

How you rebuilt the lives of Gurkha veterans one brick at a time

THANK YOU

Thanks to your unwavering support, over 1,000 Gurkha veterans, widows and their families are going to sleep tonight with a roof over their heads.

You may remember from previous editions of Samachara, when the earthquakes struck Nepal back in 2015, we mobilised immediately to ensure people had emergency supplies, food and medical assistance as well as temporary accommodation.

As weeks went on we turned our attention towards the ongoing support our veterans and their families would need, including, in many cases, new houses.

We worked on an earthquake-resistant design for our homes which, crucially, could be easily replicated across the country and then went straight to work.

We close our programme now having built over 1,000 of the houses.

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A WORD FROM OUR NEW CHAIRMAN



I am honoured and deeply humbled to become Chairman of The Gurkha Welfare Trust.

I want to begin by paying testament to the achievements of my predecessor, General Sir Peter Wall. Throughout his tenure, he gave the Trust his undivided attention. And the

charity flourished under his assured stewardship. He has left us well set to exploit opportunities as and when they arise.

So why me? I do, of course, come with some Gurkha 'baggage'. My connection with the Gurkhas began in 1982 when, as a fresh faced undergraduate cadet, I touched down at Kai Tak airport in Hong Kong to start my service with Queen's Gurkha Signals. It was – without doubt – a seminal moment in my life.

Gurkhas are renowned for their loyalty. And one of the things that sets us apart as a charity is the incredible loyalty of our supporter-base. Your continued support has helped us to enable thousands and thousands of Gurkha veterans and their families to 'live with dignity'. Gurkhas who would otherwise struggle to afford life's necessities now live comfortably, looked after by the Trust with a pension, healthcare, access to clean water and much more.

Long may this amazing display of camaraderie continue! I extend my thanks to each and every one of you. The Trust owes you too a 'debt of honour'.

I was lucky enough in January to revisit Nepal and see first-hand the incredible work that our field staff are doing to implement the many initiatives that your support has made possible. Our long established and respected presence in Nepal means we're in a fantastic position to reach Gurkha veterans in some of the most remote and difficult terrains in the world. For 200 years the Gurkhas have fought valiantly alongside us. Now, we fight for them.

I am proud to be your Chairman and will commit 'heart and nerve and sinew' to help to take the Trust forward in the years ahead.

**Lieutenant General NAW Pope CBE
Chairman, The Gurkha Welfare Trust**



Front page cont...

Amongst the beneficiaries of our programme are people like Rifleman Bhadra Bahadur Thapa (pictured left and on the cover).

Bhadra signed up towards the end of the Second World War and spent over two years serving in the British Army. After being made redundant in 1947, he returned to his home village in the Dhading district of Nepal and began a life that is typical of our Gurkha pensioners: he started a family and worked the land to put food on the table.

A HOME FOR A HERO

Now 88, Bhadra has spent the last 70 years in his home with his wife Khumba.

When the earthquakes struck, they were sitting in their garden.

"We were sitting next to the house when it happened. Within seconds of the shaking, the house collapsed. We were in shock. Our neighbours came to help us right away. I didn't know what to do... what would we eat? Where would we sleep? Everything was buried."

In September 2016 we completed construction on Bhadra and Khumba's new home, and they couldn't be happier with it.

The ruins of their former residence still stand directly opposite their new building, a stark reminder of what could have been.



"I never expected to receive this much help. Without you, I would have lived out my days in a metal shelter. You are like family to me."

Surviving World War Two

SIGNING UP

96 year-old Lance Corporal Sarbadhoj Limbu signed up to become a Gurkha at just 19 years old and was posted to Iraq with the 7th Gurkha Rifles.

"We got our first taste of action in the Middle East. From Iran we travelled to Iraq where they had big hills like ours in Nepal. You could see the enemy gunfire flashing on the slopes far away."

"Some bullets actually reached us but because we were so far they didn't even pierce the skin. Those early weeks were relatively easy."

PRISONER OF WAR

From Iraq, Sarbadhoj's battalion made their way through Syria, Lebanon, Israel and Egypt before arriving in Libya.

"The fighting got much harder there."

"On one occasion, the Germans surrounded us and we were captured. We were sent by plane to Italy where there was a POW camp. They didn't give us any food for days. I was too weak to stand, just a pile of bones."

After being sent back to a labour camp in Libya, Sarbadhoj became seriously ill and was put in a hospital for a week.

"They told me that I was to act as an Orderly for a German Captain. He used to give me some extra food like biscuits and I started to build up my strength."

"After a while, he took me to work at the Officers' Mess. They would hit me if I didn't understand instructions."

"Of course, I thought about escaping but I wouldn't know where to start. I didn't even know where I was."



THE END OF THE WAR

Allies eventually arrived and defeated the Germans, freeing Sarbadhoj. His battalion re-formed and moved to Italy, this time not as prisoners but as soldiers.

"There was a lot of fighting as we moved through the country. It was a time full of gunfire. I lost a lot of friends in that land."

RETIREMENT

In 1946, he left the Army and returned to his home village in Nepal where he got married and had children. He began farming and held the prestigious position of village head for 25 years.

Around 20 years ago he moved to Kathmandu. Having not served the

required amount of time to receive a British Army pension, he has been receiving our Welfare Pension for nearly 10 years.

"I'm very careful with money. I'm lucky to have sons who help me but this money is my independence."

Sarbadhoj has also been a regular user of our medical scheme over the years. Now living in Lalitpur, a town near Kathmandu, he likes to spend his days with his family, or relaxing at the local café with friends.

Talking about the Trust's supporters in the UK, Sarbadhoj is typically sincere.

"I'm glad that people in the UK remember what we went through. I'm very grateful to have this recognition for my service. Thank you."



Meet Tulsi Maya Gurung

Tulsi Maya is 98 years old and lives with her family in a small remote village in the Gorkha region of Nepal.

The widow of Gurkha veteran Dilbahadur Ghale IDSM, she sadly lost her sight just over 30 years ago following an infection. She remains upbeat despite the difficulties she now faces.

"I can't do much since I lost my sight. I can eat and I can talk! That's okay for me; I'm happy enough. Why worry about things that have already happened?"

MOBILE HEALTH CARE

It pains her to move around so she can't make the long journey to our nearest welfare centre. The nearest health post is over two hours of tough terrain away. Fortunately, she is visited by our mobile medical team regularly, who monitor her condition and provide her with medication for her pain.

"I'm always happy to see the GWT doctors. They are friendly and helpful. They are respectful to me and call me 'mother', which I like.

"I'm proud to have been married to such a brave man, and I'm thankful that the people he helped are helping me now."



92 years young

According to military records, Rifleman Lalbahadur Pun is 96 years old. In truth, he's actually 92. As was common in the Second World War, Lal's age was falsified so that he could sign up to

become a Gurkha early. He was only 15 when he first joined the British Army in late 1941.

Around 18 months after the end of the war, Lal was made redundant from the Army. He returned to Nepal and began work as a farmer.

By 2014, Lal was almost 90 years old.

"I was alone for many years after my wife died. I was living with my son but I was too old to farm like I used to.

After talking with the Welfare team, I eventually moved to the Residential Home in Pokhara."

The Kulbir Thapa VC Residential Home in Pokhara is a sanctuary for 26 of our most vulnerable Welfare Pensioners. Our staff provide 24-hour care for residents.

Despite his advanced years, Lal's spirit remains full of energy. He is always keen to dance and encourage his fellow residents to join in.



Water in the hills



74 year-old widow Mani Chhetri has been instrumental in providing her village with accessible clean water.

LIFE IN NEPAL

Mani lives in western Nepal, in a remote district called Rolpa. Characterised by sweeping hills and dense forests, its beauty belies the harsh reality of life there for local communities. Out in the remote hills visitors are rare compared to the more densely populated areas of Nepal, aid is also hard to come by.

GURKHA VETERAN

Mani's husband, World War Two veteran Rifleman Harka Bahadur Chhetri, sadly passed away just over 20 years ago. She recalls his stories from those dark days:

"Harka fought for more than two years in the Big War. This was before I knew him, but he said it was very hard. He told me that they once had to eat rotten meat because there was no other food. He had to go to hospital because he injured his shoulder."

Having been made redundant when the Brigade downsized after the War, Harka returned to his village and began farming. Eventually he would meet Mani and the couple went on to have seven children together. Mani now lives with their youngest son and survives on the Welfare Pension that we provide her for life's essentials.

BRINGING WATER TO THE VILLAGE

One of the biggest impacts our work has had on Mani's life, as well as that of her community, was a water



project installed in her sprawling village of Rasthar in 2012, including a tap stand right next to the widow's house.

In 2016, Mani asked The Gurkha Welfare Trust to review her village's water supply and upgrade it. We were able to deliver on her request and duly installed tap-stands for further households – benefiting just over 1,000 people.

We've partnered with UKAID to provide drinking water systems in remote areas across Nepal. You can read more about our projects on our website www.gwt.org.uk



OUR NEW MEDICAL CLINIC

In July, we were delighted to see our new medical clinic open its doors to Gurkha veterans and widows in Pokhara, one of the busiest cities in Nepal.

The world-class facilities at the new Pokhara clinic form the latest step in our ongoing efforts to provide the highest possible standard of care for Gurkha veterans and their families. In

Pokhara alone, we see an average of 27 patients each day.

Veteran Lance Corporal Khes Bahadur Gurung was one of our first patients:

"The GWT medical scheme is very useful. I come [to the GWT office] around every two months to see the doctors and collect my medication, which is free."

"The new clinic is very impressive. It's more modern than the last one. I think the standard is very good."

We've recently teamed up with International SOS, the world's leading medical and travel security assistance company, to help us develop our medical programme.

Thanks to the support of our generous donors, we make sure Gurkha veterans and their families receive the best care possible.

Shree Gaunda Secondary School

Shree Gaunda Secondary School, situated in Lamjung, Nepal, has served its local community for over 50 years. The school, sitting atop a 1,500-metre hill, provides an education to over 220 children, some of whom walk for three hours each day just to attend.

In 2015, Shree Gaunda suffered the full effects of Nepal's devastating earthquakes. All of its buildings were razed to the ground. Mercifully, the earthquake occurred on a weekend when pupils were not inside, but in the aftermath they were left with nowhere to learn.

A SAFE PLACE TO STUDY

Later that year, we agreed to rebuild the school as part of our earthquake response. It was one of 12 permanent schools that we constructed in earthquake affected areas in 2015/16.

At a cost of nearly £100,000, the project saw us build four blocks with a total of 10 furnished classrooms, as well as toilets. Our thanks go to Comic Relief for their support in funding this project.

The school's Head, Mr Uttam Man Gurung, is keen to emphasise the value of our support:

"The children are much happier. We're on top of a hill so it's exposed to the weather, especially in winter. Now they don't have to worry about the heat, the cold, the rain, the wind. They're not exposed to so much dust. It allows them to concentrate on their studies."

"We've certainly seen a better attendance since the buildings went up. We've actually been able to expand our capacity, so we hope to provide an education to even more children."

On the standard of the new buildings, Uttam Man is unreserved:

"They are excellent. In all my time in Nepali education I've never seen a better quality school than this. Even the furniture is better than what we had before."



One of the community's younger residents thanks us outside what will be her future secondary school.



Watch a video of the school at www.youtube.com/gurkhwelfaretrust

Our supporters

THE COUNTRY THAT SHOOK

There are still copies of Sophie Maliphant's amazing 'The Country That Shook' picture book about the Nepal earthquakes available.

You can purchase the book for £10 + P&P from Sophie's website thecountrythatshook.com with all funds received going to the Trust's school programme. Also available are high quality prints and T-shirts based on the book's distinctive artwork.

TWO SCHOOLS AND SIX WATER PROJECTS

Having funded the rebuild of two schools in Gorkha and in Jiri in 2016, with a donation of £160,000 we have recently received a further pledge of £200K from an individual donor who wishes to fund the installation of a cluster of six separate water projects in Dhading District.

This level of funding has allowed us to concentrate our resources in one area and construct six separate fresh water systems near each other, thereby introducing economies of scale that are not normally possible. 1,212 residents (including a school of 133 pupils) will benefit from this most recent donation. We are immensely grateful for this life-enhancing gift.



famous landmarks of the historic capital.

Each year the challenge has a different theme - this year is cockney!

There'll be plenty for you to have a butchers at along the way!

Contact: challenges@gwt.org.uk or visit www.gwt.org.uk/london-marathon-walk

HAM POLO CLUB CHARITY DAY

**1 October 2017,
Richmond, Surrey**

Join us for an afternoon of polo in this stunning setting.

Come and cheer on the GWT team who will be competing once again for the trophy!

Contact: events@gwt.org.uk

GURKHA CURRY NIGHT

**3 November 2017,
Skewen RFC, Neath, SA10 6HU**

Raising funds for the Trust, the curry is cooked and served by the Gurkhas so is as authentic as you can get.

Contact: Jan Langton on 01792 539664 or janlangton@gmail.com

GURKHA BAND CONCERT

**14 November 2017,
Dolphin Centre, Darlington**

A hugely popular military concert with a Gurkha flavour performed by the Band of the Brigade of Gurkhas and Gurkha pipers.

Contact: Keith Ryding on 01969 663551 or keithryding@hotmail.co.uk

GURKHA CURRY LUNCH

**26 November 2017,
Kathmandu Restaurant, Bristol**

This annual Autumn Gurkha Curry Lunch gets booked up very quickly - get a table together, or just come along on your own.

Contact: Bruce Jackman on 0117 973 3317 or bruce.jackman@btopenworld.com

ACT OF REMEMBRANCE

**11 November 2017,
Gurkha Chautara, Staffordshire**

Following the national Act of Remembrance at the Armed Forces Memorial NMA, the Gurkha Brigade Association will conduct its own Act of Remembrance at the Gurkha Chautara.

Contact: Rob Cross on 07968 891328 or crosses@crossimages.plus.com

Events

CLAY SHOOT

**19 August 2017,
Mendip Shooting Ground, Wells,
Somerset**

This well-established clay shoot is huge fun for teams of 4 guns. There is even a prize for the best picnic.

Contact: Alan Forestier-Walker on 01373 464633

LONDON MARATHON WALK

**23 September 2017,
Chiswick, West London**

This 26.2 mile circular walk takes in



Gurkhas on Everest

On 15 May 2017, the Brigade of Gurkhas made history when three serving Gurkhas reached the summit of Mount Everest.



Not only were the group the first from the Brigade to be successful in climbing the highest mountain in the world, but with their Sherpa climbing partners, and in an unprecedented move in recent Everest history, they fixed the ropes on the route to the summit, thereby opening the mountain for the rest of the climbers.

On 16 May 2017, a further team of 10 Gurkhas successfully summited the mountain.

Major Andrew Todd MBE said:

"This is a fantastic achievement for the Brigade of Gurkhas, after our attempt in 2015 was called off due to the avalanches from the earthquake and our team then turned to assist the humanitarian aid that was required in the area. We are ecstatic about this success. It is another example of how the British Army strives to achieve excellence."

FIXING THE ROPES

"We are delighted to have worked with the Sherpa to fix the ropes to the summit and to be the first team to summit this year — a great collaboration between Nepalis, working together to get the job done."



Image credit: gurkhaeverest2017.co.uk

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