



GOING PLACES TOGETHER

NEPAL’S RICE ECONOMY

Ever since a picture posted on Facebook of Prime Minister K P Oli and his party co-chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal dining on red rice in the company of one of the most notorious businessmen in Nepal went viral last year, the word ‘Marsi’ has entered the Nepali lexicon not just to describe a nutritious variety of rice from the uplands but the unholy nexus between politicians and tycoons.

But what it did do is draw the country’s attention to the importance of rice to our lives as well as the nation’s economy. Rice is more than a staple grain in Nepal, it is a way of life. ‘*Bhat khanu bho?*’ is much more than a literal question about whether interlocutors have eaten, but a greeting like ‘How do you do?’.



BIKRAM RAI

Nearly 70% of Nepal’s population depends directly on agriculture, and the sector contributes more than a quarter of the country’s GDP – with rice making up 21% of that. Till as late as 1985, Nepal used to be a net exporter of rice, and during the 1960s the country was exporting up to \$45 million worth of rice to India every year. How the tables have turned, in 2015 Nepal has to import 531,000 tons of rice worth \$210 million from India.

There are many reasons why Nepal’s production of rice has not kept up with demand. The foremost, of course, is that the country’s population has doubled in the intervening years. Agricultural land is shrinking because of urban sprawl, and much of the farms are fallow because of outmigration. The educated youth do not want to live off the land anymore, and look for salaried jobs in the cities or abroad. Productivity has not increased by as much as it should have, nearly 80% of farms still depend on rains since there has been very little progress in irrigation – this in turn has

made farmers vulnerable to erratic weather caused by climate change.

But there is a silver lining. As our reportage in this edition (*page 8-9*) shows, a healthy monsoon allowed paddy harvests to increase by 9% up from the previous year, reaching 5.6 million tons. An ecstatic Finance Ministry immediately raised the economic growth rate estimate to 7% this year. Even the IMF revised its previous estimate of 5% growth, and now estimates that Nepal’s year on year economic growth will be 6.5%.

The Ministry of Agriculture’s statistics division has calculated that paddy was planted on 97% of fields this Nepali year, up from only 86% in 2074 BS. Paddy yield is still not comparable to other countries in the region that have intensive rice cultivation, but it did increase by about 8% to 3.67 tons per hectare.

The long and short of it is that Nepal’s rice economy is rain dependant, the government cannot take credit for the increased paddy harvests. There is precious little successive governments in the past 50 years have done to invest on improving yield, and finding a stable price for produce. The federal government earmarked Rs80 billion last year for agriculture, forestry and livestock, but most of it was spent on salaries and overheads. Donors spent another Rs16 billion over the past seven years to

Nepal’s rice economy is rain dependant, the government cannot take credit for the increased paddy harvests.

increase agricultural productivity with mixed results.

Despite the fact that two-thirds of Nepalis depend on their farms, agriculture is neglected and is just not a priority for politicians and bureaucrats. Twenty percent of farmers are subsistence, and living in extreme poverty. A report by Oxfam last month showed that the skewed distribution of wealth in Nepal is most glaring in land ownership patterns. The richest 7% of households own 31% of the agricultural land. More than 80% of women are landless, and 44% of Dalits in the Tarai do not own any of their own land, and are mostly tenant farmers.

As rice economist Rajendra Uprety points out in his op-ed in this edition, paddy imports from India peak during the harvest season in Nepal: indicating that Nepali farmers are not growing what Nepali consumers want. The only reason this is so is because the government has not been able to turn farmers to focus on varieties of rice preferred by consumers, reduce cost of inputs to make rice farming profitable, promote mechanisation and intensive rice cultivation techniques, and unleash a movement for domestic production.

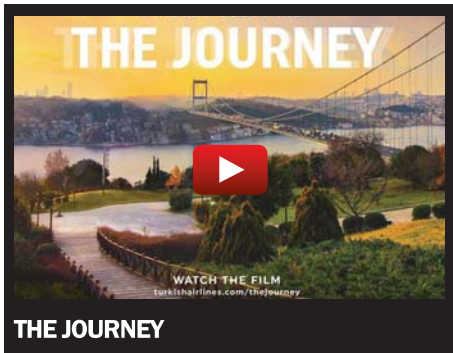
This is not rocket science. We know what the problems are, we know the solutions to increase rice production. We just have to help our farmers do it. There is no reason Nepal cannot once more be the granary of South Asia.

ONLINE PACKAGES



PRICE OF RICE

Watch video about how rice production is affected by valuable farmlands being engulfed by urbanisation, and traditional varieties of rice replaced by cheap imports from India. Even though rice production went up by 9% this year, yields are still sluggish and paddy harvests depend on a healthy monsoon. *Story: page 2, 8-9.*



THE JOURNEY

Turkish Airlines prepares to operate its Kathmandu link through its new hub, which will be the world’s largest airport. Watch an interview with Turkish’s Nepal manager Abdullah Tuncer Kecici to find out more about Istanbul’s brand new airport that has been dubbed ‘The New Silk Road’. *Story: page 4-5.*

CHOPPER CRASH

May the departed souls rest in peace and may god bless their families to cope with loss (‘Helicopter carrying tourism minister crashes’, nepalitimes.com). I extend my heartfelt condolences to all families. I am in shock and pain due to the loss of friends, that has also taken me back to the 2006 loss.

Ghana S Gurung

RICH VS POOR

Prosperity should filter down to all Nepalis (‘Nepal’s great income divide’, Ramesh Kumar, #948). Make the poor richer, not the rich poorer.

Alan Roadnight

PANGOLINS

The Nepalis have done a superb job with their rhinos and tigers (‘Protecting pangolins from being eaten to extinction, Sonia Awale, #948). Now they look toward this beautiful mammal to protect.

Direct Aid Nepal

BAD HABBITS

Here in Nepal we have very unique traditional bureaucratic process that always hinders work, but doesn’t check corruption (‘Deconstructing deconstruction’, Alok Tuladhar, #948). At the same time the person responsible has no intention of completing the work on time, and prefers to drag it on to earn money over a longer period.

Subhash Singh

NEPALI COFFEE

This is a very inspiring story (‘Four years later, Nepal’s farmers rise from the rubble’, Lisa Choegyal, #947). We at SAPPROS supported the project.

Shrikrishna Upadhyay

■ I do believe southern slopes of the Himalayan foothills are perfect for coffee beans. They will succeed, I am sure about that.

Eva Holmberg Tedert

DIGNIFIED MENSTRUATION

Beautifully expressed, not only chaupadi in remote villages but mindset of so called educated, modern women must change regarding menstrual stigma (‘That time of the month’, Editorial, #947).

Sandipa Thapa

WHAT’S TRENDING



Nepal’s great income divide

by Ramesh Kumar
Readers were agast to discover the colossal economic inequality in Nepal: 10% of rich Nepalis owning property worth an astounding 26 times more than 40% of the poorest. Visit nepalitimes.com for this and other reports analysing the details and consequences of high inequality in Nepal.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Most visited online page

Most commented

Protecting pangolins from being eaten to extinction

by Sonia Awale
Pangolins are the most trafficked mammals in the world, and Nepal is not only a source but also a transit point for the smuggling of the scaly ant eaters. This report was widely shared among the wildlife conservation groups. Read full story to find out why these gentle creatures are being killed in such big numbers, and what Nepal is doing to save them.

Most popular on Twitter

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
PM Oli: “They were jealous of my popularity two years ago, they accused me of being a nationalist...The same thing is happening this time. No one talks about my achievements on federalism, the social security scheme, our progress in infrastructure.”

Aditya Tamrakar @AdityaTamrakar4
Sir with all due respect I do not see any achievements of your government. Instead of talking, your Government could do lots of things. Nepalese people do not have high expectations, want simple things.

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
Himalayan Outdoor Festival that combines rock climbing, trail running and mountain biking begins tomorrow. @sikumarhannon reports on the rising popularity of such adventure sports in Nepal

Corinne Redfern @CorinneRedfern
I absolutely love how this feature in @nepalitimes specifically highlights the female athletes taking part in the Himalayan Outdoors Festival, without making it a gendered piece.

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
Nepal’s cultural values will be inevitably lost if the present practice of unlawful, unethical and non-transparent reconstruction of monuments continues, writes @aloktuladhar about #heritage reconstruction post the 2015 earthquake

Marianne Heredge @MHeredge
So sad there is not more appreciation of historic monuments in Kathmandu.

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
#AQI The good news is that although at peak traffic hours, the air did hit the Purple Very Unhealthy zone, the daily averages are still in the Red. It is incredible that we have to be thankful that the air we breathe is less lethal than usual.

Sushma Joshi @joshi_sushma
Fantastic. We’re all gonna die of asthma instead of lung cancer. Lucky us, Kathmandu denizens!

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Nepali Times issue # 440 of 27 February – 6 March 2009 was about growing unrest in Tarai, elected Maoist government returning to militant extortion, and demands for radical changes: in national flag, the name Nepal, etc. The Ass spoofed the national dress:

Had we not got so used to seeing it being worn by officials, our daura suruwal national dress would look pretty ridiculous. It is a cross between thermal underwear and skirt, and to cover up this embarrassing combination it has a silly western-style jacket and a topi. Our national dress is only slightly less bizarre than the national dress of the Kingdom of Tonga which consists of a reed skirt with a bow tie on a shirtless chest (for men) and a reed skirt with neck scarf on bare chest (for women). Just like a new national anthem, it’s about time we had a new national dress.

The Maoist prime minister has taken the lead in modelling a revolutionary national dress which consists of a dark suit, white shirt and red tie with a bhadgaunle topi. It does make him look like one of those rotational monarchs from Malaysia, but the dress is catching on so fast that there is now a severe shortage of topis.



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The New (Sky) Silk Road To

Turkish Airlines prepares to operate its Kathmandu link through the new hub, which will be the world’s largest airport

It has been called ‘The New Silk Road’ and Turkish Airlines is promoting Istanbul’s new airport as an aerial bridge between east and west as it expands to take advantage of Turkey’s location to become one of the world’s largest carriers.

The new airport has already had its soft opening, but is expected to be fully operational in the next few months to handle Turkish Airlines’ flights, including the ones to and from Kathmandu. Situated 35km northwest of the city near the Black Sea coastline, the \$35 billion airport will have six runways and a capacity to serve 200 million passengers a year when it is fully completed by 2023.

“The new airport was a must to accommodate Turkish Airlines’ growth plans, and we hope to give passengers to and from Nepal much more comfort and flexibility with better connectivity when the airport opens fully soon,” says Turkish’s Nepal manager Abdullah Tuncer Kecici (pictured, right).

More than 90% of the passengers on Turkish between Kathmandu and Istanbul are transit, and the new airport is expected to make transfers much more convenient compared to the current, congested Ataturk airport. Even at the existing airport, nearly three-quarters of all flights are operated by Turkish and the figure is expected to be higher at the new hub.

Turkish Airlines is on an ambitious expansion drive augmenting its current fleet of 300



MONIKA DEUPALA

aircraft to 500 by 2023. The airline currently flies to 306 destinations worldwide, and will be adding 100 more cities in the next four years. The new airport is already operating some of its daily flights to London, Frankfurt, Munich, etc on a trial basis, but will make an overnight shift of all flight operations from the old to new airport by April 5-6.

Turkish Airlines will resume its Kathmandu frequency to daily before the spring tourist season, and is involved with Nepal Tourism

Board in promoting Visit Nepal 2020 campaign with its target of increasing the number of tourists visiting Nepal to 2 million.

“For Turkish Airlines, Nepal has been a tourism destination from day one,” Kecici says, “that is why we want to be supportive of any promotional activity that Nepal government undertakes to promote tourism here.”

With its daily flights, Turkish will be offering a 17% capacity increase to 170,000 passengers both ways between Kathmandu and

Istanbul this year. The airlines has introduced a special student fare, with 10kg extra luggage, and a free one-time flight change offer. The airlines is also offering stopovers for transit passengers, and hopes that traffic to Istanbul will get a boost after the new airport is inaugurated.

“We have decided to increase capacity despite difficulties because we believe in working together with other companies to boost Nepal tourism,” says Kecici, who has been attending travel trade



fairs to promote a Special Nepal Package with Turkish Airlines offices in Europe, North America and other markets. He will also be attending the leading international travel and tourism fair ITB Berlin next week in which Nepal’s Tourism Minister who died in the tragic helicopter crash this week was also supposed to take part.

Turkish Airlines has also been hosting familiarisation trips for travel trade executives from Israel, Spain, Germany and Turkey itself to promote Nepal as a major Asian



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BIZ BRIEFS

Financial trends

According to IMF, the fiscal balance during the first 7 months of the current FY18/19 improved compared to the same period last year. Revenues increased by 22% (y/y). Total spending stabilised after a large increase in FY17/18, but capital spending has continued to rise. Central bank reserves stood at US \$8.4 billion in January, which can cover about 6 months of prospective imports. IMF further reports that consistent credit growth has pushed the credit to GDP ratio 7% of GDP above the 20-year trend.

Traffic Records

Turkish Airlines' passenger and cargo traffic results for January 2019 show a consistent growth. The airlines carried 5.7 million passengers in January and the load factor was 79.5%. Transit passengers increased



by 5.2% compared to the same period last year. With the new international airport in Istanbul, 2019 is set to be a big year for Turkey's national aviation as well as for the flag carrier.

American Center

American Center at US Embassy in Kathmandu has been renovated with fresh murals representing America, a screening room, and new programming areas. The center is open from 9:30 am to 4:30pm



through Monday to Friday and visitors can access books, magazines, movies, documentaries and other research facilities.

33 years

Nepal Investment Bank has completed 33 years of operation and on this occasion, launched a new product, 'Recurring Fixed Deposit Account' where customers with any type of savings account can open a recurring fixed deposit account for a minimum deposit of Rs333 for 33 months and receive 9.25% interest. The bank also released a comic book to improve financial literacy among children.



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Istanbul

“You think I’m having fun?”



destination. It will soon be hosting a delegation from Houston to get American tour operators excited about Nepal again.

Lonely Planet has listed Kathmandu as number 5 in the Top Ten best travel destination in 2019 because ‘the narrative (in Nepal) is all about reconstruction and rejuvenation’. With the excitement building up for 2020, some travel trade officials are however worried about the congestion and new difficulties on arrival at Kathmandu, as well as runway

repairs starting next month that will close the airport for 10 hours a day.

Nevertheless, Kececi is optimistic about 2020, and says: “Nepal has huge untapped potential for adventure tourism, culture, nature. We need to tell the world that it is more than just mountains.” 🇳🇵

 nepalitimes.com

For video go online. 

When a clip of Turkish Airlines’ new promotional video *The Journey* was aired at the US Super Bowl, it created a sensation. This was a tv commercial done in a completely different way.

The biggest difference was the length: it is over 6 minutes long. Second, it is directed by acclaimed British director Ridley Scott of *The Gladiator*, *The Alien* and *Blade Runner 2049* fame.

Scott has turned a commercial for Turkey’s new airport and Turkish Airlines into a chase sequence that looks like something from James Bond, complete with car and helicopter pursuits, an exotic locale and suspense. Scott has even brought in the Dutch actress Sylvia Hoeks (*right*) who stars in *Blade Runner 2049* to play the part of one of the protagonists who is chasing another mysterious woman between flights in Istanbul on (what else?) Turkish Airlines.

The film begins with Hoeks saying “You think I’m having fun?” But obviously she is. And so, it seems is the director, who has been given full creative latitude to film in Istanbul, a city Scott admits he had never been to but where he was mesmerised by the Bosphorus, the waterway that separates Asia from Europe.

The bridges over the Bosphorus appear prominently, supposedly signifying that the narrow passage is not a barrier



anymore and the airline is an aerial bridge between Asia and Europe.

Cleverly done, entertaining, and cinematic techniques that give the film all the hallmarks of a thriller. Says executive creative director Fabian Berglund: “We wanted to make something that celebrates the airline, this new airport and also the city of Istanbul. That is why we ended up making more of a movie than your regular 60-second spot.”

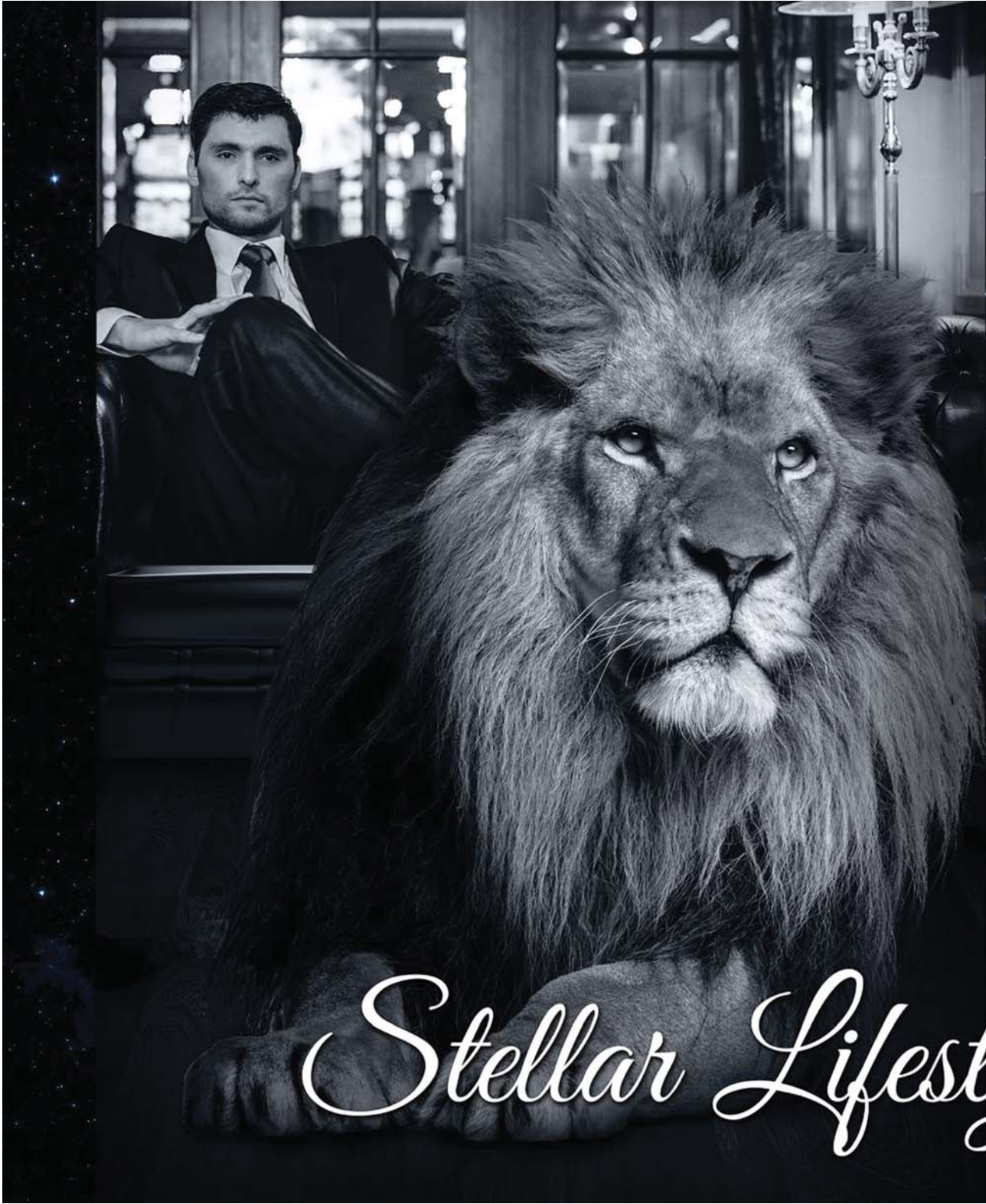
A half-minute clip of *The Journey* was aired primetime during the Superbowl, where Turkish has been advertising for the past three years. Scott said he took on the director’s job because it “went beyond the limitations of traditional advertising, and allowed me the creative freedom to

tell the story”.

Turkish Airlines is planning to release a new film in the series for its other destinations. With 306 cities, and plans to add another 100, the airline will be kept busy. Wonder when Kathmandu’s turn will come.



Go online to watch *The Journey*  nepalitimes.com




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Nepal's milk heartland rebounds

Four years later, Kavre's quake-affected dairy farmers are back in business with new fodder cultivation

The terraced fields fall away from the road in gentle waves, each neatly scored into brown ruts like a freshly moulded bar of chocolate. "All potatoes, newly planted," explains Ram pointing inside the plastic greenhouses with vegetables for the Kathmandu market. Not a rice paddy in sight, we stop the vehicle and I jump out to take a quick photograph. Not so quick, as it turns out.



SO FAR SO GOOD
Lisa Choegyal

Nepal has regressed from a major exporter of rice to a net importer, worth nearly Rs250 million annually, but that is not why we are here. Our day trip is to learn how the New Zealand government has assisted some Kavre farmers convert paddy fields to grow year-round forage crops for their animals, thus reducing workloads and increasing dairy production.

We drive another 20 minutes up the winding road southwest from Panauti, the urban sprawl thins and the valley narrows, sheltering cherry blossom and orange trees along the alder-lined river. At Aruchour, a group of Tamang farmers are bundled up in warm jackets waiting on the dusty early-morning roadside. Work-worn hands help me clamber down gullies and teeter along trenches that line their terraces to see the flourishing winter crops of dense green oats and flowering vetch which will be cut and blended as the perfect feed for domestic livestock.

Dinesh Pariyar, project



PHOTOS: LISA CHOEGYAL

GROWING FEED: Kabita and Bhagabati Sapkota show their winter fodder crop that saves them the drudgery of collecting feedstock in the mountains.

leader and veteran of Nepal's Agriculture Research Council, tells me that since 2003 many species of oats have been trialled before this variety was selected as most suitable for the soil, climate and animals. Ram Prasad Ghimire, head of the government fodder and pasture division, adds that hours of women's time previously spent collecting feedstuff from the hills are saved, competition for scant resources is avoided and livestock forage guaranteed throughout the year. Most importantly, this innovation has resulted in improved milk yields from cows and



buffaloes, by as much as 36%.

Two women farmers from the cooperative adjust their red shawls and laugh at their sensible canvas shoes. They do not regret switching some of their fertile fields to animal fodder. "Supplying Kathmandu, we take our surplus milk to the collection centre once during winter and twice a day in summer. We can make an extra Rs50,000 per year and send our children to school and college," says one. Three happy cows serenely peruse us from beside the ochre-daubed homestead and a blue kingfisher flashes overhead.

Further on, we see oats, vetch, sorghum and berseem being propagated for seeds. For the first time Nepali farmers do not have to rely on substandard imported supplies. A bilious bright mini-tiller demonstrates how land can be ploughed in a matter of hours instead of backbreaking days needed with oxen or bullocks.

Dinesh tells me they have supplied several of these mechanical marvels, as well as reapers and seed threshers, that are rotated around the cooperatives. The ladies nod in agreement. They too get a turn.

Replicated throughout the country and shared with hundreds of thousands of farmers, this new technology, income from seeds and improved dairy yields have also helped earthquake recovery. As one of the worst hit wards in the April 2015 disaster, Aruchour is scattered with new earth bag houses funded by the National Reconstruction Authority.

Although there were few fatalities, every upland home was damaged and most of their animals lost, tethered and trapped beneath the collapsed buildings. During the miserable aftermath, villagers were crammed four households into one tent.

It is time to climb the clay clinging trail to the ridgetop house where 30 farmers are waiting, most

of them women. Clutching bitter-smelling marigolds and plied with tea and orange katas, we discuss progress and they enquire after Dr Keith and Professor John, the New Zealand Lincoln University specialists who have worked with them for over 20 years. Looking around the circle of colourful garments and attentive faces, I realise how little I know about the exhaustive farming practices that shape the landscape of Nepal.

John wrote to me that one of his best moments was sitting with a women's cooperative leader outside her home looking up at hills covered in shrubs and trees. She said: "Before you came we used to spend hours each day up there trying to find fodder for our livestock. Now we can sit here and watch the forest grow."

For some time my mobile has been ringing insistently, a wrong number I assume and silence its intrusion. Engrossed in the meeting's milking chat and musings on transformed lives, it is not until we reach Lakuri Bhangyang on the shortcut back to Kathmandu that I take the call. "Have you lost your wallet?"

I scramble in my bag, and sure enough it is missing, not only cash but the full disaster of driving licence, passes and cards in a navy leather purse with silver crest dating from the Prince of Wales' first trek in Nepal.

An unlikely couple on a motorcycle are revealed to be my saviours, my heros, my guardian angels. The saintly Mr Hari Timilsina and Mr Tamang had found my wallet on the roadside where I had stopped for that photograph, and persisted in tracking me down. Mysterious phone negotiations are conducted as we retrace our steps to rendezvous in a busy Panauti street. Mr Tamang hovers, short and shy, preferring not even to divulge his name. Trucks roar past as a black plastic briefcase is carefully unzipped by Mr Timilsina, tall, thin and eyes glittering with goodwill. My wallet is produced with panache. "I am a social worker," he grins, handing it to me, everything intact.

Contented cows munch in the sunshine as we leave the coveted township of Panauti, alleged to be immune from earthquakes, secured on a massive single stone. Dinesh and Ram laugh at my luck. Panauti's sacred confluence temples are nearby, where only the enlightened can perceive the fabled third river, but there is no time to give thanks for my extraordinary and undeserved good fortune. 🇳🇵

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Mr. Saurabh Deep Singla, Senior VP and CHRO, Ecom Express, India

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When it rains, it pours. It looks this winter will break all records in amount of rain and snowfall. The high Valleys now have layers upon layers of snow, with fresh flurries even before the previous snow has melted. Avalanches and rockfalls have hit several settlements, killing livestock. And we haven't seen the end of it. After this week's westerly, we have a short respite over the weekend, when another frontal system will move in and bring more snow and rain early next week.

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17° 4°	18° 7°	18° 8°

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Toilet trained expert

A Nepali researcher is on a mission to make smart toilets accessible to the world's poor

Sonia Awale
in Cape Town

For someone who jet sets around the world, hobnobbing with governments and scientists to promote affordable and ecological toilets, Roshan Shrestha found out for himself just how difficult it is during a recent visit to his home in Nepal.

The Seattle-based 55-year-old sanitation expert (*pictured below*) found that the septic tank at his family home below Swayambhu was overflowing. But he had no clue who to turn to, and how to get it emptied.

"I did not know where to go,"

recalled Shrestha during a break at a Faecal Sludge Management Conference last week in Cape Town. "If it was so difficult for me, I can only imagine how hard it must be for the general public."

Shrestha finally got in touch with a private service provider and got the problem fixed after a few days. With over 30 years of experience in improving sanitation, Shrestha was promoted last month as Deputy Director of the Urban Sanitation Markets at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF).

Shrestha is a leading authority in the field, and involved in the BMGF's Reinvent the Toilet Challenge that has scientists around the world competing for the best design of a new generation

of toilets that do not use water, are cheap to install and easy to operate.

Shrestha has been rewarded for promoting water and sanitation projects in Nepal with his new responsibility at the BMGF, a philanthropic arm of the founder of Microsoft.

Says environmental expert Bhushan Tuladhar: "Roshan is passionate about sanitation, and does not treat it as just another job. He has great commitment and perseverance. His success is well deserved and it is only fitting that the foundation has recognised it."

The Gates Foundation's Brian Abrogast said of Shrestha's promotion: "Roshan Shrestha has been the best ambassador the foundation could ask for, exuding respect and compassion while generating admiration – and

impressive results."

The BMGF's toilet challenge has prompted top scientists from China, India and other parts of the world to come up with innovative new designs, from solar-powered smart toilets that generate hydrogen and electricity to sanitation systems that convert human waste into biological charcoal, fuel gas, minerals and clean water.

Shrestha had humble beginnings in a public school in Kathmandu before getting an MSc from Tribhuvan University in 1988. He worked in a water analysis laboratory to test the water in the Bagmati River. And later founded Environment and Public Health Organisation (ENPHO) that specialises in research and monitoring. Later, he got a PhD from a university in Austria in limnology, the study of inland water bodies. On his return, Shrestha successfully marketed the popular water purifier called Piyush.

Shrestha went on to introduce Nepal's first wetland system in Dhulikhel for small-scale wastewater treatment and reuse, and designed Nepal's first faecal sludge treatment plant in Teku in 1998.

"It was at this point that I realised that water quality would never improve without upgrading sanitation. At the root of water pollution is poorly managed sanitation," said Shrestha, who

then became involved in rainwater harvesting and turned his residence into a model eco-home complete with urine diversion dry toilet.

After a stint at UN HABITAT as a South Asia region technical supervisor, he was convinced toilet technology had to be less water-intensive to improve sanitation in the developing countries.

"We claim to have over 90% latrine coverage in Nepal but most structures do not meet required standards, and that is why we need a new breakthrough in toilets," said Shrestha.

The Gates Foundation has invested heavily in developing new technologies that can destroy pathogens on site through faecal sludge management.

"If a vast country like India can clean up its act, why can't Nepal? All we need is political will and proactive leadership committed to improving sanitation," adds Shrestha, whose foundation is currently developing a new course on sanitation at Kathmandu University, and working with Nepal Bureau of Standards on a new toilet standard.

Here in Cape Town at the global conference he helped put together, Shrestha says his goal is still to go back to Nepal: "I plan to head home, but after we have developed an adaptable technology for safer sanitation in developing countries so we can promote it in Nepal as well." 🇳🇵



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NEPAL'S YOUNGEST CUV

The price of rice

Nepal's paddy production is so important that the strength of the country's economy rises and falls depending on harvests

Ramesh Kumar

Rice is such an important food item that most Nepalis cannot do without it, but neither, it seems, can the country's economy.

Encouraging rice harvest figures have prompted the government to raise estimates for Nepal's economic growth rate this year. Paddy production was nearly 9% up from the previous year, reaching 5.6 million tons. Buoyed by these figures, Finance Minister Yuba Raj Khatiwada is optimistic that the country's annual economic growth rate will touch 7% this year.

The International Monetary Fund had predicted a 5% growth, but increased it to 6.5% mainly because of a healthy monsoon. However, the Asian Development

Bank's estimate is that Nepal's annual growth rate will be 5.5% this year.

"Rice harvests account for up to 1% of Nepal's annual economic growth rate," said Ram Krishna Regmi, who heads the statistics division of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock. Agriculture and forestry contribute more than a quarter of Nepal's GDP, of which rice makes up 21%. Two-thirds of Nepal's population depend directly on agriculture for livelihood, and of them, one in five live below the poverty line.

Although the estimates look somewhat encouraging, they have exposed yet again just how much Nepal's economy is dependent on the vagaries of the southwest monsoon. And with the summer rainfall becoming increasingly erratic because of climate change,

Nepal's economy will continue to be fragile.

Yubak Dhoj GC of the Agriculture and Livestock Development Ministry said that besides the monsoon, the reason for the increase in paddy production is due to an increase in the area under rice cultivation, the use of high-yield seeds, timely distribution of fertiliser, and the spread of mechanisation.

"There was a healthy monsoon, and timely paddy transplantation, and there were also fewer landslides and not as much river erosion," GC explained. Last year, paddy seedlings were transplanted in 97% of fields, up from only 86% the year before. All this also affected productivity, which increased to 3.67 tons per hectare, a 0.25 tons increase in yield per hectare from the previous year.

Even so, the total production could not meet Nepal's demand for 6.1 million tons of rice, and the shortfall was met with imports from India. In the first four months of this fiscal year alone, Nepal has already imported Rs9.35 billion worth of rice from India.

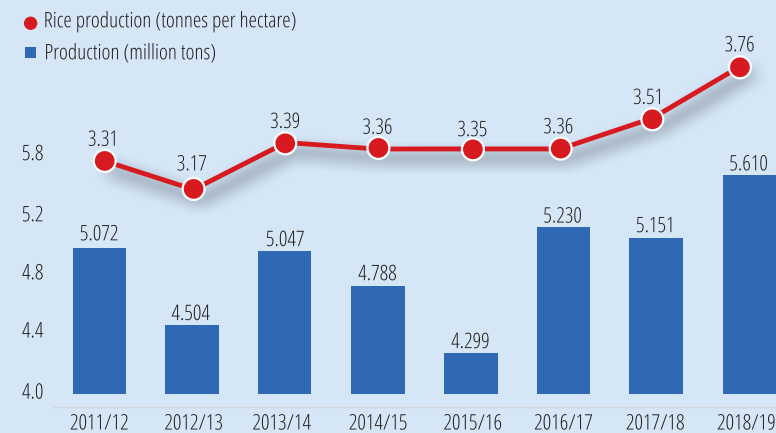
Despite the fact that educated youth, and children of farmers are either migrating or moving away from the land, agriculture is still the mainstay of Nepal's economy. Farming is also becoming increasingly feminised as most men are away in the cities or abroad for work. Which is why the increase in rice production is in one sense encouraging.

Not as encouraging, however, is that productivity is still sluggish. Paddy yield has gone up from 2.4 tons per hectare 30 years ago to only 3.6 tons today, whereas

productivity is 4.1 tons in Bhutan, 6.6 in Japan, and 7.0 in South Korea. Productivity of other crops has also not gone up by much. The reason is that nearly 70% of agriculture is still rain-fed. Cheap imports of rice from India (*see adjoining article*) as well as the disappearance of traditional rice varieties suited to Nepal's micro-climates have also impacted production.

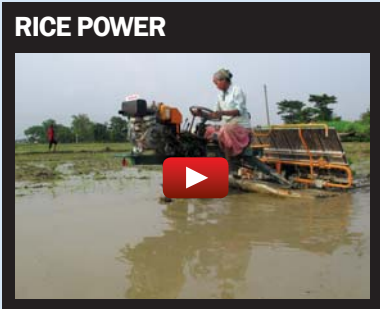
The Ministry of Agriculture that includes forests, fisheries and livestock, had a budget of nearly Rs80 billion this year. But very little of that money goes into actually increasing production, most is spent on salaries and administration. The subsidies given to farmers is either misused, or doled out to party faithful. Foreign donors have invested Rs16 billion in agriculture in the past seven years specifically to improve yields, with no





significant impact. Most farmers are indebted because even if they have increased harvests, their food and cash crops have not found a market, or the prices are too low. In fact, agriculture was never a priority for successive governments and ministers who have seen farmers only as vote banks, and not food banks.

Prime Minister Oli's slogan of 'Prosperous Nepal and Happy Nepalis' is intricately linked to raising agricultural productivity with investment in irrigation, farm inputs, mechanisation and land reform. 



Watch video about how rice production is affected by valuable farmlands being engulfed by urbanisation, and traditional varieties of rice replaced by cheap imports from India. Even though rice production went up by 9% this year, yields are still sluggish and paddy harvests depend on a healthy monsoon.

nepalitimes.com 



Right rice at right time

Despite increased paddy production, why is Nepal still importing rice?

Rajendra Uprety
in Sunsari

Only old timers remember that Nepal once used to be a major exporter of rice. At a time when India was importing rice in 1961, Nepal exported 280,000 tons of rice worth \$43 million. By 1985, the last year Nepal had a surplus, the country exported rice valued at \$10 million.

A growing population, increasing consumption and falling production meant that supply could not meet domestic demand. By 2015, Nepal imported 531,000 tons of rice worth \$210 million, mainly from India. By this time, India was exporting \$6.3 billion worth of premium rice in a year. (*See graph*).

Nepal is now in a paradoxical situation where although rice production and productivity are steadily increasing (*see adjoining article*) it is importing more rice than ever. This situation can easily be reversed if we synchronise our agricultural policy and outreach to farmers to grow the varieties of rice that consumers demand.

A visit to Surya Agro in Jhapa recently was a vivid indication of the state of affairs. At the mill that produces the Makkhan brand rice there were trucks unloading Jira Masino type of rice imported from India. What was going on here?

Despite an increase in rice production, we are more dependent on imports than ever

before because our farmers are not growing the kind of rice that Nepali consumers want. Paddy and rice imports from India peak at harvest time in Nepal.

Records at the Biratnagar customs office show that in the last fiscal year, 89,729 tons of rice were imported through the border, and it was between January-March that most of the rice (55%) and paddy (65%) were brought in. Remarkably, paddy imports from India are highest in the months when Nepal's markets are full of freshly harvested paddy.

To be sure, most rice exporting countries also import some rice. For example, Vietnam exported 5.2 million tons of rice last year, but imported 25,500 tons of the grain. Nepal also exports a small amount of rice, while importing much more. The reason for this is that countries that export large amounts of cheaper varieties also need to import smaller quantities of premium rice to meet domestic demand.

The main reason why Nepal imports so much rice despite rising production is because our farmers are not growing the right type of rice, and the government's efforts are not directed towards helping them grow the varieties that Nepali consumers prefer. For example, the Masuli variety of rice was common throughout eastern Nepal, and two thirds of the farmers in this region grew that variety.

Today, consumer demand has shifted to Jira Masinu variety, yet half the farmers are growing Rajit and Swarnal, which are not in

high demand. This shows that our promotion and policies are running counter to consumer preference. The result is that Nepal imports Indian paddy (which is not cheaper than Nepali rice) at a time when domestic paddy floods the market, and it is also the reason why rice imports are not decreasing.

Once we have decided on the variety of rice that is in demand, Nepali farmers need to be helped with improving yield though better seeds, irrigation, techniques and mechanisation. Given these interventions, Nepal can easily increase productivity from the average 3.6 tons per hectare currently to more than 5 tons per hectare.

There are also some post-harvest market interventions with pricing coordination, storage and processing. Thus, once we start producing rice varieties that are in most demand with high yield and at attractive prices, Nepal can become not just self-sufficient in rice, but can also return to being an exporter. For this, we also have to conserve, and brand our own varieties of premium rice.

Nepal has everything going for it: a long tradition of paddy cultivation, hard-working farmers, a domestic market that has critical mass, and international demand for the unique varieties found in Nepal. All it needs is concerted government policy, and coordination between consumer demand and supply from farmers. 

Rajendra Uprety, PhD, is with the Regional Agriculture Training Centre in Jhumka of Sunsari.

SEAN SHOEMAKER

EVENTS

NITFest 2019

The Nepal International Theatre Festival is a celebration of art, culture and traditions through theatre performances, and brings 30 diverse plays from 9 countries to Kathmandu. The plays are spread across 4 theatres across the valley. Rs300 for each show.

6pm at Mandala Theatre, Anamnagar, (01)5705761:
1. *Roop Aroop*, India, 1 March
2. *Jokhana*, Nepal, 2 March
3. *Ek Mulaqat Manto Se*, India, 3 March
4. *Desaparaecidos 43*, Italy, 4 March



3pm at Kausi Theater, Teku, 9841226959
1. *In Transit*, India, 1 March
2. *Paanch*, Nepal, 2 March
3. *Head 2 Head*, India, 3 March
4. *Nidravathwam*, India, 4 March

4:30pm, Gothale Theater, Battisputali, (01)4469621
1. *Hip Hop Coppelia*, Nepal, 1 March
2. *Ta Rehayee*, Afghanistan, 2 March
3. *Mattbring*, Bangladesh, 3 March
4. *Mokshada*, Nepal, 4 March

1pm at Kirtipur Theatre, Kirtipur, 9803949580
1. *Gaida Times*, Nepal, 1 March
2. *Aaran*, Nepal, 2 March
3. *Helen*, India, 3 March
4. *Garbha Chhita*, Nepal, 4 March

The Big Quiz

The quiz has 10 rounds with five questions each. With a broad range of topics, you are bound to find your forte. Each team can have up to 6 people. Bring your own team or join a table. Rs200 per person will be collected, and awarded to the winning team.
6 March, 7-8:30pm, Rs200, (01)5536051, Base camp Outdoor Lifestyle, Jhamsikhel



Mahashivaratri

Thousands of devotees assemble at the Pashupatinath temple, pray and fast for spiritual cleansing in this Hindu Festival honouring Lord Shiva. Sadhus from Nepal and neighbouring India travel to the temple.
4 March, Pashupatinath temple

Gyalpo Lhosar

Tibetan and Sherpa communities celebrate their new year.
7 March, Tundikhel



Stories

An exhibition of etchings by Sauranga Darshandhari, recipient of Shakti Art by Women Award.
1-23 March, 11am-5pm and 12-5pm (Saturdays), Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited, (01) 4218048, 4433930

Karnali Art Exhibition

15 Nepali artists have captured the lifestyle of Karnali region through their paintings which were created in Mugu as part of the Karnali Art Workshop.
4 March, 11:30am, Theatre Mall, Kirtipur, 9861463752

MUSIC



Jenn Cleary

Cleary's music ranges from upbeat songs to soulful ballads. She writes her own songs, has a dynamic stage presence, and will be performing live in Kathmandu this Sunday.
3 March, 6:30 to 9pm, Ramsterdam, Ramhiti, 9841242224

Echoes in the Valley

Nepal's finest bands -- Phatcowlee, Night, Kanta Dab Dab, Kutumba-- come together for the first time. This concert is bound to offer a diverse range of vibrant Nepali music.
2 March, 8pm onwards, Lord of the Drinks, Thamel, 9843948991

Metronome Band

Metronome is a folk and fusion instrumental band and performs a variety of tunes with guitar, flute and tabla.
1 March, 4-6:30pm, Sasaa the Newa Restaurant, Kirtipur, (01)4336770

Jam up

Topaz will lead this weekly social jam up session. Interested people can message Bikalpa Art Cafe to participate. There will be a sound system and other basic instruments. Participants can also bring their own instruments to enjoy with fellow music enthusiasts.
Every Saturday starting 2 March, 6-8pm, Bikalpa Art Cafe and Bar, Pulchok, 9851147776



Sabin Rai and the Pharoah

The band is a powerhouse of Nepali pop rock music. Be a part of their concert for a lively and enjoyable musical night.
1 March, 7-10pm, Oskar Bar and Grill, Lazimpat, (01)4418648

DINING



Embassy

Enjoy a hearty meal in the restaurant popular for its assorted menu and lively ambience. Try the Duck Breast, served on a bed of mashed potatoes and roasted vegetables in a rich peppery steak sauce.
Opposite to Japanese Embassy, Lazimpat, 9802024040



The Bent Fork

This European style restaurant offers the best salads and varieties of continental dishes. Cosy evenings with family and friends. Try their signature Grilled Chicken Burger or Beef Burger.
Bishal Nagar, 9802049888

Latin American

Enjoy authentic taste of Sopa Azteca de tortillas, tostilocos, papas a la huancaína, pasticho, enchilladas, burritos, and many more in this Latin American food festival.
1-3 March, 6:30 to 10:30pm, Hotel Radisson, Lazimpat, (01) 4411818, outlets@radkat.com.np



Koto

Maki sushi, cold or fried tofu, tempura, fried chicken, miso soup, chicken karage, Katsu Don. Koto restaurant offers all varieties from the Japanese cuisine.
Darbar Marg, (01) 4220346

BBQ Night

Fairfield by Marriott brings back the Friday night BBQs with succulent grilled delicacies that are a treat to the senses, accompanied by beer and chaat.
Every Friday, 6:30-9:30pm, Rs1499 Nett per person, Kava restaurant, Thamel, (01)4217999, 9801227613

GETAWAY



Weekend Hike

Partake in a short 2-day hike to reconnect with nature and enjoy activities like camp fire, national park visit, mountain view, and village tour. Hike from Shivapuri to Chisapani (7-8 hours) on day 1 and Chisapani to Sundarjal on day 2 (6-7 hours). Go online for cost and other details.
8-9 March, Hike for Nepal, hikeformenepal@gmail.com, 9860330497, 9846190957, 9851178537, 9851014616

Retreat at Damaar

A retreat for contemplators and creators in an undisturbed sanctuary to enrich and enlighten your inner self.
Bethanchowk, Kavre, 9851052442



Bandipur Kaushi Inn

A small, rustic place to stay in the idyllic village of Bandipur replete with cultural diversity and traditional architecture.
Bandipur, Tanahu, (065) 520083

The path of Zen

A 7-day intensive Osho meditation retreat with Swami Anand Arun. An ideal way to cleanse your mind and detach from the repression of technology and city life.
8-14 March, Tapoban International Commune, Nagarjun Hills, (01)5112012



Park Village Resort

Yoga, detox and ayurveda treatment in a quiet corner of Kathmandu. Enjoy the services of Himalayan wellness centre - a one stop centre to relax your mind and body.
Himalayan Peace and Wellness Center, Park Village Resort, Budhanilkantha, (01) 4370286

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All the world is a stage in Kathmandu

The Nepal International Theatre Festival 2019 showcases drama in real life

Sewa Bhattarai

“A girl doesn’t need a master’s degree, I have found a headmaster for you instead.”

Thus starts *Rape Machine*, a play in which actress Diya Maskey gets married off with a chain around her neck instead of a garland of flowers. Later as she travels in a public bus, she is sprayed with white foam – an allusion to women being molested on public transport. Volunteers walk down the aisle handing out candy, each of which is wrapped in a message about violence against women: ‘Today it is her, tomorrow it could be you.’ Or ‘Don’t tell me how to dress, tell them not to rape.’

The opening performance at the Nepal International Theatre Festival 2019 at Mandala Theatre in Kathmandu on Monday was emblematic of everything that characterises Nepali theatre today: realistic, hard-hitting stories and experimental storytelling.

The Festival is the first of its kind with all of Kathmandu’s theatres taking part. Over this week, 30 plays from nine countries are being performed in four theatres: Theatre Mall in Kirtipur, Kausi Theatre in Teku, Shilpee Theatre in Battisputali, and Mandala Theatre in Anamnagar.

“We used to see such festivals all over the world, and longed to have one in Nepal too,” says Rajan Khatiwada, festival director. “Considering the rise in interest in theatre in Nepal, it was high time



PHOTO: NITFEST.ORG



HARD HITTING: Salil Subedi buried in sand for a performance at the inauguration of NITFEST 2019 (*above*). Deeya Maskey is sprayed with white foam in *Rape Machine*, alluding to abuse on public transport (*left*).

all other art forms since it includes storytelling, painting, set design, costumes, visual arts, sound, performance, etc.

Across the world, actors start from theatre because it is the place to hone their stagecraft. Nepali actors from Saroj Khanal in the past to Dayahang Rai today made it big in movies after starting out in theatre. Most artists credit Sunil Pokharel who established Gurukul Theatre in the 1990s with pioneering modern theatre in Nepal.

Theatre is also popular because

it is telling stories that Nepali cinema usually does not. “Our theatre is very different from the formulaic storytelling of cinemas,” explains a festival mentor Anup Baral. “We try to look for and tell stories that reflect our current society, which audience do not get anywhere else.”

Theatre therefore attracts a select class of audience that wants to go beyond masala entertainment. “The audience of theatres and cinemas are very different,” says actor Dayahang Rai. “While cinema is created for a mass audience, theatre is created for more thoughtful viewers who appreciate nuanced storytelling. Our crowd is mostly young students with intellectual curiosity.”

The vibrancy in Nepal’s theatre scene also reflects a society in ferment, coming out of a brutal war,

a decade of instability and hopes of a revolution dashed. Visual and performance artist Ashmita Ranjit believes there is a burst of creativity in the theatre scene in Kathmandu. “There is a lot of experimentation going on and this festival has also shown remarkable solidarity among the theatres who have come together to organise it.”

Indeed, Ranjit herself is one of the experimenters in performance art where artists perform as themselves rather than characters. Along with musician Salil Subedi, she performed at the opening of the festival. While Subedi lay buried in the ground and slowly made music with a singing bowl, Ranjit brought him out of the earth, and together they took a fishbowl full of water and sprayed it at the audience.

Explains Subedi: “The performance symbolised the fact that we all come from the earth. Inflicting physical pain on myself was very different from simply acting it out in a drama. It underlined the importance of nature, and especially of water to us. This is environmental activism on stage.”

Despite the boom, Nepali theatre still suffers from a limited audience, lack of funds, shortage of theatres, and playwrights. Prime Minister KP Oli himself inaugurated the festival, and promised to change things: “Theatre is not just entertainment, it is also a means of social change,” Oli said at the event. “It is also the government’s duty to protect and help it thrive.”

The theatre community hopes he was not just mouthing those lines. 🇳🇵









Bulbul

In an industry prone to profit from escapism, Nepali cinema has suddenly started coming out with movies that portray the reality of life with all its ugly truths. The latest is *Bulbul*, a film with a straightforward plot, ordinary characters and portraying contemporary Nepal where issues like gender, patriarchy, migration, joblessness, health care, and the struggle to survive are all intertwined. This is not about 2 hours of dancers gyrating to the pulse of masala film songs, but a chronicle of the life of Ranakala (Swastima Khadka) who drives a tempo in Kathmandu's busy and narrow streets. Her husband went to Saudi Arabia to work, but has not returned for six years and cannot

send money home. She lives in a dingy flat taking care of her paralysed father-in-law. Ranakala has a daughter too, but has placed her child in a boarding school so that she can have a brighter future. *Bulbul* is written and directed by Binod Paudel, principal of Oscar International College of Film Studies which has produced quite a few filmmakers of the New Wave of Nepali Cinema. A lead character like Ranakala is a novelty in Nepali films, which usually have exaggerated personas, unrealistic romances and facile characters. In *Ranakala*, however, director Paudel taps into the story of struggle and the complex emotions of a Nepali woman's life. *Bulbul* has a character driven plot, and Swastima Khadka's authentic portrayal of Ranakala is refreshing and captivates. Her hardships are writ large in her sombre expressions and sharp dialogues which give us a nuanced, all-round portrait of her complex psychology. One can't help but root for this simple, independent girl as she makes a living in a difficult city. She is fierce at her job, tender as a mother, understanding as a friend, struggling as a wife. But overall *Ranakala* embodies the female *shakti*. Since migration has become such an important facet of the lives of Nepalis today, it is inevitable that it figures prominently in contemporary Nepali music videos and movies. But in *Bulbul*, Paudel tackles a new figure in the equation -- the impact of migration on the wives men leave behind at home. Ranakala speaks to her husband

through ear pods as she drives her tempo, pleading that he come home, speaking frankly about their relationship. Paudel is subtle, but searing as he shows us the toll migration is taking on women -- a tale repeated hundreds of thousands of times in homes across Nepal. The supporting cast is also competently natural, elevating the movie's authenticity. Mukunda Bhushal as Chopendra provides both comic relief and is refreshing as an anti-hero character that veers from the traditional perception of a lead actor in Nepali movies. Ranakala's co-drivers demonstrate a camaraderie that sustains them through difficult times, perhaps through the knowledge that they are suffering together. Ranakala's dismal habitation and its overwhelming silence, always with a backdrop of monsoon rain, poignantly accentuate her lonely struggle. *Bulbul* gets more intense as the plot thickens, as unpredictably as life often does. We don't know what will happen to Ranakala and what decisions she will make, but we want to understand her psyche because Paudel builds our intimacy with her in a way that makes us co-travellers in her life. *Bulbul* does not have any unnecessary drama, it is a candid immersion into contemporary Nepal through a woman's eyes. Paudel has redefined what a heroine is in Nepali cinema: not just a pretty lady dancing to a superficial romance, but an individual trying to stay afloat after being thrown off the deep end of life. **Prakriti Kandel**

nepalitimes.com

Go online to watch trailer





RICHARD MORRIS/TWITTER

WAR AND PEACE: British Minister of State for the Armed Forces Mark Lancaster and Nepal Communist Party Co-chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal discuss strengthening UK-Nepal relations in Kathmandu last week.



MOFA

LABOUR ISSUE: Foreign Affairs Minister Pradeep Gyawali meets with Guy Ryder, Director General of the International Labour Organisation in Geneva on Tuesday. Gyawali is in Geneva for the UN Human Rights Council.



NEPAL ARMY

DELIGHTED: Nepal Army Chief Purna Bahadur Thapa and Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for South and Southeast Asia Joe Felter meet on Monday at Army Headquarters in Bhadrakali.



KUNDADIXIT

CLOSED AIRSPACE: Two flights of Qatar Airways and Turkish Airlines wait for clearance after India and Pakistan closed their air spaces on Wednesday.



DFID NEPAL

FEDERALISM AND DEVELOPMENT: Finance Minister Yuba Raj Khatri speaks on federalism and its role in development at the London School of Economics on Friday.

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“Yes, we put that bomb”

Interview in *BBC Nepali Service*, 24 February



The Nepali Communist Party Maoist led by Netra Bikram Chand (Biplav) has owned up to the Ncell bomb that killed one person in Lalitpur on Friday. The party's central committee member Hemanta Prakash Oli spoke to Gani Ansari of BBC Nepali Service on Sunday evening. Excerpts:



SETOPATI

BBC Nepali: Why did you set off the bomb?

Hemanta Prakash Oli: The blast was a retaliation against the company evading capital gains tax. A life was lost, but little things like that happen in revolutions. We are sad.

How can you call that little? A man lost his life.

No, we did not say this was a little incident.

But that is exactly what you just said.

I said such things might happen. But we do not target people, it was an accident. We are very sad about the loss of life, and have already expressed our condolences.

Can you bring back this person's life by saying sorry?

The lives of thousands who died in Syria cannot be brought back either.

Instead of violence there are other ways to address tax issues.

No government agency has paid any attention to this looting. The judiciary is itself tainted. We have declared a parallel government because this one is unjust.

The state has threatened to come down heavily on your party.

If the government reacts to injustice with injustice, the Nepali people will retaliate strongly. We will demolish the state and establish a new state structure.

How many more innocent people will have to die to fulfil your political ambition?

This is a question that we should ask Prachanda, Baburam and Badal as well. They took 17,000 lives unnecessarily. They should be punished. And we will be more careful that such accidents do not happen again.

Why could you not wait for dialogue before resorting to violence?

The government does not want to negotiate with us. What we want to talk about is that 17,000 people sacrificed their lives for the revolution and we controlled 80% of Nepal. We had a strong army of 40,000. We want to reinstate the revolution. We are ready to negotiate on these terms. We wanted revolutionary change, but instead of class struggle, we had class reconciliation. Our leaders joined with reactionaries and rose to power.

People also say this is all about extortion.

Do not believe these rumours. We did not take up this risky path of revolution for a few donations.

Kantipur, 26 February

कान्तिपुर

The Nepal Communist Party Maoist led by Netra Bikram Chand (Biplav) has been sending letters to all rural municipalities of Province 5, demanding 2% of their development budgets. The letters claim to spend the money to install 'scientific socialism' as an alternative to parliamentary democracy.

Many local level elected representatives are said to have already paid up, some from their personal coffers, others using their development budget. In a public hearing in Rupandehi recently, a municipality chief admitted to having paid Rs50,000 to the Maoists.

The Biplav faction has been asking for three different types of donations: 2% of the development budget, up to Rs500,000 lump sum from the salaries of elected representatives, and a tender worth Rs10 million.

Many local administrations in Gulmi have been extorted. After rising pressure, municipality chiefs have got local administration officers to

Extortion in a federal state



SETOPATI

pay off the Maoists.

The party has also demanded 2% of the development budgets from six municipalities and two rural municipalities of Bardia. Party sources reveal that teachers and contractors have also been approached for donations.

Although the problem is rampant in Dang, officers there do not want to talk about it. Some are giving what is asked, while others are trying to bargain it down.

Mim Bahadur Gharti Magar of Rolpa municipality said the Maoists demanded a month's

salary from him, and half the infrastructure budgets from other local governments.

Businesses in Banke are also being extorted. Said one trader: "We got a letter demanding money, it is sad that we are facing extortion and threats once again."

Stop the extortion

Editorial in *Nagarik*, 26 February

नागरिक

The Nepal Communist Party Maoist led by Netra Bikram Chand (Biplav) has resorted to violence in over a dozen locations to set fire to Ncell towers. A civilian has already lost his life, and two more are wounded. These incidents cannot be taken lightly. The government must strongly stop this violence.

The Biplav faction has tried to justify its action by claiming that it wants to punish Ncell for failing to pay capital gains tax. But the reality is different. This is a repeat of the Maoist conflict during which people who refused to pay up could be killed.

Netra Bikram Chand was close to the current Home Minister Ram Bahadur Thapa who may still have a soft spot for him. It remains to be seen if the Home Ministry will prosecute this case strongly. So far, the government seems to be hurt more by a few bitter words in social media than by such heinous acts.



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It's a crime not to call it terrorism

Kunda Dixit

The terror attack on the Ncell head office in Lalitpur that cost the life of Sing Prasad Gurung and seriously injured three others on the night of 22 February proved that the Nepal conflict never really ended.

The ten year war cost 17,000 lives, left tens of thousands injured, and 1,400 disappeared. Thirteen years after the war ended, one more innocent civilian was killed last week.

A hardline faction of the Maoist party led by Netra Bikram Chand (Biplav) has owned up to the attack, and said the death was 'unfortunate'. Chand used to be close to the current Home Minister Ram Bahadur Thapa and Pushpa Kamal Dahal, but never took part in elections, accusing his former comrades of ditching the revolution.

comment on our internal affairs, but what do we do when we ourselves do not speak up at a time like this.'

Journalist Girish Giri, whose father was killed while mayor of Birganj in 2004 for ignoring a Maoist ransom demand for Rs500,000 attached a copy of the extortion letter, and wrote in a Tweet: 'Don't those who are barking 'I will whack you for extorting' now have to answer for killing my upright father precisely for not coughing up five lakhs? Or are these rulers going to keep on barking?' (*See screenshot below*)

Indeed, Nepal's social media has erupted with accusations against the Biplav group attacking Ncell as part of a nationwide extortion racket that to many is reminiscent of the war years. Some have wryly noted the similarity between the Nepali word for 'donation' (chanda) and the surname of Netra Bikram Chand.

In a BBC Nepali interview, Maoist leader Hemanta Oli said this week: "A life was lost, but

Biplav's former bodyguard was reportedly detained on Wednesday, the NCP's former Maoist home minister has shown no real inclination to go after a group that has unleashed a wave of terror nationwide.

By their silence, the former UML members of the NCP have shown they are also complicit in not going after the perpetrators. Although the UML is probably the least guilty of human rights violations during the war, its members have lost moral standing by not even condemning the attack.

Many senior UML leaders had thought that uniting with the Maoists would moderate the former guerrillas, but it is now looking more and more like the UML itself has been subsumed by the Maoists.

Pushpa Kamal Dahal earned legitimacy from the unification with the UML, returned to a position of power after elections in 2017 that he would have lost if the Maoists had contested alone, and he managed to muffle accusations of war crimes.

For its part, the UML by uniting with the Maoists has sacrificed its social democratic credentials, and its silence in not condemning last Friday's terror bomb speaks louder than words. The UML's strong party structure has been compromised, its local committees are in limbo.

Meanwhile, the Maoists within the NCP are not socialised into democratic functioning and essentially remain a sub-party taking orders only from Dahal and not from Oli. In fact, the ex-Maoists are doing everything in their power to embarrass the former UML, and have let Oli be their lightning rod.

The Home Ministry which should have been the first-responder in last week's bomb attack and arson on telecom towers is run by a Maoist commandant-turned-minister who used to be Biplav's buddy. He is the last person to go after the one who gave the order to bomb Ncell and kill Sing Prasad Gurung.

It is time Prime Minister Oli defended the social democratic values his party once stood for, reshuffle his Cabinet to get a minister with cleaner democratic credentials, and if need be, start thinking about post-nuptial arrangements. 🇳🇵



SETO PATI

On the night of the attack on Ncell, the party also set fire to a dozen of the Malaysian-owned company's cell phone towers across the country, causing damage worth millions and cutting off communications to a large swathe of the country. (*See page 13*)

There was shock and dismay in the Nepali cybersphere following the attack, with a lot of the scorn heaped on the government for not bothering to issue a statement or commiserate with the bereaved Gurung family.

'A foreign ambassador condemned the terrorist attack, but our own prime minister did not utter a word. He hasn't visited the family to offer his condolences,' wrote Salokya in a hard-hitting blog in the portal mysansar.com 'We often wish that others would not



little things like that happen in revolutions. We do not deliberately target people. It was an accident."

Many have also remarked that the ex-Maoists in the unified Nepal Communist Party (NCP) cannot really blame the Biplav faction of extortion and terror because those were very tactics they themselves used in the past. Although



Terror attack

Family of Sing Prasad Gurung remember a proud soldier, devoted husband, father and friend

Sonia Awale

The grim weather on Wednesday morning reflected the sombre mood at the Gurung residence in Kusunti where relatives gathered to mourn the death of Sing Prasad Gurung on 22 February in a terrorist bomb.

Women dressed in dark jackets and men with shaven heads offered prayers and sobbed silently to perform *ashyaun*, a Gurung

mourning ritual carried out by the maternal side and in-laws of the deceased.

It was a memorial for Sing Prasad Gurung, 49, a retired Singapore Police Force officer who was killed in the explosion outside the Ncell head office in Nakkhu. Taking responsibility for the deadly blast that also injured three others was the Maoist faction headed by Netra Bikram Chanda (Biplav) who broke away from the mainstream Maoist party that is now part of the ruling Nepal Communist Party.

Eye witnesses saw Gurung park his vehicle and approach the suspicious object at the Ncell gate when it exploded. CCTV footage reportedly show the Ncell security guard kicking the object away after it was left on the sidewalk by two men in a motorcycle. The security guard is said to have told police he kicked it because he



“घर शान्ति नै विश्व शान्तिको आधार: दिगो विकासका लागि लैङ्गिक हिंसारहित समाज”
"From the peace in the home to peace in the world make education sage for all"



नेपाल सरकार
सञ्चार तथा सूचना प्रविधि मन्त्रालय
सूचना तथा प्रसारण विभाग



ALL PHOTOS: MONIKA DEUPALA

leaves tragedy in its wake



TEARS KEEP FALLING: (From left to right, top image) Family of the late Sing Prasad Gurung including Son Ankush, wife Sushila and daughters Shina and Sweata performed rites in his memory on Wednesday in Kusunti. Relatives and relatives paid final respects to Sing Prasad and consoled each other.

thought it was a hoax. Gurung, who was nearest to the explosion, and few other pedestrians were thrown up in the air by the force of the blast. His legs and hip were shattered, and later died at nearby MediCiti Hospital. “He was the friendliest person I knew. He was frank, straightforward and had an open heart,” remembered Ram Prasad Gurung, Sing Prasad’s closest friend and colleague at the Singapore Police Force. Originally from Gilung village of Lamjung district, Sing Prasad Gurung spent 27 years in Singapore Police before retiring five years ago as Senior Station Inspector, and relocating to Kathmandu. He is survived by his wife Sushila Gurung, 40, and three children: 20-year-old Sweata who is an undergrad in Sydney, 17-year-old Shina who is an A-levels student at GEMS, and 12-year-old

son Ankush who studies at DAV school. Sushila Gurung looked as if she was in a trance during the ritual, broke into deep sobs, and had fainting spells during the ceremony next to a framed portrait of her husband in uniform. The Gurungs come from a military family, but the relatives looked shell-shocked with the tragic loss. The last few days have been traumatic, and they have not been able to focus on the future. The family had a modest source of income from Sing Prasad’s pension, but now there is uncertainty. More distant relatives and friends who came from Pokhara after they heard the news say it was just like Sing Bahadur to try to help out in a time of crisis, and with his military training thought he could deal with the suspected explosive device. However, they say neither

the police nor Ncell have been forthcoming with more information about what really happened that Friday night even though both are in possession of CCTV footage. “We want to know what exactly transpired. My friend died for no reason, he was innocent,” said Ram Prasad Gurung. “We demand he be declared a martyr by the state and if the incident was politically motivated, Ncell and government should compensate the family for their part in his death.” As the ceremony winded down, relatives gathered in the living room to pay final respects to Sing Prasad Gurung, offering fruits, sacred thread, incense, and flowers. Some burst into tears and they all consoled each other. One of the mourners said as she wept on the shoulder of a relative: “I had been meaning to visit him for some time, but now I will never be able to.” 🇳🇵

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BLACK CHIMNEY

FIRST BARREL: Matured in the unpeated peated Scotch Malt, finished in eight years in charred American Oak barrels in Scotland, capturing the warming spirit and smoky character of vanilla, cinnamon and other spicy aromas with intense and rich taste and a smoky finish.

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Not for the Faint-hearted

Comes news that Lonely Planet has ranked Kathmandu #5 among Top Ten cities to visit in 2019. Are they mad? This is outrageous. How dare they? What are the folks at Lonely Planet smoking? Ask anyone who has visited Kathmandu recently, they will not agree that Nepal's capital deserves to be #5 on the list. It should be #1.

Still, thanks anyway from the false bottoms of our suitcases for the endorsement. This is recognition of the hard work our city fathers have put into making Kathmandu such a fantastic adventure destination. (Slogan: 'Had Enough Excitement for One Lifetime? Return in Your Next Incarnation')

Half the fun about Nepal is the thrill of getting there on our national flag carrier. It is full of surprises, and there is never a dull moment. It is advisable to get to the airport at least two days before departure just to make sure your flight has not been pre-poned. Also, try to stay on for a day or two after the scheduled departure just in case your flight to Kathmandu is postponed.

En route, imbibe your second bottle of Chivas and share it with those seated next to you because you are now allowed to bring in only 1 litre of whiskey into Nepal. This will put you and fellow-passengers in the right frame of mind as the pilots throw in a free two-hour mountain sightseeing flight as the plane waits for its turn to land at Kathmandu.

The alcohol will also fortify you to deal with the bus from plane to terminal which at 3.7 seconds holds the world record for the shortest bus ride in the world. All 330 passengers of your widebody jet will be packed into one bus for this low-oxygen test to make sure you are suitably acclimatised for air quality in the city. If you faint, then let's face it, you are not ready for the adventures that await you. (Motto: 'Visit Kathmandu: It Is Not for the Faint-Hearted')

At Immigration there are separate serpentine queues for the visa form, to pay visa fee, for immigration stamp, to test if you are mettle free, queuing up for an x-ray to check if you are bringing in gold bullion in amounts less than 33kg. Nepal is such a popular destination that people are lining up just to get in.

To make sure you get more bang for your buck during your adventure holiday, the Ministry of Tourism. Marxism and Leninism has now ensured your trek starts at the airport itself. It has wisely, and without any warning, moved the parking lot 300m down a steep slope for which you will need climbing equipment, crampons, jumars, porters and a mountain guide.

You will also notice that Kathmandu's air quality has been optimised for your breathing pleasure. Oxygen masks will drop down automatically, and all you have to do is pull the mask, cover your nose and mouth and breathe normally.

Next Week: Fun Things To Do In Kathmandu



God created WINTERS,
we created HOT RUM PUNCH

Khukri XXX Rum

Cinnamon Powder

Lemon Juice

Star Anise

Cardamom

Hot Water

Honey

Clove