

Cover

Nepalis those land in Afghanistan with a dream to become rich overnight



Plight of Gurkha Fighters

ght are in hot waters



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■ Bhojraj Bhat/Kabul_

A permanent employee in a company for seven years, he had not touched the gun. The seven years stay in Kuwait, where he worked as cook first and cashier later, can only become a part of his curriculum vitae, however. After landing in Afghanistan, the 38-year-old Dilip Gurung of Kaski district clutched a gun for the first time, that too a sophisticated AK-47 rifle. It is very difficult for him when he has to “escort” the US troops carrying the gun without any specific training for its operation.

“Neither I possess the knowledge on the warfare, nor do I know the geography here due to which I’ve been living fearing death every time,” gushes Gurung. “However, I think I will be a good ‘soldier’ at my old age if I manage to survive till then; this all is just for money.”

Gurung’s case is only the tip of the iceberg; there are thousands of Nepalis here in Afghanistan who, even without having a close look of the guns in their earlier lives, are involved in many such risky jobs at present. It is estimated that over 10,000 Nepalis have been working here, ranging from providing security in the developmental works to providing “outer security” to foreign (US) soldiers.

Among those “money-seeker” Nepali folks, Laxman Limbu of Goldhap in Jhapa district is amongst the ones who has stayed in almost all “danger zones” of this war-torn country during his two-years stay. Now he is working at Kandahar for a security company named “Compass”.

“Sounds of rocket attacks by Taliban insurgents in nearby places are everyday affairs here,” said 35-year-old Limbu while adding, “During such attacks, we follow similar strategy as by Nato Force and US officials here.” He also revealed that most of those Nepalis working here are at Kandahar, Helman, Bamiyan, Pharah and Nimroj areas. Most of them include retired Indian, Nepali and British army men. However, a considerable number of security personnel those resigned during Maoist insurgency and even former cadres of Maoist are found working at the capital city of Kabul. Mostly, they are seen escorting the vehicles of the big companies when the latter supply goods from one place to another. Limbu also reveals that many



Nepalis have also been working in the jobs such as razing marijuana farms. Generally the Nepalis working here are involved in three types of security jobs i.e. armed guards, supervisors to Afghani security officials and mobile security tasks. Those employed as armed guards have to work for 10-hours a day. Those working in the second category report to “foreigners” about the Afghans. However, all these three jobs are involved maximum risks whatsoever. Due to it a saying is prevalent here in Afghanistan: “If there is risk, there are Nepalis”. However, it’s not good news for Afghans, of whom over six millions are jobless, that over 10,000 foreigners (Nepalis) are getting employment in their country. From here also many youths fly to Saudi Arabia, Iran and other Gulf countries in search of jobs. However, almost every day, many foreigners from Nepal, India,

Bangladesh and Philippines have been coming here just for employment. It is also because the foreigners do not trust Afghans as they do others of the third countries and Nepalis who are known all over the world as “brave Gurkhalis”. No sooner had the Al-Qaida terrorists attacked the twin towers in US on September 11 in 2001, the Bush administration started its attack in Afghanistan which was ruled by Taliban government, accusing the government there of hiding the Al Qaida terrorists and its leader Osama Bin Laden. Eventually, due to the continuous attack from the US forces, the Taliban government was removed. Following it, as per the agreement reached at Bone of Germany with an initiation of UN in 2001 December, Hamid Karjayee, who was sent to exile earlier, was made the country’s president. Subsequently, the UN-led international security forces and US military forces were deployed so as to help Karjayee’s government. The demand of Nepalis, who can work as “paid security men”, have been high right since then.



News of deaths in alien land

- ◆ Suk Bahadur Rana Sarki and Min Bahadur Gharti of Putalibazaar, Syanja, Bhakta Bahadur Gurung of Syanja and Bir Bahadur Gunjali of Mygdi.
(While working for United Nations at Kandahar)
- ◆ Gopal Limbu of Dharan
(While working at Global Security Company in Kabul)
- ◆ Tschering Sherpa of Kathamndu
(While escorting at MSMI in Kabul)
- ◆ Sher Bahadur Thapa of Butwal
(Died in Kablul after consuming alcohol)
(Available data of past six months)



Funeral programme at Dinacorp company on the behalf of Kedarmani Achharya's

The country, which has the annual budget of four billion US dollars, is now zeroing on its developmental works. For this purpose, over three dozen international companies have been working on contracts for security, good-governance and developmental works. At such places also, the demand of Nepali workers is high nowadays.

After the UN intervention, although the country's sovereignty has been protected, condition of peace process has been growing serious every single day. For instance, there were only two incidents of suicide bomb attacks in Kabul in 2002 which ascended to 27 in 2005 and 139 in 2006. Going by the UN's *Afghanistan's Human Development Index 2007*, there were 1,347 instances of bomb explosions in 2005 which grew to 3,824 in 2006. And as shown, such cases are on the rise lately. And most importantly, Nepalis have been working under such impending danger. Let alone the suburb areas or villages, bomb blasts are everyday affairs in the capital Kabul itself nowadays. As per the independent records, over 4,000 people have fallen pray to such blasts in the past few years. Worse, over a dozen Nepalis have also lost their lives in such incidents in the last three years. Of them, eight were killed when they were on duty while others died due to bad health resulted due

to adverse weather condition. Even amid such situation, Nepalis are still being attracted to "Afghan jobs".

From 'constables to Colonels'

When he was en route to Lebanon in 2001, what he had seen from the plane were desolate settlement and a few small houses. And now, when the then Major (of Nepali Army) Gopal Rana recalls, it was Afghanistan that he had seen. "Neither I had harbored any longing to come here to earn money, nor did I ever think that I would come here for vacation," he says. Revealing his resignation of the job and journey to Kabul, Rana explained, "Circumstances landed me here. But the situation here is more perilous than that of insurgency period of Nepal, it feels that you are carrying 'suicidal note' in your pocket every time."

However, it was not that difficult for him to get job here like other Nepali colleagues. He came here through an US company-- NCL Holding, which is the contractor of security, food supply and construction works altogether. Most of the time, his is "table job". However, when they have to go to the field sometimes, he has to carry weapons.

"It's not that different than to fight with death when we go to Kandahar and Helman areas. We have to give up the job,

or else we have to prepare ourselves to face the impending danger, can be a minor or major one," Rana says. Whatever the reasons be, the only reason they are ready to face such life threats is the "dollar". "Of course we have been duped when it comes to money matter. May be because we are from third world nation, we don't get the salary that we deserve for working amid such danger," he said adding, "For the same job, the foreigners get over 10,000 dollars whereas we just get 1,000 on an average."

However, the "meager" salary is not that bad vis-à-vis the existing salary scale of their home country. Many of these Nepali workers have been working for 400 to 2,000 dollars as their salary. Those working in city areas and the capital city of Kabul get less salary as compared to the "red zones" like Heart, Kandahar, Helman, etc. The only reason behind it is: clashes occur almost daily in the latter places while the workers have to protect themselves from their ambushes also.

Interestingly, many Nepalis are still in queue making the brokers happy despite the prevalent threat to their life in such "red zones" just for "handsome salary" they get. The brokers generally get double commission from the company and employee: for providing the employee from the first one and for giving job from

the second one. Due to the lucrative pay scale, the security personnel, ranging from constable to Colonel have been submitting hefty sum in order to get the job. For instance, from the retired Colonel Gopal Gurung of Kaski who is now serving at the Diana Corps Company to Sunil Lawati of Jhapa who is now an employee at Supreme Company, their job was possible after investing a good sum to their respective brokers.

Consequently, the brokers those supply manpower to Afghanistan have been spending a luxurious life despite charging unnecessarily high amount to their Nepali brothers. They have vehicles to roam around, guards, enough money to spend, and what not. Their main targets are those Nepali folks who reach Kabul searching employment.

Kathmandu to Kabul

After having visa issuance for Afghanistan, delighted Krishna Prasad Acharya of Jaidi of Baglung district was told by his broker Ramchandra at New Delhi, "A large vehicle with UN written on it will come to receive you there; please don't go anywhere in any other vehicles otherwise I have to face unnecessary hassles." Gullible as he is, he did not smell anything in the broker's

lucrative words as the broker also hailed from the same village.

After landing at Kabul, as was told, he waited for the UN vehicle. But things were not as he had dreamt of. "After a long wait of two hours, I called him (Ramchandra at Delhi) and was surprised to know that an almost worn-out vehicle was there waiting for me," he revealed. "I came to know later that there was no any UN vehicle, but another broker of Lamjung Bharat Adhikari to receive me." Acharya, who had handed over 350,000 NRs to Ramchandra on a condition that he would get a job with 2,000 dollars as salary, has now no job. Worse, he possesses no money even to return to Nepal. Although he has his passport, it has been over 10 months of "overstay" as he is unable to submit the money for his return ticket.

Like Acharya, 80 percent of those Afghan-job aspirants, who reach Delhi after providing huge money to brokers, are left with no money and other options as they rendered penniless upon their arrival at Delhi. To make the matter worse, they ask for more money to the families to fulfill their dream to get the job and eventually ended up with other brokers who charge them 600 to 1,000 dollars as commission for visa issuance

to Afghanistan.

Nowadays, CB Gurung of Khotang is very famous among such Nepalis in Delhi for getting visa to Afghanistan. Other brokers there include Chandra Dhakal, Raj Kumar Tamang, Ram Gurung, Surya Bhandari, Ravi Ale, among others. It is also learnt that an Afghani named "Wali" has also been working hand-in-glove with Nepali brokers in Delhi with forged documents to dupe the job aspirants stranded there.

However, it has been very difficult for such Nepalis to get the visa as the Afghani Embassy at New Delhi has recently tightened the process seeking documents such as work permit letter and appointment letters. Although it has posed difficulty for brokers, they have been managing it with forged documents with the help of their Afghani counterparts. The brokers also blame that the embassy officials have been charging them around 500 dollars for the visa issuance whereas only 30 dollars is charged for the same by the embassy. There have been ample instances of making the aspirants at Delhi for over a year by the brokers. Min Bahadur Thapa of Gothatar Bhaktapur, who was taken to Delhi by one Mani Subba, was made wait for over six months. "After I gave

Business partners or something more!

They have neither any family relationship nor are they in love. They commute together, share the bed at night and are involved in the same business. However, they want to identify themselves differently according to the place they are. They are business partners for Nepalis and husband and wife for Afghani. If they are met at office, their identifications will be different. One will pose as director and other will be marketing chief officer.

Most of the brokers at Kabul are accustomed to keep 'duplicate wife' for their security. The Nepali women who have arrived in the country for works easily accept Nepali brokers as their hubbies in order to be safe from Afghani people. Maina Kumari Chwai (Manu), the 'duplicate wife' of Ashok BK of Morang escaped to work at WSI Company last month. BK created havoc at that day. He went to the company and took her back claiming she was his spouse. When asked to Maina Kumari about their relation, she clearly replied, "We are compelled to live together in the guise of couple here to work despite we don't have any family ties." However, Ashok refuted to comment on it.

Similarly, Laxman Gurung of Okhaldhunga and Sunita Tamang of Nuwakot, who have been staying as business partners, are imprisoned at GGHK guest house at Sarepani in Kabul as they failed to pay the debts of 10,000 dollars. Madan Rai, who was known as don in Kabul at that time,

and Ishwori Ale also had the same relationship. Ishwori set the relation business partner with Thakur Gurung now as Madan was put into prison. Puja Pokharel of Biratnagar, who was already divorced with Bijaya Khan, is the business partner of Ram Chandra Karki of Chitwan now. Achyut Nepal of Morang was once held by police when he tried to release Puja from the prison claiming as her husband. Agent Mani Subba and Kusum Shah are another business partner in Kabul.

The successful businessman Karna Gurung of Pokhara and Nilu Karmacharya of Deharadun, India also had such relation there. The couple of Nisha KC and Padam Limbu have been trying their best as the most successful partners. Ashok BK retorted, "Other guys have sending Nepali women to the foreigners in the name of business. I have at least behaved her like my nearest and dearest one," he said when asked why he married although he had wife and children in Nepal.

The salaries and other facilities of the Nepali workers have been decreasing in Afghanistan due to such "duplicate husbands and wives". The reason is, due to their impractical and illicit relationships the employers hire foreign workers in low salary through agents providing them the commission. Nisha KC of Kathmandu admitted the fact. "Global Company gives us 300 dollars as commission when we provide them an employee."



Kabul's Nepali broker



Iswori Ale



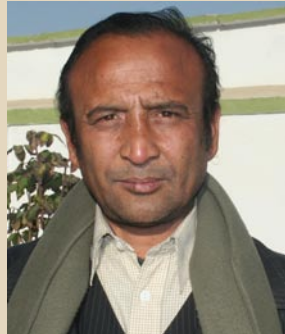
Mani Subba



Yekraj Luitel



Thakur Gurung



Ramesh BK



Achhut Nepal



Ashok BK

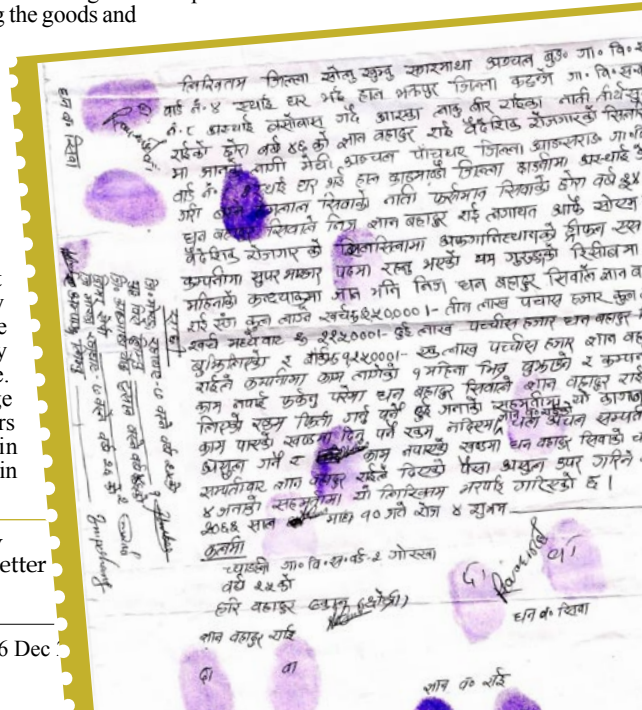
600 dollars to CB Gurung, they gave back my passport with the visa stamp for Afghanistan,” said Thapa. Min Bahadur claims that it is the biggest mistake for all Nepalis to think that their employment was sure once they obtain the visa for Afghanistan in Delhi. “Ok, the most complicated hassle has been done with. A person from the company will receive you at the Kabul airport once you reach there, and he will also take you to the company’s own guest house. You would be joining the job from the following day.” This is the most common assurance visa brokers in Delhi tell to their customers. But the aspirants, who are obsessed by the broker’s promise by now, would see their illusions being tore apart once they land at Kabul airport. “Contrary to the assured reception of the company’s representatives, brokers come to receive Nepalis in local taxis. And they take us straightaway to Nepali camps,” Min Bahadur says, sharing his chagrin of remaining unemployed since the past two years. “Devendra Shrestha from Gorkha who took \$ 700 from me, neither provided me a job as promised nor did he return my passport which he took from me saying that he would obtain a visa for it,” he added. “Later, I was bound to request the Afgani police to get back my passport.”

Life in “dungeon”
Scattered numbers of Nepalis are working – mostly as security guards – in almost all the 36 security companies approved by the Afghanistan government. Of them, over 80 percent work in Dianna Corps, Global, Armor Group, SSSI, Compass and Supreme Food Security companies. Among these companies also, over 600 Nepalis have been working in the

Australian company Compass. However, the company officials were not ready to comment over it. In November 22 this year, when this scribe was taking snaps of queuing Nepalis for jobs in front of the office, a foreign soldier even snatched this scribe’s camera and deleted all photos. Supreme Food Security Company works for supplying foodstuffs to the foreign soldiers. Just two years ago only, Former captain of Nepali Army Ajay KC among others, even rebelled against the discrimination as they were given only 300 dollars as salary. After the group had gone to another Dianna Corps even taking the weapons they were given by the prior company, their salary was increased to 500 dollars. One striking thing here is such companies have been blaming the Afghani guards for stealing the goods and going with Taliban rebels while in the field. But this has been advantage for the Nepali workers as there is no other choices of employees. Generally, the Nepalis get jobs of security men when the companies expand their project and/or receive additional tenders. But for hiring workers, they neither advertise in the newspaper nor do they publish any public notice. For it, they simply manage reliable Nepali Supervisors for new recruit and begin interview and appoint within

Brokers used to cheat by giving this type of fake letter

a matter of just a single day also. In such circumstances, it would be humanitarian on the part of the Nepali Supervisors to give the jobs to those who arrive here after spending hefty sum against collateral of their houses and lands. But unfortunately, such Supervisors too have links with the brokers in Kabul and the job is offered to only those Nepalis who provide good commission to them. However, Ram Chandra Karki, one of such agents in Kabul, denies it outright. “You see, we’ve come here for business. We have to give a commission of equal to one-month salary to the Supervisors to get the job.” He also claimed that they ask for additional amount to the job-aspirant Nepalis in order to manage the work permit and other transportation expenses.



Whatever it is, but Karki's assertion clearly reveals one thing: the Nepalis landed here can't get the job simply on the basis of free competition. "Passport here in Kabul is more important than our kidney. If we just have a single kidney, we can survive, but if we don't have passport here, it feels we are imprisoned in our own houses. And if I don't have one, I can neither return home nor can I look for jobs," said Lila Katuwal of Ilam district.

More than 400 Nepalis, who could not allegedly bribe the Nepali brokers, have been stranded in a pathetic situation in Kabul now. Four dozens of them, even do not have their passports. The brokers did not return their passports once they took for visa. Instead, there are innumerable cases of brokers taking large amount of money from Afghani by seizing their passports. Madan Rai of Khotang, Devendra Shrestha of Gorkha, Thakur Gurung of Kaski and Ishwori Ale of Palpa are the of 'gang of fours' who swindled hundreds of rupees from Nepali promising to provide job.

Ishwori Ale is "notorious" for issuing fake visas to Nepali workers who have serving their jail term in different prisons in Afghanistan on the same charge. Prakash Gurung, 21, of Dolakha has been serving his jail term there since past three and half months on the charge of fake visa when he was provided fake visa by Ale. He is undergoing treatment now at the camp of International Committee of Red-Cross (ICRC) in their supports as he terribly fell sick in the jail. "I haven't imagined that a Nepali can deceive another Nepali in this way. I have been imprisoned without committing any crimes even after losing money," said Gurung with full of tears during the visit to the representative of the *Nepal*.

Most of Nepalis who are stranded in Afghanistan have been swindled by Madan Rai and Thakur Gurung. Madan and Thakur jointly established International Security Service Group with Samilluha Guljar, an Afghani national one and half years ago. They registered security company assuring government that they have signed the contract with Afghani National Mili Bank for providing five million dollars. The Italian government assisted the bank to carry out development activities in the war-torn country. Madan and Thakur collected 1,000 dollar each from 200 Nepalis promising to send them in Afghanistan for the employment. They borrowed all the official goods that cost millions of rupees. However, the Afghani filed a case against Madan asking to get his money form him as Mili Bank did not take any initiatives to give them the contract. There was the stampede of about 200 Nepalis who had been

working there for four months. They lost the large amount of money while coming to Afghanistan for job on the one hand and on the other they did not get their salaries of four months. After then, some Nepalis hired a house and started to live there like in the camp in order to escape the incident. Madan Rai has been jailed for the last three weeks on the charge of embezzling a huge amount of dollars.

There are now 18 paying camps for the Nepalis who had been stranded due to Madan and others such brokers. About 20 to 35 persons have been staying at a camp. While staying at the camp one has to pay 3 dollars as the camp owner himself is one of the victims. Some of the brokers have established different camps in a bid for the secrecy of their deeds. Ekraj Luintel, the owner of Aman International has been operating two

camps for the same.

On the one hand Nepalis working in Afghanistan comparatively in the higher positions have secretly recruit their relatives and on the other hand the brokers tried to lure other persons after betraying their own relatives. Devendra Ghimire of Letang of Morang district gave 350 dollars to his neighbor Ashok BK, who works as an agent, for the visa to work there two months ago. However, he neither got job nor could get his passport back. "I have got opportunity to work at different two places but could not join due to the lack of passport," said frustrated Ghimire, adding, "It has been proved my blunder believing BK as my villager." Ghimire claimed that about two dozens youths of the east had been victimized by BK.

Ghimire is a villager swindling fellow



A dozen Nepalis languishing in Afghani jails

A dozen Nepalis have been imprisoned in Afghani jails now on different charges. Among them, Madan Rai has serving his jail term on the charge of swindling 500,000 dollars and other were put to the prison for fake visa and lack of passport. Rabin Ojha and Hom Bahadur Bhandari of Jhapa and Shankarlal Gurung of Gorkha, who were arrested by Afghani police at Turkham border while they were fleeing, are now in the prison.

Similarly, Dev Bahadur Gurung of Syanja, Bhimsen Gurung of Pokhara, Arjun Shahi of Chitwan and Min Bahadur Gurung of Lamjung have been kept at central jail in Afghanistan who were arrested while crossing border as they were without passports. Among them, ICRC rescued Arjun Shahi of Chitwan when he fell seriously ill in the prison. "It is said that I will be returned after some few days but I am unaware where shall I go," said Shahi, addin, "It will really be a rescue in a true sense if the government of Nepal takes initiatives for our return to our country."

Most of Nepalis have been stranded in Afghanistan due to the problems of their passports. As per the existing legal provisions in Afghanistan, the Afghani government issues visa only for 15



Prakash Gurung and Arjun Shahi at ICRC office

days at first for all the foreign workers taking just 30 dollars. However, Nepali workers have been paying up to 500 dollars through the brokers for the same. After 15 days of their arrivals in Afghanistan, the government issues visa for a month. If any one failed to get visa, s/he would have to pay 5 dollars per day.

According to victim Gopal BK, the employees at the Afghani Visa Unit

gave unnecessary tortures to the Nepali workers pretending that they understood only Pharsi. "So we have to go there with an Afghani agent. We have to pay him a handsome amount for his support and he lingers," said BK. The cases of Nepalis who have been imprisoned in Afghanistan are not very complicated except of ZMadan Rai. If the government does something concrete all those detainees can return Nepal.

neighbor. Ekraj Luintel of Jhapa has been strolling in the street at Kabul who swindled 200,000 rupees from his own brother-in-law leaving him stranded there. Luintel's relative Jiban Subedi of Morang said that Luintel had taken away all the earnings he saved while serving at Nepal Army for 19 years. "How long should I bear the pain though he is my relative? If he swindles his own relatives in this way what will he do to others? How can I be mute caring his prestige?", questioned Subedi.

As the Nepali brokers defamed day after day, they have been continuing their business along with Afghanis these days. Oli, an Afghani national has joined the group of Madan Rai now. One Najib reached to Pokhara and swindled Nepalis luring jobs in Afghanistan. When Nepal police tried to held him at Pokhara, he asked his agents in Afghanistan to detain Nepalis there. Later, Nepali in Kabul was released on the condition of his release in Nepal. Another Afghani Beroj is also actively working in this field. He married Nepali girl, Saroja and continued his business. Bijaya Khan, an Indian national has been sending Nepalis to Afghanistan these days in an illegal way after marrying Puja Pokharel of Biratnagar. They have already divorced. Puja has been serving her jail term since last six months on the charge of smuggling heroin in her private parts.

Nepali people who have been working in Afghanistan are very worried about the security. Similarly, those who are stranded there are worrying to return their homes and land which were mortgaged while they went there. Gopal BK of Bhairahawa is unable to return his home since the brokers misused his passport. Those Nepali people who did not have passports escaped to Pakistan through Tirkham border took refuge at Nepali Embassy at Islamabad some months before. Then they returned to Nepal by bus with the help of travel documents. But, the border has been sealed by Pakistan since it was declared the state of emergency. Two weeks ago, Afghani police arrested four Nepalis who were heading to Pakistan through Turkham border. Now they are in jail.

Nepal government has not taken any initiatives to inquire the situation of about 10,000 Nepalis in Afghanistan since it banned people for going to Afghanistan for works. Nepali people, especially who are in Iraq and Afghanistan for works, have been facing hardship as there are no Nepali Embassy and Councilor Offices. Nepal Embassy at Islamabad is working for both of the country. Four months ago, Khagendra Bhattra from Nepali Embassy at Islamabad visited Afghanistan to inquire the situation of Nepali workers there. However, he returned after forming a welfare

committee under the chairmanship of Mani Subba, a notorious broker to deceive Nepalis comprising other brokers. The committee did nothing for the welfare of Nepali. Instead, they have been cheating others in the name of committee.

Most of the people know that there is risk to work in Afghanistan. However, some of Nepalis have earned well taking risks. Few lucky Nepali who worked at some companies have been provided food and shelter by the companies themselves. Those companies help them sending money that they earn to their homes and families safely. And the companies bear the fare while visiting homes at every six months.

According to the data kept at Standard Chartered Bank at Kabul, more over 250 million rupees has been sending to Nepal through the bank only. We can easily guess that the number could be so high since Nepalis send money through other banks, hundi, money transfer agency and individual way too. In the recent days, Afghanistan is one among other countries from where the country gets high remittance. So the government has to think for the management of suitable working environment establishing Embassy or Councilor that can take action against those brokers swindling in Afghanistan. It will be undoubtedly fruitful both for the country and people. ♦