



Newsletter

Website: gurkha.com.hk

Contents

- Congratulations to promotions, Shipping Companies1
- GI (HK) Business, World Security: Economics, Nuclear, Europe, India.2
- The Arab World, Afghanistan & Pakistan, Thailand, Asia3
- The Malacca Straits, Somalia, Africa, The Americas, Myanmar4
- Nepal News..... 5 - 7
- Hong Kong News 8 - 9
- Conclusion10



We publish this month a photograph of the *Norwegian Breakaway* of *Norwegian Cruise Line Limited (NCL)*. If you have pictures or postcards of your ship, please send them to us for future Newsletters.

CONGRATULATIONS

We congratulate the following Hong Kong staff on their promotions:



To Senior Supervisor at the Hong Kong Golf Club, Fanling
Dewa Raj Limbu



To Supervisor at the Hong Kong Golf Club, Fanling
Prakash Gurung



To Supervisor at TML Tower
Indra Bahadur Gurung



To Supervisor at the Hong Kong Golf Club, Deep Water Bay
Kiran Kumar Ale



To Senior Guard, Magazine Court
Shiba Pun

We Welcome

Myanmar Crew
Khine Lynn
Kyaw Thu Htel

SHIPPING COMPANIES AND SHIPS LINKED TO

We are working with 21 shipping companies, and have 732 men and 172 women on ships, a total of 904 crew and staff under management.



GI (HK) Business

We are providing security services for 27 Hong Kong Clients and have 97 security staff employed.

Our employment agency placement service found 0 Bodyguard/Driver post position over the last month.



World Security

Economics

There is no major news about the world's economy this month.

Nuclear

Tensions remain high between the United States of America and its allies Japan and South Korea on the one side, and North Korea on the other.

There is no news relating to the treaty limiting Iran's development of nuclear weapons.

Europe

Tension between Russia and NATO countries remains high. Russian-backed separatists continue to battle Ukrainian forces in the east of the country.

India

Kashmir remains disturbed.



The Middle East and the Arab World

The Syrian civil war continues, with government forces attacking rebel held towns such as East Ghouta and others in Idlib province, causing many civilian deaths. Russian-sponsored diplomatic talks over the future of Syria have begun in Sochi, but the main opposition group, the Syrian Negotiations Commission (SNC), also known as the Higher Negotiation Committee (HNC), has boycotted the conference. US forces are becoming more engaged in the north east of Syria in support of SNC.

More than 98 percent of the areas previously by ISIL/ISIS held have been retaken, and more than seven million Syrians and Iraqis have been liberated.

Conflict continues in Libya. In Yemen, Saudi Arabian-led forces have killed over 10,000 civilians in their battle to assist government forces defeat Shia Muslim Houthi rebels. The situation has become complicated as a Sunni Muslim South Yemen group, the Southern Resistance Forces (SRF), the armed wing of the Southern Transitional Council (STC), have attacked government forces in Aden in an attempt to divide Yemen and make the south an independent state. They are strangely backed by the U.A.E., allies of Saudi Arabia.

Saudia Arabia and its allies in the Gulf Cooperation Council have continued the blockade of Qatar. UAE accused Qatar of intercepting its aircraft and detained member of the Qatari royal family.

Afghanistan and Pakistan

In Afghanistan, Islamic State militants attacked Afghan soldiers guarding a military academy in the capital of Kabul, killing at least 11 troops and wounding 16. In another attack, a Taliban member drove an ambulance filled with explosives into the heart of Kabul, killing at least 103 people and wounding as many as 235.

The security situation in Pakistan seems to be under control.

Asia

Tension continues in both the South China Sea and the Sea of Japan around islands claimed by China.

Thailand

The Muslim insurgency in southern Thailand, near the Malaysian border, continues.



A member of Afghan security personnel arrives at the site of an attack at a military academy in Kabul, Afghanistan. (AP photo)

The Malacca Straits

There is no news this month of piracy in the area.

Somalia

There are no more reports this month of Somali piracy. Fighting continues in the country between the government and its foreign allies and Islamic militant al-Shabaab fighters.

Myanmar

The government of Myanmar signed an agreement with Bangladesh to start repatriating some of the more than 800,000 Rohingya who are refugees in Bangladesh. The repatriation was due to start on 22 January, but did not. There are an estimated 120,000 Rohingya also living in temporary camps inside Rakhine Province, Myanmar.

Africa

A suicide bomb attack, thought to be by Boko Haram remnants, on a mosque in northeastern Nigeria killed at least 11 people in the town of Gamboru, in Borno state near the border with Cameroon. The conflict with Boko Haram has left at least 20,000 people dead and displaced more than 2.6 million. This month, more than 700 people abducted by Boko Haram in Nigeria escaped from captivity. The captives included farmers, fishermen and members of their families.

Tension has arisen between Egypt and the Sudan over plans by Eritrea to allow Turkey to build a military installation on an island in the Red Sea. Egypt and the Sudan have both reinforced their borders with troops. Egypt is also in conflict with Ethiopia as it fears that the soon-to-be-completed Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) project, the largest hydroelectric dam project in Africa, will significantly reduce its share of the water of the Nile River water.

Civil conflict continues in South Sudan. A UN spokesman said the armed South Sudanese parties who signed the December 2017 cease-fire deal have not honored their commitment to end violence. He also attacked outside interference from Uganda and Kenya. South Sudan's civil war has displaced some 4 million people and created a humanitarian crisis in the world's youngest country.

Civil war continues in the Central African Republic between rebel Muslim Seleka and Christian Anti-balaka fighters.



Four suicide bombers strike in northeast Nigeria



The new fibre optic link extends from Kathmandu to the border point Rasuwagadhi into the Tibet region. Photo: Retailnewsasia.com

Nepal News

Nepal looks to China for internet access after years of depending on India

12 Jan- Nepal ended its long dependency on India for internet access on Friday by opening a fibre optic link to China.

The country's information minister Mohan Bahadur Basnet inaugurated the link across the Himalayas at a ceremony in the capital, Kathmandu.

Previously, all internet connections in the landlocked country came via three access points in its only other neighbour, India. The service was provided by India's Bharti Airtel and Tata Communications through the cities of Bhairahawa, Biratnagar and Birgunj in southern Nepal.

Work on a communications link to China was finished in December 2014, but it was completely destroyed in a devastating earthquake in April 2015. A land transport route through the Tatopani border point to China is still closed.

The new internet line provided by China Telecom Global extends from Kathmandu to the border point Rasuwagadhi into the Tibet region.

China has tight controls over the internet

and blocks many websites which might carry content that is critical of the ruling Communist Party – including Google and Facebook – but the Nepal line is connected via Hong Kong bandwidth, which is not restricted by the infamous "Great Firewall".

The link was scheduled to be up and running by the middle of last year but it was delayed due to the difficulties of working at high altitudes above 4,000 metres.

It comes after a coalition of two communist parties that are considered pro-China won Nepal's election last month.

Leaders of the coalition said the new government will launch five or six megaprojects aimed at spurring development and job growth, including revisiting the Chinese company-funded Budhi Gandaki dam project, which was cancelled on the eve of the election. "At present, China-Nepal relations are developing at the fastest pace we've seen," said Yu Hong, Chinese ambassador to Nepal.

George Varughese, Nepal representative of think tank the Asia Foundation, said

diversifying the sources of key supplies was very important for the landlocked country, which is surrounded on three sides by India and China on one side over the Himalayas.

"Nepal is trying to find a way to ensure manageable risk in terms of resources it gets from other countries," he said. "It is a good strategy to avoid being overreliant on any particular source, whether it's China or India."

India has extensive political and economic influence over Nepal and it provides much of Nepal's supplies. In 2015, India was accused of withholding supplies, especially fuel, to the country after the devastating earthquake by blocking traffic because of a political dispute. Beijing stepped in and supplied fuel along the mountainous routes.

But Varughese said ending the monopoly on internet access would not necessarily lead to a big change in its relationship with either India or China.

"Nepal still has a long way to go to figure out how it is related at multiple levels to both countries," he said.



Chang Chuen-man is working on a project to rescue dogs in Nepal. Photo: Nora Tam

How Hong Kong trekker became one of dogs' best friends in quake-hit Nepal

6 Jan - A dream came true for Hongkonger Chang Chuen-man when he completed the challenge of a lifetime trekking in the Himalayas back in 2015. But a week before he had expected to fly home from Nepal, disaster struck and an earthquake killed nearly 9,000 people in the country.

Chang, like most others, could have looked for the next available flight out and escaped the natural disaster. But he decided to stay for a few more months to help the local community rebuild their homes.

On top of that, the dog lover also focused his efforts on saving "man's best friend".

"The feeling was like being in a boat being carried away by waves," says Chang, a former social worker in his 40s, recalling the moment he felt the 7.8-magnitude earthquake.

"All of a sudden the ground was moving ... I felt dizzy and confused.

"I only realised it was an earthquake after the tremor stopped six to eight seconds later."

Chang was safe at Bardia National Park,

around 500km west of Nepal's capital Kathmandu, when the devastating earthquake hit at around noon on April 25, 2015.

He says Kathmandu was "hell-like" when he finally got there. More than 600,000 structures in the city and nearby towns were damaged or destroyed.

From distributing food to carrying roofing materials to a post-quake camp, Chang did almost everything he could to help.

"I felt like I was the right person because of my past work experience," says Chang, who had worked as a registered social worker in Hong Kong for more than 10 years.

"While I was helping those in need, I also saw lots of stray dogs. Most were suffering from skin problems or injured by vehicles. But no one had the time to deal with them."

Chang says he became a dog lover years ago when his ex-girlfriend kept one as a pet. He likes how interactive dogs are. So, when he saw the stray dogs in Nepal, he knew he had to do something.

"I started to approach local NGOs looking

for any kind of partnership. I also brought sick dogs to the vet on my own," Chang says. "That is how I started helping dogs there. And since then, I have been deeply connected with the local community there."

In the past two years, Chang has returned to Nepal regularly to carry out similar charity work. Even though he recently took up a new job in Australia, the adventurer shows no sign of stopping.

Chang is recruiting volunteers and at least two veterinary surgeons from Hong Kong for a stray dog desexing programme in Nepal in April this year. This time, Chang aims to help 200 animals.

"I have been asked quite a few times about why I help animals in Nepal instead of those in Hong Kong. But we should not forget that conditions are much harsher and resources are quite scarce there when compared to an advanced city like Hong Kong," Chang says.

"I believe we, as outsiders, may not be the ultimate problem solvers. But, if we could offer a little bit of help, then why not?"



Khadga Prasad (K.P.) Sharma Oli (left), chairman of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist), greets Pushpa Kumar Dahal "Prachanda", chairman of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre), during a news conference in Kathmandu on December 17. Photo: Reuters

China is a reality for Nepal, a fact that India must accept

4 Jan - A Left parties' alliance is set to form a new government in Nepal after a landslide victory, seen as a triumph of China over India regarding influence in Kathmandu, with pro-Chinese nationalist leader K.P. Sharma Oli expected to be prime minister.

The alliance has an ideological affinity with communist China. Its top leaders, Oli and Pushpa Kamal Dahal, both ex-prime ministers, also have a personal rapport with top Chinese and party officials.

Breaking with the tradition of visiting India first upon taking office, Dahal chose China as his first port of call in August 2008.

And Oli signed a slew of deals, including on transport and transit, when he arrived in Beijing as Nepal's leader in March 2016. These treaties not only ended Nepal's sole dependency on India for trade but also diversified the Nepalese market for petroleum imports, crucial for a landlocked nation that has faced three economic blockades by India.

The centrist Nepali Congress-led incumbent government, in contrast,

played a role in slowing Beijing's economic advances in Nepal. Not one project has yet been pursued under the "Belt and Road Initiative", eight months since a framework agreement.

Oli pledged to bring in Chinese investment for key infrastructure projects, and to return a US\$2.5 billion hydropower project to China's Gezhouba Group, after the current government scrapped the deal citing contract "irregularities".

After the elections, Oli visited a border point with Tibet where a trans-Himalayan railway project is under review, further indicating future collaboration with China.

Once considered close to New Delhi, Oli became vocal against India when it pressured Nepal over its constitution in September 2015, then imposed a five-month blockade, and tried to bar Oli from becoming prime minister. But, he is not against seeking Indian investment for development. No government in Nepal can ignore one neighbour at the cost of another. Nor can it afford sole dependency

on either.

With China surpassing India on the list of Nepal's largest donors and investors, India's unease has deepened. The problem is India still sees Nepal as its "backyard"; it welcomes Chinese investment but expresses deep suspicions when it comes to its neighbourhood.

If India accepts developments in Nepal as the aspirations of a landlocked, sovereign neighbour to diversify its trade, transport and transit dependencies, India's clout would still count greatly. Trying to reverse this would only help steer China's speedy footprints in Nepal. India must honour its infrastructure commitments to Nepal, while admitting that China is a reality, not a choice, for Kathmandu.



Heavy traffic on Des Voeux Road Central on Hong Kong Island. Photo: Dickson Lee

Hong Kong News

How Sheung Wan became the heart of Chinese entrepreneurship in Hong Kong

27 Jan- A pioneering urban planning scheme, Walk DVRC, is looking to pedestrianise Des Voeux Road in Central and Sheung Wan districts, easing traffic congestion and making local attractions more accessible to residents and tourists alike.

The area surrounding the stretch of the road in Sheung Wan is one of Hong Kong's most distinctive neighbourhoods, with a long and colourful history. It is also arguably the heart of Chinese entrepreneurship in Hong Kong – for over a century, it was where Chinese merchants, financiers and fortune seekers made their first port of call.

The development of Sheung Wan really started in the 1840s after Hong Kong was handed over to the British by the defeated Qing dynasty, according to local historian Ko Tim-keung. Chinese vendors and street hawkers would line up their stalls on the neighbourhood waterfront, in what is now Queen's Road.

"The historical development of Sheung Wan has long been overlooked by Western historians," says Ko, who is also a former member of the Hong Kong government's

Antiquities Advisory Board.

The widespread civil unrest caused by the Taiping Rebellion in mainland China also led many Chinese merchants to move to Sheung Wan from the 1850s onwards, drawn by the flourishing Chinese community there.

"That was the first time in modern Hong Kong history that wealthy, influential Chinese with business experience settled here," Ko says.

But the rise of Sheung Wan as a business district also coincided with the discovery of gold mines in San Francisco and later Sydney in Australia, Ko adds.

By the mid-19th century, Hong Kong shipping routes were serving additional destinations in Southeast Asia, China and Japan.

Many thousands of gold-hungry Chinese subsequently used Hong Kong as a stepping stone to Australia and America. Sheung Wan effectively became their launch pad to future riches, while local financial services shops also enabled them to send money back to their

hometowns in China.

Look around Des Voeux Road today and you will find that local Hong Kong businesses are still thriving in the area, despite the influx of hip cafes, boutiques and other shops catering more towards expats.

Ko insists that despite the demolition of lots of old Chinese tenement buildings in the 1970s, the area still retains its local Chinese character.

Another iconic local business is the Tak Wing Pawn Shop at number 72, which has so far resisted being demolished, unlike other historic pawn shops in the city. Belonging to local "pawnbroker king" Ko Ho-neng, the property is instantly recognisable from its gold-hued colour.

It is hoped that a three-month trial to pedestrianise the western section of Des Voeux Road will be launched at the end of this year, opened by immigrants from Shanghai, which by now have truly blended into the local Hong Kong landscape.

Better Hong Kong child care services and maternity benefits in two years, new Women's Commission chief vows

27 Jan- Providing more land for child care facilities and improving maternity benefits in Hong Kong within two years would be top priorities for the Women's Commission, its newly appointed chairwoman said on Saturday.

Speaking on a radio programme, Chan Yuen-han said the government should consider setting a minimum standard and designating more land for community child care services.

Chan, a former lawmaker and long-time unionist, was named the head of the advisory body on January 12.

Women in the city had just up to 10 weeks of maternity leave while being paid four-fifths of their monthly salaries, Chan said, adding that this was far from sufficient.

"Better support in child care and elderly care can enable women in all fields to go back to work confidently," Chan said. "This untapped female labour force is

one of the direct solutions to the lack of manpower in Hong Kong."

A total of 530,000 women could be brought back into the work force if better social policies and supporting facilities were in place, Chan said.

Despite repeated calls for change, Hong Kong still falls behind the international standard of 14 weeks of maternity leave with two-thirds of previous earnings set by the International Labour Organisation.

"[Sufficient] maternity leave is a very minimum and personal thing," Chan said. "Is our failure to provide it due to the government's lack of attention, or the business sector's unwillingness to cooperate? What I'm seeing is that the government lacks the determination to improve policies."

As of last December, the labour participation rate was 55 per cent for women and 68 per cent for men, figures from the Census and Statistics

Department show.

The Women's Commission is an advisory body established by the government in 2001 after the city adopted the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

Critics, including former chief secretary Anson Chan Fang On-sang, have slammed the commission in the past for its ineffectiveness in pushing for real changes, accusing it of being more about "turning up for cocktails and receptions".

To avoid unnecessary red tape, Chan urged Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor, the city's first female chief executive, to "directly participate" in the commission's work. This would streamline the bureaucratic process among different departments, she said.



Chan Yuen-han is a former lawmaker and long-time unionist. Photo: Nora Tam



All of us at GIMS and BGOS wish you and your families a very happy and prosperous New Year 2018!

Nigel Collett
Managing Director