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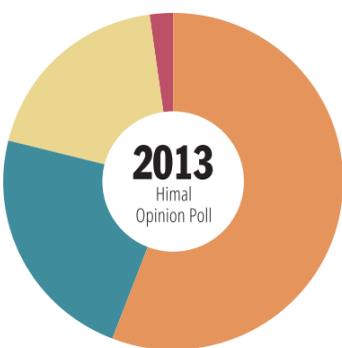
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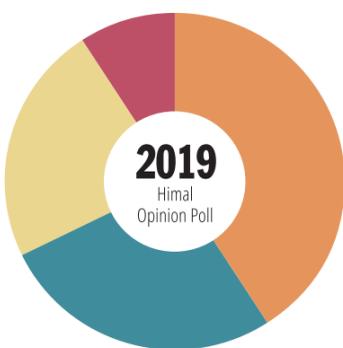
'Hope-mongering'

Compared to a few years ago, what is the situation of the country? (in %)



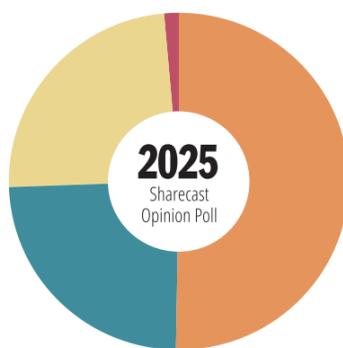
- Bad / Worse than before **56**
- Good / getting better **23**
- OK / May get better **19**
- Don't know / Won't say **2**

What direction is the country headed? (in %)



- Right **41**
- Wrong **27**
- Same as before **23**
- Don't know / don't want to say **9**

How is the state of the country compared to the last five years? (in %)



- Very good / Somewhat good **50.5**
- About the same **24.2**
- Somewhat worse / Much worse **24**
- Don't know / don't want to answer **1.3**

■ **Sonia Awale**

Half of Nepalis think the country, and their families, are doing better than five years ago. Really?

The prevailing narrative is that Nepalis have given up on Nepal, are fed up with geriatric serial prime ministers, and are fleeing the country in droves.

But the latest Sharecast Initiative poll found that half the respondents felt their lives had improved, and the country was doing mostly okay. But it has become unpopular in Nepal to say that things are not so bad, and analysts who cited the survey were mercilessly trolled on social media for being 'hope-mongers'.

"There is a strong narrative

that Nepali society is in a deep state of depression and most of us want to make it self-fulfilling," says Rameshwar Bohora, editor at the digital portal Ukaalo which got much hate mail after publishing the survey findings. "What I saw in the survey result was not despair but anger and dissatisfaction at politicians, which means there is still hope."

To be sure, the poll also registered mass discontent with a dysfunctional government, its non-performance and corruption. Respondents had a long list of complaints that included unemployment, poverty, poor service delivery, inflation, etc. The survey indicated that their ultimate outlet was foreign employment.

"The fact that people are dissatisfied with politics and

criticise politicians means they still have hope and expectation, democratic politics is also the only way to improve things," says political analyst Indra Adhikari. "People vent out their frustration to build public pressure so leaders and institutions will correct their behaviour and perform. This is how a healthy democracy works, and if we reject public opinion and treat it negatively, then it is our weakness."

Comparing previous nationwide public opinion surveys conducted over the past 20 years by Himalmedia (the publisher of Nepali Times) reveals an interesting pattern. The polls in 2013 and 2019 had similar questions: 'Compared to a few years ago, what is the situation of the country?' and 'What

direction is the country headed?'

Tracking the trend, it is evident that Nepalis are becoming gradually more optimistic (see pie-charts). One has to remember that by 2013, the post-conflict euphoria had evaporated during the fragile peace process and the Constituent Assembly was deadlocked over demands for ethnic federalism.

Today, Nepalis are still disgusted with their rulers but on the whole feel that they can still change things through elections. Their sense of wellbeing could also be affected by remittance inflows, since nearly half of all households have at least one family member who is working abroad or is a returnee.

So, is the glass half-full or half-empty? Both. The truth of the matter is that most Nepalis are angry, but not angry enough to give up hope that things will take a better turn. In fact, anger is good: it can force change if enough people vote out tried, tested, and failed incumbents in 2027.

Only then can a new crop of younger leaders start to address the mountain of problems that have been left unaddressed for so long: poverty, social injustice, political instability, environmental crises, discrimination, inequality, exclusion, inadequate healthcare and quality education.

The public has found some respite in the fact that service delivery and governance at the local level have improved, as they share in the survey. Local elections were held for the first time in 20 years in 2017 after Nepal adopted federalism, and it has taken time for accountability to trickle down to the grassroots.

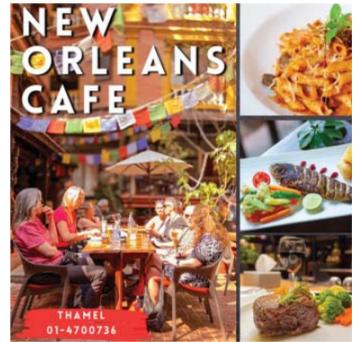
But more importantly, the current governance system allows citizens to vote out the leaders that do not perform and replace them with alternatives as they did with Kathmandu Mayor Balen Shah and RSP leader Rabi Lamichhane in 2017.

In fact, the poll results could be the Nepali people's way of telling the leaders of the three main parties: 'Just you wait.'

"Democracy is not all roses, but it also has a system to naturally filter out bad components which is especially important today when personality politics has taken over," says Adhikari, adding that the trajectory of Nepal's democracy has been progressive compared to other countries in the region.

She adds: "Yes, our expectations haven't been met, development and governance haven't kept pace, we haven't realised our true potential yet. But, considering everything, things could be much worse." 🇳🇵

Politics as usual
EDITORIAL
PAGE 2



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T&C APPLY

Politics as usual

The winter session of Parliament is set to begin amidst a warmer-than-usual winter season. But things do not look too cosy between the governing coalition and the opposition parties.

Pushpa Kamal Dahal's Maoist Centre is currently benched, and is trying to ride a rising wave of public discontent. It has in its crosshairs the coalition's plan to fast-track five ordinances related to governance, business, investment and real estate. Expect sloganeering and rostrum gheraos when the august House convenes.

Opposition leaders say the issue is not with the content of the draft amendments themselves, but the manner in which they are being passed.

Nepalis are therefore voting with their feet.

The survey shows that Nepalis reject pre-electoral alliances and the tottering coalitions they produce, blaming this for the country having to suffer five revolving door governments in the last five years.

Prime Minister Oli has made it a point to reassert that he will hand over power to Deuba as agreed. Deuba certainly needed reassurance, since his chance at a sixth premiership in these turn-by-turn deals had been scuttled more than once before.

Deuba and Oli don't get it. The 2022 election with the rise of independent alternatives was an early warning. The Sharecast Initiative survey confirms this disillusionment with serial prime ministers and their cadre and cronies.

Instead, political leaders are too busy putting out (or lighting) fires within their own parties and alliances. The establishment is focused on partnerships, not policy, and this has hurt good governance.

But not everything is doom and gloom. Respondents in the survey have a seemingly contradictory view that despite disappointment with the state of the state, a majority feel the quality of their lives have improved. They are also quite satisfied with the performance of local governments.

And even as elected leaders try increasingly to undermine the legitimacy of the press, and amid a rapidly evolving digital landscape, Nepalis by and large have maintained trust in the mainstream media.

Journalists would do well not take that trust for granted, however. The media is partly responsible for spreading public cynicism and despair. Daily headlines are obsessed with quarrelsome politicians, and its blow-by-blow coverage in turn keeps them quarrelling perpetually.

Positive news does not sell media subscriptions, and social media algorithms feed on fear-mongering, anger and hatred. Politics is not just about who stabbed whom on the back yesterday. Infighting has become so endless that it is to be expected and not breaking news.

Coverage of the Sharecast Initiative survey results by the media last week was followed by vigorous debate on its results. Many on social media were incensed that it dared to show that Nepalis were half-hopeful about the future. Those who agreed that it was not all hopeless were mercilessly trolled. It behooves some to be doomscrollers.

In all this, there was a deafening silence from the political class. Are they even listening to the voice of the people?

They should get hold of a copy of the survey, and chart out a strategy for their future political survival based on that. But we can already tell them the main message: Clean up your act and start delivering.

Shristi Karki



Key issues pointed out by responders in the Sharecast poll.

This is not new. Nepal's leaders love to amend laws through ordinances rather than votes in Parliament. What is puzzling is why a government made up of an alliance of two of the biggest parties with the near two-thirds majority required to pass laws through the Lower House, resorted to executive decisions to introduce new laws?

What, then, is the role of the legislators when the job they were elected by the Nepali people to do is largely carried out through executive orders?

The political leadership justifies taking the ordinance route because of delays in the legislative process. This is emblematic of a wider problem in Nepal's politics, where leaders employ ad hoc solutions to problems instead of taking a long hard look into the flaws within the legislative process, governance and the state mechanism as a whole.

Understandably, this is such a can of worms that the leadership is unwilling to confront it head on. But confront it they must. If the long-serving prime ministers of the three parties carefully read the outcome of the recent Sharecast Initiative public opinion survey (page 1, 4-5) they will learn that more than half of the Nepali public is unhappy with the direction politics is headed.

The survey should be an eye-opener and a dire warning to politicians to shape up or ship out in the limited time ahead of the general elections in 2027. Poll respondents have listed weak governance and corruption holding back job creation. Most respondents cited migration as the most attractive option.

Public opinion poll confirms public disillusionment with serial prime ministers, their cadre and cronies

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

1 February

Twenty years ago, on 1 February 2005, King Gyanendra staged an army-backed coup. A few days before that, we had written in an editorial that Nepal was running out of options: even moderates were being pushed to be radically republican or radically royalist. There were also signs of infighting within the Maoists, including desertions and resistance.

The coup did not protect Gyanendra. Within 14 months he was sidelined and a peace accord to end the Maoist insurgency was put forward. In another 3 years, the monarchy would be abolished by the Constituent Assembly.

An Excerpt of the editorial published in issue #232 28 January - 3 February 2005:

King Gyanendra...is now down to just two options: consolidate his takeover and scrap the constitution once and for all, or roll back October Fourth and restore a semblance of democracy. The international community has reportedly sent unambiguous signals that he desist from the temptation to go it alone. By now, it must be clear even to him that the musical chairs game of Article 127 can't go on. The king therefore needs a face-saving way out, and the only one we see is for him to join hands with a



rejuvenated political process.

Out of Nepal's 25 million people, there are probably only some 150 (arms merchants, hawks on both sides, toy boys) who benefit from this conflict. The rest don't want to have anything to do with it. But his peace constituency is not organised and represented to articulate its wish. The people have been let down by the people they elected, by a palace that is supposed to care, and by revolutionaries who have brought nothing but ruin.

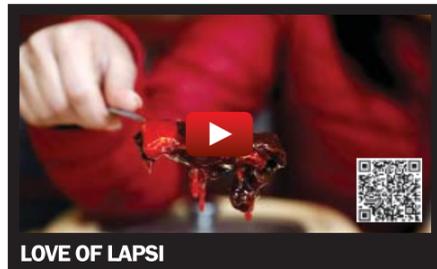
Of the three, the only way to give the people back their voice is to allow them to speak through their representatives. The parliamentary parties may have squandered democracy, but it is they who have lost the most, physically and psychologically, in the past nine years. Whether it is to restore parliament, reform the constitution, have elections, engage the Maoists in negotiations, bringing the parties back in the picture is the least-cost option. Despite their sins only parties in a genuine democracy offer the self-correcting mechanism needed to get us out of this mess.

For archived material of Nepali Times of the past 20 years, site search: nepalitimes.com

ONLINE PACKAGES



Some years ago, while working at a dairy co-op, Bishnu Pandey wanted to go abroad just like other men from his neighbourhood had done. His plans had to change after failing a Korean language exam. Instead of migrating, Pandey imported Boer goats to start his own business. Watch our video on him on our YouTube channel. Subscribe for more multimedia content.



The beloved lassi comes in many forms: umami titauras, sweet achar, spicy pickles. Watch our video on our YouTube channel about how lassi ko achar is prepared from start to finish. Follow along as this citric fruit gets peeled, boiled in a syrup and spiced to perfection.

DALAI LAMA SUCCESSION

The previous 10th Panchen Rinpoche, who had been rehabilitated by the communists in China, had visited Nepal in the 1980s. It's interesting that the current Chinese-appointed Panchen was not permitted by Kathmandu ('What (or who) after the Dalai Lama?', Sudiksha Tuladhar, #1245).

Jigme Yeshe Lama

■ This is a well-written article. We must safeguard against the setbacks that might be created by the complexities of the issue. Non-involvement with any side is the key.

Suresh Sharma

■ The Dalai Lama succession should be an easy enough choice easy if those concerned know not to mix religion with politics. But wonder what would happen if both parties chose their heir from here.

Niracar

■ This China-installed Panchen has no legitimacy over spiritual matters of Tibetan Buddhism because he is not real the Panchen Rinpoche. Moreover, there is no teacher-disciple relationship between them at all.

Tsering Samdup

TRUMP 2.0

God bless America, and prayers for the rest of the world ('Trump's second coming,' Editorial, #1245).

Rajendra N Suwal

■ One wonders if the Americans wouldn't have been better off (and less monarchical) under George III and his successors. I am, of course, joking. Mostly.

Tony Jones

EARLY WILDFIRES

Here we go again. ('Wildfire early warning,' #1245) Forest management is not something we learn, and fires that happen every year is unfortunately not something we prepare for.

Raj Gyawali

■ Wildfires will be a critical issue. It's radically impacting the tourism season on a scale that has yet to be measured and eventually these fires will swallow entire villages.

Christophe Noel

Times.com WHAT'S TRENDING



Ghosts of the Himalaya

by Sonia Awale

An on-going census ranks Nepal fourth among twelve countries in snow leopards, despite having just 2% of the total area where they can be found. Nepal also leads in research on the mountainous big cat. Read about Nepal's conservation success story at nepalitimes.com.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

My grandfather's footsteps

by Sakuya Yamanoi

On a college trip to Nepal, Japanese student Sakuya Yamanoi used clues from old family photographs to track down a public toilet that his mountaineer grandfather helped build in Patan, in 1999. Read the story online.

Most popular on X

What (or who) after the Dalai Lama?

by Sudiksha Tuladhar

Over the years, the Dalai Lama has weighed in on his succession. The Panchen Lama succession in 1995 could hint at how the post-Dalai Lama era will play out. Either way, there are uncertain implications for Nepal.

Most commented

E-GoN

by Vishad Raj Onta

E-governance in Nepal was supposed to make the state more efficient and reduce corruption. But going digital has only seemed to make things harder to get done by adding yet another layer of beauracracy.

Most visited online page

QUOTES



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

What (or who) after the Dalai Lama? The Dalai Lama succession question has uncertain implications for Nepal. Details in Sudiksha Tuladhar's report:



@bhuchungtsering

This is an interesting take on why #Nepal is a stakeholder in the future of the #DalaiLama institution. Nepal should have a policy on #DalaiLama based on sentiments of its many citizens who share a common historical, spiritual & cultural bond with him & #Tibetans



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Perfect example of how the solution by itself sounds great but when the rubber hits the road its suitability becomes an issue due to other aspects of the environment it has to operate on. Secret lies in leaders being mindful of this & charting out solutions based on the context.



Satish Pandey @SatishKTM

Perfect example of how the solution by itself sounds great but when the rubber hits the road its suitability becomes an issue due to other aspects of the environment it has to operate on. Secret lies in leaders being mindful of this & charting out solutions based on the context.

1,000 WORDS



PMO / RSS

MY TURN:

Prime Minister K P Oli met with NC Chair Sher Bahadur Deuba to strategise about their coalition's preparations for the winter session of Parliament, pending ordinances and the effectiveness of their joint government.

Times

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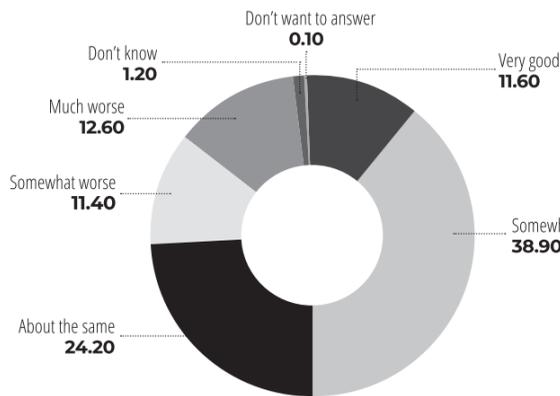
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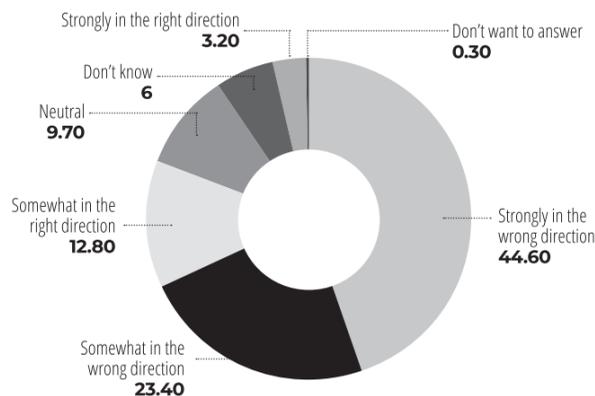
Pulse of the people

Once again, a public opinion poll shows that Nepalis are short-term pessimists and long-term optimists

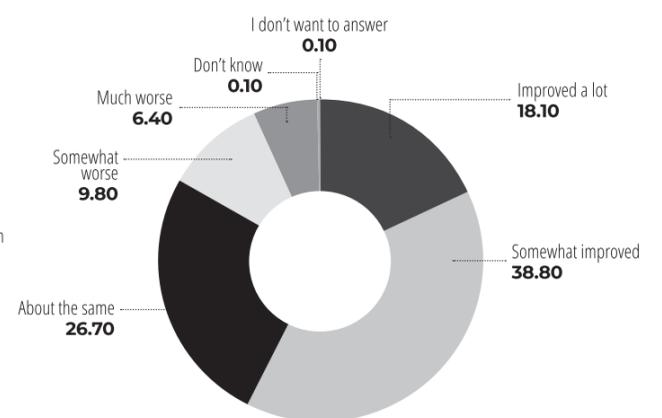
How is the state of the country compared to the last five years? (in %)



Is Nepal is moving politically in the right direction? (in %)

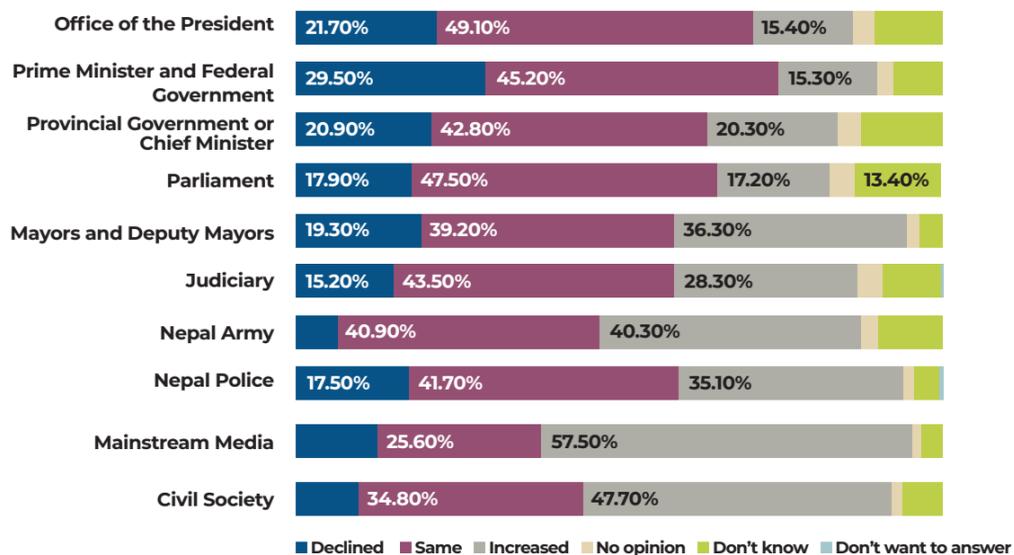


Has your life and that of your family improved compared to five years ago? (in %)



SOURCE: SHARECAST INITIATIVE NEPAL

Trust in institutions and positions



■ Sonia Awale

If there is one thing that has been consistently true for Nepalis, it is that despite war, corruption and governance failure, they are inherent optimists. They see the good even in politicians and bureaucrats who do not deserve it.

Ever since Himalmedia (the publisher of Nepali Times) started conducting public opinion surveys in 2004, respondents have shown dissatisfaction with Nepal's rulers, a majority voting 'None of the Above' when asked for their party preference. Yet, at the same time, in all annual polls after that, they have been hopeful about the future.

It still seems to be the case. The results of the latest public opinion poll by Sharecast Initiative show that most Nepalis are fed up with the chronic poor performance of established political parties, but they feel the system still gives them the option of finding alternative leaders. In other words, Nepalis are angry, but not angry enough to take

to the streets.

That should explain the apparent contradiction in their responses. Asked about the living standard of their families and the

direction the country is headed, half the respondents said there had been positive improvement in their lives, but about the same number said they were disillusioned with

politics and politicians.

The public's message to the old parties is clear: perk up, or we will vote for alternative leaders like Kathmandu mayor Balen Shah,

Rabi Lamichhane of the RSP, or someone new. The country is ruled by a coalition of the two largest parties in Parliament, but there are no signs that they understand, or care, about this public mood.

The Sharecast survey was conducted among 3,000 households across 52 districts in seven provinces between 1 December 2024 to 11 January 2025. In it, more than half the respondents said that their lives and that of their families had 'improved' in the past five years. Another 16.2% said it was 'worse' or 'much worse', and for 26.70% things remained 'the same'.

Asked about the situation of the country, again, half the respondents said it had improved, citing infrastructure development as the main reason, despite the abominable state of the country's highways.

But 24.20% said things were 'the same', and another 24% said it was 'worse'. They went on to list unemployment, poverty, lack of road access or maintenance,

NMB BANK एनएमबि बैंक



Turkish to Damascus

Turkish Airlines has resumed flights to Damascus, the capital of Syria. Starting 23 January, the Airlines will operate three flights a week with round trips from Istanbul to Damascus costing \$299. The flights, which started in February 1984, had been paused since April 2012. "We continue our mission of building bridges between countries and peoples around the globe," says Turkish CEO Bilal Ekşi. The Airlines currently operates flights to 352 destinations in 131 countries.

KIA in Ukraine

The last rites of Vinod Bahadur Sunuwar, who died fighting in the Russia-Ukraine war, took place on 27 January at Pashupati. Sunuwar had left for Russia in 2023, and was missing before his family learned of his death. With his body yet to be brought back to Nepal, a body made of kush (a sacred grass variety) was cremated. Sunuwar leaves behind 24-year old wife Srijana, a young son, and other relatives.

Samsung Bespoke

Samsung Nepal has introduced two models of its Bespoke 9kg front-load washing machine that uses AI to save energy by up to 70%, understand usage patterns, and improve washing. The machines start at Rs101,999 and come with a 20-year warranty. As an introductory offer, they can be bought at 20% cashback, with 0% interest EMI plans through Samsung's Insta Finance service. Exchange bonuses are also available.



Samsung's flagship S25 series of phones with Galaxy S25, S25+ and Ultra phones, come with AI features such as call transcription and grouping, and a personal data engine that analyses usage patterns for a tailored experience. The phones are also made with recycled parts used in its external components and battery. They will soon be available for pre-order in Nepal. For Valentine's Day, Samsung Nepal is also introducing discounts of upto Rs25,000 on its Z Fold6, Z Flip6 and S24 Ultra phones. Buyers will also get free phone cases.

Yashoda Foods

Yashoda Foods, producers of Current noodles and other snacks, announced GP Shah as its new Global Executive Director. The company exports its goods to India, Kuwait, Japan, the UK and more. Shah has experience in product development, operations, and advertising at Yashoda.

Kaiyi X3 Pro

The five-seater Kaiyi X3 Pro EV, with 370km range and 183mm ground clearance, is now for sale at Rs4,396,000. The model charges fully at home in 5-7 hours, and can go 30-80% in half an hour with DC charging. It is available for test drives and booking at showrooms across Nepal.

Indian grants

India pledged \$250 million in grant support for Nepal's reconstruction following the April 2015 earthquake, allocated to housing, education, health, and cultural heritage. A 5th Joint Project Monitoring Committee this week concluded that 26 projects in the education sector, including Tribhuvan University Central Library in Kathmandu, 32 in the health sector and three in the cultural heritage sector, amounting to Rs3.35 billion, have been handed over in the past year.



Deepal Transformer

MAW Vridhhi has announced a 'transformer' EV that is an SUV + Pickup, including a rear-wheel-drive variant with 566km range at Rs9,999,000 and an all-wheel-drive option with 590km range. The 5-meter long vehicle can wade in water upto 600mm and has a roof rack that can carry 300kg. It is available at Changan showrooms across Nepal.



Himalaya + CEAN

Himalaya Airlines and Chinese Enterprises Association of Nepal (CEAN) organised a free health camp for the 18 children of Prayas Nepal Orphanage. CEAN also donated Rs600,000 to the orphanage to buy daily essentials.

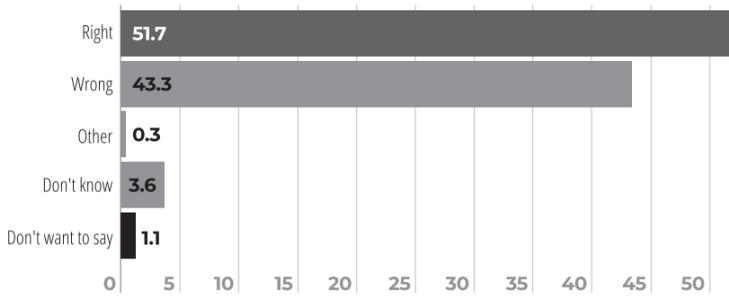
Kataho awarded

The Kataho digital address system was recognised at the World Summit Awards in the Smart Settlements & Urbanization category. Kataho is an offline location search system that allows users to generate precise 'location plates', improving access to postal delivery, ride sharing, e-commerce and emergency response.

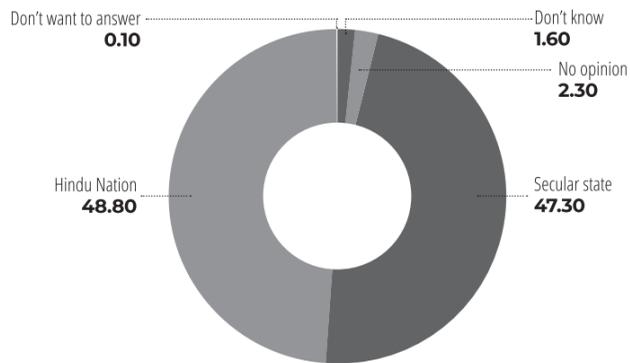
FATF grey list

Senior officials have concluded that Nepal is certain to be put on the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF) 'greylist' during an upcoming meeting owing to weakness in implementing the commitments to prevent money laundering and other reforms. Nepal narrowly escaped being greylisted in July 2023 during the 23rd annual meeting of the Asia Pacific Group on Money Laundering and was granted an extension until October 2024 to fulfill the necessary criteria to prevent such a scenario. A meeting in Paris next month will make the final decision.

HIMALMEDIA PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY 2015
Some political parties are demanding that Nepal be once again declared a Hindu nation. How do you see their demand?



SHARECAST INITIATIVE POLL 2025
Should Nepal be a Hindu nation or remain a secular state?



corruption, inflation, lack of quality education and political instability as their main concerns.

A new global study has found that Nepal ranks fourth in the list of countries with remittance making up the highest share of GDP.

Remittances are propping up not just the national economy, but also individual households. Nearly 1 million Nepalis left the country for work or study in the past year, and about 40% of young Nepali men are not in Nepal.

This could explain the seeming paradox between respondents saying their lives have improved, but that they are not satisfied with the political leadership. Indeed, over 70% of the poll respondents said foreign employment provided the best future.

More than half the respondents felt that Nepal's economy was in 'bad shape', while 24.2% thought that it was 'very good'. Another 16.5% rated the situation as

'average'. And since the economy is intrinsically linked to politics, a majority of respondents (68%) felt that Nepal's politics is headed 'in the wrong direction'. But most respondents (71%) seemed happy with the way the local government was performing, saying they received 'timely service' at the local level.

Respondents were also asked to pinpoint why Nepal's leaders kept being elected over and over again. They mostly blamed 'vote buying' (52.10%), and 24.10% said because voters were 'satisfied with a candidate's performance', another 21.80% said 'voting patterns were determined by party loyalty'.

With the government recently rocked by high-profile scandals exposed by the media, the Nepali public seems fed up with corruption in everyday life -- 80% of respondents said corruption was 'rampant', and only 0.70% said there was 'no corruption at all'.

Another 15% also admitted they had 'bribed government officials in the past year'.

When Himalmedia conducted its 2015 annual nationwide public opinion poll just before the promulgation of the new Constitution, respondents were asked if Nepal should be a Hindu state. Slightly more than half wanted Nepal to be secular.

Interestingly, ten years later, the country is still almost equally divided between secularism and Hindu state -- despite the popular narrative that if there was a referendum the country restoring the Hindu state would win overwhelmingly.

Himalmedia polls after the abolition of the monarchy showed support for a return of kingship only in the single digits, and although Sharecast did not have a question about it in the current poll, one can assume that support for the monarchy could have

increased slightly as a reaction to the perceived incompetence of the established parties.

For the past few years, Nepal has been ruled by coalitions, often with alliances between parties with diametrically opposing ideologies even if they do not stick to it. A majority of respondents in the survey (74%) were against electoral alliances.

The current coalition came into existence supposedly to amend constitutional provisions regarding proportional representation, but the public perception is that K P Oli of the UML and the NC's Sher Bahadur Deuba saw common cause in previous Home Minister Rabi Lamichhane of the RSP investigating top leaders of both their parties for corruption.

An amendment to the Constitution that scraps proportional representation would make it more difficult for smaller parties like the RSP to gain seats in the House, as well as women candidates and those from marginalised groups. Nearly

half of the respondents (46%) said major amendments to the constitution were necessary.

But what should be priority areas for the government? Controlling inflation, improving the economy, creating jobs, infrastructure, service delivery, governance and social injustice were obvious picks. Environmental problems and press freedom also made it to the list, but were clearly not the top priority.

Trust in various institutions yielded some interesting results. As in previous Himalmedia polls, trust in the Nepal Army remains high (40.30%). Even the Nepal Police has recovered some of its respect (35.10%). As expected, people had a poor opinion of the Prime Minister (15.30%), scoring even lower than provincial governments (20.30%).

Mayors and their deputies scored higher on the trust-o-meter (36.30%), and civil society improved its standing (47.70%). The mass media always scored high in annual Himalmedia polls in the 2010s, with 87-90% approval ratings. It went down in previous polls where the distinction was not made between social media and mass media, but in the current survey, mainstream media trust level is higher than any other institution at 57.50%.

Previous surveys have shown that although 90% of those with internet connection used social media platforms regularly, trust in its content was below 10%. For Nepal's mainstream press, the lesson is clear: to maintain the public trust, it should strive to defend its credibility with greater professionalism.

It also shows that the free press still has a role in defending and improving Nepal's democratic system. 🇳🇵

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Small is still possible

From water mills to improved stoves, Nepal's traditional technology was green long before climate change became the buzzword

■ Alton C Byers

Before much of the world realised the impact and severity of the climate crisis, Nepal was already moving towards clean energy through 'small is beautiful' technology that improved on traditional tools and methods.

Today, Nepal is building multi-billion dollar hydropower projects and importing fancy electrical appliances. But few know that both the government and the country's development partners were actively promoting small, renewable, and green energy sources before climate change became the buzzword.

The drivers behind this movement beginning in the late 1970s, included the widespread belief that Nepal was losing

its forests at an alarming rate resulting in soil erosion. Called the 'Himalayan Degradation Theory', it was later debunked, but not before international conferences and workshops on appropriate technology were held to address the threat of denuded mountains.

In 1978, Nepal-based Belgian Jesuit Bertrand Saubolle and Swiss engineer Andreas Bachmann authored the popular book, *Mini Technology*. They wrote about how to cool a house without air-conditioning, how to chill beer without a refrigerator, how to produce gas for cooking and lighting, and how to make crows trap themselves.

Although afforestation and agricultural programs in Nepal 45 years ago received the bulk of foreign and domestic assistance, a small but important portion was devoted to the



ALTON C BYERS

IMPROVED CHULO

Chulo stoves were tested at the Royal Nepal Academy of Science and Technology (now NAST) to be disseminated across rural Nepal. Form-fitting holes for pots, fire breaks to direct the flames more directly to the bottom of the pots, and chimneys to remove smoke increased the efficiency of traditional firewood stoves, and improved health.

Engineers test the efficiency of a traditional firewood stove, measuring the temperature of water (left).



BROT COBURN

IMPROVED GHATTA

Engineers like Akkal Man Nakrami and Andreas Bachmann (above, at a workshop in Asan in 1982) developed improved ghatta, or Multi-Purpose Power Units (MPPU), that not only improved traditional grain grinding efficiency, but also produced electricity. For the first time hundreds of villages across the country had access to electricity at night.

The more efficient water mills used better designed paddles on ball bearings that could be connected to a dynamo to generate enough power for domestic lighting in remote areas.



ALTON C BYERS



ALTON C BYERS



development of alternative sources of energy for cooking, lighting, and work.

Even back then, Dipak Gyawali, Krishna Murari Gautam and Kunda Dixit were already publishing the Biogas Newsletter and the Nepali language alternative energy journal Shakti to highlight small-scale sustainable solutions to the energy, food and water needs of Nepalis.

Some of the technologies developed and tested in Nepal are shown below. Some are from 50 years ago.

Technicians and tinkerers drove the development of these alternative tools. Some, like Andreas Bachman and Akkal Man Nakarmi, were certified engineers. Many were mechanically-inclined amateurs with a mission, some would say passion, for developing and disseminating simple technologies that could make

life better and easier for the average Nepali farmer.

All were convinced that their work would one day in one way or another lead to poverty alleviation, better natural resource management, and improved livelihoods. Today, it is important to ask: did the decades of appropriate technology research, development, and dissemination have an impact?

Biogas is one of the success stories of Nepal with over 400,000 household biogas plants installed, while large-scale industrial plants are in various stages of operation today. The spread has now slowed because of outmigration and the entry of cheap LPG.

Hundreds of improved ghatta are still in use. Scores of micro-and mini-hydropower plants continue to provide power for hundreds of

Nepal's isolated mountain villages.

Solar lighting is common in thousands of trekker's lodges throughout Nepal, as are solar battery chargers for the now-ubiquitous cell phones and laptops. Solar water boilers for kitchen use, and solar driers for fruit preservation, are in use in Nepal's more arid and sunnier locations, such as Khumbu and Mustang. Solar pumps irrigate fields in difficult terrain.

Unfortunately, the Arusha windmill never left Kathmandu Valley, and the legendary winds of the Kali Gandaki proved to be too much for what proved to be a poorly anchored Savonius windmill.

Likewise, solar reflectors and insulated cookers never really caught on, most likely because they were too cumbersome or inconvenient to use regularly.

And whatever happened to the predictions of catastrophic loss of forest cover on the mountains, one might wonder.

Unexpectedly, the 'deforestation' pressures of the 1970s were largely reduced by outmigration, abandoned farmland, LPG cylinders and second-growth forests. Nepal's successful community-based forestry initiatives of the 1980s also deserve credit, and has nearly doubled its forest cover in the past 25 years.

Reduction in fuelwood use brought about by improved chulo, solar water heaters, backburner water heaters, and locally sourced electricity assuredly played important roles as well.

Nepal is the pioneer of appropriate technologies in South Asia. But how do all of the empirical successes, and some

failures, stack up against the gigawatts of energy being produced by massive new hydroelectric stations that is making possible the current switch to electric vehicles?

In terms of total energy output, appropriate technology's current contribution is miniscule. But the spirit of innovation and the need for locally-appropriate solutions in rural areas will continue to have relevance to many. Simple, cost-effective solutions may just be what Nepal, and the world, need most in the long run.

This is especially true because expensive hydro infrastructure and dams are at a higher risk of climate disasters as seen in Melamchi and Sikkim, and Tama Kosi recently. 

Alton C. Byers, PhD, is the Faculty Research Scientist at the Institute of Arctic and Alpine Research (INSTAAR) at the University of Colorado at Boulder.



BROT COBURN

HONEY BEES

Bertrand Saubolle with a beehive in Godavari in the early 1980s (left).

The Jesuit priest was a tireless promoter of 'small is beautiful' technology like biogas, solar driers and small hydropower.



BROT COBURN



BROT COBURN

▲ BIOGAS

In the mid-1970s, the United Mission to Nepal (UMN) introduced the first village biogas plants based on successful models from India. Each unit produced clean methane gas for cooking and lighting, as well as a nutrient-rich slurry that made an excellent pathogen-free fertiliser. The innovative underground dome Nepali design was maintenance free, and cheaper and spread rapidly with subsidised loans from the government.

A biogas plant in Kathmandu in the 1980s, and a homemaker cooking using clean methane gas from a digester.



ALTON C BYERS



BROT COBURN

▲ SOLAR PLANTS

Despite the dismal state of investment and research into solar plants in Nepal today leading to a chronic lack of diversification in the energy sector, the opposite was true in the 1980s. Engineers at Balaju Yantra Shala were testing and marketing the first generation of solar water heaters for domestic home use.

Other solar technologies included solar driers for drying apples in Marpha, reflective and hotbox cookers that reduced fuelwood use by placing a boiling pot of rice into an insulated box, and solar water boilers that quickly produced hot water for kitchen use.

Solar water heaters on display at Balaju Yantra Shala (far left). Nepal is still benefiting from this early investment in passive solar water heaters.

A solar apple dryer being tested at the apple farm in Marpha in 1982.

Solar reflector cookers and hotbox cookers (left) being tested in the early 1980s which, along with similar parabolic reflectors, focused the sun's rays on a pot of water that could rapidly bring it to a boil.



ALTON C BYERS

▲ MICROHYDRO

Micro- and mini-hydropower technologies, although common to Nepal's urban regions for nearly 70 years, were being disseminated to more rural locations by the 1980s as well.

In 1985, former Peace Corps volunteer Brot Coburn and UNESCO designed and installed the first micro-hydroelectric system in Namche Bazar. It was later washed away by the Dig Tso glacial lake outburst in 1985.

A Penstock pipe being installed below Namche Bazar in 1985 (far left).

Namche Bazaar (3,440 m) at night with its first electric lights in 1985, and Mt Thamserku looming above.



ALTON C BYERS



ALTON C BYERS

▲ WINDMILLS

Windmill technology was also being introduced and tested, and included an Arusha-style windmill constructed by Peace Corps Volunteer Jack Martin and RONAST in 1980 (far left), and a Savonius-style vertical axis windmill built by Swiss and Nepali engineers at Balaju Yantra Shala in 1980 (left).

The latter was eventually installed and tested in Jomsom by USAID's Resource Conservation and Utilisation Project (RCUP) in 1981, but came to grief due to high winds.

EVENTS

**Dhulikhel hike**

This Saturday, Hike for Nepal is organising a seven-hour trek from Dhulikhel to Rampur Danda. Participants must arrive at the Bhrikutimandap exhibition hall by 6:45am. Book your place by 3pm on 31 January. There is an entry fee.

1 February, Rs1300, 9841178536, 9828054244, hikefornepal@gmail.com

WHOARE.U

Installations and paintings by artists Mukhiya Samridh and Subesh KC attempt to explore existence and expression, and celebrate the inner landscapes. Read our review on page 9.

Till 19 February, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited

With love from Japan

The Embassy of Japan in Nepal is organising the Japanese Film Festival this Friday and Sunday. The lineup of films include Brave Father Online – our story of Final Fantasy XIV, Ito, Dreaming of the Meridian Arc, Lu over the wall and The Fish Tale.

Until 1 February, Rastriya Nachghar, Jamal (01) 4526680

**Shoemaking**

Learn how to make your own shoes. Nanu Lashkush Sewing Training Center is providing free lessons for anyone interested. Call for details.

Ason, Kamalacchi, 9841463102

Feminine Futures

Ten leading voices in feminist art explore art, activism, and South Asian womanhood at Taragon; offering new perspectives on destabilising normative frameworks of gender and its representation. Read our review on page 9.

Until mid-May, Taragon Museum

Conversations in Art

Lok Chitrakar will be speaking about the spiritual and cultural significance of the ancient Paubha art form at the monthly talk at the Nepal Art Council.

31 January, 4pm onwards, Babermahal

DINING

**Alev Kebab Sultanate**

Taste the unique flavours of Turkish cuisine, including kebab prepared in an open kitchen. The vegetarian course and desserts in the menu are also excellent - check out their excellent baklava.

Tangalwood (01) 4527343

MUSIC

Nepal Guitar Festival

You don't have to be a guitar enthusiast to enjoy this electrifying evening of music, melodies, and magic.

8 February, Kyampa The Social Hub, Sanepa

**Jamesy live**

Popular hiphop artist Jamesy is performing live at Club Platinum this Friday.

1 February, 8pm onwards, 9840837855, Darbar Marg

Chill Music Fest

This festival will be anything but chill. Jhilkey and the Company, Kuma Sagar & The Khwopa and other artists will bring the house down.

1 February, Rs500-1,000, Narayani Kinar, Chitwan

**Kuma Sagar**

Enjoy the soulful music of Kuma Sagar & The Khwopa live with friends and family.

31 January, 5pm onwards, Rs750, Harisiddhi Newsuli

**Winter Music Fest 2025**

Book your tickets now for this musical extravaganza. Sabin Rai & The Pharaoh, Pariwartaan and Swar are set to perform.

1 February, 5pm onwards, Rs500, TCN Chaur, Hetauda

GETAWAY

**Weddings @ Chandragiri Hills**

With versatile indoor and outdoor venues amidst the breathtaking backdrop of the Himalayas and verdant hills, Chandragiri Hills Resort offers a customisable setting for exceptional destination weddings tailored to your vision. The resort is also an ideal honeymoon retreat for newlyweds.

Chandragiri, 9802069900

Yatri

Treat yourself to a relaxing spa treatment including a full body massage, body scrub, and sauna at Yatri Suites and Spa.

Thamel, 9802063086

**Heranya Yala**

An authentic Newa stay right in the heart of Patan. Maha Boudha, Hiranya Monastery and Durbar Square a walking distance away.

Gujibahal, Patan, 9745967569

**Shinta Mani Mustang**

With elegantly designed interiors using local materials, hand-picked art and rich textiles, this luxury retreat creates an ambience of opulence amid comfort.

Marpha, Mustang, 9802336386

Dwarika's Resort

Boasting luxury accommodations, attentive staff, and award winning dishes from around the world, Dwarika's Resort has established itself as a must-stay in Dhulikhel.

Dhulikhel (11) 490612

Sekuwa By Kilo

Taste authentic eastern Dharane flavours of seasoned sekuwa right here in Kathmandu. They also have a lunch menu that is available for Rs99 from 12pm to 3pm.

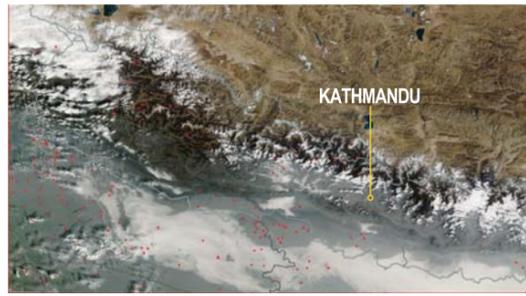
Jhamsikhel, 9801464630

**Kharayo Bakes**

This online bakery shop delivers your favourite gourmet brownies and other baked items to your doorstep. Their fudgy brownies are a must-try.

9851132172

WEEKEND WEATHER



SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY
22° 5°	23° 5°	22° 5°	23° 9°	22° 7°

Another Westerly

A massive westerly front will arrive in western Nepal on 3 February, but like previous ones this may also dump most of its precipitation in western Nepal. There is a chance central Nepal will have overcast skies from Tuesday and get light showers midweek. Farmers need the rains badly and mountain slopes are at risk of wildfires due to a third consecutive year with the failure of winter rains.

The Tarai remains fog-bound (NASA image on Thursday morning, left) and Kathmandu Valley will get a warmish weekend with hazy sunshine.

OUR PICK

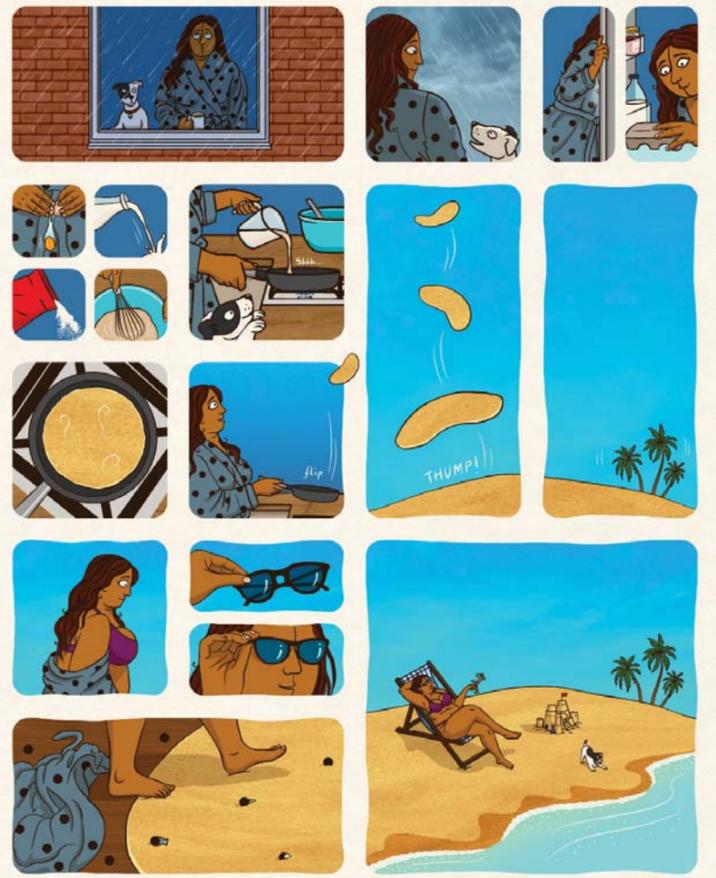


In the latest adaptation of The Count of Monte Cristo, a classic adventure novel by the French author Alexandre Dumas, Sam Claflin plays Edmond Dantès, a young sailor who is falsely accused of treason and imprisoned without trial in the Château d'If off Marseille. Years later, adopting the identity of the Count of Monte Cristo, he enacts his revenge against those responsible. The eight-part miniseries also directed by Bille August stars Jeremy Irons as Abbé Faria, Ana Girardot as Mercédès, Harry Taurasi as Fernand Mondego, Mikkel Boe Følsgaard as Gérard de Villefort and Blake Ritson as Danglars.

MISS MOTI ESCAPES

KRIPA JOSHI

MISS MOTI AND THE PANCAKE



Kripa Joshi's weekly Miss Motivation cartoon will now be expanded into this monthly comic strip 'Miss Moti Escapes'.

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 चिठ्ठा पुरस्कार जस्ता आर्थिक प्रलोभनका प्रस्तावको भरमा नपराँ ।
- 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

Communicating existence through art

Visitors at the exhibition ponder: Who am I? Why am I? What am I? Where am I going after this?

■ Kunda Dixit

Journalism as a form of communication is limited by its format and style. It is, after all, history in a hurry.

Fiction tries to transcend this-- novels are turned into movies to get the message across more urgently about the human condition. Poetry goes beyond words, using sonic language to go directly to the heart.

Art takes visual cues to go beyond even poetry. But often, it is art for art's sake. Even so, only art can reach the subconscious in us to explore existence and expression.

Which is what Mukhiya Samridh and Subesh KC are trying to get across to us with their joint exhibition of installations and paintings in WHOARE.YOU at Siddhartha Art Gallery.

Subesh KC is a Norway-based artist who is obsessed with how language determines who we are, how we perceive and are perceived. We take words and sentences as a given, the linguistic codes tumbling out from the recesses of our brain, and we spout and write words without even thinking.

KC deconstructs language into a series titled *We Simply Find Ourselves Here* with stylised human forms amidst a backdrop of random imaginary hieroglyphics (above, right).

The underlying message could be that written language is just a phonetic code of what is spoken, which in turn encrypts our thoughts, feelings and communicates them imperfectly.

WHOARE.YOU is not a question, it is an answer. But



PHOTOS: KUNDA DIXIT

visitors are not given answers on a platter, each person has to find their own meaning and interpretation. Artists are not required to explain the meaning of their work, but we ask KC anyway.

"I am trying to investigate the links between language and our perception of reality, using asemic letters and abstraction to question how language determines our understanding of the self," he says.

KC has partnered with Mukhiya Samridh for this exhibition, and they have two joint works on display. The most striking is *Status*

Quo -- an installation with 1,500 nails hammered into an off-white board and arranged in a sine curve running across like a graph (above).

"This is the cycle of consciousness," explains Mukhiya. "We start from a high point where the ego is dominant, then we find out we are not so smart after all, and only after that lesson in humility do we rise up again to be enlightened. And all the time, society is trying to hammer in any nail that sticks out."

Samridh and Subesh went their separate ways from Nepal and came

together again for this exhibition of conceptual work, and took five months to hammer out the main message: an enquiry into who we are. As visitors move through the show, they are left to also ponder: Who am I? Why am I? What am I? Where am I going after this? Why are we in this world at this time?

Samridh's installations have a bleached, faded look with no colours to distract us from the message. In a series called *Nepali Time*, just the second hand of clocks tick noisily, reminding us also of the temporal dimension.

While exploring concepts of language, consciousness, illusion and freedom, the collaborative exhibition has a thread running through it: the question of identity.

Not a national or ethnic identity but a sentient identity -- a being capable of pondering the mystery of its own existence and expressing it through the language of art. 🇳🇵

WHOARE.YOU
Till 19 February
Siddhartha Art Gallery
Baber Mahal Revisited

Of women, for women, by women

A landmark art exhibition showcasing perspectives on womanhood across Nepal and South Asia

■ Sudiksha Tuladhar

Gender, diversity, equity and inclusion have deliberately been turned into slurs, as the world's most powerful nation silences activists at home and abroad. It is therefore audacious and reassuring that an art exhibition titled *Feminist Futures* is being held in Kathmandu.

Nepal is one of the few remaining safe spaces in South Asia for open-minded discussion on balancing the scales of social justice, and *Taragaon Next* has curated an exhibition with artists from Nepal, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan.

South Asia is not safe for women. New Delhi has one of the highest numbers of sexual violence cases against women in the world. Horrific crimes against women frequently make it to the headlines in Nepal.

Feminist Futures: Art, Activism, and South Asian Womanhood attempts to highlight this through the transformative power of art to express experiences and aspirations tied to womanhood and feminism.

"We wanted to bring this region together for a common cause," explains Namita Saraf of *Taragaon Next*. "We wanted to give visitors something to reflect on and be inspired by. Art expresses emotions, and its intensity is what can bring change."

The exhibition is spread over *Taragaon Next*'s tubular brick structures and includes paintings, photographs, installations and videos from artists Anita Dube, Anoli Perera, Ashmina Ranjit, Bidhata KC, Mithu Sen, Naiza Khan, Pushpamala N, Sheba Chhachhi, Tayeba Begum Lipi, and Uma Bista. It is curated by Arshiya Lokhandwala.

Nepali artist Ashmina Ranjit at the launch event on 25 January performed *Sita! An Ideal Wife* depicting the difficulties and injustices women face when they get married (pictured, above).



BISHNU KANTA GHIMIRE

"Patriarchy treats women as objects and does not give women the rights of 'ansa' and 'bansa'," Ranjit tells *Nepali Times*, using the rhyming Nepali words for 'inheritance' and 'ancestry'. Nepali activists have been struggling for equal inheritance rights and citizenship for the children of single mothers for decades, with little progress.

While a seemingly subtle force, art has the potential to spread awareness and catalyse reform. However, the true power and impact of art lies in its ability to connect with the community. When art resonates deeply with people, inviting them to interpret, reflect, and react, it is transformed from being just personal expression into collective action.

"Being able to engage a large audience rather than a whole community and deliver an impactful message beyond boundaries is what an artist dreams of," adds Tayeba Begum Lipi from Bangladesh.

Anita Dube from India exhibits *Sea Creature*, a collection of eyes embedded in a hand. She explains, "The eyes are the eyes of God, but when they come together as people's eyes, incredibly beautiful energy emerges."

Sri Lanka's Anoli Perera's *I Let My Hair Loose* represents the protest against the male gaze. Women are constantly uncomfortably stared upon by the opposite sex, so her portrayal of the faces of women covered

in long hair shows that women represent strength and value equal to, if not more, than men.

Nepali artist Bidhata KC says her work *Being a Daughter, Being a Woman* is aimed at changing mindsets across generations. She says: "The idea is to show the independent identity of women as equal human beings, not merely as girls or daughters."

Some pieces at the exhibition are stark and confrontational denunciations of violence against women, others are more subtle critiques on the invisibility of women's labour. Both force viewers to introspect: when can the world truly become a place of equality and safety for women? Kathmandu, with its space for free speech and artistic expression, is the ideal venue for this and other exhibitions at a time when there are increasing threats around the region and the world constricting open expression.

Says Bidhata KC, "Kathmandu is all about art, our temples, and religious shrines. Our very existence is defined by an artistic culture in which women have always been portrayed as powerful."

In a cultural setting where stories of women are often marginalised or stigmatised, the exhibition highlights the creativity and strength of South Asian women as they reclaim the narrative, and lead a growing wave of feminist activism.

This goes beyond simply challenging oppression. It advocates a future where art, activism, and solidarity can uplift and empower women at a time when Trumpian regression threatens to trample social justice. 🇳🇵

Feminist Futures: Art, Activism and South Asian Womanhood
Every day 10AM-5:30PM until mid-May
Taragaon Next
Hyatt Regency premises

Farm subsidies: MONEY DOWN THE DRAIN

Despite billions spent in improving productivity, Nepal's agriculture is still underperforming

■ Ramesh Kumar

Nepal is now a remittance-driven economy and rural areas are emptying due to outmigration, yet 62% of Nepal's population still relies on farming and it contributes to a fourth of the country's GDP.

Successive governments have spent Rs107 billion in the past five years on agricultural subsidies, and banks have extended flexible loans worth Rs367 billion to farmers and agro-businesses in the last decade. By 2024, loans from private financial institutions had grown eight-fold in ten years.

All this was designed to increase farm productivity, stimulate the economy, create jobs in agriculture and reduce imports. Some of that has happened, but not commensurate with the money spent.

Investment in the agricultural sector has increased by an average of 23.4% every year in the past ten

years, but the average annual growth in farm production since 2015 is only 2.77%. In fact, agricultural productivity has actually dropped, and food imports (mainly from India) have soared.

The question then is: where did all that money go? Evidence points to the budget being leaked along the way with little of it reaching the intended beneficiary farmers.

Nepal Rastra Bank data shows that commercial loans to commercial farms, tea estates, livestock farms and fisheries accounted for 4.5% of all loans, which in 2014 alone totaled Rs50.99 billion. The government had made it mandatory for banks and financial institutions to provide 15% of its loans to farmers and agro-businesses by 2027.

By 2024, agricultural loans accounted for 8% of the total loans provided by commercial banks – of this 22% went to farming, 37% to livestock and 39% to agro-businesses. In recent years, concessional loans are also provided to farmers in which the government



provides a 5% interest subsidy. For instance, if a bank issues an agricultural loan at 9% interest, the government will pay 5% of it. By mid-November last year, Rs100 billion worth of such subsidised loans had been approved.

The government has also provided outright grants to

increase agricultural production. The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development released data last week showing that grants worth Rs107 billion had been distributed in the last five years.

Given such generous outlays, there should have been an improvement in food production by now. Yet Nepal produced a little over 9.5 million tons of cereal crops in the fiscal year 2014, and ten years later it had risen only slightly to 10.9 million tons.

The improvements are restricted to pulses, fruits, and vegetables. In the last decade, the production of cash crops increased by 8.8%, other fruits by 4.6%, and vegetables by 2.5% annually.

Meanwhile, Nepal's agricultural imports doubled over the same period, from Rs130 billion in 2014 to almost Rs257 billion last year. The country imported about Rs46 billion worth of food, Rs28 billion worth of vegetables and Rs23 billion worth of fruits just last year.

Some of the support for the government's agriculture programs has come from international donors, including the Project for Agriculture Commercialisation and Trade (PACT), Nepal Agriculture and Food Security Project (AFSP), Nepal Livestock Sector Innovation Project, High Mountain Agribusiness and Livelihood Improvement Project, and the Rural Enterprise and Economic Development (REED) Project.

Despite this, agricultural production has not increased, and the quality of life of farmers has deteriorated to the point where many are abandoning agriculture altogether. Funds meant to uplift farmers are wasted on administrative work, consultant fees, training seminars and other purchases.

The Agricultural Commercialisation and Trade Project for Nepal was launched in 2018, for which the World Bank provided a Rs2.06 billion grant and Rs2.92 billion loan. The Bank's own investigation showed that of the grants, a large proportion was pocketed by middlemen along the way. Another Rs810 million went to consultants for teaching farmers about agro-businesses, Rs680 million to pay the salary and allowances for staff, Rs460 million

was spent on buying vehicles and equipment, and Rs110 million for training seminars. Project officials also spent Rs40.8 million on foreign junkets.

An audit report showed that 40% of the total funding was spent on administrative work. The Bank even sent a letter in 2020 to Yubaraj Khatiwada, who was finance minister then, alleging corruption and requesting action. Nothing was done about it.

The Improved Seed for Farmers Program, a Rs3.28 billion project for six districts in western Nepal supported by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and other institutions, also had anomalies. An audit report records purchase of 178 motorcycles, 20 four-wheelers, more than 200 laptops and tablets, 49 desktop computers, as well as dozens of photocopy machines, printers, and cameras totalling more than Rs322.1 million.

Another Rs203 million was spent on consulting services, Rs505.3 million on training seminars, and Rs597.1 million on salary and allowances for staff.

"This is clear evidence of agro-washing, agriculture is simply a front for other business dealings," alleges Biswash Gauchan of the Institute for Integrated Development Studies (IIDS).

An Auditor General's report a few months ago cited examples of misuse of agricultural loans, and recommended that the government recover the low-interest government-administered agricultural subsidy with penalties.

A similar study on agricultural loans by the Central Bank last year found that 14% of concessional loans given out by banks and financial institutions were being misused. In response, the Finance Ministry stopped administering Interest Subsidy Loans last year.

Studies by other government agencies concluded that investment in agriculture in Nepal has been ineffective. Even a Ministry of Agriculture task force concluded six years ago that government farmer grants had 'poured money down the drain'.

The report found that the benefits went not to farmers and agro-businesses that needed help, but almost exclusively to those in collusion with higher-ups in

vianet

AWARDED

BEST ISP OF THE YEAR

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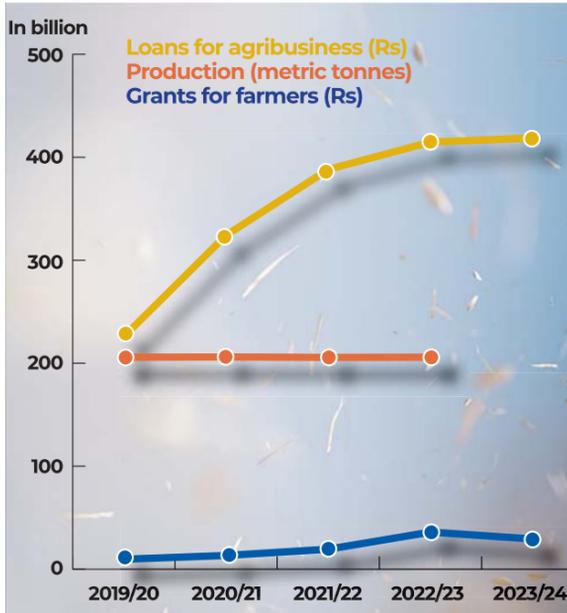
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charge of the grants. The funds, concluded the study, went towards the purchase of vehicles, luxury goods and other facilities rather than contributing to the agricultural sector.

Former NRB executive director Nar Bahadur Thapa says the reason agricultural loans appear

to be increasing while agricultural production has not risen is because the loans have been ostensibly taken for agriculture but poured into real estate speculation.

“It is not enough just to pour money into the agriculture sector, government and financial schemes will only yield results when we

create appropriate infrastructure and markets and facilitate trade,” says Hari Bahadur KC, chair of the committee set up by the Ministry of Agriculture to evaluate government subsidies.

It is clear that the problem lies in dysfunction in the government’s delivery mechanism and corruption

right up the line. The investment will not lead to increased productivity until the grants, loans, and subsidies stop lining the pockets of the wealthy and connected.

“It is an open secret that the grants are being misused, but no one wants to own up to this fact

and take moral responsibility,” says Uddhav Adhikari, former president of the National Farmers Group Federation (NGNF). “We need to strengthen monitoring to ensure that subsidies are provided to small-scale agro-businesses and farmers, and that they are utilised properly.”






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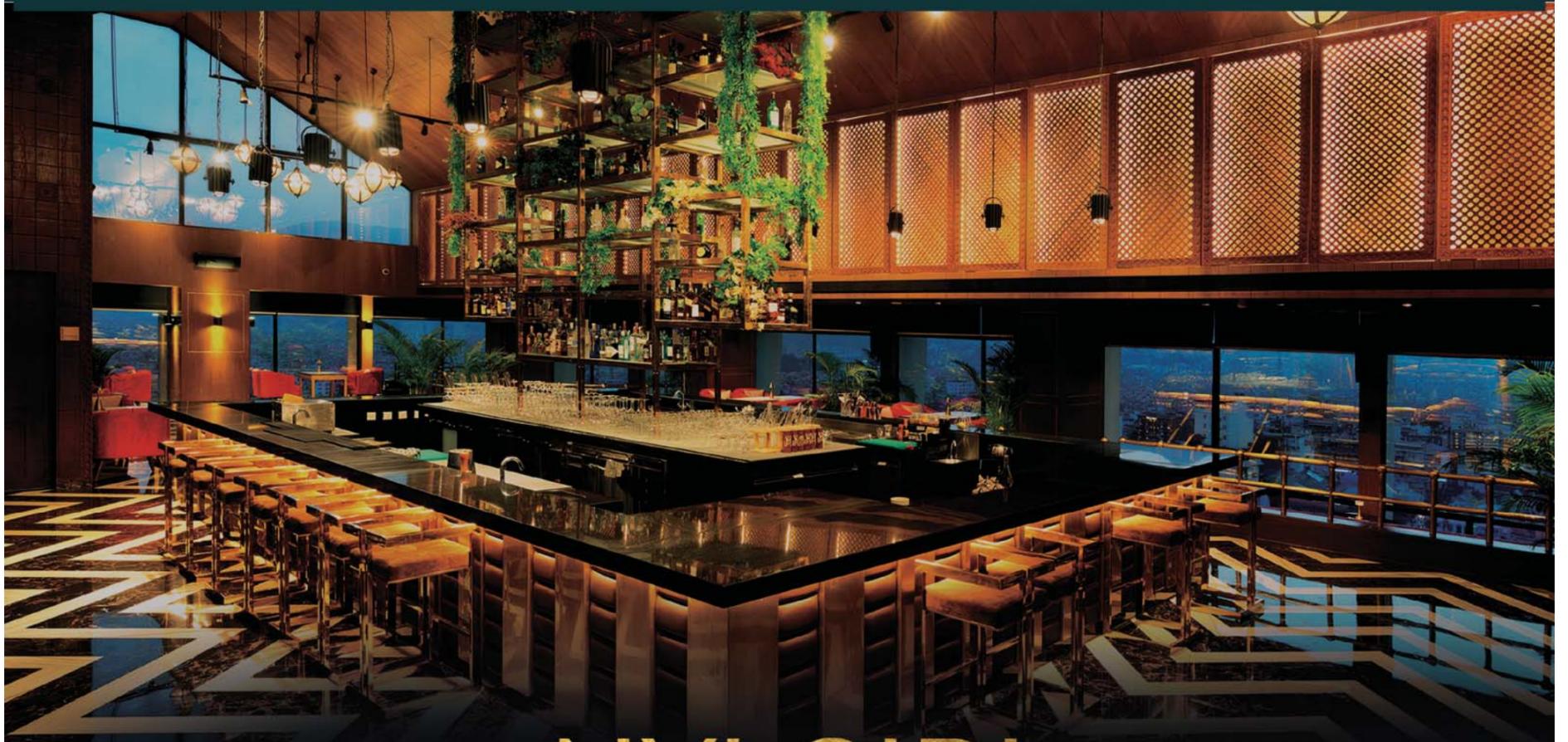
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