflicts in the future.

Andrew Duncan

■ Every British soldier has maximum respect for our Gurkha brothers.

Philippe Hanmann

■ It would be interesting to ask the director/producers why there isn't any footage of the Gurkha soldiers.

Constance Colding Jones

WHAT'S TRENDING



#TheyToo

by Sewa Bhattarai

Aftershocks of the #MeToo movement finally arrived in Nepal, but is limited to a small circle of educated women. Join the online discussion.



Most reached and shared on Facebook



Most visited online page

Nepal's fake poor

by Gopal Gartaula

Readers were indignant about corrupt politicians, traders, landowners and teachers who faked poverty for government grants. Go online to read more.



Most commented

The cost of light

by Om Astha Rai

There was enough electricity supply for Nepal to be lit up for Tihar last week, but at what price to Nepal's economic and political sovereignty? Join the debate.



Most popular on Twitter

QUOTE TWEETS



Nepali Times @nepalitimes

50,000 women in entertainment sector, 13,000 kamlari, 20,000 badi women. Thousands of women trafficked into sex trade every year. They are all routinely abused, and none have heard of #MeToo. Has the movement made any difference in Nepal? @sewa_ditee reports



ChoraChori @ChoraChoriUK

#MeToo seems to be nothing more than a joke in #Nepal. @ChoraChori is working to address the ignorance and indifference, fighting child rape and sexual assault. #Rageagainstrape #GivingTuesdayUK #charity #nonprofit



lexlimbu @lexlimbu

Glad that @nepalitimes wrote about this + @AP1TV_Official issued an apology of some sort. So many of our 'stars' continue to share questionable things, surprised it hasn't created more of an uproar.



Aditi @oktoberferst

So long as we do not recognise and see harassment/inappropriate behaviour for what it is, no amount of discussions will make any impact or so I feel.



Nepali Times @nepalitimes

Nepal should replace government vehicles with electric ones and impose a tax on fuel, to reduce its balance of payment deficit, save the country from bankruptcy, and reduce its political dependence on India. @omastharai reports



Subodh Rana @ranasubodh

Ministers should start biking



Nepali Times @nepalitimes

The conclusion of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Special Report on Global Warming could not have been more blunt: it poses an existential threat to the planet. And to Nepal. What should Nepal do to minimise the risk? @dixit_ajaya writes



Himamshu Ghimire @Himamshu

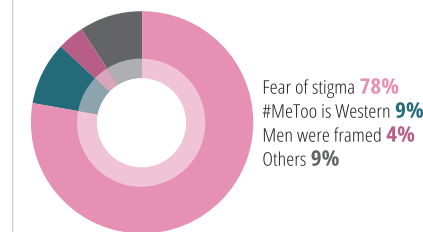
To the commoners and policy-makers, climate change effects are not palpable and its effects are not as visible as the garbage in the streets. So rather than global warming, arguments for a better economy and health can work and are working.



Weekly Internet Poll #934

Q. Why have so few victims confessed under the #metoo movement in Nepal?

Total votes: 116



Weekly Internet Poll #935
To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Should the government focus on safe migration or work to end labour migration?



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Success in Nepal means not having to work

Nepalis work hardest when they are outside Nepal

In the town of Kasara outside Chitwan National Park, the paddy was being harvested last week. The contract labourers had come across the Nepal-India border at Thori, and were busy manually slicing rice stalks with their sickles.



1/2 FULL
Anil Chitrakar

The Nepali farmers who had hired them could afford to do so because their three sons were all working in Japan and sending money home. Across the country, including Kathmandu and on trek routes, there are skilled and semi-skilled workers from northern India and Bangladesh doing the same work that Nepalis have gone abroad to do. In some cases, in districts along the 2015 earthquake zone, Indian workers earn as much as Nepali carpenters and masons earn in Qatar. In jewelry shops that line Kathmandu’s New Road, very little of the work is done by the local Newar owners, most of it has been passed on to hired Indians. Every time Nepalis get a haircut, there is a fair chance they are sending money to India as out-flowing remittance. Last week during Tihar, like all recent Tihars, the demand for marigold boomed, but there is no one to pluck them and make garlands to sell in the cities. So, we imported the garlands from India instead. In the past 10 years Nepal received nearly \$40 billion in



MONIKA DEUPALA

remittances from its workers abroad. But Nepal is also the sixth largest source of remittance for India, from its workers in Nepal. With infrastructure reaching saturation, most Gulf countries will now require managers, and service sector workers, and fewer menial workers. Korean language institutions are in high demand because many Nepali workers

believe that this is a market that will help them to move up the social ladder, and hard work really pays. USA and Australia still draw the young who are strong academically and have families willing to pay for their education. Qatar is asking the Nepal Police to help secure its venues during the upcoming World Cup in 2022. Malaysia wants Nepali workers,

HAIR CONDITIONED: Raghu Thakur is a barber from Bihar who has been cutting the hair of Nepalis for the last 20 years. India’s sixth largest source of foreign remittances is Nepal, even while the 2 million Nepali workers in India send much money home. and is willing to cover all fees associated with them under a new G2G deal. The USA diversity visa lottery is attracting hundreds of thousands of Nepali applicants. Soon, there may be more Nepalis working outside Nepal than in Nepal. Terrace farms are lying fallow, or are being farmed by contract labourers from India. There is really no other way but for Nepali farms to mechanise production and consolidate fragmented family plots. There used to be a time when Nepalis performed funeral rites for relatives if they did not come home for the paddy planting season. We may need to revive this tradition to get young Nepalis to come home during Dasain and stay home till the harvest is stored for the winter. One of the reasons why many Nepalis do not face extreme poverty in difficult economic times is because they have the option to go back to subsistence farming. This has been the insurance policy during the Indian Blockade, and the demonetisation of the INR which hit poor Nepali workers hardest by destroying their savings. Nepal’s main imports include machinery, fossil fuel and raw materials for processed goods for export. No one keeps count of how

much money goes out in haircuts, farm contract labourers, and construction workers from India in hydropower and rebuilding of earthquake-damaged houses. Many CEOs and senior managers in Kathmandu are foreigners, probably because there are no Nepalis left who can do the job. Nepalis are said to work hard, but only when they are outside Nepal. At home, manual work is regarded as shameful. The *jagir* culture thrives because salaried government jobs demand little, but assure a pension for life. You see young men playing cards or carom but not helping in the farm. Success in Nepal means not having to work. But things are changing. Nepali youth today run many businesses that require manual labor and good academic qualifications. From vegetable farming to animation studios, from raising rainbow trout to meat processing, Nepalis are launching businesses closer to home. Nepal is earning more now exporting IT products than money earned from tourism. Families and communities need to respect those who refuse to go abroad and seek work within Nepal. We are proud people, sometimes too proud to work and get our hands dirty. We need more of us to do manual work and tell the world proudly of what we do. Upward mobility in Nepal should not mean not having to do any work.

Anil Chitrakar is President of Siddharthinc



PHOTOS: MONIKA DEUPALA

Go gyakok

Momo, thukpa, laping, sha phaley, thenthuk, khapsey and few other delicacies from Tibet have been favourites among Nepalis for quite a long time. But one dish which has huge potential to be much loved, yet has not received a page in Wikipedia. That dish is Tibetan hot pot, natively known as gyakok. Gyakok is Tibet’s take on the Chinese, Korean and other East Asian nations’ familial stew that comes simmering in a copper pot with a chimney-like opening on top, and a burner at the bottom for a constant flame. You can drop your desired meat, vegetables, seafood, mushrooms, wontons, dumplings, tofu, or anything else, into the soup and eat it as it cooks. The dish is for those who want their momos and thukpas in one place and can share it with others. For a few years, restaurants and hotels in Kathmandu have been promoting this indulgent Tibetan dish during winter. This year, it is Hotel Shangri-La in Lazimpat and its resort in Pokhara bringing out the pot first. They are relaunching Shangri-La Gyakok for the coming winter from mid November until the end of December.



“Gyakok can be modified according to guests’ choice: vegetarian or non-vegetarian, rice or noodles and types of meat and veggies. Guests can experiment with the taste and enjoy with a big group of friends or family”, say Shangri-La’s new executive chef Vikram Kumar (*above*). Shangri-La offers plenty of ingredients to add to the pot: mutton balls, shrimp or prawns, pork and chicken, boiled eggs, tofu and seasonal veggies. Side dishes include kimchi salad, garlic cucumber salad and

mushroom bok choy. These can be paired with steamed rice, Tibetan momo (steamed bun), or chicken or vegetable momo too. Altogether, the dish becomes a hearty feast that checks all the nutrition requirements to get winter-ready. Chef Kumar had a taste of Gyakok 10 years ago, and wanted to continue Shangri-La’s annual gyakok promotion. It took him just few days to understand how much Nepalis love momo, and he hopes Tibetan hot pot will be adored equally. It has been just two weeks since chef Kumar came to Kathmandu, and this is his first endeavor outside of India. “I plan to introduce many rarely available foods, including my signature dishes, and a new menu”, says the chef. “But before that I have to identify with the food culture here and I am looking forward to guests’ feedback on the gyakok.” **Sikuma Rai** *Shangri-La Gyakok Festival 18 November- 31 December Hotel Shangri-La, Lazimpat, (01) 4412999 Shangri-La Village Resort, Pokhara (061) 462222*

prabhu BANK

BIZ BRIEFS

Nepal 10th in US

The number of Nepali students studying in the United States increased by 14% this year compared to 2017. Nepali students posted the highest growth among the top 25 sending countries, and increased to a record 13,270 this year, the third year in a row to see growth. Nepal now ranks 10th for undergraduate students in the US.

Turkish turnover

Turkish Airlines posted a profit of \$1.15 billion in the first nine months of 2018 despite increasing fuel prices. Both

passenger and cargo revenue went up, with an increase in sales revenue by 20% to \$9.9 billion compared to the same period last year.

Wings of change

Speaking at an IATA Wings of Change Conference in Madrid in 13 November,

Qatar Airways Group CEO Akbar Al Baker highlighted the challenges and opportunities for European aviation in

emerging markets such as the Asia-Pacific and the Middle East in the coming year.

Cake mixing

Radisson Hotel Kathmandu ushered a fruit soaking event for Christmas cakes last week

at its Terrace Garden, with Pratima Pande, Edwina Logan, Suman Nepal, Rita Bhandary, Anu Parajuli, doing the mixing.

World Bank funds

The Government of Nepal and the World Bank signed two agreements totaling \$155.7 million for the construction and maintenance of bridges in Nepal, and for improving food security of vulnerable communities. The first credit will finance the Second Bridges Improvement and Maintenance Program while a \$22.7 million grant will support the Food and Nutrition Enhancement Project.

Byanjan soya nuggets

Nimbus, an animal nutrition and pellet feed manufacturer in Nepal, has stepped into food production and distribution in 40 districts. It has introduced new products like Byanjan Oil, and Byanjan Soya Nuggets.

prabhu BANK



ALL PHOTOS: JAZZMANDU FACEBOOK

The 16th edition of Nepal's first and only jazz festival Surya Nepal Jazzmandu 2018 began on 1 November with a free concert for school children at Alliance Française, Jhamsikhel. The rhythm and instruments may have been unfamiliar, but the students enjoyed the lively music, dancing to the beat – proving jazz is indeed universal.

They sang along and whistled to international music, from Brazilian beats to European melodies, as musicians interacted with them. The day ended with a performance by Cadenza, the group which first brought Jazzmandu to Nepal, at their home base Jazz Upstairs.

The following day had jazz gigs at various venues around town. Adrien Brandeis performed piano-led soulful melodies at Manny's Eatery & Tapas Bar,

while Dave Feusi and The Groove Gang presented groove jazz, building their rhythms around saxophones. At Jazz Upstairs, Cynthia Abraham's husky voice and Eduardo Mendonca's Brazilian bass gelled well to wow the audiences. Nick's Cousins presented jazz with a punch of rock at House of Music, a show geared at audiences who enjoy exploratory jazz.

The next day was for large stages and group revelries. Free shuttle buses departed to Gokarna Forest resort where musicians wowed crowds at the edge of the forest on 3 November. True to Jazzmandu's goals, the day showcased not just international artists, but also gave them something to take back and learn about Nepali music, as international artists jammed with a team of sarangi players from Nepal.



Jazzmandu finale



On 5 November, the day Nepal worshipped crows, audiences got a South American flavour of jazz, with 'Sounds of Latin Jazz' at Dhokaima Cafe. The exuberant audience enjoyed the loud and vibrant music with enthusiastic applause.

Students of jazz were able to interact with visiting musicians at the Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, where vocal and instrumental workshops were held. Like the

concert for schoolchildren, this event was also free but with limited seating.

"One of Jazzmandu's main concerns is promoting music education and cross-cultural understanding of music," says organiser Samir Chettri, also a member of Cadenza. "We have always made these opportunities accessible to those who are interested, and we hope to develop an appreciation for international



styles of music through these programmes."

Kantipur Temple House saw true jazz style fusion as Cynthia Abraham and Maria Fajardo sang soulfully to the tunes of Rabin Lal Shrestha's tabla, and other eastern classical instruments. An attentive crowd quietly savoured jazz becoming more vibrant with the infusion of eastern classical music.

Jazzmandu bid adieu to its 16th year with a finale timed for Dog Day on 6 November at the Yak & Yeti. The week-long extravaganza ended with all the performers coming together for a rousing evening of entertainment. Like every year, Jazzmandu entertained audiences while raising the bar for contemporary music in Nepal.  **Sewa Bhattarai**



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Mexico adopts Kukur Tihar

Nepal's tradition of honouring dogs at Kukur Tihar has been taken to the other side of the world by a collective of Mexican animal rights groups that has started celebrating the festival too.

Last week, after Nepal worshipped its dogs, Mexicans brought out their pets in Mexico

City's Revolution Square and in Puerto Vallarta, garlanding and smearing vermilion on them just like in Nepal.

Kukur Tihar celebrations were started in Mexico in 2016, and was inspired by the Nepali festival to spread awareness there about the respect humans owe to all animals. Since then,

the festival has gained popularity, and dogs have been singled out for special honour.

"It is important to raise awareness among the population about the respect we owe dogs," organiser of the annual festival Martha Dau told the *El Universal* newspaper, "we are convinced that a human being who does not hurt

an animal will hardly hurt a human being."

Dogs garlanded with marigold, and smeared with red powder could be seen with their owners in Puerto Vallarta at two events this week. One of the organisers, Protección del Perro Callejero also shared a YouTube tutorial on how to make marigold garlands for dogs.

Anemio Maya of the Organización Properro said the festival was inspired by Kukur Tihar in Nepal in which dogs are worshipped because they are messengers of Yamaraj, the God of Death. "We hope that this celebration will spread throughout Mexico to raise awareness about the abandonment suffered by dogs and create a feeling of gratitude that is so necessary," Maya added.

Owners fed dogs their favourite treats, and played with their canine friends throughout the celebration, which included colourful drapes,

banners and even rangoli adorning the celebration grounds at Hotel Puerto de Luna in Puerto Vallarta, creating the vivacious atmosphere that defines Tihar.

Last year's event in Puerto Vallarta paid tribute to Frida, a rescue dog involved in the earthquake in Mexico in 2017, and observed a minute's silence to all other pets which died in the quake. 🇲🇽



Mexican activists were so inspired by Nepal's Kukur Tihar dog festival, they have transplanted it to Mexico. Complete with marigold garlands and red vermilion, it really was a dog's day out. Watch a video by Más que un amigo de Tihar in Mexico City's Revolution Square.

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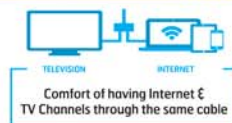
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NEPAL. WHEREVER YOU ARE.

Times.com



Kathmandu is starting to feel the pangs of winter in many ways. The temperature is now dipping into the mid-single digits, even inside the city's urban heat bubble. This has enhanced the seasonal overnight inversion layer that traps polluted air near the surface. Although prevailing winds due to this depression over the Bay (left) is keeping the haze from the plains away, there is enough pollution within the Valley to make the air unhealthy. Expect an all clear weekend with afternoon breeze clearing the air somewhat.

Going places together - qatarairways.com

Bipul Chettri

Back in Kathmandu



In September, American producer and DJ Diplo and Danish songwriter star MØ released a music video with Nepali singer-songwriter Bipul Chettri and rapper Laure. ‘Stay Open’ has already got 9.4 million views in YouTube. Now, Bipul Chettri, Laure, Diplo and others, are bringing a one-of-a-kind concert to Kathmandu on 17 November. *Nepali Times* spoke with Bipul Chettri on his arrival in Kathmandu for the concert. Excerpts:

Nepali Times: Are you happy with your musical journey so far?

Bipul Chettri: Music for me is a tool to express my thoughts and emotions. My journey has only just begun, and I am still learning and progressing. Satisfaction comes with every new song or tune, so I am quite content.

Which of your recent overseas gigs stands out for you?

I speak for most musicians when I say performing live is special, no matter where you are. But there are some venues, like the SSE Arena at Wembley, which are on bucket lists for artists. Especially since most of the people who have played at such venues are icons one has grown up listening to, and have been huge influences in shaping our musical expressions.

The Nepali audience is fragmented, yet your music seems to appeal to everyone. What is the secret?

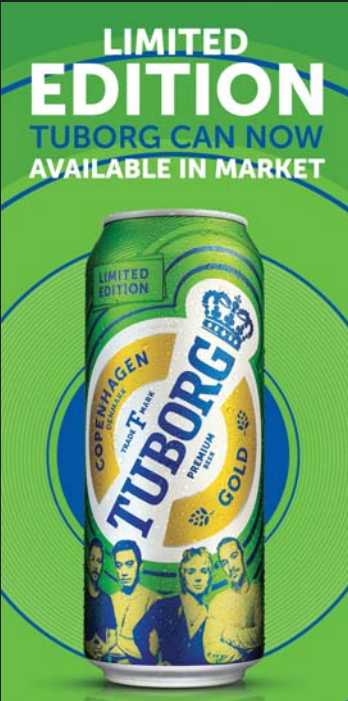
I cannot fathom what the secret is but if I can guess: it has to be the feeling of home that the diaspora audience misses. The music may help them escape the foreignness, even if for a brief moment.

How did the Stay Open collaboration with Laure, Diplo and MØ happen?

The song was already composed by Diplo and sung by MØ. Tuborg provided a set of guidelines to follow in terms of space and lyrics to add Nepali perspective to the tune without actually taking away from the melody and theme of the song. We accepted the project so that we could understand and experience how international artists worked. It was a great learning experience for all of us.

How do you see the scope and prospect of folk songs in the Nepali-speaking diaspora?

Nepali music listeners are very active and informed in the age of the Internet. Content is available at the click of a button, and people are now exposed to more music than ever before. The chance of Nepali music being heard is greatest now, be it folk or any other genre. It may be too early to say if Tuborg Stay Open helps create an image for Nepali music, but I think it is a stepping-stone for local musicians to test the waters for an international audience. Most Latin music that we know and hear, have actually come out of these kinds of associations.



How difficult is it to mix and market music in Nepal and India separately? Music is not a brick and mortar business like it used to be, when tapes or CDs were the only way to acquire music. Physical borders no longer matter, any content one uploads to an online platform is available to everyone in Nepal, India or the world. But being an independent artist is the real challenge as everything ends up being a DIY project, which in a way is fun and exciting but it does bog one down with compromises along the way.

Can you tell us about your day job? I do have a day job as head of the Arts Department at a school here in Delhi, and I teach western classical guitar to children aged 6-18.

What's next for Bipul Chettri? We are currently recording some new material and we hope to release it by first half of 2019, not sure how many songs.

SOUL MUSIC



Go online to watch the Stay Open music video recorded by American producer and DJ Diplo and Danish singer/songwriter star MØ. Nepali artists Bipul Chettri and Laure have injected a Nepali touch into the track with their unique voices.

nepalitimes.com

Tuborg Open Fest
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Tickets: tkmonkeys.com, (01) 4444428

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LEST WE FORGET

The political, socio-economic, military and demographic impact of Gurkha recruitment in World War I on Nepal, 100 years on

David Seddon

The centennial of the Armistice last week was an occasion to gauge the scale and significance of Nepal's involvement in World War I. Politically, it cemented the long-standing subordinate semi-colonial relationship that locked Nepal into British Imperialism, but it also consolidated Nepal's formal independence and the legitimacy of the Rana regime.

It led directly to the Anglo-Nepal Treaty of 1923 in which the very first article read: 'The two Governments agree mutually to acknowledge and respect each other's independence, both internal and external'. There was the additional benefit for Prime Minister Chandra Shumshere Rana of an annual payment by the British of a million rupees.

The War also served to underline the divisions of class, caste and ethnicity within Nepali society because the majority of soldiers who went to fight were not only from specific regions but

from particular ethnic groups and rarely from the dominant castes or ruling classes. It also contributed to the distinctive political ideology of Nepali nationalism as a *bir* (brave) nation. As historian Pratyoush Onta has noted, the Kathmandu ruling class legitimised 'the soldier's pain in the battlefield ... as part of one's necessarily sacred duty to the Nepali nation'. That pain (*dukha*) was very real.

Militarily, Nepal made a real contribution with the deployment of soldiers in support of the Allies, not only of the Gurkha regiments of the British Indian Army on the Western Front, in North Africa and in the Middle East, but also of Nepal Army forces in India to relieve British troops while the Indian Army was serving overseas and helped in campaigns, including in Waziristan on the North West Frontier, to maintain British control across the subcontinent.

Historians say more than 200,000 Gurkha recruits were put at the disposal of the Indian Army, which represented a quarter of the total male population of the ethnic groups involved. These Nepali troops were deployed as part of

the Indian Army, in many of the most difficult of operations and at the forefront of the battle and, as a result, suffered disproportionately high casualties.

Whether freezing in the cold and rainy weather in the trenches on the Western Front, or in the hot dry conditions of North Africa and West Asia, the Gurkhas, Sikhs and other regiments of the Indian Army suffered not only from enemy fire and bombardment but also from sickness, cold, heat and neglect.

There are first-hand accounts of the disastrous Gallipoli campaign and of the various battles in Palestine and Mesopotamia, and particularly of the defeat of British and Indian forces at Kut, and the long march afterwards to concentration camps in central Anatolia, where the Ottoman Turks fighting on the German side incarcerated thousands, including Gurkhas.

The Gurkha regiments officially suffered over 20,000 casualties, and together with the influenza epidemic of 1917, led to the apparent decline in the population of Nepal between 1911-1920 from 5.6 million to 5.5 million.



Even though 10% of the recruits were casualties, there has been no detailed study of the social impact at the local level in those communities from which the majority of troops were recruited.

Already suffering from the absence of their husbands, brothers, sons and fathers for years on end, those who remained 'to keep the home fires burning' (the women, the children and the elderly) also had to cope with the fact that many failed to return, and many more came home with debilitating and

disabling injuries or conditions.

There was little in the way of public 'welfare assistance' for these casualties of war and for their families who were obliged to look after them, and also ensure their livelihoods when men were physically unable to work. There was little or no recognition of what today is referred to as 'post-traumatic stress disorder', and only the loving care of family members of affected individuals.

The economic impact of the war must also have been considerable.




NEUVE-CHAPPELLE MEMORIAL

Thousands of able-bodied men were taken away not only from their families but also from fields, leaving those left behind to cope with the demands of farming and with a reduced labour force, and one which relied more heavily than ever on women, children and the elderly.

The cost in terms of loss of production, as well as loss of income at the local level, as a result of the absence of so many men for four years is incalculable, but was undoubtedly felt acutely

by those affected. There must have been serious additional costs of supporting those who returned home unable to work because of physical or mental trauma.

Men returned to Nepal with much personal suffering and the loss of comrades. But they also came back with experiences of mixing with soldiers from other cultures and backgrounds, facing daily challenges, travelling and visiting places in far-off countries across the sea. All this had a dramatic impact on social and cultural awareness in the local communities to which they returned.

Ultimately, this greater consciousness was to play a part in a growing dissatisfaction with the poverty and underdevelopment of Nepal, and to increasing demands for social, economic and political change in the 1920s and 1930s. 



Dr David Seddon is Director of Critical Faculty, author/co-author of many publications on Nepal, and currently writing a three-part book

on 'Nepal and the Great War'.

MARKING TIME: A British officer performs a kit inspection of a Gurkha unit in France in 1915 (*above*).

Nepali soldiers and porters assemble in Tundikhel in 1915 before marching down to India to join the Allied forces in Europe, Turkey and West Asia. Of the 200,000 people conscripted, about 20,000 were killed (*above, top-right*).

Gurkhas storming a German trench at Neuve-Chappelle in France during World War I (*above, right*).

The military hospital gifted by Britain to Nepal in 1925 in recognition of the sacrifices made by Gurkha troops in World War I (*right*). After the original structure at Tundikhel in Kathmandu was damaged in the 2015 earthquake, the hospital was reconstructed in the original style with a modern annex.

Names of Gurkha soldiers who died while fighting in France and those whose bodies were never found. They are among 4,700 soldiers from the British Indian Army commemorated in the Neuve-Chappelle Memorial (*left*).



PHOTOS: IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM

11 AM, 11/11/1918

As the world commemorated Armistice Day on 11 November to mark the cessation of hostilities on the Western Front, there was not much done in Nepal to remember a war in which so many Nepali soldiers were killed, and one that had such a historic impact on the country's political, socio-economic and cultural life.

The Armistice took effect at 11 o'clock in the morning (the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month of 1918) and initially expired after 36 days. A formal peace agreement was only reached when the Treaty of Versailles was signed the following year. In other theatres of the war, including the Middle East, fighting continued.

The date is a national holiday in France, Belgium, and in many Allied nations. In some countries, Armistice Day coincides with Remembrance Day and Veterans Day, and other public holidays. In Italy the end of World War I was commemorated

on 4 November, the day of the Armistice of Villa Giusti. Armistice Day has been a statutory holiday in Serbia since 2012, and Poland celebrated National Independence Day on 11 November to commemorate the anniversary of the restoration of Poland's sovereignty in 1918 from the German, Austrian and Russian Empires.

A German national day of mourning, Volkstrauertag has, since 1952, been observed on the Sunday closest to 16 November. In Denmark, Netherlands and Norway, the end of World War I is not commemorated as the three countries remained neutral. Denmark instead observes Flag Day on 5 September in commemoration of both living and dead soldiers who served in any conflict. In the Netherlands, 4 May is Remembrance Day.

In India, there is no official Armistice Day, but the day has been marked by tributes and ceremonies in army cantonments and by memorial services in some churches. Prince Charles and Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall, marked the day in Mumbai's St John the Evangelist Church. Services are held at Kohima, Imphal War Cemeteries and the Delhi War Cemetery.

Because the two 'World Wars' were fought while India was part of the British Empire, the idea of 'commemoration' was largely dismissed as an unwanted colonial relic. In July 2016, however, a campaign called India Remembers was launched to commemorate the sacrifice of Indian soldiers in various conflicts, including the First World War, with a proposal that the marigold join the poppy as a symbol of remembrance.

The day chosen for the official day of remembrance was 7 December, to commemorate the centenary of a historic cavalry charge led by Indian horsemen on the German trenches on the Somme. The horses and their riders did not fare well against German machine guns, but their sacrifice was something that those who launched the campaign wished to remember as the epitome of 'the human spirit in the face of war'.

The contradictions between the focus on 'valour' on the one hand, and the reality of pain, suffering, injury and death in appalling conditions, on the other, are acute. One strategy that recognises this, at least in part, is to emphasise the importance of commemoration for peace and reconciliation. This year, the British and German governments rang bells at the same time in the same way, expressing the reconciliation of former enemies in sound. The leaders of France and Germany embraced each other at the commemoration in Paris on Sunday.



MONIKA DEUPALA

EVENTS



Photography workshop

A five-day photography workshop focusing on storytelling, by Niva Rajbangshi. Bring along a DSLR and even get a chance to be selected for their internship program. 19-24 November, 8-10am, Jazz Productions, Kuponhole, Rs6,000, 9860272812, 9801040644

Story telling for kids

Award winning children's book publisher, author and Thang Goodwill ambassador Mark Janssen is offering a 'Drawing & Illustration' workshop, followed by a story telling session of his books—*Nothing Happened, Island and Dino's do not exist*—for 5-10 year olds. 18 November, 3-5pm, HUB, Thamel, Register at: 9866273244, events@madeinnepal.com

Silent disco

As funny as it will be to see everyone dancing without loud music, there will be no complaints from neighbours. Bring along your fully charged phone, or a portable music device, and a good set of earphones. 16 November, 7-10pm, Base Camp: Outdoor Lifestyle, Jhamsikhel, 9841226397

Mixed media exhibition

'Changing Lanes' by Tulku Jamyang and 'Levitation' by David Douglas: a mixed media exhibition on display. 16-29 November, 11-5pm, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited, (01) 4218048



Kathmandu: My Fascination

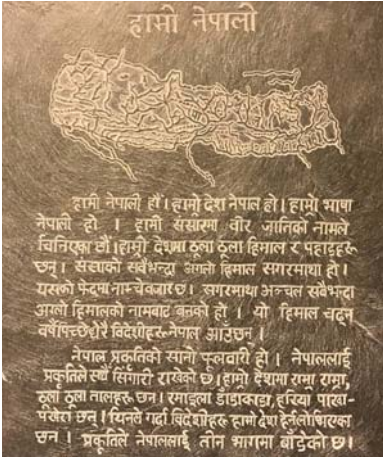
A novel exhibition showing Prabod Shrestha's pop-art silkscreen prints with sound installation, on the lifestyle of modern Kathmandu, juxtaposing the old and the new. 16-30 November, Bikalpa Art Center, Pulchok, (01) 5013524

Walkathon

Walk with Rekha Thapa, a prominent actor and anti-child marriage campaigner, and activists, academicians, students, teachers and people from all walks of life to bring attention to issues surrounding child rights and marriage. 17 November, 8:30-11:30am, Bhrikuti Mandap, (01) 5538758

Dukuchhap-Tika Bhairab hike

Register before 3pm on Friday for 6-8 hours circuit hike from Dukuchhap – Sarangi Danda - Deurali -Tika Bhairab with an experienced guide. 17 November, 6:45am-6pm, Bhrikuti Mandap Exhibition Hall, Rs1,000 (first timers), Rs500 (repeated hikers), 9860330497, 9851192705



Opposite Dreams

Opposite Dreams: The Politics of Local encounters the realities of social hierarchies and invasive international influences in Nepali societies by highlighting the misuse of power, and state-sponsored violence. The exhibition is an anthropological perspective expressed via mixed multimedia. 16-17 November, 11am-7pm, Artree Nepal, Samarpan Marg, Tripatheshwor, 9846382653

Comedy Tuk Tuk

Something special to your Sunday social: Comedy Tuk Tuk has a two-hour special standup comedy with Shraddha Verma, Aayush Shrestha, Fedor Ikelaar and Rajina Shrestha. Music, drinks, food, socialisation and a lot of laughter. 18 November, 4-8pm, Musicology, Maitri Marg, Lalitpur, 9860368061

Social Science Baha

Dipak Gyawali, an Academician of the Nepal Academy of Science and Technology, talks about Nepal's development predicaments at Lecture Series C of the Lens of Cultural Theory by Social Science Baha. 21 November, 4:30pm, Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka, (01) 4480091

MUSIC



Tuborg Open Fest

Watch the American super producer DJ Diplo live on stage with Nepal's dearest Bipul Chettri and Laure. Joining them are Neetesh Jung Kunwar, Rohit Shakya and Trishala Gurung. Keep your schedule open for the one-of-a-kind international collaboration. 17 November, 4-10pm, Hotel Annapurna, Darbar Marg, Rs2,000, For tickets: (01) 4444428, tikmonkeys.com

Viva con Agua

Ratul Pradhan, Pranav Pachhai, Dabu Fantastic and Pablo Charlemoine will play original Nepali, English and German songs of different genres like hip-hop, reggae, acoustic pop/folk and blues, to raise funds for water projects through Viva con Agua. 16 November, 5-8pm, The Yard by Oasis Garden Homes, (01) 5532965



NyaLi

Singapore based singer-songwriter NyaLi brings her pop compositions to Nepal for the first time. With influences of jazz, R&B and soul, she will be joined by Kathmandu pianist Yuvash Vaidya. 17 November, 8-9:30pm, Base Camp: Outdoor Lifestyle, Jhamiskhel, 9841226397

BBQ and blues

A pre-Thanksgiving celebration with Bob Boxer from the USA. Barbeque-roasted chicken with a plethora of other foods, with a classic pumpkin pie for dessert. 16 November, 5pm onwards, Hannah's Café, Dhobighat, 9801053546

OUR PICK



Opens in Kathmandu on 16 November

The second movie in the Fantastic Beasts series has generated a lot of excitement among its fans already. The spinoff of the famous Harry Potter series is set one generation before Harry, and is centered on then arch-villain Grindelwald. Fans were excited when Johnny Depp was revealed as Grindelwald in the first movie. Now they cannot wait to see what he will do next and how his lover turned nemesis Dumbledore will confront him. Directed by David Yates, it stars other beloved actors like Jude Law as Dumbledore and Eddie Redmayne as Newt Scamander.

DINING



Bayleaf

Drop by the garden restaurant for Burmese dishes, such as tofu thoke, khao swe thoke (Noodle Salad), mohinga (fish noodle soup) and other signature pork dishes. For starters try corn fritters. Tangel, opposite to Attic Bar, (01) 4437490

Capital Grill

This America inspired diner offers an assortment of appetisers and entrees to suit everyone's tastebuds. Present three bills paid in Capital Grill within the same month and get a privilege membership for seasonal offers. Bhatbhateni, (01) 4428426

Mezze by Roadhouse

Smart interior design and the terrace view of the palace provide a great atmosphere to enjoy dinner with friends. The chef's special is recommended: mixed vegetable broth, beetroot salad and a grilled basa fish roll. Mercantile Plaza, Darbarmarg, (01) 4223087



8848 Mt. Bar

Offering a selection of world-class beverage at a reasonable price. The interior is well designed to provide a cozy and comfortable ambiance. Enjoy your favorite drinks at the bar, patio or even in resort's main courtyard. 7am-11pm, Gokarna Forest Resort, Thali, (01) 4451212

Muse Restobar

A multi-cuisine restaurant and bar with sophisticated wooden interior, providing the perfect family environment. Uttardhoka, Lazimpat, (01) 4445533

GETAWAY

Harmony Spa & Health Club

Amongst trees on the edge of a plateau overlooking Gokarna Forest and the grassed valley below, Harmony Spa combines therapeutic care within a natural environment impossible to recreate elsewhere. Included are a variety of rejuvenating courses, emphasizing Ayurvedic treatments within Ayura, the Adam & Eve, and Serenity massage rooms. 6:30am-10:30pm, Gokarna Forest Resort, Thali, (01) 4451212



Hotel Annapurna View

The boutique hotel situated at 1,600m in Sarangkot offers everything: sunrise, the Annapurnas, view of Phewa Lake, serenity, and luxurious accommodation. It's a perfect season for amazing views of the Himalayas. Don't miss! Sarangkot, Pokhara, (01) 443566

Club Himalaya

Amazing mountain views for refreshing weekend escapades. A quick trip to Kathmanduites' favourite getaway place. Nagarkot, (01) 6680080

Namo Buddha Resort

Constructed in traditional Newari style and surrounded by lush greenery, the resort is an oasis of peace and tranquility, offering spectacular views of the Himalayas on clear days. Take a short trek to Namu Buddha and Thrangu Tashi Yangtze Monastery for a pure refreshment and relief from the city stress. Namu Buddha, Phulbari, 9851106802

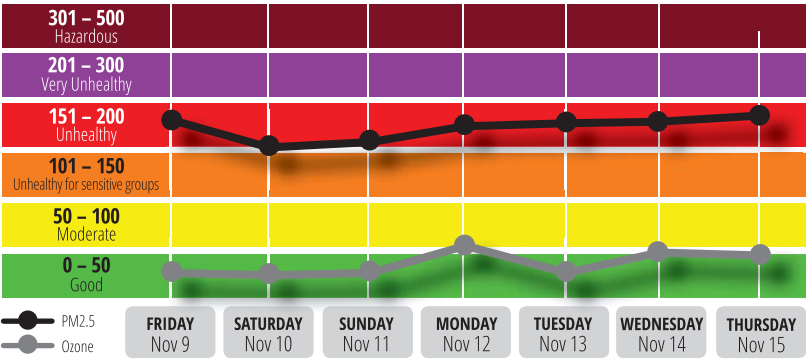


Milla Guesthouse

If you prefer the quiet and admire a mix of old and new, this is the perfect place to stay. Not too far from the city, yet worlds apart. Bhaktapur, 9851024137

AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 9 - 15 November



Winter's curse is here. Kathmandu's air quality was in the red 'Unhealthy' band throughout this week. Since prevailing winds have kept pollution from the Indo-Gangetic plains away, most of the PM2.5 suspended in the city air is from vehicular pollution. This week's Kathmandu's PM2.5 concentration matched that in San Francisco (downwind from forest fires) and was much higher than Beijing (25) where air pollution control efforts are showing results. The surface ozone concentration also shows an upward trend with two-wheeler traffic picking up after the holidays. Follow live AQI updates on nepaltimes.com and on https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/

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Don't go quietly into the night

All three levels of government were responsible for Shyam Sundar Shrestha's death

Kunda Dixit

Hundreds of children had been walking past the gaping open drain outside the gates of Laboratory School in Kirtipur every day for the past six months. Teachers had repeatedly asked the Kathmandu Valley water supply utility to cover the ditch. A parent who complained recently was told by workers: "Mind your own business." A shopkeeper across road has lost count of the number of motorcyclists injured trying to avoid the gutter at night.

On 27 October, yoga instructor Shyam Sundar Shrestha was spending the Saturday evening at his home in Chagal with his mother, Sabitri and sister, Shoba. He told them not to let his little nephews waste time playing with mobile phones.

Shyam Sundar had dinner, checked his laptop, washed his face, and said he was bicycling out to Chobhar. His mother wondered why he had to go out into the dark streets, but did not say anything because her 41-year-old son had criss-crossed Nepal on his bicycle.

Shyam Sundar was an introvert since childhood, his mother remembers. He lived frugally, ate little, dressed simply and had a passion for spiritualism and bicycling. He loved the great outdoors, and had followed his guru on a walking pilgrimage from Kathmandu to Kanya Kumari on the southern tip of India, a distance of 4,000km.

When he did not return till late that night, Sabitri Shrestha tried unsuccessfully to call her son on his mobile. Even though she was not unduly worried, she called around to relatives who reported a missing person to the Police.

The call from the Police came early on Sunday morning: a pedestrian had found Shyam Sundar's body inside an open drain on the road to Chobhar. The family was in complete shock, as weeping neighbours gathered around. At the site, Police extricated Shyam Sundar's red bicycle and shoes, and sent his body to hospital for an autopsy.

It was just the latest tragedy that brought into sharp focus the death trap that Kathmandu's road have become, with open manholes and drains, gaping ditches on dark streets without pedestrian sidewalks, and the lack of warning signs.

Shyam Sundar's death occurred down the road from where renowned conservationist Pralhad Yonzon was killed almost exactly six years ago. Both were avid bicyclists, and their deaths have exposed criminal state negligence about road safety and the lack of bicycle lanes that the city promised.

Friends, relatives, colleagues and bicycle enthusiasts gathered on 10 November at the spot where Shyam Sundar Shrestha died for his 13th day remembrance. They paid tribute to a quiet, spiritual man dedicated to helping others. Away from crowd, weeping silently was Sabitri Shrestha.

"I cannot describe to you what a decent man and devoted son he is," she sobbed, still speaking in the present tense about her son. "He never says an unkind word to anyone, never raises his voice. He does not take sugar or white rice, eating only fruit and buckwheat, and has few cravings."

After his two sisters got married, Shyam Sundar was taking care of



PHOTOS: KUNDADIXIT

his mother in their Chagal home. His father died when he was young. He worked as an English tutor and a yoga instructor, but never felt the need to make much money.

Shyam Sundar's five-year-old nephew points at a photo of him and says, "Pau." Carrying him on her arms, Shobha Shrestha says tearfully: "He had just started recognising his uncle, and has been asking where he is. What do I tell him?"

The ditch where Shyam Sundar died has now been covered with

concrete slabs. But the night before the commemoration, an ambulance that had tried to avoid another pothole had rammed into the side of the road, just next to the white ghost bicycle chained to a tree that serves as a memorial to Shyam Sundar.

As the small gathering observed a two-minute silence, Nepal Sambat revellers on pickups roared past, there was the sound of fire crackers going off nearby. An ambulance rushed past siren blazing.

Advocate Sunil Ranjan Singh's



INHERITANCE OF LOSS: Sabitri Shrestha (left) at the 13th day commemoration for her son, yoga instructor Shyam Sundar Shrestha, on Saturday on the Chobhar Road.

Police extricated Shrestha's body from the open drain on the morning of 28 October.

Concrete slabs now cover the ditch into which Shrestha fell and died on 27 October. A ghost bicycle tied to a tree marks the spot as a memorial to a decent, spiritual man.

Sundar's body was found, the Kathmandu Valley water utility (KUKL) covered up the open drain in half-an-hour. "If it was so simple to cover it and make it safe, why didn't they do it earlier? Did someone have to be killed?" advocate Sunil Ranjan Singh asked.

The police released the autopsy report over Tihar, it was as everyone had suspected: Shyam Sundar was knocked unconscious after falling off his bicycle and drowned in sewage half-a-metre deep.

Despite the people consoling her, Sabitri Shrestha looked alone and forlorn. She joined her hands in prayer, and said softly: "I used to tell him not to go where there are no roads, but he died on a road, right here in the capital. I hope no more Nepalis have to die like my son." 🇳🇵

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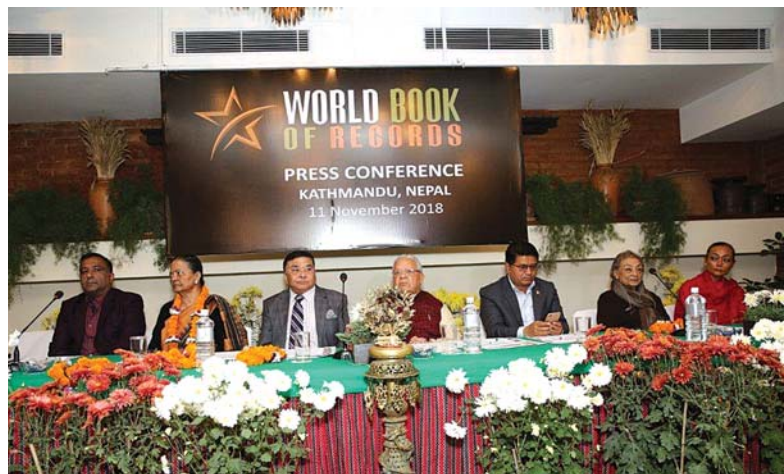
RANDY BERRY / TWITTER

THE U.S. AND US: US Ambassador to Nepal Randy Berry met with Prime Minister K P Oli in Singha Darbar on Wednesday. The two talked about shifting the US-Nepal partnership into high gear.



RABINDRAADHIKARI / TWITTER

TRANSHIMALAYAN HERITAGE: Tourism Minister Rabindra Adhikari and Chinese Ambassador to Nepal Yu Hong (left) welcome Minister of Culture and Tourism of China, Luo Shugang, in Singha Darbar on Tuesday.



DWARIKA'S HOTEL

RECORD KEEPING: The World Book of Records (WBR) London listed Nepal's Pashupathinath and Lumbini in its big archive, and awarded Himalayan Bank and Dwarika's Hotel for contributions to banking and tourism at a function in Kathmandu on Monday.



BIKRAM RAI

DIVINE DANCING: A 12-day long annual Kartik Nach started at Patan Darbar Square in Mangalbazar, Lalitpur on Monday night.



ETIHAD AIRWAYS

15 YEARS FLEW BY: Etihad Airways celebrated 15 years of global operations on Sunday, honouring top travel agencies in Kathmandu on Sunday. The airline started flying to Kathmandu in 2007 and now operates two daily flights to and from Abu Dhabi.

Re-imagining South Asia

The book *Another South Asia!* with an assertive exclamation mark in its title requires one to pause and step back to recall what South Asia is, before engaging with the idea of what could be 'another'.

The essays in this book explore institutional lapses like SAARC which have not done much about the region, and includes the failure of academics. The book posits the possibility of exploring 'another': a soothing, disarming, and yet not credulous, utopia.

It is common to understand the region through the lens of 'India's hegemonic power' -- often provides for understanding everything bad in South Asia, be it the Indian Blockade of Nepal or the omnipresence of China's influence in the region. The book jolts one out of this intellectual stupor, rejecting not just the conventional approach, but also explores a tapestry of lived history woven into the fabric of daily life. It begins to feel that there is more to the idea of South Asia than one realised.

The book explores South Asia through its fluid faiths and intellectual history, cross border bonhomie of artists, revolutionary poets of the region in the framework of 'organic intellectuals', and the Progressive Writers' Association as a case for a South Asian literary imagination.

That is not all. The dramatic and performative traditions of the region show them to be trans-local and deeply melodramatic, without being Bollywood-like. It also invites us to see, smell, and savour South Asia



far beyond its cartographic territory. Most importantly, this all premises on the idea that the region ought to be understood on its own, both as a World Region, a civilisational entity in its own right.

This is a refreshing departure from the intellectual preoccupations of scholars, diplomats, bureaucrats, and officials, who tend to be in confusion about South Asia. It is not too concerned with finding 'the other', but in this strength is also its weakness. Even while the book accepts the predominance of the state in South Asia, it resists an attempt to have a discussion about it. It is perhaps due to the objective of exploring a much needed utopian imagination.

The book can only be summarised in metaphor, which is also a metaphor for the history of South Asia. The Jinnah House in Bombay which Indians cannot understand why after insisting

on a separate nation, Jinnah said he wanted to spend a peaceful retired life in it after partition. Pakistani diplomats insist that it is a sign of Jinnah's generosity, and that Indians have misunderstood him. Meanwhile, the biggest builder of Bombay who is also a member of parliament wants to pull it down, and replace it with something 'better'.

If the gates of that abandoned house were to be opened for people to live in it, and the house was to have a library, one imagines that a copy of this book would find a prized place on the shelves of that library. *Another South Asia!* offers that tantalising possibility. 🇳🇵

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Children and crime

Rameswor Bohara in
Himal Khabarpatrika,
28 October – 11 November

हिमाल
खबरपत्रिका

Dhanusha's Sunita Devi Yadav was alarmed one October night to discover that her seven month old son, Shobhan, was missing. The police were notified, and after a two-week long investigation, they found Shobhan being nursed by Leela Devi Shah in the adjoining district of Siraha.

Leela Devi was desperate to have a son after delivering four daughters, and decided to "buy" a son from kidnappers. She and her accomplices are now in police custody. Nepal Police reported 77 cases of kidnappings across the country in the past year. Most cases were for ransom, and young children were prime targets.

In all forms of heinous crimes, including rapes, sexual assault, human trafficking or murder, the number of child victims is disproportionately high in Nepal. The figures of rape are particularly staggering. Of the 1,480 rapes reported to police in the past year (30% up from the previous year) 64% of victims were below 18.

Nepal Police has started a Community-Police Cooperation program in all 77 districts since October, and spokesperson Uttam Subedi says it was because law enforcers were themselves shocked by the growing number of child victims.

"We realised that the law alone was inadequate, and we need the help of communities, especially schools," Subedi says.

There were 876 missing children in the past three months, and 64% have not been traced. Missing children are often assumed to have been trafficked, or sold for their organs. Hemanta Malla Thakuri, who was previously the chief of the investigation unit CBI, says: "The majority of lost children are from poor families. Parents report once, but are not capable of consistently following up. That is why it is hard to find most children."

Criminals often target children because of their vulnerability and since there is little resistance from them. It is easier to convince innocent children not just through fear, but also attracting them with gifts. After the crime, subduing their voice using threats is less challenging than for adults. Anthropologist Suresh Dhakal says children are more distanced from their families these days, and the education system also does not teach children to protect themselves in risky situations.

Crimes against children are common in war-torn states, and where the social and state structures need to be rebuilt after conflict. Nepal's own insurgency institutionalised impunity, which is directly reflected in the increased crime rates. The Nirmala Panta rape and murder case is a case

study in the ineffectiveness of law enforcement.

With poverty and extreme physical pressures, there have been instances of mothers killing their own children. Taplejung's Kamala BK drowned her one-year old twin daughters in a toilet in July. Having eloped with a driver from Udayapur at a young age, she had left the house while pregnant.

Morang's Amahiki Kabita Yadav had lost her husband two years ago

and had been living with Ramdev Jha, whom she introduced to neighbours as her husband. When the two had a fight, she hung her 10- and 5-year old sons and committed suicide herself. Her older son survive because of a loose noose.

Children are also involved in crimes themselves. In July, a 13-year-old was found with prohibited drugs in Tanahun. In



Rupandehi, a 14-year old boy lured a 7-year old girl into his room with chocolates and raped her. Police figures show that in the 2016/17 fiscal year, 7% of rape perpetrators were below 16.

Says Subedi: "With children being victims as well as involved in crimes, it is important for the communities and schools to assist the police."



nepalitimes.com

For full Nepali version of this piece, go to himalkhabar.com



Om Astha Rai

Hari Pun, 31, was working on the scaffolding of a building in the Malaysian city of Penang last year. He was wearing a plastic helmet, but had no safety harness. As he leaned to reach out, he fell to the ground.

Pun had asked for a safety strap, but his Chinese supervisor had told him: “It is just a three-storey building. You won’t die even if you fall.” The supervisor was right: Pun did not die. But his fractured spine turned left him quadriplegic.

Pun was working in Malaysia for three years, after spending two years in Saudi Arabia. Missing home and family, he was preparing for a return to Baglung to be with his wife and two little boys. When he did return home, it was with broken bones and shattered dreams. It has been a year since Pun was confined to bed, where he lies staring at the ceiling of his stone and mud house. His wife works on the family farm and looks after their livestock. She had been able to send their children to a private school with the money Pun sent home. Now, the family cannot afford it, and the boys will go to a government school.

“I did not die, but what I am going through now is like dying every single day,” Pun told *Nepali Times* over the phone this week.

When Kamal Khatri, 21, went to work at a rubber factory in Johor Bahru in Malaysia last year, he shared a room with an older Nepali migrant worker who had lost four of his fingers and warned him: “Be careful, those machines can swallow you alive.”

Khatri was careful, but during one late night shift, his right hand was caught in a latex grinding machine and torn to shreds. It happened at 5AM, and Khatri had been on the factory floor for nine hours. He was tired and sleepy, and had reached down to pull out a rod that had got stuck in the grinder when the machine suddenly

restarted.

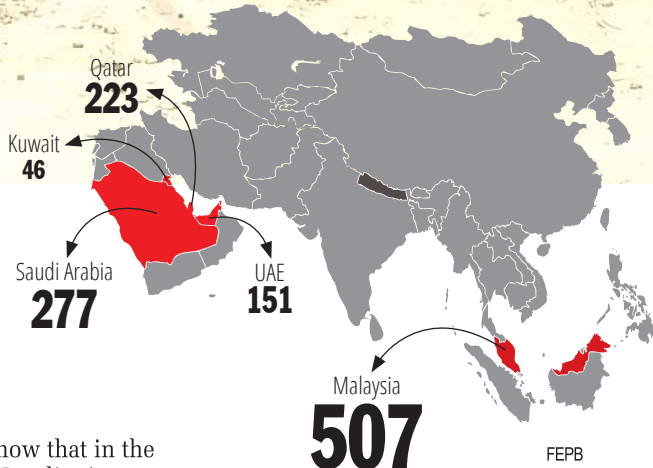
“It happened so fast it took me a long time to realise that my hand was gone,” he recalls. “For months, when I had an itch or when I wanted to hold something, I would reflexively turn to my absent hand.”

It has been a year since Khatri returned to his village in Bhojpur, but is still not used to being left-handed. “My aim was to look after my elderly parents, but they have to look after me,” he told us.

The Nepali media often print pictures of coffins of dead migrant workers arriving at Kathmandu airport, and the human cost of labour migration gets much

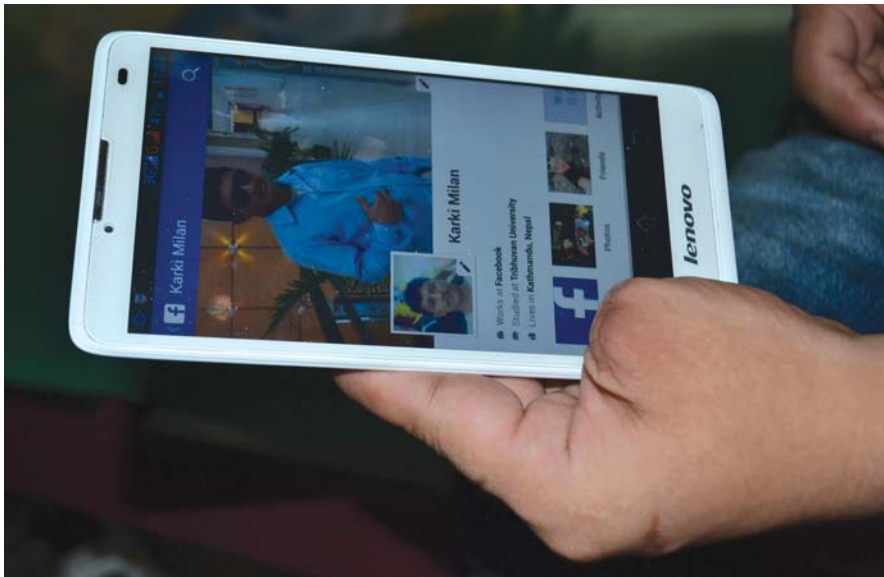
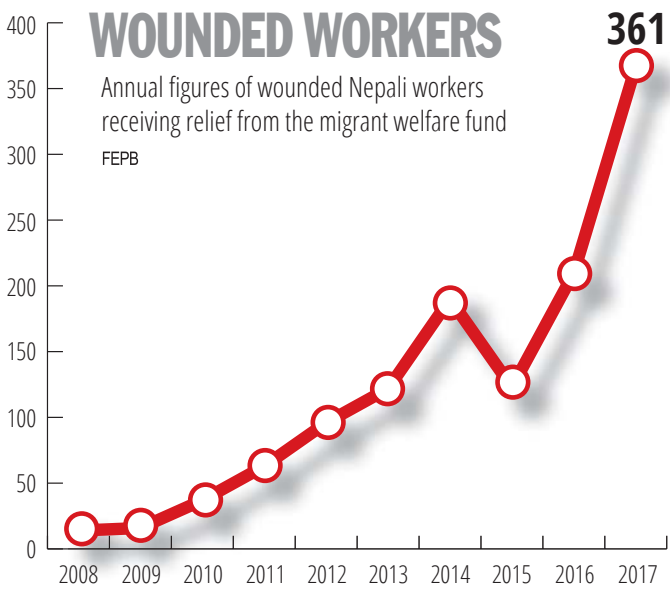
attention. But the fatalities overshadow the plight of wounded migrant workers, and their lack of support back home.

Official records show that in the last ten years, 1,178 Nepali migrant workers returned home wounded. The actual number could be higher. Undocumented workers who have lost limbs are not counted, like Milan Karki whose right thumb was chopped off while working at a factory in Kuala Lumpur. He stayed back (pictured, below left on mobile) even after his contract



DANGEROUS DESTINATIONS

Top five countries where most Nepali workers were wounded in the workplace in the past 10 years.





“I begged the nurse to poison me.”

Mithuwa Kumar Thakur, 36, (*left*) was determined to escape poverty and unemployment in Nepal. So when all his construction worker friends would take a short nap after lunch break, he would practice driving a road roller in the sweltering desert of Saudi Arabia.

One hot afternoon, he lost control of the compactor, crushing his left leg below the knee. It had to be amputated.

When he came to at a Saudi hospital, he wept for days, not because he was an invalid but because he realised that he was the sole breadwinner for his family. Thakur comes from Dhanusa in the eastern Tarai, the district with the highest number of migrant workers.

“I was in agony, so I begged the nurse to secretly poison me to death,” he confided. “I did not want to return home without a leg.”

He says he thought of killing himself, even after coming home: “I could not look at the dejected faces of my wife and growing daughters.” But after being counselled by a psycho-social expert mobilised by the Swiss government-funded Safer Migration (SaMi) project, Thakur regained his determination to live.

He learnt carpentry, and now works at a local furniture factory. “Because I do not have a leg, I do not earn as much as other carpenters,” he says. “But this is just enough to feed my family.”

PHOTOS: OMASTHARAI

expired.

Nepal’s Foreign Employment Promotion Board provides financial help up to Rs700,000 for wounded migrant workers, depending on the severity of their disability. Since its inception a decade ago, the Board has doled out more than Rs160 million in aid to those returning with disabilities. However, for the severely wounded like Hari Pun, and those suffering mental trauma, compensation is not enough.

The number of wounded migrant workers is still much less than fatalities, but it has been on the rise (*see chart*). Experts say the fact that so many Nepali


workers are being injured abroad shows systemic lapses in their pre-departure orientation.

In the past, migrant workers could easily obtain certificates after participating in pre-departure orientation on safety without attending a single class. The government now claims to have curbed this malpractice, but ensuring participation may not be sufficient. Jiwan Kumar Rai of the Board says: “We need to develop a system to examine if migrant workers have understood the basics of the pre-departure orientation.”

The rising number of wounded workers also exposes Nepal’s failure

to press destination countries to do more to ensure their safety. Malaysia tops the list of the riskiest destinations not only in terms of deaths, but also workplace injuries. Nearly half the Nepali workers who returned home with workplace injuries in the past decade were wounded in Malaysia. (*See map*).

Nepal last month signed an agreement with Malaysia to protect Nepali workers from exploitation by recruiters and employers. Labour Secretary Mahesh Prasad Dahal told Nepali Times the pact was the most progressive labour agreement Nepal has ever signed with a destination country.

He said: “The agreement will enable Nepalis wounded in the work place to claim compensation from Malaysian employers.” 

LOSING LIMBS



Watch video depicting the plight of Nepali workers who have returned wounded and disabled from overseas. What can be done to reduce the injuries, and to help rehabilitate the wounded?

nepalitimes.com 

INTERVIEW

Win-win migration

As chair of the Colombo Process, Nepal is hosting the 5th ministerial meeting of this network of 12 labour-sending countries in Kathmandu on 15-16 November. Labour Minister Gokarna Bista spoke to *Nepali Times* about the recent labour pact with Malaysia, and how this loose forum can promote safe migration. Excerpts:

Nepali Times: How will Nepali migrant workers and Malaysian employers benefit from the bilateral MoU you signed?

Gokarna Bista: Malaysia had been hiring migrant workers from Nepal for over two decades, but the two countries never had a written agreement. Our workers therefore faced problems like lack of minimum pay, social security and workplace safety. Malaysian employers had their own grievances. But we never had a legal or policy framework to address these issues. Now, we finally have an agreement that not only protects Nepali migrants but also helps Malaysia manage foreign workers in a dignified way. The pact is even more important for us because it requires Malaysian employers to bear airfare, insurance, visa and security clearance fees previously charged to Nepal’s workers. It also makes it mandatory for employers to deposit the minimum salaries into bank accounts of Nepali workers within the first week of every month. It binds employers to grant workers a 15-day leave if anyone dies in their families.



KUNDA DIXIT

But aren’t there challenges in implementing these points?

Those who have been exploiting poor migrant workers probably want to foil this agreement, but I am sure it will be implemented because it reflects the common interests of Nepal and Malaysia, and both governments are committed to promoting safe and dignified migration.

Is this model now going to be applied with Gulf states as well?

We have labour agreements with a few Gulf countries, but they are obsolete. Some do not have provisions for social security, forcing Nepali migrants to work for less than minimum wages. They cannot return home because their passports are controlled by employers. We need to renew and update these agreements with Qatar, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Kuwait, incorporating new measures to tackle new challenges.

How important do you think is the Kathmandu meeting of Colombo Process?

It is very important. There is a sense that destination countries are hiring migrant workers out of charity, making sending countries feel humiliated about exporting manpower. We want to change this misguided notion, and the Kathmandu meeting of the Colombo Process will be crucial in making both sides feel respected. It may be a loose forum of 12 labour-sending countries, but it will certainly amplify the voice for zero-cost and hassle-free labour migration. It can be a win-win.

What is your take on the ban on Nepali housemaids?

A parliamentary committee had directed the government in early 2017 to bar Nepali women from going abroad as housemaids. We need to review this, and have already begun discussions with the parliamentary committee. But before taking a decision on the ban, what we really want is to have exclusive MoUs with countries that want housemaids from Nepal. We want to ensure that Nepali domestics are paid well, have a safe place to live, stipulated working hours and a safe environment in which to work.

Many migrant workers return home wounded. How can we tackle this problem?

When Nepali workers get wounded or disabled while working abroad, they are simply dumped by their employers and they have to be taken care of by the Nepal government and their families. So we are holding talks with governments of labour-receiving countries to ensure that employers also take responsibility for wounded workers. Malaysia has already agreed, and I hope other countries will follow suit.



