



PRADEEP RAJ ONTA / RSS

■ Shristi Karki

On 27 January, hours after Nepal's Supreme Court ruled that Rabi Lamichhane was not eligible to hold office because of his citizenship issue, he walked out of the Home Ministry and declared dramatically: "I am stateless."

The former tv anchor was using irony to depict his predicament, but also showed a determination to get back his job as home minister. It may not be so easy.

The Lamichhane affair has sparked debate about Nepali citizenship, with people drawing attention to the estimated 1.5

Home-less Lamichhane

million Nepalis who still do not have citizenship papers, the discriminatory laws about children getting citizenship through their mothers, but also Lamichhane's own human right to citizenship.

Within two days, Lamichhane easily restored his citizenship from the Kathmandu District Administration. Then he was quickly reinstated as RSP chair, the fourth-largest party in Parliament.

Now, Lamichhane may have to face a criminal investigation into his Nepali passport, which he is understood to have obtained in 2015 through his old papers, despite having been granted US citizenship in 2014.

Lamichhane has been busy all week lobbying with Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal and the UML's K P Oli to have his powerful Home Ministry job back. Oli and another

coalition partner, Rajendra Lingden of the RPP are all for it. But the prime minister has kept the home ministry portfolio for himself and appears reluctant to give it up, or use Lamichhane as a bargaining chip on the election of the new president (see Editorial, page 2).

If reinstated as Home Minister, Lamichhane can hold the position for six months without being an MP, but has to contest by-elections in his constituency in Chitwan-2 to get back his House seat.

Lamichhane for his part has made it clear to Dahal that his party's support of the government will depend upon whether RSP gets back the Home Ministry as per its deal to endorse Dahal for prime minister. The UML, for its part, has hinted at a compromise solution: someone from the RSP other than Lamichhane as Home Minister. 🇳🇵

The Juggler



DIWAKAR CHETTRI

AN
UNCEREMONIOUS
PRESIDENT
EDITORIAL
PAGE 2

All the bargaining over Lamichhane has put the already fragile 7-party coalition in an even more precarious position. The royalist Hindu-right RPP, despite being in government, is challenging the federal and secular Constitution.

The JSP has still not joined the government because it is not satisfied with the ministry it was given. The Janamat Party had also refused to accept its portfolio, but changed its mind later on.

The Nagarik Unmukti Party's unmet demands to release its leader Resham Chaudhary, who is serving a prison sentence for the murder of policemen in Tikapur in 2015, has brought government formation in the Sudurpaschim Province to a standstill.

While one fringe party pulling out of the coalition may not dent Dahal's government, the RSP and RPP both withdrawing support would. Even more damaging would be if the UML left the coalition, which could happen if Dahal and UML chair Oli cannot agree on who gets to be the next President.

Nepali Congress (NC) chair Sher Bahadur Deuba wanted the president's position to go to his party, which is the biggest in Parliament, in exchange for giving Dahal's government the vote of confidence.

PM Dahal is receptive to the idea, but the UML does not want him to renege on the deal that granted the UML the positions of Speaker, Presidency, and premiership after two-and-a-half years in return for Dahal becoming PM now.

Dahal is juggling the demands of his 7 coalition partners, factions within them, and demands of the opposition NC all at once.

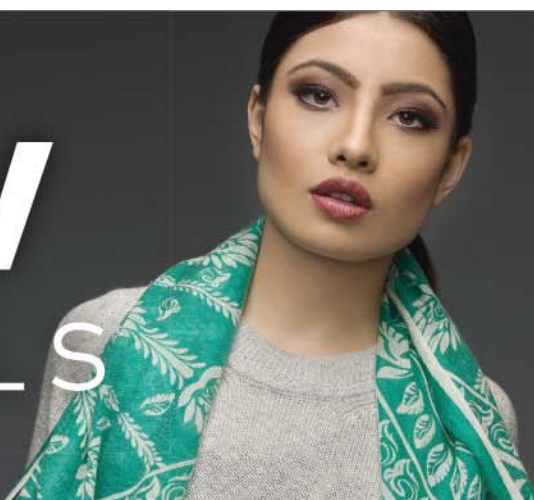
On Monday, UML General Secretary Shankar Pokharel said the NC cannot claim the presidency since that party is in opposition. Dahal has met Oli and Deuba to try to find a way out.

But even if the Maoist-UML coalition collapses over the election of the next president due on 9 March, a Maoist-NC coalition would be unable to form a majority just through the strength of their two parties alone.

To achieve that, support from the RSP and RPP will be crucial to both the UML and NC. 🇳🇵



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NATUREKNIT

CASHMERE REDEFINED

An unceremonious President

Nepal's president is a ceremonial post with only residual powers. Why then is there such a frantic tug-o-war going on about who gets to replace President Bidya Devi Bhandari after her five-year term expires on 13 March?

Why are the supreme men of the three main parties acting as if the sky will fall if they do not get their candidate to be elected the next president?

Because they know how much the president's constitutional power can be abused to do the bidding of the incumbent prime minister, as has happened repeatedly in the past four years.

Bhandari's candidacy for president was strongly backed by K P Oli when he was prime minister, and she quickly gave her

electoral college of federal and provincial assembly members needs to elect a new president, the UML is in a collision course with the Maoists and NC.

The Election Commission has set elections for 9 March, just two days before President Bhandari's term is over. The NC wants it on 11 February, one month before the president steps down, as stipulated by the Constitution.

But more contentious than the date is whether the UML will maintain its support for the 7-party coalition if it does not get its candidate to be president.

Dahal got Deuba to support the government despite the NC being in the opposition, reportedly with the assurance that a Congress nominee would get to be president. But Maoists and the NC combined do not



RSS

stamp of approval when Parliament was dissolved to stave off a challenge from Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Sher Bahadur Deuba.

The move was stopped by the Supreme Court, and Deuba succeeded Oli as prime minister. But when he tried to pass ordinances on the citizenship bill, to allow parties to split, or give blanket pardon for war crimes, President Bhandari was not as prompt in signing them.

After the November election, Oli pulled a fast one and got Dahal to defect from Deuba to form the 7-party coalition which is currently in power. In return for letting Dahal have a first go at being prime minister, Oli secured a deal to have the posts of president and speaker (see page 1).

But such is the level of mistrust between him and Oli, that Dahal soon started having misgivings about letting the UML have so much power. And because of Oli's past behaviour, Dahal and Deuba feared that giving the UML all three posts of president, prime minister and speaker would make Oli all-powerful after two-and-half years.

As per the agreement with the Maoists, the UML already has its Devraj Ghimire as Speaker, while the RSP got Indira Rana Magar in as Deputy Speaker. Now that a weighted

The election of president should not involve such wheeling-dealing, in the spirit of inclusion it is the turn of a respected Janjati or Dalit candidate.

have the numbers to do that. Having given his word to both the UML and the NC about the presidentship, Dahal is in a bind, and has said he is seeking "a national consensus" on a candidate.

This is where the high drama surrounding the Supreme Court verdict on 20 January about the RSP's Rabi Lamichhane's citizenship becomes critical.

Lamichhane with backing from the UML, is trying to regain his Home Minister post. The UML's claim for presidentship would be bolstered by Lamichhane continuing to be a powerful member of the Cabinet, and Oli's game plan is to keep the coalition intact.

The NC is likely to field Krishna Sitaula or Ram C Paudel as president, while Baburam Bhattarai could also be a candidate from the Maoist party when it unites with the Nepal Socialist Party. Oli appears to want President Bhandari to continue for a second term, and failing that may put forward Subhas Nembang.

The post of president should not involve such political wheeling-dealing. It is the turn of a Janjati or Dalit candidate to represent the constitutional spirit of inclusion.

More importantly, it should be someone who is a respected a-political person – and there are plenty of Nepalis to choose from.

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Absence of war is not peace

During the 10 long years of the Maoist conflict, there were several instances when it looked like the ceasefire would work and the country would return to peace. Both the Maoists and the government had announced the ceasefire around the time the then chief of Armed Police Force IGP Krishna Mohan Shrestha was murdered on 23 January 2003. This was also the first time the war felt so close to Kathmandu's power centre.

But it would take another three years and 10,000 more lives before the peace accord was finally signed. However, the absence of war is not peace (or stability). Excerpts from editorial published on Nepali Times issue #130 31 January-06 February 2003 20 years ago this week:



fervently believed in peace. It was when he and his wife and bodyguard were killed last Sunday that even those who did not know him lost hope. Luckily, negotiators who were already embarked on the peace process did not allow the murders to derail it. In fact, by all accounts the Shresthas' murders seems to have added a new sense of urgency to the behind-the-scenes negotiations.

What is different this time is that the Maoists don't seem to be using this as a ruse to buy time to regroup and rearm as they did last year. The political leadership appears to be reacting to internal pressures of a revolution that was going out of control and to the squeeze of regional geopolitics. The Maoists realised that with army's new weapons and logistics this war could drag on for another

25 years and they would be no closer to their goal. On the government side, there was realisation among the generals that not even taking the army's strength to 100,000, adding 25 more helicopters, and ordering new mortars and RPGs was going to bring them any closer to victory.

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

ONLINE PACKAGES



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Follow our reporters to Dhanusha and Mahottari districts in Nepal's Tarai where children in most families suffer from chronic malnutrition. Watch what the locals have to say and what do the experts recommend for this chronic national problem with its roots in governance failure. Subscribe to our YouTube channel for more original multimedia content.



GEOKRISHI

43-year-old Rajan Bajracharya left his job as GIS specialist to develop GeoKrishi, an agriculture information web and mobile-based app that provides crucial contextual and location-specific information for farmers. The app also won the US Data-Driven Farming Award worth \$100,000. Read story and watch video at nepalitimes.com

ROADS AND RAILS

The simultaneous development of our highways and railways is important ('On the fast lane to expressways', Chandra B Shrestha, #1146).

Vaamhast

■ People have been waiting more than 40 years for an international airport in Pokhara ('Putting Nepal on the right track', Arnico Panday, #1146). So maybe by around 2065 my ashes can travel on a train from Kathmandu to Pokhara.

Arne Walderhaug

■ Nepal needs good roadways instead of railways. Railways are just ambitious projects and debt traps.

Art DS

■ This is a pipe dream and a potential safety disaster. Why branch out into trains when the management of pedestrians, bikes, cars, buses and planes is already a failure?

Shiriin Barakzai

TRAVEL SAFETY

Don't travel at night ('Dying to travel', Editorial, #1146). Try to afford the better bus tickets. Break your journey and stay over somewhere. Give a big tip for a careful driver. But I know this is luxury for many Nepalis.

Slow trekking

HOMESTAY

The lure of the city or overseas for a job to generate more income is strong and understandable ('Vacant homes become homestays in Nepal', Bhadra Sharma, nepalitimes.com). This is a result of rural areas not being a priority on our development plans.

Netashwa

■ Just like in Japan, the Nepal government now needs to come up with financial incentives for Nepalis to return to their villages and raise their children there.

Dinesh Uprety

MIGRATION

I hope the Prachanda government will serve better ('Making overseas migration better', Kunda Dixit, #1146). Portfolios for the home, health and foreign ministries have gone to young and capable candidates. I hope services to the public will get better. Let us hope for more health posts, institutions, and faster services to public like passports and driving licenses.

Gyurme Dondup

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING

Momo and Uncle Yeti

by Sahina Shrestha

Nepali myths and characters are the subject of new international children's books like 'Momo and Uncle Yeti', which weaves a sense of adventure, appreciation of one's family, and tolerance of different cultures. Go to nepalitimes.com for our selection of some new and exciting children's books.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

On the fast lane to expressways

by Chandra B Shrestha

Nepal's Transport Policy needs an overhaul to reflect demographic shifts and need for better connectivity, writes a former member of the National Reconstruction Authority.

Most popular on Twitter



Putting Nepal on the right track

by Arnico Panday

A train network will generate jobs in construction and operation, bring efficiency and connectivity to Nepal. And although it may sound like a dream, dreaming is important for long-term planning. Read full article online and join the discussion.

Most commented

"It does not pay to have integrity."

On 24 January, entrepreneur Prem Prasad Acharya self-immolated before Parliament, later succumbing to his injuries. Prior to his death, Acharya left a testimony on Facebook. The government has formed an investigation committee to look into the allegations in his statement. Read the full English translation of the testimony on www.nepalitimes.com and an excerpt on page 4-5.

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS



Nepal Times @NepaliTimes

Open season on hacking into gov.np Sunday's DOS attack on Nepal government websites was a warning of things to come.



Pranaya Rana @inkthink

So yesterday's 'technical issue' was a DoS attack which is fairly easy to conduct and also easy to guard against. If official websites can be taken down simply by overloading the servers then what does that say about the security of all our private, personal data?



Nepal Times @NepaliTimes

The sun and moon of the country's double triangle flag are set to go into orbit soon in satellites designed by intrepid Nepali students.



S @lost_rig

I had watched a podcast about this, and was happy to see that Nepalis have been working to the best of their abilities. Good luck to them.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Vacant homes become homestays in Nepal. Women left behind turn their homes into tourist destinations, as the menfolk migrate for work



Nepal Now @now_nepal

Enterprising local women!



Nepal Times @NepaliTimes

It is the poorest Nepalis who are most vulnerable to dangerous roads, and this is a criminal lack of responsibility on the part of the state.



Bibek Subedi @bibekbilly

Travelling to die.

1,000 WORDS



UNITED COMMUNISTS: Jhalanath Khanal and Madhav Kumar Nepal of the CPN (Unified Socialists) presenting a memorandum on the dire economic situation of Nepal to Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal on 31 January.

RSS



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“It does not pay to have integrity”

Excerpted translation of the testimony that Prem Prasad Acharya left before self-immolation in front of Parliament on 24 January. Acharya's wife Nanuka has filed an FIR with Police against 12 individuals and companies mentioned for abetting the suicide.



I am an ordinary youth entrepreneur Prem Prasad Acharya (Santosh) born on 17 August 1986 in Fikkal-11 Kerabari of Ilam district, Province 1. I was fulfilling responsibilities towards my family, society and country, but after 36 springs, I have to admit the bitter truth that I have not been able to achieve much. I beg your indulgence to relate what I went through in this social media post.

My father died of a brain tumour in 2010, when I was still young. I was married and I moved to Kathmandu to study and to work in Thamel. I sold my inherited property in Fikkal and built a house in Budhanilkantha and opened a travel agency. The business did well, until I faced problems with customers owing me money.

I had to rent cars to take tourists around and decided to buy a Suzuki Ertiga with a NIC Asia loan and Rs600,000 down payment. I asked for a two-month grace period, but they refused and took the car back and kept my Rs400,000. Western tourists stopped coming, the Chinese and +2 colleges didn't pay, and Indians didn't want to spend anything. So I sold the travel business and went to Qatar. Within six months I had been promoted to Sales and Marketing Manager with a salary of QAR5,000. Between 2014-17, I managed to pay off all my debts and returned to Nepal.

I went back to Ilam and established Suryodaya Agro Industries & Farmhouse. That was

a mistake. I should have invested in real estate, and made a five-fold profit. I emulated what I saw in Qatar by packaging ghee, *gundruk*, *akbare* chillies, chutney and bamboo shoots and selling them in the market.

I rented cars to take my products to Birtamod, Damak, Itahari, Dharan, and Biratnagar to sell them in small shops as well as Gorkha Department Store, Baraha Department Store, Satasi Department Store, and NMC Cooperative. But I never got paid in time. I had to borrow more to pay back what I had borrowed.

I tried to take my own life several times, but was not able to. I tried to crash my car once, but it didn't work. I couldn't die because of my wife, children, and responsibilities.

Next, I tried dealerships. But the government started harassing me and I couldn't take my goods to Dharan and Biratnagar. I had to bribe police every step of the way. How much do you want to rob us?

I made ghee under the 'Nature' brand for Nepal Gramodhyog Company which belongs to Dr Upendra Mahato and Dr Samata Prasad, the billionaire duo, because of their businesses in Russia. They paid me well in the beginning, even gave me an advance. But over time, that stopped-- they pirated my product and even returned some, stating that they had expired. If you can't sell a product for nine months and have to cheat a middle-class supplier, why did you even come

back to Nepal?

Mr Min Bahadur Gurung of Bhatbhateni, you want a 30% margin on products you sell? Small and big manufacturers are supposed to send their goods to your department store on credit? And you don't even pay them back in three months, even though you have been contracted to do so within a month? Big Mart agreed on payment terms as per the sale. They used to order goods worth Rs5-700,000 a month but I was paid just Rs75,000.

Golyan Agro canceled the order of 110 cartons of ghee because there was no market demand. Why did you ask me to manufacture the goods without conducting a feasibility study of the market? Aren't you ashamed of yourself?

Anil Basnet's metrotarkari.com and NEP EXPRESS UAE took *gundruk* and *tama* from me, they sold it in Dubai. I was so proud to have my products exported and promoted it via Google, Facebook. But I still haven't received payment for the items I sold you. Dabur Nepal, I supplied ghee to your factory in Bara and your procurement staff Shankar Pant openly asked for a kickback. I still haven't received full payment.

The main culprit here is the market that runs on credit, and the tendency of big retailers to look down upon small businesses. How long can I tolerate phone calls, messages, threats day in and day out? Creditors, banks, tax offices, raw material suppliers, relatives,

clients and employees all call for money. Wouldn't it be nice to get a call from those who want to give, for a change?

And even after all this, I have still managed to pay all the banks, farmers and the poor. I have paid the bank's monthly instalments and interest so far, except for future payments. On the business front, I need to return Rs800,000 to three parties in Chitwan. I haven't been able to pay other personal loans, interest and VAT.

I was affiliated with the Bibeksheel Sajha Party for five to six years, as district coordinator for Ilam, but come elections, the party collapsed. The Rastriya Swatantra Party offered me a ticket to contest the election from Ilam-1, but I had no money.

I tried to go abroad again for work-- I was selected for the position of a driver at a ministry in Qatar but the manpower agency asked for a Rs800,000 fee. Where could I get that kind of money?

Depressed, my wife said she would kill herself too. I have decided to give up. Please do not try to save me. If I am saved, I will kill myself again. If the police catches me, I will kill myself in prison. I am revolting, so that this country may help someone else like me who wants to do something, may create a conducive environment.

I tried everything to live, but now even hope has failed me. I am sorry. If anyone has a kind heart, please help my wife pay my debts. Or else, she might follow me, and our two daughters will be left alone. NANUKA ADHIKARI
SAVING AC 2907010001814
GLOBAL IME BANK, NEW
BANESWOR BRANCH
Contact: 9849383133

My Nanuka, please do not fret, you will get help. Please forgive me, I tried everything I could do to make things better. The care of our daughters is now on your shoulders. When they are older, please make them understand that their father could not achieve success in this country despite everything, was met with adversity at every corner, was robbed and exploited everywhere. Those who cheat others fare better in this country than those who toil

hard.

I was once a very optimistic, positive-thinking and ambitious person ... I worked hard, went through all kinds of struggles to achieve my dream. I was very good in sales and marketing. I had the training and experience in leadership and motivational skills, I had a talent for business ... I had also learnt English, computer skills, modern business techniques, legal formalities, and was a skilled driver too.

But I understood from my own professional frustrations why so many young Nepalis leave this country to work abroad. They are running away from Nepal's corrupt policies, from an economy run by brokers, from the monopoly market, nepotism, favouritism. Nothing can be done in this corrupt country. There is injustice and discrimination at every step.

I joined politics thinking it was the only way to save the country. But Rabindra Mishra, Suryaraj Acharya, Mumaram Khanal, Keshab Dahal, Milan Pandey, Mahendra Thapa, Bhim Prasad Adhikari, Nidhara Silwal, Samiksha Banskota, Prakash Chandra Pariyar, how could you play with the feelings of so many aspiring youths of this country? If you could not stay united, run a party, why did you bring so many of us into politics? Why did you waste our time and money?

My family, relatives, friends, colleagues and neighbours, please forgive me. I reached out to my relatives and family many times because I wanted to live. I begged you to help me out, but you did not lift a finger.

My darling Nanuka, do not worry at all. Our family did not care for our tears, but there is certainly someone in this world who will support you and help you out of this distress. My relatives, my own mother and brother stopped listening to me. My friends became distant. There is no place for me to rest my sorrows. How much longer can I carry this burden? Rs2 million would have sufficed for now ... to pay back the loan and interest to Siddhartha Bank, or monthly instalments to Machapuchre Bank.

I could not stay alive although



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Turkish films

Turkish Airlines has released three commercial films highlighting the opportunities offered by its SMARTIST hub operated by Turkish Cargo. The first film follows a Barramundi grown in South Asia and transported to New York. The second shows a ceramic vase owned by a Chinese dynasty and auctioned in Paris. The third is set in a greengrocer counter in Tokyo about Kiwano that has been flown in from Africa.



The SMARTIST hub in Istanbul distributes a range of products, from automotive parts to perishable goods from all over the world. Says Turkish Airlines Chair Ahmet Bolat: "We built SMARTIST, our mega cargo facility that ranks among the largest hubs in the world. With this strategic investment, we have become the bridge of trade between east and west."

Shequal Ncell



agriculture problems in the country. Termed 'Hacking for Humanity,' the event will take place from 10-12 February.

Shequal Foundation with Ncell is organising the largest hackathon involving Nepali female information technology students. Those selected will be tasked to create solutions to solve health, education and

Power shortfall

Nepal's electricity generation capacity has gone down from 2,500MW to barely 800MW due to falling river levels due to the long winter drought. It has not rained in Central and Eastern Nepal since mid-October. There is a daily peak hour unofficial power cut for industries, and Nepal is importing electricity from India to meet the shortfall.

However, NEA has reduced system loss, leakage and pilferage to 7.49% at a little over 317 million electricity units in the last five months. Janakpur had the most electricity leakage at 12.80% and leakage in the overall system was 12.05%. NEA is trying to reduce this further with new and upgraded substations, better meter reading, controlling theft and replacing closed meters.

More Indian aid

India's new budget announced this week has increased cooperation assistance to INR5.5 billion, which is INR1.25 billion more than the previous year. However, tiny Bhutan, which has a population of just 700,000 is still getting INR24 billion in aid, although this is less than last year.

Tightening belt

Finance Ministry has decided to cut government expenditure to save Rs10.5 billion. This means reducing the budgets of all ministries and agencies of the federal government by 20% which includes fuel, maintenance, office



supplies, newspapers, printing services, information system and software operating expenses, tours, program expenses, monitoring and evaluation expenses, staff training, seminars, machinery, furniture and structural improvement of constructed buildings. The treasury has a deficit of Rs90 billion.

FNCCI support

Chandra Prasad Dhakal, Senior Vice President of the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI), has assured that the chamber will



support local entrepreneurs and the agenda put forth by the private sector despite the economic slowdown and the government's austerity measures.

USAID visit

USAID head Smantha Power is visiting Nepal this week, following close on the heels of the two-day trip to Kathmandu by US Deputy Foreign Secretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland. Power is expected to meet government officials, civil society leaders, students, and businesses. She will emphasise USAID help in 'Nepal's efforts and achievements in becoming a more democratic, prosperous, inclusive, and resilient country', USAID said, adding: 'Administrator Power will announce new efforts to build momentum to strengthen democratic gains in federalism, social inclusion, civil society and media freedom'.



I wished to. After I wrote this statement, I shared it with a few people in an attempt to save myself. I was assured I would get help, but such assurances turned out to be empty platitudes. I made this decision when I ran out of options. I wanted to spend time with my daughters and help them grow into good citizens, I wanted to hold on to my wife for a long time. Where do I go? With whom do I share all of this?

Prachanda, you fought a war that killed 17,000 Nepalis. You made the country a federal, secular republic. You promulgated a new Constitution through Parliament. But you turned this country into one where young people like me are unable to do anything.

How can I be unaffected when the country is going through all this? All of these problems are due to the credit market, unscientific tax policies, capital flight, a lack of foreign investment, freeze on estate, capital, and shares, and much more.

I am consigning my body to flames with the following demands to the Nepal government, and an appeal that these demands be fulfilled. May this nation be one worth living in, one that is kind to those who work hard. I hope my appeal reaches everyone. These are not just what I have gone through, it is everyone's experience. So, why is nobody else saying anything? I am only ending my own life, and will not bring harm to anyone else. I am making this appeal in a way that ensures that the government will listen.

May my country become one that people can be proud of, and one to which the millions of young people who have gone overseas can come back and make something out of themselves. Goodbye!

1. Zero VAT on domestic products. Charge 20% VAT on imported goods instead. VAT is the main cause of the price increase in consumer goods.
2. Implement market policies like 'Buyers Pay First', and put an end to the credit market.
3. Implement tax policies like 'Higher the Profit – Lower the Tax Rate'. Since increased profits will mean decreased tax rates, businesses will earn more profit.
4. Enable a system of land leasing. Nepalis have become complacent due to the practice of land inheritance. Make laws so an individual can own land for up to 50 years only.
5. Bring reforms to Bank Mortgage Valuation. Let the productive land in our village have the same

valuation as the unproductive land in our cities.

6. Bring all rentable properties under the tax ambit. People with monthly salaries of Rs10,000 have to pay 1% TDS, yet is it fair that those who collect millions in rent monthly pay no tax at all? Even if homeowners do pay tax, it comes out of the tenants' pockets.
7. Big business and industries have been holding Nepal's markets hostage — they need to be regulated.
8. Shut down all online businesses that operate without registration. Such businesses must be legally registered and should have paid necessary taxes.
9. Scrap labour permits for those who want to seek foreign employment through official visas. Labour permits are just a formality required at Nepal's airport, and a way to keep brokers well-fed with fees and kickbacks.
10. Make public all your old files relating to grants and subsidies, and we will learn about the degree of corruption. Incentives and subsidies should be provided to all those who need it, and not to companies that only exist on paper.
11. Eliminate middlemen. The government should develop a national online server called Palika Bazar to connect Nepal's local units. Prices of agricultural and industrial products in all local units must be broken down on the national database.
12. Nepalis export cardamom to India and buy imported cardamom powder, sell ginger to India and import ginger paste, export orthodox teas from Ilam in Calcutta and drink imported Lipton tea. Nepali brands must be made available in the Nepali market. Let the international market recognise our products.
13. Legalise marijuana farming and the country will prosper within two to four years.
14. Discourage privatisation of education, health, and the public transport sectors, which are basic services that the state must provide to the people.
15. Provide housing facilities to government employees. A government salary of Rs45,000 is not enough to cover housing, education, healthcare and more. So what will government workers do if not resort to corruption?
16. Bring comprehensive reforms to the Public Procurement Act. Development contracts should not go to those who bid the lowest, but to those who present modern, scientific, self-budgeted proposals.
17. Parliament must implement capital punishment for corruption, heinous murders and rape.

18. End caste-based reservation and provide such quotas to farmers and poor people through an identity card-system.
19. Close the open border with India. At the least, issue visa-on-arrival for a set time to Indian citizens from all border checkpoints.
20. Encourage domestic production and imports to replace exports. Facilitate production-oriented programs. The government must provide every kind of encouragement to the manufacturing industry.

21. Shut down micro-finance institutions. 60% of Nepal's money is circulated through savings and loan cooperatives, while 40% is circulated through private and government banks. Apply the concept of micro-financing to agricultural and industrial co-operatives.
22. Development expenses are facilitated by the taxes we pay. Yet 25% cash is being collected from consumers in the name of development partnership in places where infrastructure is being

developed. Put a stop to that.

23. Introduce 'Entrepreneurship' as a mandatory course in schools from Grade 6 onwards. Such skills are necessary to earn a living.
24. Immediately put into effect a rule that children of government employees and elected officials at all levels must be educated in public schools and colleges.
25. Ensure that interest rates on bank loans never increase above 7%. Much of the nation's money is in the hands of big businessmen, and it is those very businessmen who have investments in Nepal's leading banks.

To the new leaders who have sought power in an attempt to run the country: Rabi Lamichhane, Rajendra Lingden, Gyanendra Shahi, Sobita Gautam, Gagan Thapa, Bishwa Prakash Sharma, Yogesh Bhattarai, Toshima Karki, and all the new faces — do not just compete to be in government or get ministries, but address the underlying problems that affect the people.

Thank you,
An ordinary citizen of this nation
Prem Prasad Acharya (Santosh)
Suryodaya Municipality-11,
Kerabari, Ilam, Province 1, Nepal.
Currently in Kathmandu.
May my country live, even as I die.

Farewell. 🇳🇵

Full translation of the testimony online.
For counselling, and suicide prevention helpline:
TUTH Suicide Hotline: 9840021600
Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation-Nepal Crisis Hotline: 1660 010 2005
Mental Health Helpline Nepal: 1660 0133666
Centre for Mental Health and Counselling Nepal Toll-free: 16600185080, Hotline: 1145
Kashish Toll-free helpline: 166001-22322 (Bagmati Province)
Patan Hospital Helpline: 9813476123
National Suicide Prevention helpline operated by Mental Hospital Lagankhel and TPO: 1166



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CHITWAN'S BOTE PEOPLE IN A CHANGING WORLD

Little known fishing community clings to
life at the edge of the jungle

■ **Sravasti Ghosh Dastidar** in Chitwan

A tourist trip to Chitwan National Park usually includes interaction with the Tharu community. But most visitors do not get to see the region's lesser known indigenous people, the Bote.

The Tharu are known for their unique culture and artistic decorations manifested on walls, verandahs and household items. And while the Tharu are the people of the forest, the Bote are river people.

They mostly live along the East Rapti and Narayani rivers bordering Chitwan National Park, although there are some Bote settlements in Gorkha, Tanahu and Lamjung. The Bote are among the least known indigenous groups in Nepal, and their population is dwindling. According to the 2011 census, there were only 2,830 speaking the Bote language as a mother tongue.

Whereas transmigration of mountain settlers in the 1960s cleared the forests and displaced the Tharu, the expansion of Chitwan's highway towns and a tourism boom encroached on the Bote settlements along riverbanks. When traditional fishing and foraging of the Bote was restricted after the Chitwan National Park was established, the community moved to agriculture.

Lately, they have also adapted to other trades like carpentry, motorcycle repairs and even auto rickshaw driving. Near Sauraha three or four households still fish at the edge of the Chitwan National Park, as rhinos and crocodiles prowl on the opposite bank.

Dusk settles stealthily on the meandering East Rapti, which marks the boundary between the Chitwan National Park and the tourist village of Sauraha, where tourists are just beginning to return after the pandemic.

Asian Pied-Hornbills, spotted doves and kingfishers flit through the *sal* canopy. A group of men loiters around the thatched mud hut of Rishiram Bote (pictured, above).



Rishiram's wife and daughters go about the household chores of feeding their pet dogs, hen and goats, sweeping mud floors and washing utensils at the tube well. The boys play football. Everyone keeps looking towards the river expectantly.

The sun is now low in the misty sky, and in the golden light two small dugouts carved out of *simal* logs pull up at the bank. Unlike the longer canoes that ferry tourists and forest department personnel, these boats accommodate only two people.

The women and children run towards the canoes with red plastic basins and machetes. Rishiram and three others jump off the boats with handheld fishing nets brimming with bighead carps, silver carps, *rohu*, *naini*, *mrigal*, silver fish, catfish and eels.

There are 120 species of fish found in the cool, slow-moving waters of the Rapti. Some



of them are big, and there have been catches of up to 10kg. The licensed Bote fishermen are not allowed by the national park to use longer nets which would entangle crocodiles, and also make fishing unsustainable. The Bote fish for their own community, and have to be satisfied with whatever they can haul in their smaller nets.

The women unload the fish, weigh and sell them to the men who have gathered to inspect the evening catch. They are regular customers, mostly hotel and restaurant owners from Sauraha who wait around for the boats to return. They can resell the fish at triple the cost price in town. Within minutes, the entire lot is gone. It has been a good day.

On other days when there are some unsold, the Bote dry the fish and consume it themselves. The catch varies, with fewer fish in winter. Rishiram leaves at 6AM when it is still dark, paddling into the thick fog of the Rapti and returning late. The national park rules do not allow them to fish at night, and the Bote existence is hand-to-mouth.

The Bote literally live on the edge – the edge of jungle, and the edge of the rapidly urbanising inner plains of Chitwan Valley. Modernisation has pushed them to adapt to a monetised, mostly tourism dependent economy. And the national park, with its endangered and protected animals, keeps them out. This is life along the periphery of human habitation, and at the fringes of a protected nature reserve.

It can be dangerous floating along these crocodile infested waters and the tall grass of the Rapti floodplain which is the favourite habitat of tigers and rhinos. Sometimes, fish-eating gharial crocodiles get entangled in the nets, and although setting them free can be dangerous, the Bote are forbidden from harming the rare reptiles.

Gharials, with their long snouts and razor sharp teeth have to be disentangled with

great care, and there are always park rangers watching through binoculars from sentry towers along the river. The Park warden has trained them to follow instructions on fishing, the do's and don't's. For example, after disentangling them, the gharials have to be taken to the breeding centre at Kasara.

The larger mugger crocodiles are even more dangerous, and the Bote have lost friends and family to them, Rishiram's friend's body was found 50km downstream from where he was last seen in 2020.

During the monsoon, the Rapti's waters rise and the crocodiles come right up to the huts. They are shoed away with sticks, sometimes unsuccessfully.

In the misty winter mornings, the tall, thick elephant grass has rhinoceros, tigers and sometimes even wild elephants, lurking in them. The fishers and rhinos frequently cross paths.

On one such cold morning, Rishiram's uncle had gone into the forest with his nets, and he saw the rhino too late. It charged, and gored him.

Encountering tigers and wild elephants can be a risky affair. Especially if it happens to be Ronaldo, a rogue elephant which enters villages, mauling inhabitants. Villagers usually ward off the wild elephants with electrified barbed wire fences.

However, the intelligence quotient of elephants is legendary. They know when there is a power cut and listen to the sounds of generators, and vibrations in the wires, to determine when the wires do not carry a current. The villagers then have to resort to lighting fires to keep the animals out, as well as keep themselves warm.

Since the Chitwan National Park was

established in the 1970s, fishing activities have been regulated with strict guidelines. Some Bote now grow crops by the river. They also sell chicken, eggs and elephant grass, and buy *dal*, rice and buffalo meat to supplement their own supply of fish, mutton, chicken and homegrown vegetables.

They now have solar-powered lights, but the homes are still plastered with mud and cow dung. The roofing is made from elephant grass, which is harvested once a year in spring when the Park is open for collection, and have to be rethatched annually.

Rishiram and his brothers Parshuram, Dipak and Pardeep are the last few members of the Bote community in Sauraha. There are a few others living down the river in Pathiani. Chitwan is, however, dominated by the better-

known Tharu who have cleverly showcased their culture to attract tourists. Being more under-served than the Tharu, the Bote and Majhi communities of Chitwan are at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder.

The Bote language, dress, dances and songs are indigenous, and endangered as the way of life of these people is transformed.

The Bote language is Indo-European but does not have a script, and is distinct from the Tharu and other indigenous languages here. The link language with other communities is therefore Nepali, and as children go to school, they are losing touch with their mother tongue.

Many members of the community have moved on from Chitwan in search of greener pastures. The traditional livelihoods are being gradually replaced by agriculture and other trading activities that generate better income. The Chitwan National Park, which restricted



fishing, has given some of them auto-rickshaws under an instalment scheme as an alternative to their traditional livelihood.

But Rishiram's family has stayed on, and is one of the few that still make a living from fishing. He could not continue his studies as he had to become the provider of the family, but he encourages his own children to get an education and pursue their dreams.

The four children and Parshuram's two sons want to continue their studies though they are not sure about what they want to be when they grow up. Their school timings do not allow them to go fishing with their fathers, hence their interest in the traditional occupation of their community has waned. The girls go to school where they learn Nepali, English and Mathematics. They also help in the housework.

The transformation of Bote lives have not eroded their filial bonds. Community ties are still strong, and the families find dignity in working together, approaching life with plenty of smiles and pride in who they are. As with other communities in Nepal, change is rapid and relentless. Literacy and income generation can help Rishiram Bote and others lift themselves from their subsistence lifestyles without erasing too much of their precious culture, heritage.

Programs to uplift their socio-economic status involving tourism and conservation could combine tradition with modernity, and help preserve what is best in the Bote way of life. 🇳🇵

Sravasti Ghosh Dastidar is a photographer, travel and lifestyle journalist. She has a content writing and website development firm Sravasti's.

 **nepalitimes.com**
More pictures online.

EVENTS



Women in Music

This weekend, enjoy a night of traditional Nepali music accompanied by sounds of *madal*, *sarangi* and the flute.
4 February, 6.30pm, *Bluenote Coffee Shop, Lazimpat*

Art fest

Support local artists. Unwind at the Art and Craft festival every weekend. Enjoy the food, music, art and crafts and the Kids Art Station.
Saturdays, 11am-3pm, Bikalpa Art Center, Pulchok

Blood Donation

Participate in the weekend blood donation drive, and help save lives.
4 February, 10am, *Little Einsteins Sundar Preschool, Basundhara*

Mass Rally

Take part in Nepal Cancer Relief Society's mass rally and mark World Cancer Day this week.
4 February, 8am, *Bhrikuti Mandap*



Ladies Night

Spend time with your girlfriends at Pauline's Rooftop, and get a free cocktail every hour.
9 February, *Pauline's Rooftop, Lazimpat (01) 4002711*

DINING



DanRan Restaurant

Don't miss out on the soft tofu, pork cutlets and don varieties offered at DanRan Restaurant.
Jhamsikhel Road (01) 5521027

ONLINE ARCHIVES

King Falls AM

A bimonthly podcast, King Falls AM centres on a lonely little mountain town's late-night AM talk radio show and its paranormal, peculiar happenings and inhabitants. Find on Stitcher and Apple podcasts.



Roblox

Roblox is a global video game platform that hosts user-created games of multiple genres. Join the immersive 3D world and enjoy games created by players for players.

Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya

Browse through the collection of Nepali archived content including manuscripts, newsletters, sketches, and photographs on the Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya database.



Street Festivals

Google's Colourful Street Fests & Carnivals is a virtual tour of eight of the most vibrant street festivals in the world, some of which include the La Tomatina food fight in Spain and the Mardi Gras festival in New Orleans.

Kahoot!

Kahoot!, a free game-based learning platform that brings fun and learning to any subject. Play at work, school or at home.



Tukche Thakali Kitchen

Having a hard time deciding what to make for lunch? Head to Tukche and get a taste of Thakali food made from the Nepali staple *dal bhat*.
Darbar North Gate (01) 4412462

Anatolia

Anatolia's halal Indian and Turkish dishes are packed with spices and an unforgettable assortment of flavours. From the Mutton Kofta Curry to the Baklava, the dishes will keep one wanting more.
Thamel (01) 4258757

GETAWAY



Dwarika Resort

Dwarika Resort offers a re-energiating spa experience as well as appetising multi-cuisine. Try the Crystal Salt therapy during the visit.
Dhulikhel (11) 490612

Namo Buddha Resort

The traditional Newa style resort is perched on a hilltop with a magnificent view of the Himalaya each morning. Also perfect for short hikes.
Namo Buddha, Phulbari, 9851106802

Kathmandu Guest House

Kathmandu Guest House's buildings offer hospitable and comfortable accommodations, serene gardens and a short walk to Kathmandu Darbar Square.
Thamel (01) 4700632

Temple Tree Resort

Temple Tree, with its traditional Nepali architecture and delicious food, promises a tranquil atmosphere at Lakeside.
Lakeside, Pokhara (061) 465819



Tiger Tops

Get up close and personal with wildlife and the local Tharu culture at the Tiger Tops Tharu Lodge, located four kilometres away from Chitwan National Park.
Kawasoti, Nawalparasi (07) 8690721

Buingal

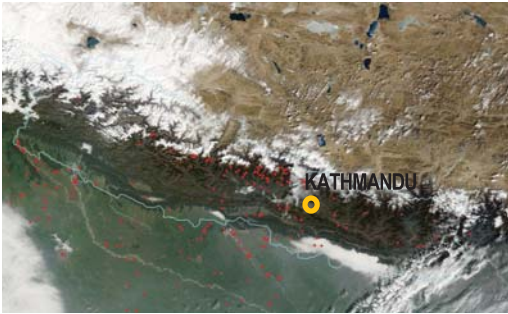
Buingal offers an amazing multi-cuisine and a great ambience for family and friends to come together. Don't miss out on the vegetable *sekuwas*.
Maitidevi (01) 4521393



Mad Over Pizza

Mad Over Pizza definitely promises to make visitors mad over the pizzas made with care and exploding with flavour.
Milan Chowk, Baneshwor (01) 4498970

WEEKEND WEATHER



| FRIDAY | SATURDAY | SUNDAY |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 21° 5° | 21° 6° | 20° 6° |

Winter drought, wildfires

This is a composite of a satellite weather map of Nepal and a NASA Fire Information and Management System (FIRMS) infrared, tracking wildfires in the Himalaya in a 24-hour period Wednesday-Thursday. Most fires are in central and eastern Nepal, with big ones raging out of control in Dolakha, Sindhupalchok, Gorkha and Myagdi. Last week's rain prevented fires in west Nepal. With no significant moisture-bearing westerlies forecast for next week, the dry spell is going to continue. Maximum temperature in Kathmandu will stay in the low 20s, with breezy afternoons and chilly nights. Accumulated precipitation forecasts do not offer much hope for rain till at least mid-February. The Air Quality Index (AQI) remains hazardous, especially in the Bhaktapur area.

OUR PICK

The highly-acclaimed 2021 South Indian Telugu drama *Love Story* set in Hyderabad follows zumba instructor Revanth 'Rocky'—a lower caste Christian—and a B.Tech graduate Mounika Rani 'Mouni'—an upper caste Hindu—who meet in the city while chasing their dreams. What follows is a love story that develops organically, but the pair must overcome the massive caste divide as well as address difficult issues including child molestation. Naga Chaitanya Akkineni gives a career defining performance as Rocky and Sai Pallavi as Mouni mesmerises with her expressions and dance moves. Soulful music and a powerful supporting cast of Rajeev Kanakala and Easwari Rao directed by Sekhar Kammula add to the experience.



MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI

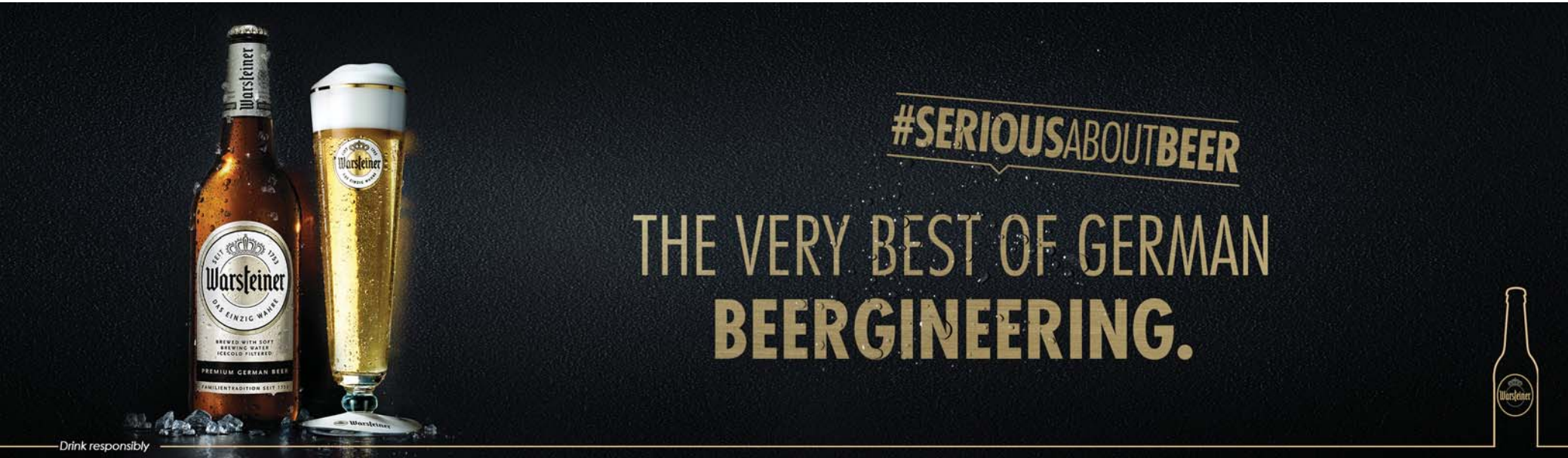


सामाजिक सञ्जाल प्रयोगमा सचेतता अपनाऔं

- सामाजिक सञ्जालमा अपरिचित व्यक्तिको साथी बन्ने अनुरोधलाई विश्वस्त भएर मात्र प्रतिक्रिया जनाऔं ।
- अपरिचित व्यक्तिलाई जथाभावी साथी बन्न अनुरोध नपठाऔं ।
- सामाजिक सञ्जाल तथा अन्य विद्युतीय माध्यमबाट चिन्ता पुरस्कार जस्ता आर्थिक प्रलोभनका प्रस्तावको भरमा नपरौं ।
- आफूले प्रवाह गरेका सन्देश वा सूचनाबाट समाजमा पर्नसक्ने नकारात्मक प्रभावको ख्याल गरौं ।
- आफ्नो सन्देशले कुनै व्यक्ति वा अन्य कुनै समुदायको आत्मसम्मानमा चोट नपुऱ्याऔं ।



नेपाल सरकार
विज्ञापन बोर्ड





When art unites what divides us

Two exhibitions tune into the dialogue between nature and life through experiments in contemporary art

■ Ashish Dhakal

A large painting immediately catches the eyes of visitors to Siddhartha Art Gallery. ‘Modern Rawan’ is an acrylic on canvas by Roshan Pradhan and shows a naked figure crouching with one hand under its chin. Its face is missing, replaced by a pink lotus. The figure wears a golden crown on its head with a swirl of clouds around its shoulders like an ethereal scarf. Disembodied faces of Albert Einstein, Michael Jackson, Steve Jobs, Da Vinci, Stephen Hawking, Karl Marx, even Adolf Hitler, hang on both sides. Pradhan’s striking depictions of cultural motifs in conversation with modernity are at once a reflection and diversion. When AI-generated digital art is in vogue, centuries-old practices hang uncertain. An android is a central figure in ‘New World’, with metallic limbs and closed eyes. Honeycomb is another prominent motif which calls to mind laborious bees, hive-mind, as well the notion of clockwork colonies. Pradhan is concerned with the questions of free-will, human intelligence, culture and nature, and what we take into the future. Or, rather, is anything from the past worth saving when modern ideas and technologies continuously inform our choices and lifestyle? Pradhan is part of the five-member Pagoda Group, featuring artists Kishor Nakarmi, Pradhumna Shrestha, Mala Shrestha and Rudra Bahadur Pun, whose works are currently being exhibited at Siddhartha Art Gallery. Called *Collective Expressions*, the paintings cover a wide array of motifs and styles, but have the common theme of Nepal’s cultural heritage. The variance in style reaffirms Nepal’s unique position as a living culture with diverse traditions, faiths and backgrounds. Pradhan’s futuristic metaphors, Pun’s calming chörten to Nakarmi’s gothic Buddhas, or Pradhumna Shrestha’s blazing Darbar Squares to Mala Shrestha’s expressionistic *mudra*, the paintings capture the dialogue between creative forces and a sense of spirituality and one’s roots. A striking example of this is Pradhumna Shrestha’s ‘Shangrila’

series on architectural and material space. The Darbar squares of Kathmandu Valley are seen through a fiery lens, with delicate accuracy. There is a discomforting hotness to depictions of vanishing traditions and heritage, almost crying out to the viewer: What are you waiting for, how can you sit comfortably as fires rage around you? Elsewhere, Mala Shrestha takes the symbol of nature and life, merging a step further as paintings and woodcarvings blend with trees, and by extension the earth, their origin. Her works highlight the significance of emotions that bridge nature to the arts and crafts. In ‘Holy Water’, colours and shapes inspire the viewer to look beyond the present reality. **Woodcut prints** The gallery’s other space across the courtyard is currently showing a very different kind of artwork: woodcut prints. *Monsoon Printmaking 2023* is the result of an online workshop organised by Bindu Space for Artists in 2022 and brings together the unique expressions of 35 multidisciplinary artists, including Anusha Thapa, Aman Maharjan, Bidhata KC, Bidhyaman Tamang, Jenney Ghale, Saurganga Darshandhari and Sujita Chaudhary. Woodcut is a form of relief printing, and this artform highlights the balance between ink and no ink, which the artist cuts away into the surface of a block of wood with gouges, leaving the printing parts level with the surface while removing the non-printing parts. There is a variation of expressions, from monochrome, duotone to multicoloured prints. Manisha Manandhar’s ‘Lukha Duwa’ pays homage to Newa traditions and architecture while Katyani Rai’s ‘Self Portrait’ depicts a surreal landscape with trees, faces and a crow. Bidhyaman Tamang’s ‘The Older I get, The More I Learn’ shows a letterbox, cats and rats, a urinating dog, and Snellen charts strewn around: a metaphor, perhaps, of miscommunication and lack of vision. Right next to it sits a very endearing cat, its round eyes like planets peering at coins in the sky: ‘Gravity’ by Sony Rai. These symbols for money present the staggering reality of capitalist

attractions as a curious creature looks on. Inside, ‘Structures’ by Bidhata KC shows an ambiguous green landscape with no top or bottom (or are we looking at it from above?) as rectangles and squares make out buildings, indicating a dialogue between the earth, trees, sky ... and humans. Rubi Maharjan’s ‘In the Blues’ appears as a raging sea, but looking deeper there is a profoundly beautiful sadness in the spaces, which is inexplicably also hopeful. Together, the exhibitions occupy a liminal space between seasons, where it feels as if all meanings are possible. Experimentation draws attention to challenges and expressions that define our lives and experiences. None of them grant us easy answers. 🇳🇵



Collected Expressions by Pagoda Group
Till 17 February 2023

Monsoon Printmaking 2023 by multiple artists
Till 18 February 2023

Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited
Sunday – Friday: 11:00am - 05:00pm
Saturday: 12:00 - 5:00pm



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Biodynamic agripreneurs

A new organic farming approach that helps revive soil health is spreading across Nepal

■ **Sanjib Chaudhary** in Saptari

Across Nepal, the organic matter content of the soil is falling due to erratic weather, poor farming practices and overuse of agro-chemicals. Ideally, a farm should have 5% organic content in the soil, but in most places it has fallen to less than 2%.

Spiral Farm House near the small town of Mahuli in Saptari district in the eastern Tarai is out to reverse this trend, and has become a learning centre to revive soil fertility and improve yields.

"I started this farm ten years ago for sustainable farming and conservation of soil and microorganisms," explains Sudarshan Chaudhary of Spiral Farm House (pictured, right). "We make eight different types of biodynamic composts which not only help revive the soil but also give us wholesome food that helps maintain good health."

Chaudhary says that intensive cropping, continuous application of chemical fertilisers and pesticides, mechanised farming, among others



PHOTOS: SUDARSHAN CHAUDHARY

have led to soil degradation in Nepal.

But the composts at Spiral Farm House have been doing wonders for the farm, and Chaudhary says the nutrients in the soil are replenished organically with the compost, providing better harvests and yield.

Chaudhary not only makes manure and compost from cow dung, cattle horn, bone, silica, straw, twigs, dried leaves, and plants, but also makes liquid fertiliser and biopesticide from medicinal plants and locally available materials.

Biodynamic farming is a fancy name for going back to the basics of traditional farming. It emphasises the use of locally available raw material, particularly compost made from animal dung, herbs, and other raw materials, with the goal of achieving soil self-sustainability. The necessity to add extra sources of nutrients, such as cow dung, bones and straw is due to soil fertility in Nepal's farms being sub-optimal.

Due to its reliance on organic inputs for soil fertility, biodynamic farming needs a holistic approach that incorporates crop rotation, crop-livestock integration, and seasonal farming cycles.

In Chaudhary's farm, cow horn manure, used for improving soil biodiversity, is made by burying fresh manure of pasture-fed cows in hollows of horns for six months. Horn silica, which is useful for plants to grow, is made from the sand buried in the horns of cattle. The other six varieties are medicinal plants used to improve the microbial population, which is necessary for soil fertility.

Farmers reap what they sow, and more

Boosting small and medium farm enterprises can lift household income and the national economy

■ **Marissa Taylor**

Tulsi Giri had little idea three years ago that his agri-food marketing platform in Kaski would take off so quickly.

Today, his digital startup called Kheti has grown from 1,300 farmers to 10,000 spread across Bagmati and Gandaki provinces.

"We always knew the potential of growth a platform like Kheti would have, but we didn't think it would grow this quickly," admits Giri, whose platform facilitates farmers to improve farm productivity and connect them to markets.

Kheti does this with advisory technical support to farmers, and collaborates with banks for agri-financing and subsidies. It also documents the agricultural cycle of farmers so they can improve productivity with inter-cropping, and connects them to consumers.

A report by the South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment shows SMEs make up 80% of the industrial sector's contribution to the GDP in Nepal and about one-third of the agricultural sector.

Some 66% of the country's total population depends on farming for livelihood, yet small and medium enterprises, especially in the agriculture sector, face multiple hurdles for growth.

"Politics and inconsistent policies have always been a barrier to prosperity, including in the agriculture sector. So, farming suffers from the high cost of production and stiff competition in export," says Gokarna Raj Awasthi of FNCCI.

Other challenges include an inadequately trained workforce that lacks skills, high interest rates when accessing credit for farmers, procedural difficulty in subsidy programs, poor post-harvesting plans and ineffective dissemination of



RITU POUDYAL/SWISSCONTACT

GREEN WITH JOY: A farmer associated with Kheti harvests and sorts mustard greens to sell to local vendors and wholesale markets.

information about existing incentives and facilities.

Nepal's diverse topography provides agriculture with immense as yet untapped potential, says Durga Prasad Bhandari of Paicho Pasal, another company that works with over 25,000 farmers in delivering produce across Nepal.

He adds, "Agriculture is the only sector in the country that is capable of mass production, but we have not been able to capitalise on it ... we do not even meet local demand owing to challenges in channeling and logistics management."

Paicho Pasal also assists farmers in strengthening production capabilities by providing technical skill training to improve harvests, and reduce marketing gaps.

"Another reason that has held back growth is a lack of concrete policies to

increase productivity. There is also no strategy to export," says Bhandari.

When asked, government officials admit that almost all farmers in Nepal have small-scale holdings of less than a hectare which keeps them at barely subsistence level. Asked what the state is doing about this, Secretary at the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development, Govinda Prasad Sharma, told us: "The government is prioritising agriculture as the main engine for economic progress and working to reduce risk for farmers and private investors."

Indeed, in 2015 Nepal unveiled the Agriculture Development Strategy to make farming more competitive, sustainable, and inclusive to improve livelihoods, job creation and provide food and nutrition security.

The Nepal Rastra Bank has also made provisions for refinancing at 2%, special refinancing at 1% and general refinancing at 3% to small enterprises. Banks are not allowed to charge more than 5% interest on small enterprise refinancing and general refinancing and more than 3% interest on special refinancing from the borrower.

In January last year, the government opened the agricultural sector to foreign direct investment for the first time.

And both Kheti and Paicho are currently working with the Commercial Agriculture for Smallholders and Agribusinesses (CASA) implemented by Swisscontact Nepal, which supports agri-SMEs to secure investment.

Since its introduction in 2019, the program has worked with over 20 SMEs, 30 producer organisations, and several industry associations and government bodies to overcome various logistical and financial hurdles and expand their horizons.

"We have been able to bring in over \$2 million investment through local financial institutions in the past four years. This is of course just a drop in the ocean considering the size of our agriculture sector, we collectively need to do more to realise the full potential of Nepal's farms," says Siddharth Khadka of Swisscontact Nepal.

Bhandari of Paicho Pasal agrees that reviving agriculture is critical in generating rural jobs and reducing out-migration, but for that the government has to focus on securing investment and dynamic policies.

He adds, "In a world where wars, pandemics, and a climate crisis can throw everything off balance, Nepal needs to strengthen its agricultural production and become food secure." 🇳🇵



BUMPER HARVESTS: Sudarshan Chaudhary of Spiral Farm House in Saptari district proudly displays his harvest of cauliflowers (left). Biodynamic compost made from cattle dung but adds the horns of dead livestock to enrich nutrients in the fertiliser (above). Kabindra Yadav of a biodynamic farm growing organic vegetables and fruits in Kanchanpur in the western Tarai.



PHOTO: SUBODH KUMAR CHAUDHARY

Biodynamic farming increases crop productivity and nutritional quality while also improving soil carbon sequestration by making these soil-enriching sources available. Microbes play a major role in carbon storage in the soil. Encouraged by successful yields produced using biodynamic techniques, Chaudhary has also turned to mentoring and motivating the next generation of farmers in Saptari and surrounding districts. “I teach youth why biodynamic farming is important and why we should adopt it for sustainability,” says Chaudhary, who learned the basics of biodynamic farming during a training in 2012. Since then, he has trained more than 200 other farmers from Sunsari, Morang, Saptari, Siraha and Chitwan districts. Suman Kumari Mirdaha, a 24-year-old business management student, has been helping her parents grow rice, lentils,

and vegetables after attending Chaudhary’s training session on biodynamic farming and believes organic farming is the answer to the growing concerns, given the climate crisis. Sukhi Lal Chaudhary and Lalit Chaudhary, both in their 50s from Saptari district, have also learned biodynamic farming from the Spiral Farm. Sukhi Lal has been growing biodynamic vegetables which he said fetch a better price than vegetables grown using chemical fertilisers. Lalit’s farm soil quality has improved due to biodynamic techniques. Despite this, the need to produce more to earn more is luring most farmers in Agnisair Krishna Sawaran Rural Municipality to increase the dose of chemical fertilisers every year, despite knowing that it is adversely affecting the soil. A 2019 survey showed that 39 of 40 farmers interviewed in the

Rural Municipality used chemical fertilisers to boost production. But Sukhi Lal Chaudhary says there is no need for chemicals and he has been getting regular yields as much as what farmers using chemical fertilisers and pesticides are getting. And he is not the only one. Mahendra Kumar Shrestha from Holy Green Agro Farm says that to create a healthy eco-friendly community, he engages local farmers to switch to organic and biodynamic agriculture, as well as explore ways of achieving a sustainable and humane economy. Krishna Gurung’s Kevin Rohan Memorial Eco Foundation, established in 2008 in Khokana in Kathmandu Valley, has also been promoting biodynamic farming methods. Currently, some 5,500 farmers across Nepal are practicing biodynamic farming and more than 5,000 farms covering over 400,000 acres have been certified in 60

countries across the globe. According to a Cambridge University Press study, biodynamic farms ‘have better soil quality but lower crop yields and equal or higher net returns per hectare than conventional farming’. The study added that more research is needed to confirm the benefits of soil preparation and how it works. Biodynamic farming focuses on producing necessary manures, compost, and nutrients on its own as much as possible. However, considerably small farms need to source fodder and additional food resources for animals from outside. Biodynamic farming principles, developed by Austrian architect and social reformer Rudolf Steiner, incorporate elements of regenerative farming. But for Chaudhary, it is like returning to the farming practices of his forebears before the advent of chemical fertilisers and pesticides. Biodynamic farming also

includes crop rotation and intercropping which have been practiced by farmers for generations in Nepal’s southern plains. They generally sow flaxseed and lentils in the paddy fields before the paddy starts to ripen. When it is time to harvest paddy, they already have a standing crop of flaxseed and lentils in their fields. After harvesting the flaxseed and lentils, they would prepare the land for wheat cultivation. “But climate change is resulting in unpredictable rainfall, heavy hailstorm, and random drought period occurring on a frequent basis which is affecting the overall farming and livestock rearing system,” says soil expert Sambat Ranabhat. “Biodynamic farming is a holistic approach through the integration of the different farming sectors. When climate change affects one of the components, then it will affect overall farming.” In 2022, Sudarshan Chaudhary sold his biodynamic mangoes at Rs100/kg. However, before converting into biodynamic, his mangoes fetched just Rs30-40/kg. For his biodynamic vegetables, he charges Rs5 more than the regular produce being sold in the market. “People here do not care much for organic and biodynamic products,” lamented Chaudhary. “We are planning to supply our produce to major cities, including Kathmandu where the consumers pay a premium for chemical-free produce.” The need of the moment is to expand the biodynamic practice in the country and provide the products at reasonable prices, and Nepal’s pioneering ‘agripreneurs’ like Chaudhary, Shrestha and Gurung are at the frontlines of this transformation. 🇳🇵

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Guerrilla-turned-Member of Parliament

Urmila Majhi wants her former commander, now prime minister, to work for the people for a change

■ Anita Bhetwal

It was raining heavily. Urmila Majhi was returning home after a long hard day of paddy planting in her Kavre village. On the way back, she saw policemen taking away at gunpoint Maoist guerrillas, two men and two women, whom they had just detained.

The next day, the bodies of the two men were hanging from a tree. The two women had also been killed after being raped.

It was 17 July 1999, the day that changed the course of Urmila's life. She learnt that the Maoists were fighting to liberate the people, for social justice, and to make Nepali society more egalitarian.

"Being witness to such a monstrous act, especially the rape of women, filled me with outrage and a sense of rebellion," says Urmila, who was only 15 then.

Soon, Urmila became a member of the Maoist student committee, started reading party pamphlets and learnt revolutionary songs. A year later in 2000, she joined the Maoist militia with her cousins Purmila and Chetkumari Majhi, both of whom were already inducted.

Urmila left her home one morning to join them. Her mother begged her to stay, promising to educate her. But Urmila was filled with revolutionary fervour, and was determined to join the armed struggle.

She became a district committee member of the Maoists in Lalitpur, and was assigned to mobilise support for the party in the villages



WAR TO PEACE: Urmila Majhi at her revolutionary wedding to fellow-guerrilla Prem Tamang in 2002 (left) and in Parliament this week (centre) as a representative of the CPN Maoist-Centre party.

along the border with Makwanpur.

She met artist Prem Bahadur Tamang at a party program, and the two fell in love. In November 2002, the party got the two comrades married by exchanging their guns. Less than a year later, Tamang was killed in an encounter with police.

"I got the news a month later. I was heartbroken but did not shed a single tear," recalls Urmila, who gave birth to their daughter just a week later. Within three months, she was area in-charge of Makwanpur, and would walk the forest trails with the baby strapped to her back.

After her cousin Purmila was also killed in action, Urmila left her baby with her mother and joined her comrades in battle. She was caught up in a fierce firefight in Jhurjhure near Hetauda.

Guerrilla leaders Barshaman Pun and Agni Sapkota were leading the attack, and the battle lasted all night. Pun was known by his nom de guerre Ananta, and went on to become Finance Minister, while Sapkota was Speaker of Parliament in post-conflict coalition governments.

The battle lasted all night and by the end of it, 26 Maoists, 60 security force personnel and three civilians had been killed.

"People were dead or dying, the villagers were all grieving," remembers Urmila. "For the first time, I was terrified, and I came to realise the futility of violence."

During her work in Makwanpur, Urmila met a journalist affiliated with the Maoist movement, Santosh Paudel. They were like-minded, and the two got married.

After the peace accord in 2006,

the Maoist party sent its cadre back to their home districts and Urmila also returned to Kavre. She wanted to field her candidacy for the first Constituent Assembly election, but she was not given a ticket.

The Maoist party itself, to Urmila's dismay, had lost its way. She gave birth to a son, but could not stay home much because of her involvement with the Majhi Rastriya Mukti Morcha in Lamjung.

Finally, 15 years after her first attempt at getting into post-conflict national politics, Urmila was endorsed as a PR candidate by her party in last year's election.

During the war, Urmila had only heard of her Maoist commander Prachanda, and met him for the first time after the ceasefire in 2006 at a training program as Pushpa Kamal Dahal. She remembers thinking that he could do a lot more for Nepal's

under-served after joining peaceful democratic politics because he believed so fervently in the upliftment of the Nepali people.

But in the following years, her hope that the Maoists could bring change started to dim. Equality was just an empty slogan. The goals of the armed struggle were never met. Those who had given up their lives for the revolution were forgotten.

Federalism and inclusion might have devolved power on paper, but it has not changed the centralised power structure. Still, Urmila felt that she should herself try to change things from within.

She says: "To my former commander, and current Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, I want to say this: please pay attention to the people and start working for their welfare for a change." 🇳🇵



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