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AMIT MACHAMASI

PLANTING SEEDS OF DEMOCRACY

● Shristi Karki

Four members from Madhav Kumar Nepal's Unified Socialists including Urban Development Minister Ram Kumari Jhakri and Tourism Minister Prem Ale resigned from the Cabinet this week to make way for new ministers from their party. This followed their initial defiance of the party's order recalling them, and hinted at problems in Nepal's new party even after its local election wins

in Pokhara and Hetauda. However, there has been dissatisfaction within the party regarding the 5-party alliance's inability to fetch it better election results. Now, the cabinet reshuffle has revealed fissures within the party that broke away from the UML last year. Prime Minister Deuba of the Nepali Congress himself facilitated the split by overriding a constitutional provision with an ordinance so that UML dissidents could break away and join his coalition. Deuba's first year in office has

been rocky. He took over from the UML's K P Oli after a long and bruising power struggle in the midst of the pandemic. Deuba is credited with holding local elections despite initial reluctance of his Maoist and Unified Socialist coalition partners. But efforts to revive the economy have been stymied by Russia's war in Ukraine. Making matters worse was Finance Minister Janardan Sharma seeking to oust the Rastra Bank governor, which had Deuba's blessings. Sharma is also knee-deep in a budgetary scandal. Despite all the trouble and the differences within alliance members after local elections in May, Deuba's five-party alliance initially formed to oust K P Oli of the UML continues to hold. Even as the new ministers were sworn in, trouble was brewing in another coalition partner,

REFLECTIONS: A villager walks past a flooded paddy field in Pokhara this week as the annual rice planting kicked off.

the JSP with Upendra Yadav and Baburam Bhattarai blaming each other for poor showing in the May election. JSP and the breakaway LSP lost their Madhes Province strongholds, and Yadav has reached out to LSP chair Mahanta Thakur in hopes of a reunification. Now, Yadav has recalled JSP ministers without Bhattarai's input for a cabinet reshuffle. This could be the straw that breaks the camel's back and splits the party twice in less than a year. Meanwhile, Bhattarai is working on a Plan B: meeting his erstwhile Maoist nemesis Pushpa Kamal Dahal to smoke the peace pipe. There is also talk of Oli and Dahal getting back

DEUBA'S MIXED REPORT CARD
EDITORIAL
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together. With all this pre-election jostling, many in Deuba's own Nepali Congress think they do not really need an electoral alliance heading to the November polls. But the wily Deuba probably wants to prevent having to once more face a formidable Communist alliance of Maoists, Socialists and the UML in November. In February, Deuba also got the American-aided MCC project Parliament ratification despite considerable opposition from the Communist alliance partners, complicated geopolitics and polarising public opinion. But the government has found itself in the middle of another geopolitical quagmire with the US-proposed State Partnership Program (SPP). This has become such a hot potato that Deuba had to cancel a visit to the US in July. The opposing UML, coalition partners, as well as members of Deuba's own party want the prime minister to clarify his position on the SPP. American military training and exercises in Nepal is not new, but the SPP could be a minefield for Deuba ahead of elections, and at a time when Sino-US relations are at rock bottom. 🇳🇵



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Deuba's mixed report card

On his first anniversary in office this month, Nepal's five-time prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and his coalition government get a mixed report card.

Deuba came to power by riding on an internal feud within the leadership of the powerful Nepal Communist Party (NCP) that ruled the country after the UML and Maoists together won the 2017 polls. As the NCP disintegrated, so did the UML, and Deuba replaced K P Oli in July 2021.

It has been a chequered year for Deuba. On the plus side, more than 90% of Nepal's eligible population is fully vaccinated against Covid-19, the American-aided MCC project got ratified by Parliament after a bruising political battle, local elections were held.

However, just as Nepal was emerging from the Covid-19 pandemic, it plunged headlong into an economic crisis spawned by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The economy is in bad shape.

But perhaps the biggest achievement of the Deuba administration has been the relatively successful conduct of local polls in May which was held in 752 local constituencies with 35,045 representatives elected. Holding elections in time should not be regarded as an 'achievement', but we have to remember that Deuba had to convince both coalition partners Pushpa Kamal Dahal of the Maoists and Madhav Nepal of the CPN-Unified Socialists who were reluctant about polls because they thought their parties would lose.

Deuba even managed to convince Netra Bikram Chand, erstwhile separatist C K Raut, and Resham Chaudhari who had been expelled from Parliament on allegations of involvement in the Kailali massacre of 2015, not to disrupt the voting. But Deuba's second singular achievement was to steer the \$500 million MCC infrastructure grant through House ratification despite the political polarisation that it had created. The MCC was stuck in Parliament repeatedly when the NCP with its near two-thirds majority was in power, but Deuba deserves credit for deftly manoeuvring the bill through the House.

The MCC was not just important because of the size of the grant, but because the future of Nepal's hydropower development, distribution and possibility of future export of surplus electricity to India depends on it.

The previous Oli government had been accused of corruption in the import of

Covid test equipment, vaccines, security printing press, and real estate scams. The Deuba coalition has not been able to escape allegations of corruption in high places either.

As soon as his coalition took over from the Oli government, Deuba sent both Houses into recess and called a Cabinet meeting the very next day to pass an ordinance allowing parties to split with just 20% of the membership.

This was targeted directly at the UML, allowing its rump Unified Socialists to split off. This was a blatant misuse of power for partisan benefit, especially since it was Deuba himself who was responsible for a law requiring 40% membership of a parliamentary party for a break-up — a requirement especially designed in 2017 to prevent political instability.

All this was the height of hypocrisy for a coalition that had attacked the K P

Oli government for violating the rule of law. Deuba ended up out-doing Oli in bending rules for power and partisan gain.

Since then, scandals have been coming on thick and fast involving ministers in the Deuba government. Finance Minister Janardan Sharma first got burnt in sacking Nepal Rastra

Bank governor, then for allowing outside consultants to help him pass tax laws in the new budget that benefited only certain business houses.

Sharma then got embroiled in allegations that he had allowed special interest groups illegal access to the budget design process. And then there was the tape of now former Minister of Culture,

Tourism and Civil Aviation Prem Ale abusing and manhandling the head of Nepal Airlines, allegedly over refusing to give jobs to the minister's cronies. Instead of reprimanding the minister, Deuba's ministerial council sacked the airline chief.

There was also blatant interference in the promotion of the new police chief, which sent the message that the security services had been politicised.

Despite all this, by the sordid record of past governments in Nepal, this coalition government is relatively clean. With federal and provincial elections looming on the horizon, the Nepali Congress still has a chance to distance itself from its tainted partners and aim for a fresh mandate in November.

Santa Gaha Magar



AMIT MACHAMASI/NEPALI TIMES ARCHIVE

The Nepali Congress still has a chance to distance itself from its tainted partners and aim for a fresh mandate in November

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Climate Meltdown

Climate change is one of the biggest problems of our times. It did not start today, it took decades, but we must act now at all levels to prevent its most catastrophic consequences.

20 years ago this week, Nepali Times published a page 1 report about how the Khumbu Glacier has retreated, the increasing risk of Glacial Lake Outburst Floods and the elevated warming trends in the Himalaya.

It has only gotten worse since. The good news is that there is now widespread awareness about the climate crisis even as the global community struggles to achieve absolute political will to confront the impending disaster.

Excerpts from issue #100 28 June – 04 July 2002:

. The Khumbu Glacier has retreated 5 km since the first ascent of Mt Everest 50 years ago.
. 44 glacial lakes in Nepal and Bhutan are growing so fast, they are in danger of bursting their banks in the near future.
. A few small ponds on the Imja Glacier have grown in the past decade into a huge lake 2 km long.



Aside from the polar ice caps, it is in our mountains that the effects of atmospheric warming are most dramatic.

Temperature records started being kept in Nepal only 40 years ago, but even in that time, there is already a discernible warming trend. In some parts of the country, the average annual temperature has risen by 0.1 Celsius a year, and research shows the warming trend is faster in the trans-Himalayan regions of northwestern Nepal.

The only long-term solution is to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. But an international treaty

on cutting emissions is bogged down because of opposition mainly from the US, and disagreements over reduction quotas for developing countries like India and China.

From archive material of Nepali Times of the past 20 years, site search: www.nepalitimes.com

ONLINE PACKAGES



It is that time of the year again when farmers across the country come together to transplant paddy seedlings. But the National Paddy Planting Day is no longer the optimal time to plant the first seedlings due to the increasingly erratic monsoon. Take a tour of Pokhara Valley which grows Nepal's most famous indigenous varieties of rice and find out from the farmer how they are preserving local varieties even as they cope with climate-induced crop failures. Read the story on *pages 10-11*. More on rice special on *pages 4 and 6-7*.

HEALTHCARE

Your special issue on health is a strong testament to the absolute need for effective universal health care (UHC) for the common person in Nepal administered by the state. This arrangement could be a role model for the region. Bhutan's UHC is great, but the country has a population of less than 800,000. Clearly, handing this task of delivering UHC over to the private sector is deadly.

Dr Buddha Basnyat

Healthcare-related equipment and products must not be taxed heavily ('In a healthy state, Editorial', #1117). We should be able to acquire equipment at affordable costs in bulk from third countries. Nepalis are getting sicker because there is a lack of awareness. Most diseases are preventable. Money has come to villages through remittances. The poor are being sucked dry at every corner.

Neil Pande

The vicious cycle of poverty-disease-poverty has infected the country.

Keshav Kalle

We should all take note of the government's effort to hand over health care to the private sector. I wonder who is behind this. There are powerful forces, including donors that promote privatisation of healthcare. We must be careful to not let this happen. Otherwise it will take years to set it right.

Ranjan Aatriya

Brilliant examples of cooperation between public and private entities in the healthcare sector ('Taking health out of wealth', Anita Shrestha, #1117).

Alan Roadnight

30 years after democracy, people in far-western Nepal have nothing good to show ('Sick of it', Sagar Budhathoki, #1117). My generation was hoping Nepal would see development in 20 years. Let us hope it will happen by the time we are retired.

Gyurme Dondup

Such an important debate on health. The true cost of any illness is economic. One sick member of a family costs the aspirations/futures of the whole family. A premium based insurance scheme may not work because income disparity is so huge that it will inevitably leave the most disadvantaged behind. We can build back universal health care if we start with areas with good health care infrastructure, first. That way the initial costs will be only in providing care.

Sushil Koirala

Our government spends millions for view towers rather than spending on the health care management, infrastructure, training and insurance system. We need to change our mindset. National health insurance should be made compulsory. The main idea is that there should be enough funds in the healthcare division so that all diseases and chronic illnesses can be managed for free, and the staff can be paid a good amount to motivate them to work in rural areas. The government can buy even the latest medicines at the manufacturer's cost and shipping charges, and also spend some on research facilities.

Suman Shrestha

AIRLINE SAFETY

Insightful analysis with realistic infograph ('60 years of living dangerously', Kunda Dixit, #1116). Thanks to the *Nepali Times* team for presenting such massive information. Topographically, Nepal's aviation might have its own challenges, but that should not be an excuse. Air accidents in Nepal are not new, our government has never shown any kind of remorse or seriousness to investigate case-by-case. The root cause for everything is either bad weather or human error. CAAN has never admitted to incompetency, lack of engineering, and administrative resources. Aviation safety standards are merely limited to books.

Ashim Raj Muktan

Pilots, responding to airlines and personal/cultural pressures, continue to attempt to fly into adverse conditions and lose sight of terrain and ground reference. So unless pilots exercise proper flying discipline and turn back/refuse to fly into non-visual conditions pilot-caused crashes will continue. Ultimately, the pilot is the last causal factor in the chain of events who also has the ability to break it. Otherwise, Controlled Flight Into Terrain accidents and deaths will continue to occur.

Roger Ray

Surely in the 21st century, there is equipment/radar capable of giving a pilot important information. This needs to be sourced quickly. Interested as I do fly a lot of internal flights in Nepal.

Alan Roadnight

WHAT'S TRENDING



A tale of three cities

by Ashish Dhakal

Restoration of monuments damaged in the 2015 earthquake have been carried out differently in Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur, and this has depended a lot on the political will and community involvement to adhere to traditional building methods and materials. Visit www.nepalitimes.com for details.

f Most reached and shared on Facebook



Taking wealth out of health

by Anita Shrestha

Nepal's medical industrial complex, while modernising healthcare, has also pushed treatment out of reach of most citizens. But there are notable examples of public-private partnership hospitals in rural Nepal providing free care proving that the state can too. Full story on our website.

t Most popular on Twitter

In a healthy state

Editorial

Nepalis are sick because they are poor, and they are getting poorer because they are sicker. Healthcare should not be guided by the free market, and as long as the state does not take responsibility for the wellbeing of its citizens, there will never be equity. Join the online discussion.

66 Most commented



Thai cuisine returns to Kathmandu

by Arita Parasari

Before the pandemic, Bangkok was among the most popular tourism destinations for Nepalis holidaying abroad. Now, chef Pairaj Polgeng is in Kathmandu to lead the ongoing food festival, bringing the authentic taste of Thailand to Nepal.

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

#DiasporaDiariesEvery day for the past four years, I have worked for 12 hours, 30 days a month to send home over Rs40,000. But I realised the fragility of our lives when my roommate, also a security guard, died a few months back.



marty logan @martydlogan

Another tragic story. Thank you for publishing this series. Perhaps it will open some eyes.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

"Nepalis are dying because they are #poor"
#Activist#surgeonGovinda KC speaks to Nepali Times about the dismal state of #healthcare in #Nepal



Forester @kuenvmgt504

Living life meaningfully. Doing the best one can



Shirley Blair @himlayanchildrn

Imagine what Nepal would be like if there were a scintilla of this wish to help others in all of us.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

"Of all the things that social media offers, the one thing it can never teach is patience and reflection."



KYU Yeti @KyuYeti

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Nepal sets ambitious target for food sufficiency

The government plans to reduce crop imports and increase domestic production despite a lack of irrigation and fertiliser

● Ramesh Kumar

Finance Minister Janardan Sharma's budget last month unveiled a plan to increase domestic agricultural production by one-third. On paper it sounds like a good way to reduce the country's food imports. But upon closer inspection, the decision is too ambitious and unrealistic.

Given the trends in falling agricultural productivity over the decades due to a chronic lack of irrigation, improved seeds, fertiliser and most recently, the climate crisis, domestic farm output is not expected to increase much.

The government wants to boost paddy productivity from the current 5.13 million metric tons to 6.69 which is a 30% increase in just a year. Two years ago, Nepal had hit a record high yield of at 5.62 million metric tons only for it to come down by 8.74% last year due to unseasonal rains at harvest time.

"This is a very ambitious target and even as we are making an action plan on how to achieve it, it looks very challenging," admits Prakash Sanjel of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock.

In 1961, Nepal used to grow only 1.9 metric tons of paddy per hectare. This was before the green revolution and the use of modern technology in agriculture and paddy productivity. But improved seeds, chemical fertilisers and new farming techniques in the last decades have revolutionised agriculture.

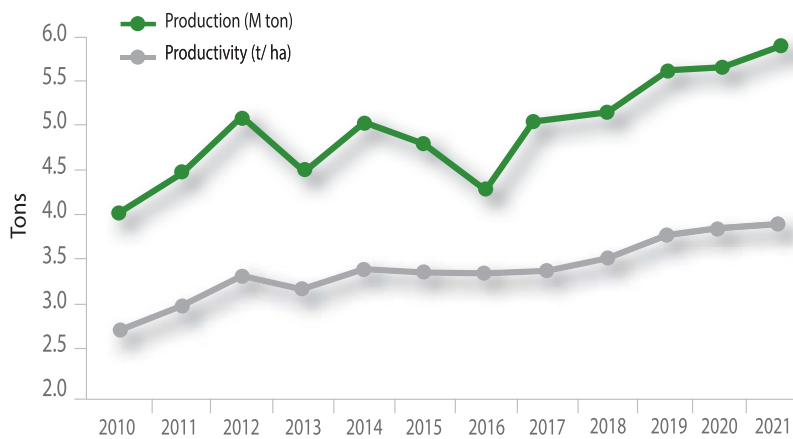
Hybrid seeds that mix varieties of rice with different qualities, capacity to adapt to soil and climate, have significantly increased the yield. In China, hybrid paddy, now grown in more than half of the total rice area, yields an average of 7 metric tons per hectare. Bangladesh has similarly reached productivity of 5 metric tons per hectare with the use of hybrid seeds.

Nepal on the other hand took 60 years to double its productivity. It went up from 2.7 tons per hectare



AMIT MACHAMASI

Rice production and productivity growth 2010-2021



in 2001/02 to 2.9 10 years later and now it is 3.47. As per the budget target, this has to increase to 4.5 tons per hectare. In the past, it had taken Nepal nearly 20 years to increase its productivity by one ton a hectare.

At present, about 10% of the total paddy cultivation in Nepal is estimated to be from hybrid varieties and three-fourths of the

area has used improved seeds. The National Rice Research Center has recommended hybrid seeds of two varieties namely Hardinath-1 and Hardinath-3, but farmers also use hybrid seeds imported from India.

Government agro scientists first recommended improved seeds in 1966, a CH-45 *Chaite Dhan* that produces 3.5 tons of rice per

hectare. Since then, 97 varieties (22 of which have been removed from the recommended list) of improved seeds have been delivered to the farmers.

But the acceptance of hybrid and improved seeds in Nepal has been slow. Paddy seeds should be replaced every 3/4 years, but most farmers plant the same seed over and over again. In Nepal, the replacement rate of paddy seeds is only about 24%.

A decrease in cultivable land due to rapid urbanisation has also reduced production. While the government estimates that 1.477 million hectares of land is used for paddy plantation, the figure is based on the census conducted 10 years ago and does not take into account changing land use patterns.

"When much of the cultivable land in the Tarai districts are being turned into housing, how can we expect the paddy production to grow?" asks one frustrated official at the ministry.

Similarly, in the lack of a proper irrigation system, farmers are still

dependent on rain-fed agriculture. Which is why yields every year are determined by the monsoon. Only a third of Nepal's total cultivable land has irrigation facilities throughout the year.

Irrigation or lack thereof is also the reason farming communities have been so affected by the climate crisis.

Moreover, farmers across Nepal face chronic fertiliser shortage every year, and less than half the demand of 900,000 tons is met. Failure to fertilise paddy plants on time reduces the yield by one-third, and applying 1kg of fertiliser increases harvests by 10kg.

"Irrigation, improved seeds and chemical fertilisers are the main prerequisites for increasing productivity. Once they are met, Nepal can become self-sufficient," says Ram Baran Yadav of the National Rice Research Program, adding that the country needs a total of 7.2 million tons of paddy production or 5 tons of rice per hectare to feed itself.

At present, Nepal imports 1.6 million tons of paddy to meet demand. In the last 10 months, it imported rice worth Rs42.19 billion. Experts say one way to improve productivity is to prioritise *Chaite dhan* over the annual paddy as the former's yield is up to 30% higher.

But it is near impossible to improve agriculture productivity after decades of state neglect. The government can however immediately invest more in procuring chemical fertilisers on time while also promoting organic manure generated domestically at industrial-scale biogas plants.

The finance minister in his budget speech claimed to have significantly increased the budget for agriculture, but it is up just to 6.68% from 6.25% the year before. Added to other pre-existing challenges, this is highly unlikely to meet the government's production target in a year.

Says Yadav: "It is not possible to leap in production in a single year. It requires long preparation and political will." 🇳🇵

prabhu BANK

Turkish IATA Chair

Turkish Airlines chairman Ahmet Bolaf has been appointed a member of the International Air Transport Association (IATA) board of governors for a three-year term. Bolaf has experience in strategy development, fleet investment and planning, commercial partnerships and Alliance coordination within Turkish Airlines for almost 17 years.



"As the leading actors in airline business, we believe the value of solidarity and collaboration between partners especially during these times that global aviation enters in an active post-Covid rebound," says Bolaf. "As the national flag carrier of Türkiye, we are confident that we will successfully fulfill the responsibilities associated with our new assignment through our solid expertise and professional background."

Nexon Dark

Tata Motors is shipping the first lot of Nexon EV Dark edition to Nepal after eight months of waiting. The EV has quickly gained popularity in India for its dark interior and exterior features. Sipradi Trading represents Tata in Nepal.



Nepal-Germany ties

German Ambassador Thomas Prinz met prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba this week to hand over a letter from Germany's Chancellor Olaf Scholz to continue Germany's support to Nepal's development efforts in three core areas: Sustainable Economic Development, Climate and Energy and Health and Social Protection. Nepal and Germany have had long-standing bilateral cooperation for over 60 years. Since September 2021, Germany has also supported Nepal's shift to a green, resilient, and inclusive development (GRID) pathway.

Nabil Green Week

Nabil Bank is celebrating a weeklong Green Week to mark one year of sustainable banking launched last year to ensure financial literacy in rural areas, commercialise the agricultural sector, promote entrepreneurship and support the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It has provided Rs410 billion to 571 farmers and 60 entrepreneurs. The bank is also a member of Partnership for Carbon Accounting Financials (PCAF) and measures greenhouse gas emissions related to its loan portfolio and investment.

More flights

Thai Smile, a low cost subsidiary of Thai Airways, starts regular flights from Bangkok to Kathmandu from 1 July, seven days a week. Sri Lankan Airlines has also been allowed to operate daily flights to Kathmandu starting from 6 July, up from four flights a week. The airline with an aircraft of 150 capacity makes Colombo transit for Gulf destinations, USA, Australia, London, Japan, Korea and Thailand.

Wizz Air to GBIA

Ultra low-cost airline Wizz Air will start operating international flights from the Gautam Buddha



International Airport to Abu Dhabi from September. The carrier is using Airbus 321 Neo series 190-seat aircraft on the route.

MJ in KU

Kathmandu University School of Arts has started a Masters of Journalism program, a two-year 60 credit hours course with 20 subjects. Anyone with at least three-years of undergrad degree with a score not less than 50% or GPA 2.5 are eligible to apply. For working journalists over 10 years of experience, the criteria is the score of at least 45% or GPA 2. There will be 20 seats, 20% of which will be scholarship funded.



Mahindra Scorpio-N

Mahindra & Mahindra has released the Scorpio-N SUV designed at Pininfarina in Italy and at Mahindra India Design Studio in Mumbai. The SUV has a 149.14 kW powered engine, 6-speed manual and automatic transmissions, premium crafted interiors, benchmark driving dynamics, steering setup, low CO2 emission and any terrain friendly technology.


Courage and Impact

Journalist, editor and *Nepali Times* publisher Kunda Dixit received the East West Centre Award for Courage and Impact during a ceremony held in Honolulu, Hawaii





GUNARAJ LUITEL

on 28 June. Dixit has over 30 years of experience in journalism and is the author of the books *Dateline Earth: Journalism as if the Planet Mattered* and *The People's War* trilogy.



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TERRACES

Kathmandu Valley marks Paddy Planting Day on 28 June as urban sprawl and infrastructure encroach on its last remaining rice fields

● Photos and text by **Abhushan Gautam Shakya**

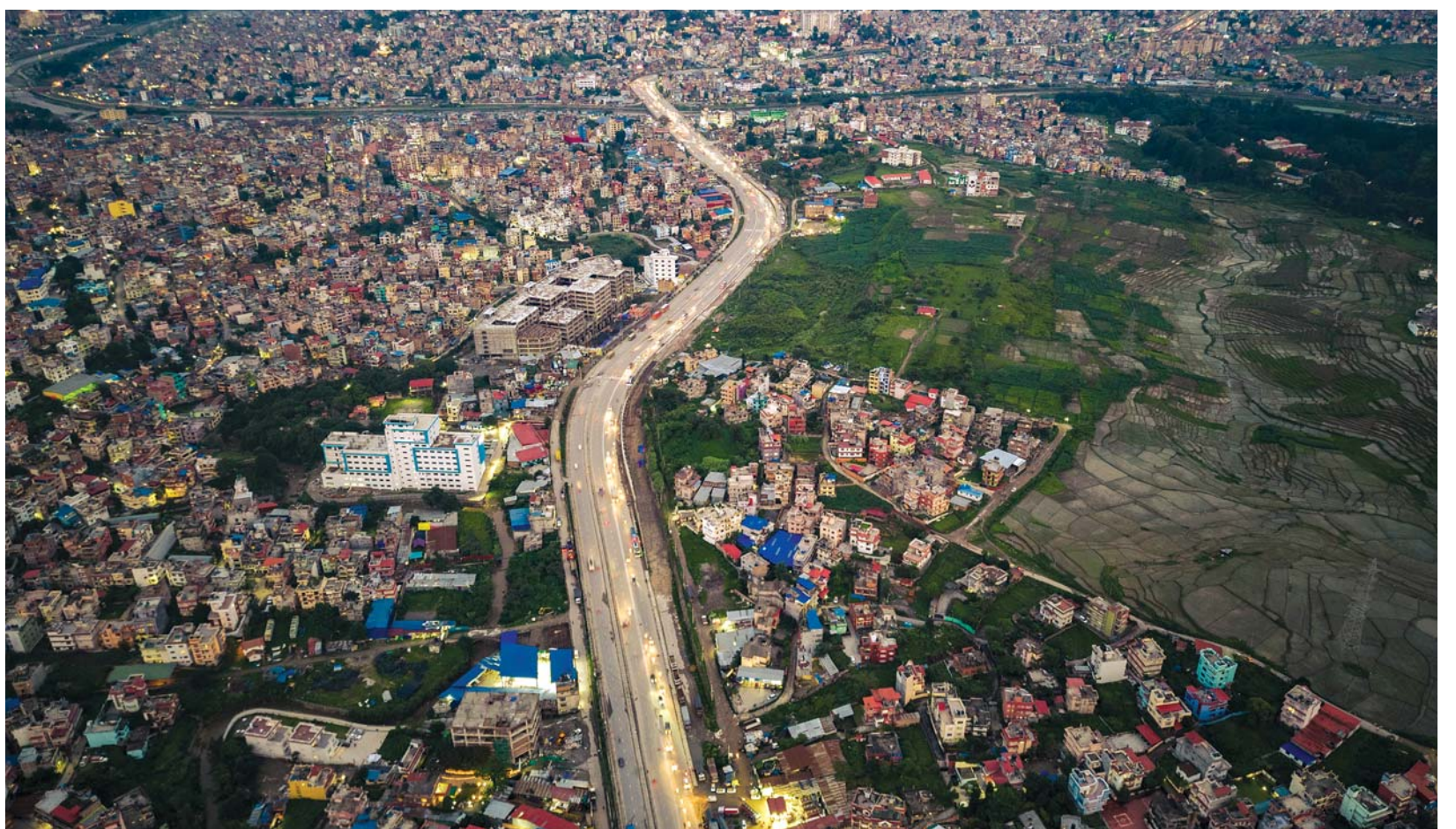
The annual paddy planting season is upon us, and the sculpted contours of rice terraces mirror the clouds as farmers wade into the submerged fields.

Across Nepal on Wednesday communities came together knee-deep in mud to transplant the first paddy seedlings on watered terraces.

There was mud splashing, much singing and dancing to Nepali folk tunes and a traditional feast of *dahi chiura* as they celebrated the beginning of this year's rice cycle that is interwoven with the Valley's festivals. This golden hour drone photo of Balkhu (*left*) strikingly juxtaposes the urban sprawl that has encroached on land owned by Tribhuvan University and currently farmed by locals. Some of these plots are gradually being used to construct new buildings and modern facilities for university students. The lower part of this photo shows what Kathmandu Valley looked like during monsoon paddy plantation in the past decades.

The other aerial photos capture rice planting along the Bagmati in Khokana (*below, far right*). These are the last few remaining patches of paddy that remain untouched by Kathmandu's relentless urban expansion.

Further away from the fields, there are increasing numbers of settlements and brick factories nearby. The kilns fire moulds of fertile clay deposits of Kathmandu's pre-historic lake to feed the voracious appetite for bricks for buildings that now stand on the former rice fields. The fertile terrace farms of Khokana are disputed, with the government trying to evict farmers to make way for the Kathmandu-Terai Expressway. 🇳🇵



EVENTS



Sound Therapy
Take a break from the hectic schedule and shower in the healing tunes of the Himalayan sound bowl.
2 July, 6pm onwards, Avata Wellness Center

Kathmandu Conversations
Kathmandu Conversations will delve into how an inclusive support system in education, workspace and home can be created with LGBTQIA+ leaders and family.
1 July, 4pm-5.30pm, Impact Hub Kathmandu, Pulchok

Monsoon Hike
Be one with the nature and partake of this rejuvenating hike from Dhulikhel to Namobuddha.
1 July, 9849964110

Art Exhibition
Check out the Art, Tea, Nature exhibition at Siddhartha Art Gallery which will showcase the artwork of Gopal Kalapremi Shrestha.
1-10 July, 5-8pm, Baber Mahal Revisited



Save Lives
Join this blood donation drive this weekend and help save lives.
2 July, 10am-2pm, Nepal Soka Gakkai International

DINING



Choila
Shyam Dai Ko Haas Ko Choila (Shyam Dai's duck choila) is not for the faint of heart. Only those who can handle their spice have dared to try the dish. How about you?
Dhobighat (01) 4280273

MUSIC

Shailu Rai
Don't miss Shailu Rai take the stage at Beers N' Cheers. Take your family and also enjoy the good food and drinks.
3 July, Beers N' Cheers (01)5524860



Time Dilation
A fun night with Time Dilation as well as Latin, RnB, Funk and Soul performances at Shisha Lounge and Bar this Saturday.
2 July, 8pm onwards, Thamel

The Reckoning
Book the date for the Reckoning with band performances from Screaming Marionette, Strangle and many more.
9 July, Purple Haze Rock Bar, Thamel, (01) 5910126



Cobweb Nepal
Check out Cobweb Nepal perform live at Ai-La lounge with opening act from the Circle Band.
1 July, 6pm onwards, Kumaripati

Blues undercover
Chill with your pals this Friday evening with the first performance of Blues Undercover at GG Machaan.
1 July, 6:30pm onwards, Pulchok



Kotheys
Looking for mouthwatering Chinese street food? Look no further than Kotheys. We also recommend their noodles.
Pimbahal, 988662433

Honacha
Serving authentic Newa food since 1934, Honacha was originally formed to feed hungry farmers. This family owned restaurant now welcomes anyone with an appetite. Enjoy the warm and mouthwatering dishes.
Mangal Bazar

GETAWAY



Hotel Barahi
Located just beyond the banks of Phewa Lake, Hotel Barahi offers stunning views and luxury rooms decorated with rustic pieces and earthy tones for one to destress.
Lakeside, Pokhara, (61)460617

Bandipur Safari Lodge
From wildlife safari to bird watching and nature walk, Bandipur Safari Lodge offers an authentic jungle experience that a few relate to this town known primarily for its cultural heritage.
Bandipur, 9449597880, 08229-233001

Hotel Country Villa
Atop Nagarkot, Hotel Country Villa is surrounded by magnificent hills and mountains. The Hotel also serves scrumptious Indian and international cuisine.
Naldum Road, Nagarkot (01) 6680127

Himalaya Hotel Lodge
Away from crowded Ghandruk, at Himalaya Hotel Lodge one can experience the quaintness of the village life all the while enjoying their spacious accomodation that comes with a fireplace. Guests can also dine in the presence of scenic views.
Ghandruk, (01) 4435686



Tiger Palace Resort
Regarded as one of the most luxurious resorts in Nepal, Tiger Palace Resort offers a wide variety of entertainment, eateries and activities. A must-visit for travellers venturing south of Kathmandu Valley.
Rupandehi, Bhairawa, (71)512000

Bricks Café
A multi cuisine restaurant in the heart of Kathmandu prides itself in serving the best wood fired pizza in town. The lasagna is a must try too.
Kupondole, (01) 5521756



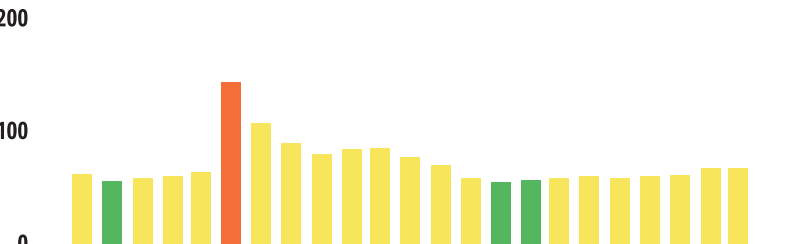
Momotarou Restaurant
Enjoy a hearty Japanese meal. Don't miss out on the soft tofu, pork cutlets and don varieties, and the exquisite bento box.
Sanepa Chok, (01) 5537385

WEEKEND WEATHER



Flood Risk Warning
The Department of Hydrology and Meteorology has issued flood risk warnings for the mid-mountains for the coming days, with the eastern Tarai, Makwanpur and Tanahu most likely to see river levels rise because of precipitation in the catchment area. Kathmandu Valley will see quite a bit of rain on Saturday, and briefer showers likely on Friday and Sunday. Humidity level is high so it will be muggy when the sun is out.

AIR QUALITY INDEX



Kathmandu AQI from 11AM 29 June - 9AM 30 June measured at US Embassy, Phora Darbar
The Air Quality Index (AQI) is better than pre-monsoon levels, but it still briefly climbs to the Code Red level above 100 between showers as the traffic builds up. What is unseen is more dangerous, and this is mostly from the toxic gases from vehicular emissions. People living or working near busy streets and intersections need to be careful. Fine dust along roads as the mud dries up raises the 10 micron particulate concentration in the air. Mask up against pollution when outdoor, and indoor to protect against Covid.



Mira is a Hollywood superstar, disillusioned by her career in superhero flicks and a recent breakup. Keen to change the direction of her career and shake off a recent tabloid scandal, she comes to France to star as Irma Vep in a remake of the French silent film serial *Les Vampires*. Against the backdrop of a sensational and melodramatic crime thriller, Mira's life begins to take interesting turns as the distinctions between herself and the character she plays, between the real and the reel lives, blur and merge. Directed by Olivier Assayas based on his 1996 film of the same name, *Irma Vep* is a sophisticated meta-experience, intellectually loopy, wiggly, funny and absorbing, taking a playful look into behind-the-scenes of big-budget filmmaking in a sustained clever and thoroughly postmodern note. Stars Alicia Vikander, Vincent Macaigne, Adria Arjona, Byron Bowers, Jeanne Balibar, Vincent Lacoste, Nora Hamzawi and Hippolyte Girardot.

कोभिड-१९ विरुद्धको खोप सरकारले निःशुल्क लगाइरहेको छ ।

अबैध रुपमा खोप बेच्ने र किनेर लगाउने दुवैलाई प्रचलित कानुन बमोजिम कडा कारवाही हुनेछ ।

कोरोना विरुद्धको खोप बेचबिखन भएको थाहा पाउने जो कोहीले स्थानीय प्रशासन, प्रहरी कार्यालय, पालिका वा स्वास्थ्य कार्यालयमा यथार्थ जानकारी गराउनु हुन अनुरोध छ ।

बजारमा लुकिछिपी बेच्न राखिएका खोपहरु नक्कली हुन सक्छन् ।

New generation of alternative artists

Latest pop-up at Bikalpa explores themes of mental health, loss, grief and body autonomy

● Ashish Dhakal

Bikalpa Art Centre (BAC) in Pulchok is an interdisciplinary space onto itself. A cosy complex cloistered by low-hanging trees, it has a cafe, workstations, a music stage and a rectangular gallery where the latest pop-up exhibition *Monsoon Hymn* is underway. Bikalpa means ‘alternative’ in Nepali, and the gallery features works by artists Aashma Dangol, Sundar Lama, Aditi Sherpa, Anamika Gautam, Devina Joshi, Katyani Rai and Priyanka Singh Maharjan. The exhibition explores the essence of growing up and youth culture in Nepal, alongside documenting their multifaceted inner lives and their surroundings, through photographs, paintings and poetry.

Among the striking works is ‘Letting Out’, a photographic journey by Devina Joshi through a period of mental exhaustion, looking to find spiritual, emotional and creative outlet for her thoughts and feelings. The picture of feet decorated with *ala* (red pigment) turns the lens towards the inner child emulating the Kumari. The divine feminine resides in every girl, believes Joshi, and the picture represents a search for the goddess within.

Next to it is a photograph of a chair – washed-up, almost, in sepia tones, exuding a profound sense of loneliness and immobility. Pictures speak a thousand words – and this is the case with the other artworks on display as well – and here, the four-legged furniture waits: for company, perhaps, or for meaning. The edges look frayed and fading, and there is also a sense of time trickling away.

But even then, the outward motion of expressing or releasing reflects back to one’s interior. Joshi relates life and time in her photographs, and ultimately finds a connection to herself. This act of healing is immediately relatable to the viewer, whether in the solitary chair or in fading footsteps.

Healing is indeed a large part of the monsoon, as rains can symbolise the washing down of one’s sorrows and plights. And the many artworks in the exhibition have that quality about them, even when what they represent or depict appear at the outset intimidating and violent.

For example: Katyani Rai’s ‘The Waves’, ‘Hymn of Death’ and ‘Insomnia’, that form a sequence of varied media where dreams and dismay peek with engaging looks from across the frames. Finding inspiration in her insomnia, Rai experiments with printmaking, charcoal and pain to tell cohesive stories of war-torn realities in deep red, beaked angels of death in black and white, and anxious feet soothed by silvery moths.

Elsewhere Aashma Dangol’s triptych ‘Coming of Age’ depicts the creation of self and body autonomy through the classic American bacon and eggs breakfast, each



frame zooming into the image of vulnerability that comes with breaking open one’s shell and turning to face the world (*pictured, top*).

Next to it sits the ‘Sir Frog’, its wide eyes and smile – slightly flirtatious and immensely comforting – drawn in the style of portraits of important people (*pictured, above*). Perhaps this painting is the most obvious connection to monsoon, reminding one of the integral roles the amphibian plays in an agrarian ecosystem such as Nepal’s.

This is the nature of a pop-up exhibition, explains curator Saroj Mahato: “There is no overarching theme: it’s just artists expressing themselves and being promoted.”

And this is true of *Monsoon Hymns*,

which was quickly brought together in collaboration with the artists and BAC. The title reflects the in-between season– a period for planting and growth – and the symbolism of new, rising artists showcasing their works here could not be more apt.

And the absence of a rigid theme has allowed an assortment of artists with diverse stories to take their place in the ever-expanding Nepali contemporary art scene.

For instance, Anamika Gautam’s cubist ‘Winter in her Palace’ and ‘The Grief’ are captivating medleys of geometric shapes. Here, she depicts the socio-political assessment of gender and mental health in deceptively simple execution with vibrant colours.

Priyanka Singh Maharjan’s ‘Home in a City’ is also an example of simple and vibrant series, but here the subjects are entirely different. Evenly spaced thin lines fall from the top of the canvas to the bottom, and in those lines shapes begin to take form, women talking, telling stories, working, participating. In pen and ink, she weaves the tapestries of society, placing women front and centre and depicting the side of our culture and community so often overlooked by the prominent male gaze.

Sundar Lama’s sequence of three – ‘Lungs’ – are selectively coloured and paired with poems in Nepali that look at the Covid pandemic and healthcare. Ribs suspended mid-air feature in the three frames, as symbols of protection or prisons, together with clouds,

floating hands, and a quiet child caught between the past, the future and salvation.

Aditi Sherpa’s colourful paintings are equally abstract in their narratives. Eyes stare out right into the viewer’s souls. The cacophony of shapes ask “What are you?” in large bold Devnagari letters. A yellow lemon with windows floats between a banana, omelette, lizard, face and a confused clock. As the artist grows from one canvas to the next, these are anxious pieces that look for answers in our environment and imaginations.

Says Namami Rana, assistant art manager at BAC: “This is a vulnerable exhibit. The artists have explored topics such as mental health, social conformity, stigma, the fear of Covid. It is very exciting to see the positive response from the audience as well which has been encouraging to the artists.”

In fact, some of the artists are showing their works for the first time at *Monsoon Hymns*, and Mahato’s curation is impeccable, giving each their own space, their own corner to shine, without saturating in the mix.

Most artworks are for sale, especially as the promotion of the artists and finding a space for them to explore and be discovered are central to the exhibition, and the prices range between Rs10,000-40,000. 🇳🇵

Monsoon Hymns
By various artists
Curated by Saroj Mahato
Bikalpa Art Centre, Pulchok
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Climate change hits Himalayan rice

Nepali farmers come together to preserve local seed varieties that can cope with climate induced crop failures

● Erica Wu in Pokhara

It is that time of the year again when farmers across the country are busy on flooded terraces, transplanting rice seedlings, slinging mud, singing and dancing to folk tunes, and celebrating the occasion. Unlike in the past, however, National Paddy Planting Day (on 29 June this year) is no longer the optimal time to plant the first seedlings. Erratic monsoon, irregular rain leading to too much

water or too little due to the climate crisis has meant that farmers are now confused about when to plant paddy. Water sources including natural springs have also started drying up right across the Himalayan foothills. Villagers do not have sufficient water even for their households, let alone agriculture. Last year Nepal was expected to record its highest annual rice harvest, given the early start to the monsoon, only for most of the standing crop being destroyed in unseasonal post-monsoon

cloudbursts in October. “We don’t get rain like we used to which was most suitable for farming, it doesn’t rain on time and when it does it pours,” says Krishna Prasad Adhikari, a farmer in Lumle. “The winds are also stronger and it is hotter to farm during the day.” Kasnath Neupane from Sundarinanda village has a similar experience: “We are now planting paddy about a month later than we used to. If rainfall patterns continue to be this erratic, our planting schedule will have to be pushed by 3-4 months.”

Locals have also seen a declining trend in the number of native rice breeds, and fear they might be disappearing. Even in Pokhara, which grows Nepal’s most famous indigenous varieties of rice, farmers have noticed the change, particularly the loss of the distinctive aroma which makes the rice variety so special. New plant diseases have added to the problem, wiping out entire harvests. This and the additional challenges posed by climate change are making farmers dependent on rain-fed agriculture lose their very

livelihood and become poorer. “Back in the day my father could feed an entire family of almost 10 members and still had a surplus to sell in the market, but I can barely grow enough for four people now,” adds Adhikari. The only alternative left for many farmers here in Central Nepal’s mountains is to migrate to India, the Gulf or Malaysia for better economic opportunities. But as young men move out of the country, there is no one left to till the land, adding to the decline of agro-productivity.



High and dry in Jumla

At 2,514m, Jumla district in western Nepal grows rice at some of the highest elevations in the world. It is the home to the famous Marsi rice but increasingly these indigenous crops are affected by the climate crisis. This has added to food insecurity in a traditionally grain deficit area. Farmers are having to plant crops at higher altitudes for better yield, but they are also vulnerable to new diseases and pests. Jumli Marsi in particular has been found to be more susceptible to the blast disease. Under its Evolutionary Plant Breeding project, LI-BIRD is working to mix the strengths of different varieties of seeds to develop climate resilient and high performing varieties for future generations. An evolutionary population can be formed segregating seed varieties. Sometimes,

varieties with similar functional traits can be mixed turning the static seeds into dynamically evolving populations. Farmers can then select the desirable varieties which have higher genetic diversity. “Due to climate change, some of the varieties that were performing better are now more prone to diseases, insects and pests,” says team leader Shree Prasad Neupane. “We aim to breed seeds that are more stable in production, less prone to diseases and higher in nutritional values.” Local farmers have also noticed that while non-local improved seeds do result in higher yield in certain parts of the year, this is not consistent. But seeds bred with evolutionary methods have adapted to changing conditions and can also withstand diseases better. But it is not just the quantity that matters in these rugged mountains of western Nepal.

Historically neglected by the state, Jumla and surrounding districts are lowest in the human development index in Nepal, with a high rate of malnutrition among marginal and smallholder farmers. Which is why protecting varieties rich in nutritional values like Jumli Marsi is even more important. New hybrid seeds lack important micronutrients. Evolutionary Plant Breeding is also different because it empowers farmers to select the varieties for breeding based on their experience and local knowledge. Communities themselves are breeding the most resilient varieties against production instability, diseases and lack of nutrition, all the problems exacerbated by the climate crisis. Adds Shree Prasad Neupane: “Farmers decide where to plant the seeds and which seeds to plant, which one is better to retain and multiply. And we leave the rest to nature to choose the most suitable one for the subsequent generations.”

Erica Wu



ALL PHOTOS: AMIT MACHAMASI



The good news is that locals in the villages of Kaski district are saving their local varieties of rice. They have set up a community seed bank to preserve seeds of local varieties that would last them several years with assistance from the Local Initiative for Biodiversity Research and Development (LI-BIRD).

“Our local rice like Jethobudo, Gurdi, Darmali, Mansara, Manamri and Ghaiya are on the verge of extinction, but because of this seed bank we have managed to revive some of them, including Jethobudo,

Paheli and Mansuli,” says Homnath Neupane from Sundaridanda village.

Farmers have also been spreading awareness about planting local seeds over hybrid varieties which, in their experience, have a higher yield but not the same capability to survive against diseases.

Farmers here have also developed a mobile app to disseminate information about preserving and promoting local seeds of different crops. There are agriculture centres in every

village which communicate with each other. There is also a radio program called Chautari which is a reliable source of information for the farmers.

LI-BIRD has been working with farmers from more than 3,000 households in Sindhupalchok and Kaski districts to scale-up climate-resilient agriculture by promoting crop diversity, improving soil health, conserving water, all the while maximising the utilisation of local resources. The project is aimed at building the resilience of smallholder, indigenous and

women farmers.

Recently LI-BIRD jointly with National Agriculture Research Council and Bioversity International registered five varieties of rice for their conservation, including Rato Anadi, Pahaley, Ekley, Kaalo Jhinuwa and Bayerni.

“Now the source of these seeds will be preserved,” says Pratikshya Thapa of LI-BIRD which also works to archive vegetables, millet, yams and medicinal herbs.

As farmers marked Paddy Day here on Wednesday, there was concern about how the climate crisis is affecting weather and crop patterns. They have adapted by changing their way of farming based on local knowledge and community effort. The need is now for the government to backstop them with technical know-how and financial support.

“There is no insurance in agriculture. We only ask the government to either provide us alternatives or insure our investment in growing food,” says Adhikari. “We want to learn about more farming methods and crops that can resist the impact of climate change.”

Just this week on 28 June, based on extensive research the Agriculture Division of the Pokhara Municipality introduced minimum selling prices for 23 crops, vegetables and fruits to help farmers.

By setting a minimum selling price, farmers are protected from fluctuating market trends, they can sell at the price set or higher to the customers or approach the Division where vendors will pay the set price. If the market price is lower than the minimum selling price, the government will pay the vendor to cover the difference.

“Agriculture is a sector where farmers suffer right from the seeds to the market, from hailstorms to monkey attacks,” says Manahar Kadariya of the Division. “These measures intend to preserve the locally grown crops as well as enhance the livelihoods of farmers.”

Another major challenge is the youth moving away from the land. There is an intergenerational disruption in farming.

Adds Krishna Prasad Adhikari: “We need to improvise our education system to also include agriculture in the curriculum. Technological advances in farming and institutional support can help revive agriculture in Nepal.” 🇳🇵

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Feedback questionnaire

As Nepal tries to revive its tourism industry, it would be a good idea to hand out Visitor Feedback Questionnaires for dear and departing passengers to fill out while they wait for delayed flights out of Kathmandu airport. It helps them kill time, provides valuable feedback so Nepal can improve its tourism sector, allowing it to fine tune its product range, upgrade quality, streamline procedures so that we find out where we don't yet charge entry fees to visitors. Filling multiple choice questionnaires is no joke. It is like taking a final exam, needing deep concentration, the power of evaluation and subjective judgement. The questionnaire can be a revenue-generating source if tourists are also charged \$5 for taking the trouble to fill out the form. The money will be used to print more questionnaires for future feedback. We aim to please, and realise that there is always room for improvement to make your stay in Nepal more profitable for us. Please be so kind as to take a few moments of your time to complete this short survey. The information you provide will be held in strictest confidence, unless of course you decide to be nasty in which case we will put an Interpol Red Corner notice on you.

1. Did you find Nepal up to your expectations?

☐ Great ☐ Hmmm. ☐ Not really ☐ What expectations?
2. If you came looking for Nirvana in Nepal, did you find it?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Om ☐ Didn't run into Mr Chaudhary
3. What was the condition of the public toilets in Nepal?

☐ Excellent ☐ Needs improvement ☐ Didn't find any
4. Was your privacy respected?

☐ Constantly ☐ No, I don't want to buy another bloody khukri ☐ You want to see my khukri?
5. What was your reaction when you found out you had to pay three times more than Nepalis for a flight to Pokhara?

☐ Happy to be of assistance ☐ Daylight robbery ☐ I got peanuts, they didn't
6. Which of the following did you expect to see during your visit versus what you actually saw?

Expected to see	Actually saw
<input type="checkbox"/> Hashish	<input type="checkbox"/> Hash browns
<input type="checkbox"/> Gorillas	<input type="checkbox"/> Guerrillas
<input type="checkbox"/> Gurkhas	<input type="checkbox"/> Airport friskers
<input type="checkbox"/> Yeti	<input type="checkbox"/> Yak & Yeti
<input type="checkbox"/> Paradise	<input type="checkbox"/> Paragliding
7. How do you rate your overall trip?

☐ Compared to what? ☐ You don't want to know ☐ Let's just say it was "memorable"
8. Was the visa officer at the airport courteous?

☐ Friendly guy, wanted my home address ☐ Didn't have change for \$100 ☐ Visa machine was rude and refused to work
9. Who will you recommend Nepal to:

☐ Friend ☐ Foe ☐ Friend and foe alike
10. If asked to pay Rs1,000 to enter another Durbar Square, you will:

☐ Strangle person with your bare hands ☐ Embrace him tightly and execute a Heimlich Maneuvre so he regurgitates his lunch ☐ Drop verbal hints about his canine motherhood ☐ Show him the khukri you bought



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