Mend in Nepal

Next June’s CA election is looking like a mirage

KIRAN NEPAL

E lecting an assembly to draft a new constitution is what brought the political parties and the Maoists together. It is the one thing almost everyone agrees on. Yet, it is unlikely the polls can take place in June 2007 as planned.

Missing the first deadline to sign the Comprehensive Peace Accord was not by itself serious, but other cut-off dates have been missed. The weapons lockdown, finalising the interim constitution, and dissolution of parliament are all on standby. The Election Commission stops short of saying that elections are impossible, as does everyone else. But planning for the polls and the run-up to them can only happen when the interim constitution is adopted, laws are passed on the scope of the Commission’s mandate and details of voter registration.

Until it is written into the interim constitution, the EC remains effectively illegal for the purposes of the CA, and not allowed to plan constituencies, lay down campaigning rules and administer a poll. The extent of the EC’s ‘refereeing’ role is undecided, including whether or not it will have any punitive authority to check campaign or ballot irregularities.

Just how ‘fair’ we expect this election to be, and in what ways, needs to be put in writing. Voter registration remains a contentious issue. The cut-off dates for newly-granted citizenship and for being put on voter lists are conflicting. Should a couple of million people be unable to vote, this too will affect the fairness of the election. Other lists must be updated to reflect migration patterns and internal displacement.

Strict rules which dictate that registered voters may only vote in their home district will need to be altered for maximum turnout, including through absentee ballots. Some changes need to be written into the new constitution, not just legislation. An election to a constituent assembly election is not a general election, but mixed-process polling. Voter education will be an essential function of the EC and the parties if we are to have a valid election at all. It will be obvious to Nepali and international monitors if voters are ill-informed, say if there is a larger than usual number of invalid ballots.

The election will essentially be a highly-polarised referendum on the monarchy, with high stakes all around, and security will be a major concern. With the army in barracks and the APF greatly distrusted by the Maoists, the job is left to the police. But will the police be able handle the task? Can 45,000 police guard 37,000 potential polling booths? There are shortfalls in all resources needed to run an election. But the biggest problem might not be logistical at all. Can the country survive a postponed election? Will the parties be able to sustain their united front if the polls are shifted to after the monsoon?
THE WEEK AFTER

Hard to believe it’s been just over a week since the signing of the peace accord. The euphoria persists, but there is also great expectation and great impatience. The breathless live coverage from the parking lots of the Summit or the Shring-La has oscillated from intense optimism to acute pessimism. The people have been taken on a rollercoaster ride, and are now mature enough to see through the media’s short attention span and cynicism. Even when a daily overstretched itself to replicate the Rajboi scandal by banging a story on the SUVs of leaders, most readers refused to be swayed by its mocking tone.

It is fashionable these days to be disparaging of the seven party leaders and sneer at their perceived incompetence. You hear this superior tone from exet peace consultants, and our own civil society has always bad-mouthed government forever (I think it is indispensable. But it was the political parties that steadfastly defended the middle path. They brought down a royal dictatorship through a non-violent pro-democracy movement, and made peace possible by narrowly the Maoists into the mainstream. Of course, the process was not always smooth. It was never supposed to be. There was the usual fecklessness and dourness, but that is what parties are by definition: they have short time horizons and are only at their best at the time. Those things are given. The fact that the alliance of seven parties achieved its goal shows that it had leaders with vision, who understood that the people most wanted peace, and then went about restoring it despite tremendous odds.

To last as long as the ultra-right used the security apparatus to enforce its powerbase and the revolutionary left believed only possible through bloodshed, the political parties demonstrated the moral superiority of non-violent struggle. The parties are the only entities which do not need the force of arms to gain and retain power. Their reason for being is the electoral process and democracy.

Having said that, the parties can’t afford to throw away a popular democracy is best safeguarded by improving their lives. The Nepali people have heard too many untruths about communism. They have been in power too often—this time it must be for real. The government must not waste any more time in dogmatism and sentiments rhetoric. It must get to work to make the peace dividend tangible. The best way to do this is to urgently launch high-profile activities that improve access, create jobs, and make an immediate difference in the lives of the most-neglected Nepalis.

If the seven plus one parties show the same steadfastness and vision towards this goal as they have shown in restoring peace, the political rewards will be great.

STATE OF THE STATE - C L K

There are two reasons why the most controversial figure in Nepal politics has been receiving such adulation. His opponents may be corporising to dismiss him by burying him in false praise. But those who think they can con Koirala by merely calling him a son of the soil are in for an even bigger disappointment. He expected censure from conservatives, but people want to nominate him for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Goodbye to hate Girijababu

GP deserves praise, but there’s a reason why he’s getting so much of it.
REALITY CHECK
I was amazed to see GP Koirala and PK Dahal congratulating each other for bringing peace to Nepal. I was even more amazed to hear that the idea of them receiving the Nobel Peace Prize is being touted. For what? Ending a conflict they started? Since when did the generators of Operation Romeo and Kilo Sierras, and the people who recruit children into insurgencies—all resulting in the deaths of 13,000 people—receive awards? What a devaluation of such a prize. They both owe the Nepali people a huge apology and some humility, especially all those children whose lives have been affected.

Even more amazing is the suggestion—made while babbling about Peace and Reconciliation Commissions—that the king and his ministers should be indicted for human rights abuses. Get a life. By the same token GPK and PKD should jointly be indicted for the deaths of 13,000, not a couple of dozen. Is life so cheap that we can forget those dead, those decapitated and garrotted, those ‘class enemies’ who struggled for a living in the villages of our land? Shame on anyone who applauds such foolish witch-hunting.

As for Kamal Thapa, Comrade Awesome should perhaps give him a medal. Think of Kathmandu traffic—without the curfews the former Home Minister clamped down, the Rhododendron Revolution would have been trampled over by road rage.

KA Tamang, Middlesbrough

STUMBLING BLOCKS
The Comprehensive Peace Agreement is a great step forward towards long-lasting peace. But where is its commitment to eliminating political corruption? This was why ten years of multiparty democracy failed in Nepal, and it can happen again. Simply making the monarchy redundant and signing a political declaration will not help avert this kind of crisis.

Abhi, New Delhi

CLEAN NAMES
The Maoists have landed safely and are entertaining the Nepali public, with the participation of our all-powerful neighbours and the UN. From what I gather, the Maoists are living up to their doctrines and road maps—just read about China’s Maoist experiment. Personally, I feel no one is playing honestly. It all seems too good to be true.

Topgyal, email

SENSATIONAL
The world media has not reported with due importance our historic peace deal. When the bloody conflict was on, there were sensational programs and news items all around. So why don’t they let the whole world know now that a monumental socio-political revolution is taking place through peaceful negotiations in a much-expected-upon country like Nepal? Can’t the world’s peace-lovers see that this country needs more attention than ever before?

Divas Sarma, Kathmandu

 MONEY FOR NOTHING
You have donor support to start a hydro project. Then you negotiate an agreement that states you get paid even when you don’t work. And then project contractors hire more project lawyers than engineers, simply to try the money away from the government. No surprise there is no incentive to negotiate or complete the work. Finally, if the work is ever completed, you’re guaranteed two to three times the going rate for electricity. No wonder there is huge private sector interest in hydro power in Nepal.

Scott Justice, email

PEACE CORPS COME BACK
There is much to be done to restore Nepal to a viable democratic nation. Much of this involves returning the villages to normalcy. Education and infrastructure have suffered greatly due to the insurgency. The Peace Corps had been working in Nepal since 1963 and it had made a huge difference in Nepal. Then two years ago, the United States government, fearing for their safety, ordered the Peace Corps to leave. Many changes have occurred since then, and now it is time to bring the Peace Corps back to Nepal.

Indeed, it is crucial that we do so. There is a pressing and urgent need for the very types of skills for which the Peace Corps is famous: working closely with the people, teaching them and giving them the skills enabling them to live productive lives.

We urge President George W Bush to immediately return the Peace Corps to Nepal. They have been sorely missed, and will be gratefully received.

Lawrence and Joyce Tapper, USA

UNTRUE
In Sophia Tamot’s article (‘Long Overdue’ #324), I have been falsely accused of having been a ‘former defaulter.’ Neither I nor the Jyoti Group has ever been declared a defaulter.

Roop Jyoti, email

CLARIFICATION
On 16 August, the Rastra Bank released a lift of defaulters. The Jyoti Group was listed as owing Nepal Bank over Rs 7 million. On 25 August, the Rastra Bank released a lift of defaulters. The Jyoti Group was listed as owing Nepal Bank over Rs 7 million. On 25 August, the Rastra Bank released a lift of defaulters. The Jyoti Group was listed as owing Nepal Bank over Rs 7 million. On 25 August, the Rastra Bank released a lift of defaulters. The Jyoti Group was listed as owing Nepal Bank over Rs 7 million. On 25 August, the Rastra Bank released a lift of defaulters. The Jyoti Group was listed as owing Nepal Bank over Rs 7 million.

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LETTERS
Nepal Times welcomes feedback. Letters should be brief and may be edited for space. While pseudonyms can be accepted, writers who provide their real names and contact details will be given preference. Email letters should be in text format without attachments with ‘letter to the editor’ in the subject line.

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Training in Thailand PM & E 11 - 15 Dec
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MALLIKA ARYAL

Al Singh Adhikari was arrested by police in the spring of 1996 on suspicion of being a Maoist. He was hanged in Pokhara for three days last month and says he was tortured and interrogated about his dance restaurant business before being produced in public and subjected to this kangaroo ‘people’s court’ in Halan Chok, Lakeside.

“After that there was pressure to dig a hole in which to bury me alive, I thought it was a good idea,” says the 47-year-old from Rukum who spent three hellish years in prison.

Today, Adhikari can’t bear or see very well. He has trouble walking, is forgetful, and looks like the cowering shell of a man.

What happened to him—and to thousands others in the last decade—is barely treated as a crime in Nepal. The state signed the UNG Convention Against Torture (CAT) in the mid-1990s, but that commitment languished until the insurgency began, and then the offensive against it.

“After that there was pressure to do something about the torture situation in Nepal, so the government created the Torture Compensation Act to please the international community,” says Advocate Bidhya Chapagain of CAT.

Getting even just an acknowledgment that you have been done wrong is a bureaucratic nightmare. Victims of torture have to file cases against perpetrators within 35 days. Insec—estimates that the average case runs about five years and even then, victims are unlikely to get compensation. If a case is decided in favour of the victim, the district office has to recommend the case to the Home Ministry, which then requires the Finance Ministry to send the compensation amount back to the victim’s home district. The maximum of Rs 100,000 is barely enough for a person to rebuild their life or even seek medical help.

Of the 186 cases filed under the Act so far, 85 have been decided, 27 cases in favour of the plaintiffs. Three victims have received compensation.

Advocate Hemang Sharma says that following the provisions of the Act and the requirements of CAT would be a good start. Under CAT, Nepali authorities are required to keep records of the whereabouts of detainees, a provision conspicuously missing from our laws. Only ‘departmental action’ is required against state officials accused of torture. “The most that can happen is that they get transferred and the case is closed,” says Sharma.

CVICT estimates that the thousands it counsels annually make up five percent of the victims who’ve been tortured, or been traumatised by the war. Lack of writ and victim protection programs is a major reason for such massive under-reporting.

“People know that no matter who tortured them, the state cannot protect them. Who wants to be vindicated again?” asks Sharma.

“The first step is criminalising torture,” says Kathir Shrestha, assistant chief district officer for Lalitpur, and a member of the CAT reporting team. “Security personnel need to know torture is unacceptable, and taught better interrogation techniques,” he adds.

Victims of torture need institutionalised rehabilitation and counselling programs, says CVICT psychologist Rajan KC.

“Our experience of working with torture victims shows that they usually seek medical help for physical injuries, but have no clue about their legal rights, and most don’t know that their malaise is deep, long-term mental trauma,” says KC.

Ultimately, the challenge may be less about impunity and more about culture. Jammala Poudel, an advocate with CVICT, says “Culturally we think it is okay to beat someone up for confession.”

For that to change, individuals need to stop thinking that a little roughing up helps anything.

Still missing

NARESH NEWAR

As the nation celebrated the ‘official’ end of the decade-long armed conflict on 21 November, thousands of Nepalis were disqualified to hear nothing about the fate of their missing loved ones.

In 2004, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) received 1,600 reports of disappearances at the hands of the security forces alone, making Nepal the country with the highest number of ‘disappearances’ in the world. After the breakdown of ceasefires in 2001 and 2003, the royal government and the Maoists unleashed a wave of vengeance against the civilians, arresting or abducting anyone on suspicion of working as ‘spies’ for the other side.

The other problem is more chilling. Kafle maintains that as long as witnesses, victims, and perpetrators are not held accountable for their actions, impunity will remain in the nation.

The challenge is massive. Kafle maintains that the nation must act to ensure that the problems of witness and victim protection are solved.

Rights activists and the OHCHR believe impunity on disappearances will be a major stumbling block in the reconstruction process. “The culture of impunity in Nepal is a key hurdle in promoting rule of law, human rights, and democracy,” argues human rights lawyer Mandira Sharma.

OHCHR believes people implicated after finding evidence of criminal responsibility should be brought before a civilian court. The peace accord provides for a truth commission, but its implementation remains a big question mark.

Until then, people just want to see their family member’s name on a list that acknowledges that they are disappeared. “If that does not happen, we will launch a street revolution, even against the Maoists,” explains Sharma Tripathi, president of the Society.
On top

Samsung Electronics has claimed the world’s top spot in sales and revenue for its LCD TVs in the latest economic quarter. Samsung accounted for 10.5 percent of all LCD TVs sold worldwide in July-September period, and the company global revenue share was 15.6 percent.

Keeping time

Seiko’s brand new showroom and service centre at Rama Ghar, New Baneshwor, which opened on 27 November in partnership with Time World, will showcase the best of its products for the Nepali market, including lines like Arctica, Sportura, Premier, Vivace, and Rivoli. The showroom also has an introductory offer of a gift with each purchase and free servicing of all Seiko watches until 26 December.

Womanly assets

Bank of Kathmandu is launching a new Grha Lamzi Bachat account, targeted at boosting savings among female customers. Women can make a minimum deposit of Rs 5,000 at any Valley branch, or Rs 2,500 with Bank of Kathmandu branches outside Kathmandu and open a Grha Lamzi Bachat account. A lucky draw every Friday will award one account holder with Rs 25,000 worth of Samsung household appliances, and a bumper prize draw every three months will give away household appliances worth Rs 100,000.

Low down payment

As part of its campaign, motorcycle riders can now opt for the popular Bajaj Discover DTSI motorbike with a down payment of just Rs 11,111.

NEW PRODUCTS

HAPPY FEET: Bess Footwear has started marketing BF Dear Hill Shoes in Nepal. Although targeted more specifically at youth, the range is for all ages and includes formal, causal, and sports shoes, all of which come with a six-month warranty.

NEW DUO: Maruti is launching the new Wagon R, which boosts 10 percent more fuel efficiency and a slicker new SUV-inspired design, and the Wagon R Duo, which can run on petrol or LPG (which reduces running costs by about 33 percent). The new Wagon R is available in eight colours, and full options costs Rs 1.45 million. The newly-launched Duo Wagon R is priced at Rs 1.56 million.

REGISTERED: The new SAM4S Electronic Cash Register from South Korea is now available in Nepal through SII. Its built-in software has programmable tax rates and a backup battery, and it can also generate customised reports.

NEW RIO: Continental Trading is following the success of the KIA Rio in Nepal with new models of the small city car, in sedan or hatchback options. The all new Rio has upgraded engines and improved fuel economy.

“Foreign investors need fair treatment”

Nepali Times spoke with Ruslan Zaiika, CEO of Spice Nepal, on the state of telecom in Nepal and the foreign investment scenario.

Nepali Times: Where is Spice Nepal business-wise?
Ruslan Zaiika: Today, Spice Nepal and its Mero Mobile brand is the fastest growing and most innovative telecom operator in Nepal. In our first year of operations Mero Mobile built a state-of-the-art mobile GSM network which supports voice, data and video transmission. The Mero Mobile family has about 300,000 subscribers who can make

and receive telephone calls, organise conference calls, have internet access, send SMS, SMS e-mail, MMS, download and set Personal Ring Back Tone (PRBT), pictures and melodies, call waiting, and missed call notification service.

Has your performance matched your expectations?
We’re making very good progress despite problems, such as political instability, and the reluctance of other telecom operators to share facilities and infrastructure. For example, we still don’t have enough capacity on interconnection links. Difficulties are part of the work but we’d really appreciate the government paying attention to our problems and providing Spice Nepal the same rights and facilities as other operators. We need an International Gateway license, and we have to send roaming traffic through our network, and the other operator accepts our traffic, but can’t ensure quality. Normally, the government is naturally interested to resolve such situations and request the license holders to provide adequate quality to us as our customer, or allow Spice Nepal to organise its own international connections. The government needs to step up its role from that of just a regulator to a facilitator.

What’s it like to do business in Nepal?
What works well, and what would you change?
Nepal has huge potential for further development and growth and we’re lucky to live and do business here. With peace and a stable political situation, changes in some foreign investment policies, and a fair attitude to foreign investors on the part of the government could attract a lot of potential foreign investors whose money and experience can help Nepal move up in the region.
“National power”

Jhalanath Khanal, Permanent Central Committee member, CPN-UML Budhabar, 29 November

Did the party decide on whether or not to join the interim government at Friday’s central committee meeting?

The meeting analysed the recent political developments following the peace agreement. Nepal will have an interim constitution, an interim parliament, and an interim government, all as a result of the sacrifices made by the people. The CPN-UML is a national power driving this hurricane. Surely then it is a historical need for us to be involved in all three institutions.

But the leadership seems confused about whether or not it will join in. There is no question about joining or not joining, honour or dishonour. This is about the right of the CPN-UML to participate in parliament and an interim government. When talking about the interim parliament and an interim government we must not forget that the last Jana Andolan took the form of a peaceful revolution. Parliament and the government are tools to make the most of that revolution. The country must go in for the first time, but we can question those that have time and again been in government, who have experience, but remain under control of the Maoists. The NC leader seems confused about whether or not it will join in. The NC leadership, and others on the basis of what is necessary. Some will go on the basis of political leadership, and others on the basis of inclusiveness from various regions.

What will be your party’s role in the interim government?

From our side there will be a few new rookie comrades entering the government. We do not have the right to criticise those who are going in for the first time, but we can question those that have time and again been in government, who have experience, but remain under control of the Maoists. The NC leadership seems confused about whether or not it will join in. The NC leadership and others on the basis of what is necessary.

Won't the growing distance between the UML and NC affect the new government?

Politics in this country is gravely polarised. The ideological and practical polarisation between those for a democratic republic and those for the monarchy is essential. I do not take it to be unnatural. But if the NC decides to go for a democratic republic, this distance will lessen.

Will you send the team that is in government presently to the interim government?

When talking about the interim parliament and government we must not forget that the last Jana Andolan took the form of a peaceful revolution. Parliament and the government are tools to make the most of that revolution. A different team will join the interim government.

Has the decision already been made?

We are heading in that direction. The central committee has already said we need a new team. It is yet to be decided who will be in the team and how big it will be. More important than the team itself are the reasons for joining the government.

Will your senior leaders join the interim government or will you send representatives according to the principles of inclusiveness?

Forty-eight seats will have to be filled. We will probably get six to ten of those seats. Whatever number we get, we will fill on the basis of what is necessary. Some will go on the basis of political leadership, and others on the basis of inclusiveness from various regions.

Looter Maoists

Rajdhani, 30 November

NEPALGUJ—The Maoists have been looting poor farmers in Banke and Bardia. This week alone they seized over 100 quintals of food grains in these two districts. Khashig Singh Tharu, Ekavkar Sharma, and Kishan Sharma from Nahaspata VDC of Banke watched helplessly as a group of Maoists led by ‘Uday’ loaded their food grains onto three tractors. These farm owners were told they had no right to any grain they grow as long as their land remained under control of the Maoists. Maoist cadres also seized the grain harvested from 14 bighas of land belonging to the late Nepal Congress (NC) worker Shanker Shah in Mahadevpuri VDC, ignoring his widow’s pleas.

Shah was killed by Maoists and his family driven out from the village about eight years ago. Mukesh Swar of Gola VDC, Bardia also lost 200 quintals of grain to the Maoists. They refuse to return eight bighas of his land, which they have occupied for the past eight years. “We had hoped the Maoists would not act like this after the peace agreement, but they have not improved,” said Swar. Many civilians like Swar had hoped that peace process would change their difficult situation. But sadly, poor farmers are still the ones suffering the most from Maoist intimidation.

Fakes arrested

Janadharan, 30 November

Two fake astrologers of Indian origin who had been regularly advertising their alleged astrology skills in the back pages of Kathmandu have been nabbed by the Nepal Police. The police arrested Harka Boshi alias ‘Swami Rajuran’ from Hotel Vaishali and Naushiji More alias ‘Dr Duttaranjan’ from Hotel Pisang.

The arrests were made after several victims, who were duped of large amounts of money, complained to the police. The police have received permission from the Kathmandu District Court to proceed with the investigation. While printing advertisements, newspapers that people have come to trust must
also be careful about disseminating inaccurate information. Kathmandu, which was printing advertisements publicising the two fakes, only published the news of the arrests in a small column in its inner pages. Perhaps the Press Council should question this as a violation of the code of ethics.

Anti-Gyanendra Chhabal, 26 November

Former vice chairman of the council of ministers Tulsi Giri has openly been blaming King Gyanendra ever since the Rayamajhi Commission report recommended action against Giri. At a recent meeting at Kamal Thapa’s residence, sources say Giri accused the king of being indecisive and making him unpopular, he also said the king never followed his advice.

Giri regularly holds meetings with royals and RPP leaders at his residence in Balkot. In the last few weeks he has also met the king’s advisor Sharad Chaurasia several times. Giri now maintains that it will be extremely difficult to save the king.

Giri also said that the 1 February takeover occurred with India’s approval. Before the coup, the king in a meeting with Giri had said the only way to save democracy in Nepal was for him to take over, and India had supported this decision. “It was only about four days later, when the international community started boycotting the king’s takeover, that India changed its stance,” said Giri.

Needless army in Nepal, 3 December

The Nepal Army is now almost 250 years old. It was through the NA that Prithvi Narayan Shah successfully united Nepal. During those days, the army was useful in establishing a kingdom and protecting it. Then it was also natural for the kings to find it impossible to have a kingdom without an army serving under them.

But today things are different, and we have a debate about whether the army is necessary or not. Some feel that Nepal would be highly insecure in the absence of an army, especially when the Indian and Chinese soldiers have been mobilised along the border. But the important thing to remember is, even if this country came under any military attack, Nepal would never have the military strength to face China or India. It would be ridiculous to assume that a country would lose its sovereignty in the absence of an army.

On the contrary, if we try to remove the army from our country, it will boost the dignity of both our soldiers and their citizens. It would especially help in making the arms management of the Maoists successful. Even now, the process of arms management is still filled with doubts and there is uncertainty about its effectiveness.

However removing the army also means depriving the livelihoods of a large number of personnel. The state has to think of an effective employment programme for around 95,000 from the NA and 35,000 from the PLA. This will directly or indirectly affect the livelihood of around 500,000 people.

The most important factors associated with the army is economy and politics. With an already weak national economy, the country can no longer afford such a modern army. It already costs around Rs 10 billion annually to finance the NA. In addition, it would cost another Rs 600 million if the country is to also look after the PLA soldiers. So instead of spending such colossal funds on our military, the amount if used to invest in their future employment would release them from our age-old imperialistic tradition.

Removing the army would not only avoid any future military co-op as in Thailand but would also avert the possibility of future dictators. It is high time that we change our traditional mindset, the belief that a state can only run if we have an army with weapons. There are already 14 countries around the world without armies. We can very well be the 15th.

The business community is debated by the recent peace agreement, as peace has always been the first condition for business and investment to thrive. There are already small but encouraging signs in the share market. This particular accord like any other detailed peace accord in the world is not limited to politics. It promises economic and social transformations too.

Povverty and economic backwash was the main reason the Maoists’ recorded to arms. Now it is thus all the more necessary to initiate programs to boost the income level of the ordinary Nepali.

However, the political parties have not done their homework on what the new economic policy should look like. Contradictory parties on capital formation are a huge obstacle in the making of an economic policy. Since the roadmap is still unclear, entrepreneurs are still hesitant about investing in Nepal.

On the other hand, the business community does not trust the Maoists, though they are set to be part of the political system. Maoist leaders at different levels have different opinions on globalisation and nationalisation.

Parties that earlier supported an open economy while in power now seem uncertain about it. This confusion makes the work of the National Planning Commission difficult. Donors are ready to provide assistance, but are awaiting a clear plan. The 10th plan, whose poverty alleviation strategic paper was used to seek donor assistance, comes to an end this fiscal year.

However, discussions on economic policy are often redundant — there is no alternative to an open economy. Ten years ago, Nepal started moving in this direction, and so far it has been successful in poverty alleviation and economic modernisation. More work needs to be done on mainstreaming rural communities in development. Raising the gap between the haves and have-nots, the best use of resources, decentralisation, and good governance.

Now, all parties need to agree on an open economic policy that is also socially responsible. Just like we agreed on the political roadmap, we should also draft an economic agreement. Donors want a clear plan, and an economic policy could be another step in ensuring that we don’t repeat our mistakes.
100% Woman (Canada, 2004)
Dir: Karen Duthe, Duration: 51 min
Trials and tribulations of a transgender athlete.
On at: 5:45 PM, 11 December at RCC, Hall A

37 Uses for a Dead Sheep (UK, 2006)
Dir: Ben Hopkins, Duration: 87 min
A Central Asian tribe chooses exile over communism.
On at: 5PM, 8 December at Gurukul
2PM, 11 December at RCC, Hall B

Alone Across Australia (Australia, 2003)
Dir: Ian Darling and Jon Muir, Duration: 52 min
A man and his dog go for a long walk.
On at: 10AM, 10 December at RCC, Hall A

Alta Rezia Freeride Tour (Switzerland, 2005)
Dir: Ateie Volkohrt, Duration: 30 min
The chief guest at this year's Kimff. Sabir earned Pakistan's
Nepal venture that explores classical dance in Kathmandu.
Sangita Shrestova's Dancing Kathmandu (premiere) a US/
Exhibition Road
(USA, 2005)
5PM, 11 December at Tourism Service Centre

Ciaro Martins (Poland, 2004)
Dir: Danusz Zakowski, Duration: 21 min
A climber is far from home.
On at: 4:30 PM, 5 December at RCC, Hall B
Climate's First Orphans (India, 2006)
Dir: Nila Mohab Panda, Duration: 22 min
Climate change impacts coastal Orissa.
On at: TBA, 10 December at RCC, Hall B

Dancing Kathmandu (USA, 2006)
Dir: Sangita Shresthova, Duration: 43 min
Reconnecting with Nepal through dance.
On at: 3PM, 8 December at Gurukul

Der Propellervogel/ The Propellorbird (France, 2005)
Dir: Brigitte Glaudem Sperber, Duration: 29 min
A Pakistani Kalash passenger passes away.
On at: TBA, 9 December at Gurukul
TBA, 8 December at RCC, Hall B

De un hilo/ By a Thread (Spain, 2005)
Dir: Juan Carlos Romero, Duration: 9 min
A climber's faith is tested.
On at: 5:15 PM, 8 December at RCC, Hall B

De un hilo/ By a Thread (Spain, 2005)
Dir: Juan Carlos Romero, Duration: 9 min
A climber's faith is tested.
On at: 5:15 PM, 8 December at RCC, Hall B

Der Propellervogel/ The Propellorbird (France, 2005)
Dir: Brigitte Glaudem Sperber, Duration: 29 min
A Pakistani Kalash passenger passes away.
On at: TBA, 9 December at Gurukul
TBA, 8 December at RCC, Hall B

Dem Sidste Aere/ The Last Honours (Denmark, 2005)
Dir: John Johan & Thomas Hinke, Duration: 5 min
About four birds.
On at: TBA, 8 December at Gurukul
Hall A

Detervas (India, 2005)
Dir: Saray Barma, Duration: 28 min
Negotiating traditions with contemporary discourses on conservation.
On at: TBA, 10 December at RCC, Hall A

Die Gorillas meines Grossvaters/ The Gorillas of my Grandfather (Australia, 2004)
Dir: Adrian Warren, Duration: 53 min
Demystifying the mountain gorilla.
On at: 10:30 AM, 9 December at RCC, Hall B

Flying over Everest (Italy, 2004)
Dir: Fabio Toncelli, Duration: 60 min
A man, a hang-glider and two birds.
On at: TBA, 6 December at Tourist Service Centre
10.30 AM, 9 December at RCC, Hall A

Footprints (UK)
Dir: Ben Hopkins, Duration: 60 min
Mines turn homelands into hostile environments.
On at: TBA, 5 December at RCC, Hall A

Greina (Switzerland, 2006)
Dir: Villy Herrmann, Duration: 28 min
A Swiss lamer encounters change.
On at: TBA, 11 December at Tourist Service Centre
TBA, 10 December at RCC, Hall B

Himalayan Dreams (Maldives, 2006)
Dir: Ahmed Shafeeu and Ali Rashid, Duration: 28 min
Madavian longing for Himalayan heights.
On at: 5PM, 9 December at Gurukul

4PM, 7 December at RCC, Hall A

I sosa la tus noms/ They are Playing Over the Towers (Italy, 2004)
Dir: Detomas Margherita, Duration: 9 min
The Dolomites are alive with music.
On at: 3:30 PM, 9 December at RCC, Hall A
3:45 PM, 10 December at Gurukul

Invisible Children: Rough Cut (USA, 2004)
Dir: Jason Russell, Duration: 55 min
Abduction and child soldiers.
On at: 5PM, 9 December at RCC, Hall B
6:45 PM, 8 December at Gurukul

Kekilili: Mountain Patrol (China/ USA)
Dir: Lu Chuan, Duration: 85 min
Ridking life for the Tibetan antelopes.
On at: 5:30 PM, 7 December at RCC, Hall A

4PM, 8 December at Tourist Service Centre

Kilimanjaro (UK, 2005/06)
Dir: Richard Heap and Ben Pritchard, Duration: 52 min
Disabled climbers battle the odds.
On at: 10:30 AM, 8 December at RCC, Hall B
3PM, 11 December at Tourism Service Centre

Klimflaun (Animation, Germany, 2005)
Dir: Thilo Ewers and Waldemar Fast, Duration: 3 min
Braun's adventure.
On at: TBA, 8 December at RCC, Hall A

Light of the Himalaya (USA, 2006)
Dir: Michael Brown, Duration: 69 min
Climbing and caving catastra.
On at: 72 noon, 9 December at RCC, Hall A
4PM 10 December at Tourism Service Centre

Malenikya Katerina/ Tiny Katerina (Russia, 2004)
Dir: Ivan Golovnev, Duration: 24 min
A girl grows up in Siberia.
On at: 3:30 PM, 11 December at RCC, Hall A

Manaslu (Japan)
Duration: 112 min
The Japanese ascent of Manaslu.
On at: 2PM, 11 December at RCC, Hall A

Meeting Me (Germany)
Dir: Angel Stiffler, Duration: 5 min
A short story about the discovery of the world.
On at: 9AM, 6 December at RCC, Hall A

New Samaritans (Israel, 2006)
Dir: Alexander Shabatian, Sergey Grankin, Edin Kushuk, Duration: 52 min
Foreign brides ‘refresh’ the nation’s blood.
On at: 4:30 PM, 11 December at RCC, Hall A
SMC, 10 December at Gurukul

No Limits (Germany)
Dir: Heidi Wittinger, Anja Peer, and Max Stotzenberg, Duration: 1 min
A driver shows no mercy.
On at: TBA, 8 December at RCC, Hall A

Nomads: Wandering Women of the Whitewater Tribe (USA, 2006)
Dir: Polya Green, Duration: 21 min
About three compassionate kayakers.

The feature edition of the non-competitive biennial Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival (Kimff) begins 7 December. Over five
more, days, more than 70 documentaries, features, animation, and shorts from 26 countries will be screened back-to-back simultaneously at the Russian Cultural Centre (RCC) in Karnali Parkahi, Gorkakil in Old Baneswor, and the Tourist Service Centre on Exhibition Road. Kimff will open with filmmaker Sangita Shresthova's Dancing Kathmandu (premiere) a US/
Nepal venture that explores classical dance in Kathmandu.

Naziq Sahib, the first Pakistani to scale Mount Everest is the chief guest at this year's Kimff. Sabir earned Pakistan's
prestigious President’s Award for Pride of Performance in 1982 and The Sitara-i-Imtiaz (Star of Distinction) in 2001 for his outstanding achievements in mountaineering.

A committed environmentalist, Sahib is involved in conservation activities in Pakistan’s northern areas. Sahib has been a jury member at the Banff International Film
Festival since its inception in 2000. Two books, Atlas of the mountain gorilla and a collection of his Nepali writings, will be released at a special tribute session. Kimff ’06 will also present a retrospective of films by the late Naran Singh Thapa, an Indian filmmaker of Nepali origin who specialised in films on Himalayan valleys and mountains.

Kimff ’06 will also showcase “Best of Banff”, a selection of films from Canada’s premier mountain film festival, and a ‘Know Your Himal’ quiz about the Nepal Himalaya. In collaboration with WWF Nepal, the festival will feature a photo competition and exhibition on Nepal’s highlands.

The only award given out at the festival will be the Audience Award.


Pass Me Over the Binoculars…
2PM, 9 December at RCC, Hall B

A touching tale of friendship.
Duration: 23 min
(Nepal, 2005)

TBA, 7 December at RCC, Hall A
On at: TBA, 9 December at Gurukul
On at: 11.45 AM, 10 December at RCC, Hall B
A Peruvian porter thinks aloud.
Dir: Juan Alejandro Ramirez, Duration: 20 min
(Peru, 2003)

On at: 4PM, 10 December at RCC, Hall A
How far should rescue work go?
Duration: 27 min
Dir: Pierre Mortimer, Duration: 10 min
(USA)

A Himalayan-sized passion for Canada’s national sport.
On at: 6PM, 10 December at RCC, Hall A

Off Road to Athens (Custom World Tour Edt) (USA)
Dir: Jason Berry, Duration: 51 min
Eight US cyclists hope to make the Olympic team.
On at: 6PM, 8 December at RCC, Hall A

Return/Sender: Bug Out (USA)
Dir: Peter Mortimer, Duration: 10 min
A ten-year-old’s commentary on climbing.
On at: 8 December at RCC, Hall A

Sur en fil des 4,000 (France)
Dir: Gilles Chapiez, Duration: 50 min
Adventure in the Alps.
On at: 3:30 PM, 8 December at RCC, Hall A

The Khumbu Mighty-Mites (USA)
Dir: Karl Swingle, Duration: 3 min
Khumbu’s children enjoy home-made skis.
On at: TBA, 8 December at RCC, Hall A

The Lost People of Mountain Village (USA)
Dir: Carol Black and Neal Marlens, Duration: 15 min
We may never know what really happened.
On at: TBA, 8 December at RCC, Hall B

The Magic Mountain (Canada)
Dir: Pat Morrow, Duration: 50 min
Offbeat story of a Canadian educator.
On at: 2PM, 8 December at RCC, Hall A

Unconquerable Summit (Kazakhstan)
Dir: Vladimir Tulkin, Duration: 40 min
Life and times of alpinist Anatol Boujenov.
On at: 4:45 PM, 8 December at RCC, Hall A

UFO (USA)
Dir: Stephen Burgess, Duration: 6 min
Unusual flying objects galore.
On at: TBA, 8 December at RCC, Hall B

Whiteline (Canada)
Dir: Charles Bolieu, Duration: 10 min
A new style montage in the freeskiing world.
On at: TBA, 5 December at RCC, Hall B
Declaration delayed

The UN General Assembly’s Third Committee (Social, Economic, Cultural and Human Rights) has chosen not to pass, not reject, but amend the draft resolution on the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The delay came after Namibia and other African nations proposed the amendments saying that “some provisions ran counter to their national constitutions”, and that deferring its adoption would allow for more consultations. The Declaration aims to raise international standards for the protection of the rights of indigenous peoples.

The decision comes amidst a gathering of representatives of indigenous peoples who approached him. At the same meeting, homosexual”, and later refused to speak to a small group of minorities in the new constitution.

The seven-party alliance to include protection of the rights of sexual orientations held at the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) in Kathmandu, to present their findings on an assessment of the first UN Decade of Indigenous Peoples. Alok Tumbahanghey

At peace, at home

Land transactions in the Valley have declined sharply since the start of the current fiscal year, says the Malpot (Land Revenue) Office in Dillibajar. “Buying and selling of land has gone down by over 50 percent in the past four months,” says Ramesh Subedi, a non- gazetted officer at the Malpot Office. Daily transactions have gone down from over 120 to around 50 per day.

The drop in the number of transactions has been largely attributed to the success of Jana Andolan II and the peace process. “People are safe in their villages now, so they aren’t migrating to Kathmandu,” explained real estate agent Jit Kumal. During the conflict thousands fled to Kathmandu from the districts due to Maoist intimidation, extortion, and abductions.

Despite the fall in trade, land revenue hasn’t really been affected, because collection depends not just on the number, but also on the location and cost of a transaction, as well as on the periodic payments from large landholders. Last year, the Dillibajar Malpot Office collected Rs 613.67 million in land revenue, while in the past four months it collected Rs 220.23 million. Sofia Tamot

Visit Nepal, if you can

Despite the political optimism, the international arrivals figure (by air only) last month was 4.4 percent lower than that for October last year. The Immigration Office at Tribhuvan International Airport says just over 36,851 visitors entered Nepal this month, and that there has been a significant increase in the number of visitors from Malaysia, Japan, South Korea, France, Norway, Spain, and the US.

Arrivals from SAARC countries, especially India, have dropped the most. Aditya Pant of the Nepal Tourism Board for the Ministry of tourism attributes this to the significantly fewer flights between Kathmandu and Indian cities. Cosmic, [FICAN, and Indian Airlines flights to Delhi, Kolkata, and Benaras have been cut in the last few months.

In recent years, tourism entrepreneurs have complained that there are simply not enough flights coming into Nepal. This tourist season was no exception, and flights and out of Nepal through to the end of the year have been fully booked for months.

As a stopgap measure, before Dasain the government announced that it would allow entries into the country, Airlines like Korean Air, GMG Bangladesh, Air Arabia, ElEth, Orient Thai, and Sri Lankan Airlines (again) have recently been permitted to operate in Nepal and are expected to meet the rising demand. Air Arabia’s first flight in was on 7 November, Korean Air’s the week after, and Thai Orient is expected to start in coming weeks. Mahila Aryal

High level homophobia

Nima Lama, 18-year-old transsexual from Nuwakot, died last Sunday after drinking tainted alcohol sold to her by two unidentified children. Though there is no evidence yet that this was a hate crime, the Blue Diamond Society, with which Lama was associated, says it was a “planned attack” on sexual minorities in Nepal, and follows recent physical attacks on other members of the society in Lajumpat. Lama, who was celebrating her birthday with eight friends in Baudha, had bought what police and doctors say was most likely fumes from light burners at banquet. Tharu Babi Pant, president of the Society, says Lama did not receive adequate treatment and was moved unnecessarily between hospitals.

Pant and other members of the BDS called on Prime Minister Koirala, Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kumal Dahal, and other leaders of the seven-party alliance to include protection of the rights of sexual minorities in the new constitution.

Two days later, on 29 November, at the third national consultation meeting organised by the Women Rehabilitation Centre, Foreign Minister KP Oli said that he and his party had “nothing to do with homo- sexuals”, and later refused to speak to a small group of transgenders who approached him. At the same meeting, Amrita Thapa, general secretary of the CPN(M) Mahila Sangathan said “homosexuality is unnatural and pollutes society”. Alok Tumbahanghey

Afterlife of a rhino

On 27 November, the villages surrounding Chitwan National Park, had a feast. The star attraction— forbidden rhino meat. That very morning, a male rhino had been found dead in the Chitwan National Park. The cause of death had been a bullet through the head. We were told by Tika Ram Paudel, a ranger from Lekh Khusi, at Chitwan National Park, that a single gunshot had been heard three nights before the dead rhino was discovered. It was rumoured the poachers were back in the park.

The red rhino had been poached by locals, but this time they kill for, but this time the Tharu community is particular is said to enjoy rhino meat. It’s not served in hotels, but if you want a taste, you have to ask. Already this year, 10 rhinos have been killed in Chitwan National Park, in large part, says Major Bishal Shah, “because the number of army posts inside the Park has come down from 38 to 14.”

FINDERS KEEPERS: Locals finish cutting and distributing the dead rhino in a matter of few hours, depriving natural scavengers like vultures of their food.

“Maybe (janajatis) should have their own political party.”

The United Nations created the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in 2002 to advise the world body on issues concerning the world’s 370 million indigenous people. Its chairperson, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz from the Philippines, was here this week to attend a meeting on indigenous people in Asia. We talked to her about Nepal’s janajati movement just days before the UN General Assembly was to vote on the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Nepali Times: Are people outside Nepal aware of the indigenous people’s movement here?

Victoria Tauli-Corpuz: People are aware of Nepal’s struggle for democracy but, sadly, indigenous people’s participation in bringing about change in countries like Nepal is not really visible.

Now that we’re in a post-conflict situation, what experiences do you think Nepal’s indigenous people can learn from?

I think the Bolivia experience can be very instructive for Nepal. I heard the adviser to Bolivian’s foreign minister speak recently. He said “we went through everything, through armed struggle, through complaints, and we had a country that was always used by the left or the right, but when they got into power they forgot us. We got sick and tired of that, so we decided why the hell can’t we run and get into government...” That was a thought for indigenous peoples in situations like Nepal—maybe they should play a more active role in government, maybe have their own political party and run for power on their own indigenous agenda.

The UN General Assembly is supposed to vote on the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples this week. It passed the Human Rights Council in June but is being actively opposed by a few western nations. What if it doesn’t pass?

Ideally it would be adapted by consensus, but even the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adapted by a vote... even if it doesn’t get adopted by the General Assembly it has already been adopted by the Human Rights Council, an organ of the UN, so it would still have the weight of customary international law. At least, that’s my view.

The Second International Decade of the World’s Indigenous People started in 2005. What influence did the first decade have in Asia?

You can’t really generalise. In some countries there was an impact—in the Philippines we came up with the Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act—but in some countries there were no clear policies or programs related to the decade... what really determined what happened in these countries was how active indigenous peoples themselves were.
adopting a snappy new nom de guerre is the latest craze sweeping the nation, led by the supremo trendsetter, Mr Awesome. Despite having successfully initiated a number of wildly popular fads recently, including extortion, purging, and bullying (which don’t appear to be flush-in-the-pans and promise to be with us for decades to come), he is not one to rest on his laurels. As if to stretch the limits of credibility and prove there is no holding him back, Comrade Prachanda’s recent signing of the Comprehensive Peace Treaty in his assumed name exhibits typical cutting edge panache, and is certainly worth emulating next time we apply for a bank loan.

Such racy pseudonyms not only make life more fun and exciting, they also allow us to re-live the happier days of childhood when fantasy had free reign, we were all heroes, and nobody needed a job. Keen to jump on the bandwagon and fit in with the times, I wracked my mind for a suitable moniker; how to express my inner charlatan while still inspiring fear and loathing like the greats? Many of the best stage names (i.e. Badal/Cloud) were already taken, leaving us with also-ran spin-offs like Quiro (Fog) and Baph (Steam). While ruminating, it dawned on me such aliases can serve a very useful purpose, best illustrated by Pushpa Kamal Dahal/Prachanda’s disguise, which conveniently obscures the fact a high-caste Brahmin is once again leading the dalits and poor to perdition. For small fry like me, an alias could come in handy to sidestep persecution and murder for cracking a few jokes at Maoist expense. We all know how touchy they can be.

‘Neporeko Quire’ and ‘Johnny RisUthdo’ were soon struck off my list of possible identities as being too unwieldy, despite the charming inclusion of the National Language and insight they offer to my essential character. ‘Running Dog’ has that wonderful kitschy Cold War flavour, so reminiscent of the last time Communists stalked the earth, but might identify me too closely with capitalist ethics (or lack thereof). ‘Pox’, on the other hand, is apolitical and has a nice catchy ring to it, but would likely see me blamed when plague next hits.

I finally settled on ‘Foreign Hand’, as the one force constantly alluded to whenever Nepali politicians are especially desperate to cover up their own inadequacies. Ever since the country opened in the 1950s and your average citizen became aware that foreigners actually possessed hands, the ruling class has found it expedient to mutter darkly of conspiracies hatching in distant capitals. Rarely willing to concede the obvious, including the fact that foreign powers stopped caring about this country decades ago, leaders of the seven ‘patti’ alliance pulled my name out of the worn and soiled hat throughout the recent peace negotiations. This sentiment was echoed doggedly by the Maoists, like some sort of demented mantra, and I stood accused of interference and grand designs at every turn. This surely makes me the single most vilified player, bar none, both then and now.

I get the sole credit for every failing of the elite, mainstream or Maoist; the indignant rage running rampant across the political spectrum is all mine. Nepotism, corruption, abduction, indoctrination, coercion, intimidation, extortion, terrorism; are nothing compared to my all pervasive yet curiously invisible presence. Read my name and quake with nationalistic ire, for I am the greatest meddler in history. I am ‘Foreign Hand’, reviled equally by one and all, the eternal all purpose scapegoat at your service. Hard to beat that, I figure. Stay tuned.

Modern parliament

There may not be a much-needed new parliament for a new Nepal, but our current premises at Singha Darbar are proving as flexible as ever. The building went from being a Rana naachghar to parliament for the kingdom. Parliament won’t be moving anywhere any time soon, but the hall is moving into the 21st century.

The building will now have to seat 330 members compared to the previous 205, and new seats have been added between the pillars that used to form a passage outside the original hall. Even this expansion will not be enough though, as the constituent assembly will require seating for 425. There is room to grow, though, as the ground floor and viewing balcony together can seat 900 people. The trick is to make sure they can all see each other.

The speaker’s podium has a 17” LCD display with a four-screen display so the speaker can see all members, especially those obstructed by the pillars that now stand in the middle of the newly-expanded hall. There are six CCTV cameras and two 2.4m screens mounted on the walls for parliamentarians to keep an eye on each other.

Dhruva Simkhada

OPINION
Foreign Hand

The inalienable right to an alias

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Proposing and forging solutions to such daunting long-term global challenges. In fact, from 1992 to 2002, the UN member governments signed a number of treaties and agreements that can and should provide the foundation for long-term global solutions. Three treaties emerged in 1992 out of the so-called Rio Conference on the Environment—a change, biodiversity conservation, and desertification. In 2000, the member governments agreed on the Millennium Development Goals. And in 2002, they agreed on the so-called Monterrey Consensus, pledging concrete efforts to triple aid flows to the poorest in order to reach the international goal for foreign assistance of 0.7 percent of rich-world GDP.

But today’s UN, therefore, is not to create more goals, but to implement those that have been set. This, too, its strongly with the spirit in which Ban has approached his new position. He has made clear his intention that the UN should implement the commitments that the world community has made.

During his mandate, the Secretary-General will face the pressing challenge of forging a global agreement on climate change for the years beyond 2012, when the Kyoto Protocol ends. The Millennium Development Goals remain far off track in the poorest countries. Despite a global pledge to reduce significantly the loss of biological diversity by 2010, huge areas of rainforest and oceans continue to be destroyed.

If the US works more closely within the UN framework, it will find willing partners in the rising Asian powers, which are intent on using their influence and resources to solve today’s global challenges. After all, Asian countries are interested in global stability to underpin their own long-term development. The new Secretary-General comes to office with the world yearning to solve debilitating problems. Importantly, there is already broad agreement on a set of shared goals. Those goals are achievable. The challenge is implementation. • (Project Syndicate)

Jeffrey Sachs is Professor of Economics and Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University.

A productive tension between moral philosophies and economic prescriptions

Friedman completed Keynes

The UN must now implement its goals, not create new ones

Completion of Keynes's work. Friedman was not the most famous and influential economist of the past century died last month. Milton Friedman was the star pupil of, successor to, and completer of Keynes's work. Keynes, in his General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money, set out the framework that nearly all macroeconomists use today. That framework is based on spending and demand, the determinants of the components of spending, the liquidity preference theory of short-run interest rates, and the requirement that government make strategic but powerful economic interventions to avoid extremes of depression and mania-excess. As Friedman said, "We are all Keynesians now."

To Keynes's theory of employment, interest, and money—Friedman added a theory of prices and inflation. This proliferation, and UN reform, the new Secretary-General will inherit a long list of hotspots: Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Palestine, Lebanon, Somalia, Myanmar, Sudan, North Korea, and others. Recent attempts to influence developments in these countries through threats and sanctions, and sometimes war, have failed. Most are less stable today than they were five years ago. Clearly, a new approach is needed.

The leading Asian countries, including Ban’s South Korea, have long favored a balance of diplomatic approaches and economic incentives to solve complex challenges. This balanced approach is important because most of the world’s hotspots are in trouble not only because of politics, but also because of the underlying challenges of hunger, disease, and environmental crisis.

Climate change, deforestation, growing populations, and other ecological strains will challenge the very survival of hundreds of millions of people around the world in the coming decades. UN leadership will be instrumental to proposing and forging solutions to such daunting long-term global challenges. In fact, from 1992 to 2002, the UN member governments signed a number of treaties and agreements that can and should provide the foundation for long-term global solutions. Three treaties emerged in 1992 out of the so-called Rio Conference on the Environment—a change, biodiversity conservation, and desertification. In 2000, the member governments agreed on the Millennium Development Goals. And in 2002, they agreed on the so-called Monterrey Consensus, pledging concrete efforts to triple aid flows to the poorest in order to reach the international goal for foreign assistance of 0.7 percent of rich-world GDP.

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To Keynes’s theory of employment, interest, and money—Friedman added a theory of prices and inflation. This assumed a natural rate of unemployment, and limits on government policy in stabilising the economy, beyond which intervention triggers uncontrollable and destructive inflation. The Great Depression also led Keynes and orthodox successors to underestimate the influence of monetary policy. Friedman, in a 30-year campaign starting with his and Anna J. Schwartz’s A Monetary History of the United States, restored the balance. As Friedman also said, “And none of us are Keynesians.”

From one perspective, Friedman was the arch-opponent to Keynes and orthodox successors. Both agreed that successful macroeconomic management was necessary, that the private economy on its own might be subject to unbearable instability and that strategic, powerful, but limited intervention by the government was necessary to maintain economic stability. But the key for Keynes was to keep government spending and private investment stable, and while for Friedman it was to keep stable the money supply—the purchasing power of businesses and households in readily-spendingable form.

A technical difference in means, you might say, a difference of opinion based on different judgments about how the world works. You’d be half right. But this difference in means, tactics, and empirical judgments rests on top of a deep gulf between the moral philosophies of Keynes and Friedman.

Keynes saw himself as an advocate of public management. Government officials of goodwill could design economic institutions superior to the market, or at least tweak the market equilibrium to fix the problem. Government failures, Friedman argued, were greater, more terrible than market failures. Governments were corrupt and inept, and staffed by people who liked ordering others around. Friedman believed that even when the market equilibrium was not the utilitarian social-welfare optimum, and even when government interventions to improve matters from a utilitarian point of view, there was still additional value in expanding human freedom. This, Friedman said, something intrinsically bad about government ordering people about. If we didn’t know what it was doing.

The tension between their two views has been a valuable driving force for human progress over the past hundred years. • (Project Syndicate)

J Bradford DeLong, professor of economics at the University of California, Berkeley, was Assistant US Treasury Secretary in the Clinton administration.
Winter skies

Go on morning walks for the best December stargazing

Observing the pre-dawn sky is the best option for stargazers, as there is less light pollution than in the evening. A number of us go jogging early in the morning, and an added incentive to continue that in winter is also to take the chance to observe the changing night skies.

Early this December, in the morning, the planet Saturn will be just overhead in the constellation of Leo. Of the constellations, you will see the Gemini Twins to the West and The Big Dipper (Saptarshi) to the North. Use star charts to identify Polaris (Dhruva Tara) with the help of the ‘Pointers’ of the Big Dipper.

During the first week of the month, take your binoculars to enjoy the spectacular show of three planets in the eastern predawn sky. A wonderfully tight Mercury-Mars-Jupiter conjunction stands low in the predawn twilight on 8-10 December. These planets will engage in a most intriguing pre-Christmas gathering, as if to celebrate the coming New Year. The best time to look for the trio will be around 6:30 AM local time.

For evening sky watchers, in December you will find the brilliant constellation Orion, The Hunter in the Eastern Sky. Look for the Orion Nebula (M42) just below the ‘belt’ of the Hunter. This is the brightest nebula where young stars are being born.

This year eight four-person teams from Nepal, the UK and abroad since 1989, brought together contemporary Nepali artists, including Mithila artists from Janakpur, and painters from Bangladesh, for a 15-day workshop. The outcome, ‘Collaboration with Mithila Art’, is on show at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Bakul Mahal.

“The original inspiration behind Mithila folk art may be religious—the paintings were originally tributes to deities—but increasingly, Mithila artists are painting scenes from daily life, images of animals, birds and fish, and abstract design patterns.

To encourage such explorations, the Janakpur Women’s Development Centre (JWDC), which has been promoting Mithila art in Nepal and abroad since 1989, brought together contemporary Nepali artists, including Mithila artists from Janakpur, and painters from Bangladesh, for a 15-day workshop. The outcome, ‘Collaboration with Mithila Art’, is on show at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Bakul Mahal.

“Tayeba Begum Lipi from Dhaka says her inspiration came from the vibrancy of colours, the bright saris and exotic jewellery central to life in Janakpur. “I wanted to express my womanhood by paying attention to the bodies of the women around the village,” she explains. Lipi’s paintings illustrate women in their daily lives, but she pays special attention to the decorative custom of tattooing hands and necks (see pic).

Artist Samil Siggel gave Mithila artists canvases to draw and painted on their drawings. As an extension of this series of works, he also drew a few canvases and asked them to paint on his drawings. “My paintings are about the relation people in Janakpur have with domestic animals, they’re of children strolling around the grass fields all day.” He says that through his paintings, Mithila art may look childlike, but the concepts he embodies are complex.

Collaboration with Mithila Art at Siddhartha Art Gallery till 3 December.

Mithila in the city

Mithila art, whose roots are in the Mithila region of eastern Nepal, is a unique style of folk art that originated in the 19th century. It is characterized by its use of bright colors and intricate patterns, and is often associated with Hindu deities and religious themes. The art form is particularly popular in the Janakpur region, where it is said to have originated.

Mithila art is created on various surfaces, including walls, temples, and even on the bodies of women. It is often used as a decorative element in homes and temples, and is also used for rituals and festivals.

The art form is typically characterized by the use of simple geometric shapes and patterns, often accompanied by intricate designs. Mithila art is known for its bright colors and bold, eye-catching designs, which are said to represent the vibrancy of life in the Janakpur region.

The art form has been preserved and promoted by organizations like the Janakpur Women’s Development Centre (JWDC), which has been working to promote Mithila art in Nepal and abroad since 1989.

In recent years, Mithila art has gained recognition on the global stage, with exhibitions and events showcasing the art form in various countries. It has also been integrated into contemporary art, with artists incorporating Mithila motifs and techniques into their work.

Jumbo joy

It’s been 25 years since Tiger Tops’ Jim Edwards, aided by alcohol and a polo enthusiast, decided to replace fleet-footed ponies with lumbering elephants and start Nepal’s Elephant Polo World Championships. The annual event in Chitwan’s Megahuli airfield has become a tradition, and first-timers are amazed by the speed and skill required. The game has developed its own set of rules, such as, it is a foul for an elephant to pick up the ball with its trunk during play. So is passing the ball to a player on the half-field. The somewhat slow game is played on a 120m by 70m pitch, and four elephants with a mahout and a player makes a team. There’s a 15-minute interval between each 10-minute chukka. So is the polo ball, which is 7 to 8 inches in diameter. The game has a 15-minute interval between each 10-minute chukka. So is the polo ball, which is 7 to 8 inches in diameter.

This year eight four-person teams from Nepal, the UK and abroad since 1989, brought together contemporary Nepali artists, including Mithila artists from Janakpur, and painters from Bangladesh, for a 15-day workshop. The outcome, ‘Collaboration with Mithila Art’, is on show at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Bakul Mahal.

“Tayeba Begum Lipi from Dhaka says her inspiration came from the vibrancy of colours, the bright saris and exotic jewellery central to life in Janakpur. “I wanted to express my womanhood by paying attention to the bodies of the women around the village,” she explains. Lipi’s paintings illustrate women in their daily lives, but she pays special attention to the decorative custom of tattooing hands and necks (see pic).

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AFTER TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- Nepal from the Sky Exhibition of aerial photographs of Nepal by Captain Bed Upadhyay, Maya Maya Kendra, 3-10 December
- Collaboration with Mithila Yatra paintings until 3 December at Siddhartha Art Gallery, 11AM-5.30 PM; 4438979
- Inspired Expression tribute to Ravi Joshi on until 6 December at Park Gallery, Pulchowk, 5522507

EVENTS

- Vagina Monologues opening on 1 December 2006 at The National Academy, Kamladi at 5:30 PM. 4421800
- Surya Lights Rythm Niles with Ankita and DJ Charlotte, 1 December 8PM onwards at The Akhram, Hotel Yak & Yet, Rs 999 including a dinner
- AWION Christmas Bazaar 2 December, 10AM-5PM at the Hyatt Regency. Entry Rs 100 for adults, Rs 50 for children
- Shastrartha at Martin Chautari by MAPS, 3-5PM, 2 December to discuss culture and personality. 4328050
- Stories in Motion with international storyteller Cassandra Wye from 2-10 December with the British Council
- Luncheon on the Grass Garden open with French games, food, and film at the Alliance Francaise, Triprewashwor, 10AM-5PM, 3 December. 4241163
- Mahan Shilpi Nepal adaptation of Henrik Ibsen’s The Master Builder, presented by Anaban Guntri at Nirmal Nabiaghar, Old Baneshwor daily at 4:30 PM. 4466956
- Jamaican Peace Party at 1905 with reggae from Jerry Julian & the Power of Joy. 8 December, 6PM onwards, Rs 599
- Seven habits of highly effective people 6-8 and 10-12 December, 9.30 AM-5:30 PM at Soallie Crowne Plaza. 9851036719
- For Good winter concert by The Kathmandu Chorale, 3:30 PM and 8PM on 9 December at The British School. Admission free

MUSIC

- Music at the Red Onion Bar, Lazimpat. NIVA from 8PM onwards on 1 December, Priety Kaur on vocals and Sanjaya Suman on piano from 8PM onwards on 2 December.
- Ramalo Sanjh with Anil Shahi and Maya Mantra, 1 December, 6:30 PM onwards at Doma Café, Thamel. 4215069
- Open Mic Night at Viva Café, Thamel every Friday, 8PM
- Neykhand Band live at Shambala Garden Café, Shangri-La, Kathmandu. Wednesdays, 7PM onwards, Rs 600 with barbeque
- Live music at Absolute Bar with Anil Shahi during 1 December. 7PM onwards. 5522414
- Folk and Funk Yatra Rythms of Nepal featuring Stupa and 25 Nepali percussionists, 3PM, 2 December at Yala Maya Kendra, Rs. 999, 5520212
- Classical fusion music at Jatra, every Saturday, 7PM onwards.

DINING

- Walk and lunch at Shikupi Hills Cottage, 16 & 23 December
- Saturday Barbeque Special at Le Meridien Golf Resort and Spa. Rs 1200 for adults, Rs 600 for children
- BBQ Special on Fridays at Courtyard Restaurant, Kamalak, 4235058
- Barbeque Ban-Bhok at Godavari Village Resort, every Saturday and Sunday. 5566879
- Pork chops and lamb steaks at Sports Bar, Kamalak. 4438017
- Theme Dinners at Shangri-La Hotel. Sunday and Monday Nepali thali with cultural show, Rs 700. Friday Bhaktapur Nights with cultural show and Newari cuisine, Rs 800
- Foodcourt at Bluebird Mall, open 11AM-8PM every day. 4228333
- Woodfired Pizza at Java’s new extension, Thamel. 4422519
- Happy Hour buy one get one free at Lost Horizon Bar.
- Shaken Not Stirred Martinis 007 style. Wednesdays at Fusion, the bar at Dwarika’s. Rs 555 including tapas platter
- Charcoal and Flamin’ Cocktails with live music for Rs 799.
- Happy Hours and Saturdays, 7PM at Hotel Yak & Yet. 4348999
- Woodfired Pizzas at Roadhouse Café, Thamel. 4622768 and Pulchowk. 5521755

GETAWAYS

- Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge pure relaxation. 4361500
- Winter Package three days and two nights at Shangri-La Village Resort, Pokhara. Rs 749, 4412999
- Harmony of the mind, body and soul at Club Oasis, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 4491244
- Yoga Camp at Shikupi Hills Cottage, 1-3 December. 9841371927
Siraaha’s good soldier

T

hree years ago, all Rikma BK knew was, things in her village of Bastipur in Siraaha were far from perfect. Little did she know that her fight against traffickers and usurper landlords would one day land her in hospital, and her daughter in the hands of kidnappers.

The 35-year-old describes herself as an uneducated housewife who in 2003 participated in a 90-day course on women’s and children’s rights advocacy. The more Rikma learnt at the Women’s Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC), the angrier she became.

She was soon going door-to-door in her village, telling people about the false promises middlemen were making to them—their children would be employed as domestic help in Punjab, India and they’d receive handsome sums of money in the future. Rikma knew the children would disappear to a shady fate, and the parents wouldn’t get a paisa.

By January this year, Rikma had collected enough evidence to press for the arrest of Sitey Bista, who has traded over 300 children in the last five years. Bista, who has close political and gangster connections, was arrested, released by the police, re-arrested at the insistence of families of missing children—and released again.

The price of that—Bista’s men beat up Rikma so badly in public last month that she had to be rushed to Kathmandu for emergency medical treatment. She’s still in pain, but says, “My fight against this will not stop.”

Last month Rikma’s 15-year-old daughter Diwas was abducted and forcefully married to the kidnapper because Rikma has been waging a campaign against Bastipur’s landlords, who have also seized plots leased out to tenant farmers without warning or compensation. Rikma’s supporters in neighbouring villages rallied to find the girl, but they were later convinced by her daughter not to pursue. Sitey went into hiding, but no one has been punished yet.

“There’s a price to pay for the good fight,” Rikma says, “but you should never give up. And eventually you will win.”

Naresh Newar

PEACE MUSIC: Young monks at Tengboche Monastery in Khumbu blow the conch on Wednesday as a symbolic gesture to usher in peace.

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The Land of the Shivs

The most commonly seen postage stamp in this secular kingdom of ours is the one commemorating the Silver Jubilee of the World Hindu Federation. How appropriate, then, that the Vagina Monologues is being staged in the Land of the Lingam. And this week we have not one but two Shiv Shankers in town besides, of course, our own Lord Pashupatinath himself.

So what if Nepal has been declared secular, our Unified Marxist-Leninist Supremo was spotted this week draped in saffron and garlanded in marigold while leading the puja at the Dandayanchal Mahayagya of the Gayendra Kshetra Dhyanam at the sacred confluence of the Kali Gandaki with the Narayani at Tribeni. With the Maoists snapping at his heels, one can understand why Comrade Nepal is now hopelessly addicted to the opiate of the masses.

Nepal was really reluctant to go to the peace accord signing ceremony, and the Ass has learnt that it was Girija the Great who had to bundle the UML leader into his car and drag him kicking and screaming to the BICC.

Which explains why he had on a casual jacket while everyone else was dressed up to their nines. And this news just in: the last minute hitch during the signing ceremony was caused by Home Minister Sitaula accidentally dropping the documents while making a quick stopover at the loo on the way to the Great Hall of the People.

Anyone who has found Baburam Bhattarai’s Nokia 3210 please return it to its rightful owner or else face bhautik karbai. The handset had some important phone numbers and BB suspects his phone was stolen (an inside job perhaps?). Comrade Lalitr has reportedly called his number as soon as he found his set missing but it was switched off. Something tells the Ass BB can easily get a new one.

If there is a kleptomaniac loose in the movement then Pushpa Kamal Dahal better keep an eye on the awesome golden Mont Blanc fountain pen with which he signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement last week. In contrast, Girija Prasad Koirala used a Rs 2 plastic ballpoint of an unspecified brand to sign the historic document.

And was that a Breitlin Chronomat we spotted on The Fierce One’s wrist at the Y&Y the other day in that glittering conflab of communal communists and anti-social socialites? History really comes a full circle, doesn’t it, and some people are more equal than others. It’s getting hard to tell the difference between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Are our comrades going to emulate Dear Leader Kim Jong II and his penchant for some of the finer things in life?

Like fleas leaping off a just-deceased dog, all the king’s men seem to be abandoning him. At first, they denied ever advising King Gyanendra on matters of state. Then, when the Rayamajhi Commission summoned them in one by one, they passed the buck. Now they are all bad-mouthing their former royal master.

Kirtinidhi Bista is too nice a nice guy to say anything nasty, but his fellow vice-chairman Tulsi Giri is seething. Lately Giri has taken to holding court with ex-Mandales and their ilk at his Baluwatar residence and a large part of the time is taken up in Gyan-bashing. Giri meets up with Sharad Chandra Shah, Kamal Thapa and others to commiserate about how the king plucked him and Sharad out of a comfortable exile and foisted a government on them. And he seems to be in the mood to spill the beans: he says the king staged his February 1 coup d’état only after getting a green light from New Delhi. The good doc now thinks the king is a goner.

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