

THE DMN NEWS



From small Indian town to the White House

This Indian man, once a victim of human trafficking who endured years of physical and mental torture, somehow survived. Years later, his resilience and advocacy led him to the White House, becoming a symbol of hope and justice in the fight against trafficking.

Kathmandu: When Harold D’Souza arrived at *The DMN News* office, the team eagerly awaited his story. They anticipated tales of his story, but what they learned was both harrowing and inspiring. D’Souza recounted how he had been deceived and trafficked to the United States with promises of a lucrative job—only to face unimaginable hardships.

Back in India, Harold had a stable job as a business development manager for a manufacturing company. One day, he received a seemingly life-changing offer to work in the United States. “I could never have dreamed of going to America. I didn’t even have a passport until I graduated from college.

Coming from a small town in India, securing a job in the U.S. felt like a dream come true,” he shared.

Born and raised in Baroda, originally hailing from Mangalore, D’Souza came from humble beginnings. His father worked as a train conductor, and financial hardships were a constant reality for the family. Despite these challenges, Harold pursued his education with determination.

He started working as a telephone operator while still in school and later earned a master’s degree in marketing management, a postgraduate

diploma in human resource development, and a law degree specializing in labor law. For Harold, the opportunity to work in the U.S. represented a chance to uplift his family and secure a brighter future.

Convinced of this promise, Harold moved to the United States in 2003 with his wife and their two young sons, aged 7 and 4. However, the dream quickly turned into a nightmare. “I was manipulated, tricked, and trapped,” he said, reflecting on the betrayal that awaited him.

“When I got the offer to work in the United States, I was overjoyed,” Harold recalled. The position promised a salary of \$75,000 a year—a fortune by 2003 standards when converted to Indian Rupees. Armed with an H1B work visa, Harold was ready to embrace his new life. His wife and sons, issued H4 dependent visas, joined him on this journey. Unfamiliar with U.S. visa regulations, the family was unaware that dependent visa holders were prohibited from working.



Chasing the American dream, he reached Cincinnati full of hope and excitement. Excitement, however, turned to confusion when they landed in Cincinnati. The trafficker—someone Harold trusted—asked for their cash and documents, claiming it was unsafe to carry them in the U.S. Harold complied, unaware this was the first step in a calculated plan to exploit them.

The family was taken to a one-room apartment near a restaurant. When Harold questioned the cramped conditions, the trafficker reassured him it was temporary. In reality, the setup ensured the family could be controlled and forced into labor.

From their first day, Harold and his wife were made to work up to 18 hours a day in the restaurant under grueling conditions. The trafficker withheld their wages and subjected them to inhumane treatment. Despite having a roof over their heads, they slept on the floor, enduring relentless verbal and psychological abuse. Harold described feeling utterly helpless. “I handed him all my documents. I trusted him as an older brother.

We had nothing—no documents, no cash, no help,” he shared.

Although D’Souza had arrived in the United States legally, his circumstances quickly spiraled into illegality. His wife was forced to work despite her dependent visa restrictions, and Harold himself had no access to his documents, leaving him helpless and unable to seek assistance.

The situation worsened in August when his employer coerced him into visiting a bank to sign some papers. Unaware of the implications, Harold found himself holding a five-figure check in his name. The trafficker then took him to his mansion, poured him a drink, and exclaimed, “Cheers! You’re a rich man!” However, before Harold could process the moment, the trafficker produced a slip and declared, “You owe me USD 40,000!”

Shocked, Harold was left speechless. The trafficker then added with a smile, “Actually, Harold, you owe me a lot more than that.”

”It was at that moment Harold realized he was trapped in debt bondage, completely under the trafficker’s control. At that moment, DSouza’s world shattered. Within seconds, he felt his voice, courage, hope, and freedom slip away entirely.

The very next day, D’Souza received a bank notification that the money they had saved for their children's education, along with the loan amount, was missing. His employer had emptied the account. For the 18 months Harold and his wife had worked, they hadn’t been paid a single penny.

But the exploitation didn’t stop there. The trafficker used psychological manipulation, calling them “hey illegals, hey illegal” verbally abusing Harold, and sexually assaulting his wife. He even went so far as to abuse their children in front of them. Harold was terrified of what the trafficker might do if they ever refused him.

“I failed as a parent, provider, protector, and a person,” D’Souza told.

After nearly two years of suffering, Harold’s wife mustered the courage to confront the trafficker. When she demanded their unpaid wages, he retorted coldly, “You’re illegal here. You can’t even work on your visa.” Her request for the return of their cash was met with outright denial and threats of arrest and deportation.

In that moment, Harold’s world shattered once again. The man who had once seemed like a godly figure in his life had now revealed his true colors. But the trafficker didn’t hesitate. Within hours, his lawyer threatened Harold, warning that failure to comply would lead to his arrest.

One day, his chef, who was also a victim of trafficking, pulled him aside and warned him, “You need to run away from here, or you and your wife will die.” This was the time for D’Souza to escape. Soon after, their case was brought to the attention of the police. It was the beginning of a long and dangerous journey toward escape and justice.

As D'Souza began to fight back against the exploitation, his trafficker hired someone to kill him. Harold was hospitalized, with doctors already giving up on his survival. He was given eight units of blood in an attempt to save his life. Weighing just 40 kilograms, D'Souza was barely hanging on, overwhelmed by the fear of death. In addition to his own suffering, the trafficker escalated his cruelty. They attempted to kidnap Harold's children, and his wife was subjected to continuous abuse. Harold felt trapped, not knowing where to turn or what to do as his family endured unimaginable torment.

D'Souza did not give up. He wrote a 1000-page handwritten report detailing the abuse and damages caused by his trafficker and filed a lawsuit seeking USD 3 million. Every month, he attended court sessions, while his trafficker's lawyer fought fiercely for him. On one occasion, his trafficker showed up, asking Harold to withdraw the case, but Harold remained steadfast. Eventually, the trafficker filed for bankruptcy, and the case was closed. But Harold's fight wasn't over.



During these tough times, Harold saw who truly stood by them. While people back home believed they'd brought shame upon themselves, their local community supported them without hesitation. A lady from their church, along with 10 other families, came together to help with rent and visa applications. One of the families, planning to go on a trip to Las Vegas, instead gave D'Souza the money they would have spent gambling. They said, "I'd rather bet on you!"

Months later, their case was recognized as human trafficking, and the FBI launched an investigation. When Harold's trafficker heard about the investigation, he threatened to kidnap Harold's children, prompting the authorities to set up protection for the family.

Harold's resilience paid off when he received a Non-Immigrant Crime Victim (NCP) visa and landed a job at Cincinnati Children's Hospital. He was excited to be able to work there, and this time, he was paid for every hour he worked.

He worked 16-hour shifts, including holidays, making up for lost time and trying to save. Over the course of three years, Harold and his family slowly rebuilt their lives. By 2011, they had saved enough to buy their own house—something they hadn't had in eight long years. For the first time in their lives, they had a place to call home. The day they moved in, the emotional weight of everything they had been through hit them. They hugged each other tightly, knowing they had finally achieved stability. Though they didn't have furniture or beds at first, they found comfort in the fact that they had a roof over their heads.

To celebrate, Harold invited all the families who had supported them over the years to dinner. They cooked traditional Indian dishes—chicken and pulao—and their friends loved it. The joy Harold felt in sharing their new home with those who had helped them was immeasurable. The following day, the families surprised Harold with a gift—a bed. "We couldn't sleep all night. We had to!" they said.

Slowly, brick by brick, they rebuilt their life. However, D'Souza's trafficker was never prosecuted.

Then after, D'Souza began traveling, sharing his story to raise awareness about human trafficking. "It's often your own people who traffic you," he would say. "I was trafficked by an Indian, just as Nepalis are often tricked by fellow Nepalis."

One random day, he received an unexpected call from the White House.

On the other end of the line, he heard the words: "Harold, you have been appointed as one of the advisors to President Obama."

Harold found himself unable to hold back tears.

He worked at the White House for eight years until 2020.



For his extraordinary contribution, the United Nations in 2023 honored him with the prestigious Human Rights Hero Award at their headquarters in New York. He had previously been recognized with the Rashtra Prerna Award 2021 by the World Book of Star Record jury members for his mission as a social activist. In 2022, he received the distinguished Heart of the Father Award in Los Angeles.

Today, as a co-founder of Eyes Open International, a non-profit organization, D'Souza is dedicated to developing prevention efforts through survivor-informed research.

“I was inspired by First Lady Michelle Obama to start a non-profit organization. I didn't even know how it operates,” he said.

“In God's home, there is delay, but no denial,” he concluded.

Founded by Harold D'Souza, Eyes Open International operates in over 15 countries worldwide. The organization officially launched its initiatives in Nepal on August 1, 2024.



India or China? The debate over choosing Delhi or Beijing has been trending in Kathmandu for the past few weeks. It began when the CPN-UML secretariat announced that their leader, Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli, would travel to China for his first bilateral visit after assuming office for the fourth time.

Since the announcement, Nepal's domestic politics has been in turmoil. Former Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' accused Oli of playing the 'China card' by choosing Beijing, claiming Nepal-India relations are already strained. Meanwhile, another former Prime Minister, Dr Baburam Bhattarai, criticized the public airing of sensitive geopolitical and diplomatic issues, calling it shameful.

Whether Oli chooses India or China, Nepal's weak diplomacy has been exposed as she failed to manage the India-China dynamic in a balanced and strategic manner.

Kathmandu-based analysts argue that Nepal's weak diplomacy is

undoubtedly causing hardships for its citizens, especially as geopolitics surrounding electricity takes center stage. Since assuming office as Prime Minister four months ago, KP Sharma Oli has frequently directed verbal criticism toward the south. First, by repeatedly raising issues related to the disputed territories of Lipulekh, Kalapani, and Limpiyadhura. Second, in October, he revisited the 2015 blockade imposed by India during his first term, claiming once again that his stand against the blockade forced him to step down.

Analysts caution that Nepal is not in a position to continually poke India over issues that have already settled on the surface. Stirring up old disputes, they warn, risks muddying the waters, further damaging the relations.

This time, the south is closely watching Oli's moves. During the official visit of Nepal's Foreign Minister to India, Delhi extended a warm welcome. To everyone's surprise, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi personally met her to discuss a range of issues.

However, Modi did not extend an invitation to Prime Minister Oli through his foreign minister. This signaled India's reluctance to embrace Oli's leadership.

According to Prashant Aryal, a political analyst, India is closely monitoring Oli's actions. "The south waited to see how Oli would respond to the absence of a formal invitation from Delhi," he said.

Delhi, analysts suggest, is not keen on Oli visiting Beijing and has its ways of pressuring him to turn toward Delhi instead. "It's the 'power of power' that India holds," they explain. As winter approaches and Nepal's rivers begin to dry up, hydropower production is expected to drop by 30 percent, leaving Nepal increasingly reliant on Indian electricity to meet its energy needs.

Interestingly, India has not renewed power agreement with Nepal, and has not replied to multiple enquiries from the Nepal Electricity Authority.
