

Women reach the top in Nepal's trekking industry

By Binaj Gurubacharya
The Associated Press

POKHARA, Nepal — When Lucky, Dicky, and Nicky Chettri tried to break into Nepal's male-dominated trekking industry 20 years ago, competitors tried to run them out of business. They say men threatened them, harassed them — even filed bogus police reports against them.

“The men said this is a business for the men and we should leave it alone,” said Lucky, the eldest Chettri sister in the 3 Sisters Adventure Trekking Company. “They would even accuse us of trying to take away food from their table.”

Now the sisters have a booming business and a waiting list of Nepalese women who want to join their six-month training program for mountain guides.

The rise of the Chettri sisters' business in many ways reflects the increasing clout of women in Nepal, which remains in most ways a deeply patriarchal country.

Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay first climbed Mount Everest in 1953, but it was another 40 years before the first Nepali woman reached the peak. Since then, women have made progress in politics, education, and business.

About five percent of Nepali politicians were female in 1990, but women won a third of the seats in the 2008 parliamentary election. Some discriminatory laws have been changed, including one that allowed only sons to inherit parental property.

Shailee Basnet, who led a 10-member Nepali women's team to Everest in 2008, said the number of women in trekking and mountaineering has risen as well, and she gave credit to the Chettri sisters.

“They have started a trend for women to take up this profession. Women guiding foreign trekkers in the region has become a



ALTITUDE ADJUSTMENT. An instructor at the 3 Sisters Adventure Trekking Company wears a helmet as she prepares to provide lessons on climbing a rock surface in Pokhara, Nepal. When Lucky, Dicky, and Nicky Chettri tried to break into Nepal's male-dominated trekking industry 20 years ago, competitors tried to run them out of business. They say men threatened them, harassed them — even filed bogus police reports against them. (AP Photo/Niranjan Shrestha)

\$3,000 a year from guiding tourists, a better-than-average salary in the poor Himalayan nation. Monika Rai, a 19-year-old student, hopes it leads to something better.

“I am here to learn the skills of trekking and English language so that I can become a guide and make more money than in any other jobs,” she said.

The Chettris have 150 women guides who lead close to 1,000 foreign trekkers each year. They cater to those who travel the lower mountain trails, not the mountaineers who go beyond Everest's base camp and up to the world's tallest peak.

Mountaineering and trekking are big businesses in Nepal, where half the foreign visitors come to explore the mountains. According to the Nepal Mountaineering Association, some 340,000 foreign tourists ventured on treks last year.

Many of the visitors are single women who prefer to have a female companion, including Sophie Whitwell, a 25-year-old marketing executive from London who signed up with 3 Sisters.

“I would definitely want a female guide. I am sure it would be fine if you went with a male guide but you just don't know, and you are walking with them potentially alone for several hours a day,” she said. “If you are in a scenario where you need a rescue ... a female guide is just as capable of walking to the next town to get help or make a phone call.”

normal thing now,” she said.

The Chettris came up with the idea of opening a woman-run trekking agency when they heard from foreign female travellers who were harassed, even sexually assaulted and threatened by their own male guides while trekking remote mountain trails.

“These girls were really afraid and felt insecure,” said Lucky, 48, at their office next to the picturesque Phewa lake.

The sisters once led trips themselves, but had trouble finding more women who knew trekking, spoke English, and were willing to spend days walking with foreigners away from home. Their solution was to bring the women to Pokhara and train them for months.

“At the beginning it was very unusual for the women to join our program because they had to leave their homes for many days, working with westerners,” said

Nicky, the youngest of the sisters. “Some thought it was against our culture because women are expected to be at home doing household work.”

But soon the word spread. “These women began to like the idea that they don't need to depend on their husbands for money,” Nicky said.

Gam Maya Tilicha, 25, once planned to become a teacher but is now a full-time guide at the agency.

“I never imagined that I would be a trekking guide. But the income is very good and I like what I am doing — meeting people from all over the world and travelling to new places in Nepal,” she said.

The sisters take in 40 students every six months, giving them free housing, food, and clothing. The money earned from the trekking agency supports the training.

Once they graduate, they make about

AirAsia to use Interpol system to check passports

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (AP) — Top Asian budget carrier AirAsia says it will become the world's first airline to check the passports of all its passengers against Interpol's global database of 42 million stolen or lost travel documents by the end of this month.



STRENGTHENING SECURITY. A ground crewman walks by a fleet of AirAsia passenger jets on the tarmac of the low-cost terminal KLIA2 in Sepang, Malaysia in this file photo. The top Asian budget carrier says it will become the world's first airline to check the passports of all its passengers against Interpol's global database of 42 million stolen or lost travel documents by the end of this month. (AP Photo/Joshua Paul, File)

The disappearance of Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 two months ago revealed a gaping loophole in aviation security when two passengers were found to have boarded the plane with stolen passports. Interpol said it had information on the theft of the passports but authorities had not checked its database.

AirAsia, which is also based in Malaysia, said it will use Interpol's “I-Checkit” system to screen passports when passengers check in. This will be done for its 600 daily international flights using 100 airports across the region, it said.

“AirAsia has established the new standard for airline security,” it quoted Interpol secretary general Ronald K. Noble as saying. “This will raise the bar across the industry for passenger safety and security.”

AirAsia said no personal

data will be transmitted to Interpol other than passport numbers and the issuing nation. If there is a positive match against the database, local authorities and Interpol will be notified, it said.

Less than 10 countries do systematic screening of travel documents against the Interpol database. More than 1 billion times last year, travellers boarded planes without their passports being checked against the database, the international police organization said.

“Airlines will no longer have to depend solely on countries screening passports to keep passengers safe from terrorists and

other criminals who use stolen passports to board flights. Like AirAsia, they will be able to do it themselves as well,” Noble said.

Malaysian police determined that the two men travelling with stolen passports on Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 were Iranians seeking to migrate illegally to Europe and were not terrorists.

The Boeing 777 with 239 people on board was travelling to Beijing from Kuala Lumpur on March 8 when it disappeared. Malaysia's government said the plane's last position was in the middle of the Indian Ocean, west of Perth, Australia. It has not been found.

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Auditor seeks proposals for vehicle, boat licensing in east County

Proposals for a contract to license motor vehicles and boats are due by 4:30 p.m. June 13.

Detailed applications: online at www.clark.wa.gov/auditor/auto/index.html and at Clark County Auto License Department, 1408 Franklin St., Vancouver, WA.

Requires services in east Camas or Washougal area. Examples:

- > Ownership titles and title transfers.
- > Annual license renewals.
- > Registration documents.
- > Certain permits and special registrations.

Submit to Clark County General Services, Public Service Center, Sixth Floor, 1300 Franklin St., Vancouver, WA. Fax or electronic transmittal not accepted.

For other formats, contact the Clark County ADA Office: **Voice** (360) 397-2322; **Relay** 711 or (800) 833-6388; **Fax** (360) 397-6165; **Email** ADA@clark.wa.gov.

