Nepal’s peace dividend may be elusive, development sluggish, and reconstruction slow, but one area where the government has been moving with uncharacteristic speed in the past year is in licensing new hydropower projects.

As if to make up for lost time, the Ministry of Water Resources is about to unleash a flashflood of new investments in large and medium-size hydropower schemes. Past controversy over India-Nepal water projects and public perception of New Delhi arm-twisting had made river harnessing a hot potato that no politician wanted to touch.

But given India’s role in chaperoning Nepal’s peace process, some say it is not a coincidence that most of the prospective new investors in Nepal’s rivers are private Indian companies. New Delhi now sees the political situation in Nepal to be much more conducive, and it is also driven by a projected domestic demand in the north Indian grid which is facing a 12 percent peak hour deficit.

Proximity of Himalayan rivers, especially in western Nepal, to India’s load centres make hydro-investments in Nepal an attractive proposition for Indian business. Indeed, Prime Minister Girija Koirala’s policies and program speech in parliament on Tuesday marks out hydropower development through “multi-purpose projects in the national interest” as a priority.

The scrapping of the 1990 constitution, which stipulated a two-thirds approval by parliament of any cross-border river deal, has made it easier to steer joint water projects through Kathmandu’s decision-making circles. However, parliament’s Natural Resources and Means Committee is still extremely sensitive about Nepal being shortchanged in future investment contracts.

India’s Bangalore-based GMR Infrastructure appears to be ahead in the race with bids for four major projects including Upper Karnali (300 MW) and Arun 3 (402 MW) in which it has come first. But it is the Upper Marsyangdi 2 and 3 (246 MW) for which GMR looks like is it about to get a green light on a domestic-plus-export deal.

As a sweetener, the Indian government has offered to build the 250 MW Naumure Dam in Piuthan to meet peak power needs for Nepal’s domestic grid as well as irrigation in Kapilbastu. It will be the largest Indian aid project of its kind in the country.

The long-awaited Nepal-Australia joint venture West Seti (750 MW) in western Nepal is set to begin construction later this year once financing is sorted out with its Chinese partners. Norwegian SN Power, which is partnering with Butwal Power Company, has already got licenses for the export-oriented Upper Tama Kosi 2 and 3 (462 MW).
More than 100,000 Bhutanese refugees are finally seeing the end of the tunnel. After 17 years in camps in eastern Nepal, there is the prospect of resettlement in the United States, Canada, Denmark, and Australia. But the refugees are now suddenly confronted with a political backlash from activists and refugee leaders who insist that resettlement would jeopardise their right of return to Bhutan. We find this incongruous.

The Lhoutshampa have suffered enough. Thimphu’s constant prevarication and India’s baffling unwillingness to confront the crisis in the Himalaya has meant the refugees would be dispossessed and the refugees would disappear into the South Asian night. The US resettlement offer lets Thimphu off the hook for now, but offers refugee families a chance to rebuild their lives.

There is a surprising silence from the refugees. A majority of refugees would want to take up the resettlement offer rather than wait any longer in Jhapa. But ultra-left radicalisation of the camps has so far taken over. Some Bhutanese political leaders who stand to lose their flock to resettlement are also against the proposal.

There is genuine concern that the refugees’ right of return might be compromised if they are settled overseas. Nepal fears resettlement may trigger another wave of Lhoutshampa, and warn that 50,000 are ready to be ‘prepared’ for departure. Resettlement rather than return will trigger deppopulation of Nepal from the Indian northeast as well. These fears have a sound basis, but the interest of the refugees must come first. This is a humanitarian issue and only then a political one. People cannot be sacrificed to principles against their best interests.

Besides, the real risk of return to Bhutan will not be when they are resettled. And a future Bhutan diairora could even as a strong force for human rights and democracy back home, as we have seen with refugee resettlements elsewhere.

Refugee leaders must now speak for the humanitarian interest of the people they represent. The Centre Group countries might find that a Bhutanese diaspora does not go unenlightened in the long run. Nepal’s Home Ministry must maintain law and order in the camps so individual refugees at return will not be compromised when they are resettled. And a future Bhutan diaspora could even as a strong force for human rights and democracy back home, as we have seen with refugee resettlements elsewhere.

Refugee leaders must now speak for the humanitarian interest of the people they represent. The Centre Group countries might find that a Bhutanese diaspora does not go unenlightened in the long run. Nepal’s Home Ministry must maintain law and order in the camps so individual refugees at return will not be compromised when they are resettled. And a future Bhutan diaspora could even as a strong force for human rights and democracy back home, as we have seen with refugee resettlements elsewhere.

Refugee leaders must now speak for the humanitarian interest of the people they represent. The Centre Group countries might find that a Bhutanese diaspora does not go unenlightened in the long run. Nepal’s Home Ministry must maintain law and order in the camps so individual refugees at return will not be compromised when they are resettled. And a future Bhutan diaspora could even as a strong force for human rights and democracy back home, as we have seen with refugee resettlements elsewhere.

Refugee leaders must now speak for the humanitarian interest of the people they represent. The Centre Group countries might find that a Bhutanese diaspora does not go unenlightened in the long run. Nepal’s Home Ministry must maintain law and order in the camps so individual refugees at return will not be compromised when they are resettled. And a future Bhutan diaspora could even as a strong force for human rights and democracy back home, as we have seen with refugee resettlements elsewhere.

Refugee leaders must now speak for the humanitarian interest of the people they represent. The Centre Group countries might find that a Bhutanese diaspora does not go unenlightened in the long run. Nepal’s Home Ministry must maintain law and order in the camps so individual refugees at return will not be compromised when they are resettled. And a future Bhutan diaspora could even as a strong force for human rights and democracy back home, as we have seen with refugee resettlements elsewhere.

Refugee leaders must now speak for the humanitarian interest of the people they represent. The Centre Group countries might find that a Bhutanese diaspora does not go unenlightened in the long run. Nepal’s Home Ministry must maintain law and order in the camps so individual refugees at return will not be compromised when they are resettled. And a future Bhutan diaspora could even as a strong force for human rights and democracy back home, as we have seen with refugee resettlements elsewhere.

Refugee leaders must now speak for the humanitarian interest of the people they represent. The Centre Group countries might find that a Bhutanese diaspora does not go unenlightened in the long run. Nepal’s Home Ministry must maintain law and order in the camps so individual refugees at return will not be compromised when they are resettled. And a future Bhutan diaspora could even as a strong force for human rights and democracy back home, as we have seen with refugee resettlements elsewhere.

Refugee leaders must now speak for the humanitarian interest of the people they represent. The Centre Group countries might find that a Bhutanese diaspora does not go unenlightened in the long run. Nepal’s Home Ministry must maintain law and order in the camps so individual refugees at return will not be compromised when they are resettled. And a future Bhutan diaspora could even as a strong force for human rights and democracy back home, as we have seen with refugee resettlements elsewhere.

Refugee leaders must now speak for the humanitarian interest of the people they represent. The Centre Group countries might find that a Bhutanese diaspora does not go unenlightened in the long run. Nepal’s Home Ministry must maintain law and order in the camps so individual refugees at return will not be compromised when they are resettled. And a future Bhutan diaspora could even as a strong force for human rights and democracy back home, as we have seen with refugee resettlem
FOOD FIRST

The donor and NGO community need to view mental health as a human right for which all persons should have access to services...psychosocial counsellors are also needed.

This is a self-serving piece of advice from a MD-PhD candidate ('All in the mind', Guest Column, #355) looking for a future jagir as a privileged provider.

Drinking water, elementary schools, very basic health services, good roads, electricity, personal safety, and decent incomes would work miracles for the mental health of the Nepali people (which, despite ongoing disasters, is still probably still better than that of, say, the French people, a huge percentage of whom live under tranquilisers). These will be far more effective than 'transcultural psyche-social' advice, or anything of that kind.

This article illustrates well the deluge of NGO prescriptions that have submerged Nepal for decades, impeding instead of promoting the country's development. Everybody comes around for advice, full of theories often long rejected elsewhere in the world, feeding endless seminars in Kathmandu, all with the fine intention of 'helping' poor Nepalis who may actually teach us all lessons in resilience.

And if anyone in Nepal needs counselling, I'd say it is the politicians who suffer from many disorders including delusions of grandeur, acute paranoia, fits of self-destruction, violent anti-social behaviour, etc.

As for Jumla, it is food that they need first. It's all in the belly.

MR, Paris

BAD THING

Indeed, the views expressed by Daniel Lak ('The next big bad thing', Here and There, #354) are true. We have nothing in the media except celebrities, war, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Let's hope, this type of journalism will be replaced.

Suman Pathak, email

- Daniel Lak laments and asks why the world has become the way it is ('In the future', #355). Unfortunately, he is unable to see that the answer to his question looks back at him in the mirror.

When secular man declared that 'God is Dead' some 150 years ago, they removed God as the standard and replaced Him with themselves. Now every man's behaviour is determined by his own personal idea of right and wrong, making one man's behaviour no more valid than the next.

So, when we see the greedy capitalist, the brutal dictator or the self-righteous journalist, all we see is the fruit of man worshiping at the altar of himself.

Stephen Knoble, Kathmandu

NOT READY

Agreed that it is getting late for the political parties to prepare for the constituent assembly election ('Full speed ahead', Editorial, #355). But for what? Nepal has not yet formally entered into discussions about the future constitution and no political party is prepared to usher in a serious discussion. Opinion-building should be focussed on the future constitution and consensus should be built about that, and not seat distribution.

The media and civil society must put pressure on the political parties to come up with programs and policies to be included in the proposed constitution. A very good constitution was thrown into the rubbish bin by our political leaders and their parties. Sorry, it was not the king who destroyed it.

Kamal Kishor, email

DAUGHTER QUEEN

While we are talking of women's empowerment, inclusion, and representation in Naya Nepal, I am surprised no one has followed up on the Ass’s idea ('Burgher king', #354) to declare the daughter of the late Princess Shruti to be the next on the throne, if at all the monarchy is to continue.

Why do we completely dismiss the one option part of the direct lineage of the late King Birendra and nominate Hridayendra who is, after all, a few steps removed?

Nepali Keti, email

MONEY TALKS

I admire your paper’s ethical stance, allowing a voice for all sides but siding with the common good. However, guys, please put your money where your intentions lie. Your prime advertising spots are consistently sold to alcohol and cigarette companies. You and your readers will be well aware that in terms of damage to health and social harmony, tobacco and alcohol consumption will soon contribute to more devastation in a year than has been caused by eleven years of conflict. Set an example please!

Ken Woods, email
It’s hydropower, stupid

Past mistrust still cloud efforts to make a big push on Indo-Nepal joint ventures

RESERVOIR DOGGED: Kulekhani is the only reservoir-type hydropower plant in Nepal today. In the next ten years there could be ten projects much bigger than this one on snow-fed rivers. How do both India and Nepal benefit?

There have been no new major investments in hydropower in the past four years, demand has outstripped supply, and Nepal is suffering crippling blackouts. Since the power plants being negotiated now will take at least seven more years to build, these cuts will only get worse. This is why there is a new urgency to launch new projects.

The government also thinks the political climate is now ideal for negotiating export schemes to sell electricity to the power-starved north Indian grid, which already has a shortfall of 5,000 MW at peak periods. After a initial spurt in private power producers exploiting the newly deregulated market in the early 1990s through projects like Khimti and Bhote Kosi, political squabbling and the conflict turned off other investors. Regime change in April 2006 was a watershed in bringing investors back.

Indian companies’ interest in Nepal picked up after the Power Summit in September 2006, which brought together developers, contractors, creditors and insurance companies. (Power sharing, #314). Some 14,000 MW worth of projects have been put on offer exclusively for export to India. Eleven foreign companies, most of them Indian, are in various stages of the bidding process.

While GMR’s bid for Upper Marsyangdi 2 and 3 sees itself to being finalised, the Indian company is likely to also get Upper Karnali and Arun 3. The parliamentary committee is said to not be satisfied with the 30 percent free equity and the 7.5 percent free power it is to get from the projects and wants more. Indian officials say these issues could be negotiated, but that reopening the bids would send the wrong signal to potential investors.

Because joint river projects have become so politically sensitive in Nepal, India is trying to get private firms involved. Says Jawed Ashraf, the Indian Embassy’s Commercial Counsellor in Kathmandu: “Upper Karnali and Arun 3, for example, couldn’t have been done as government-to-government projects. But it is urgent for Upper Karnali and Arun 3 to be awarded quickly to sustain the momentum and investor interest.”

However, Maoist MP Lokendra Bista who sits on parliament’s Natural Resources and Means Committee says not enough homework has been done. “We will not let these projects go ahead,” he told us, and warned, “if they do, we will take whatever steps are necessary, and local people in project sites will not let construction proceed.”

This kind of talk makes investors jittery. But others say it is just the Maoist way of bargaining not so much its choice jobs when the projects begin.

The critical points that the parliamentary committee is looking at while examining each of the projects are issues of royalty, free electricity, free equity as well as handover period. Members are under pressure to probe if Nepal is selling itself short out of desperation.

There is also a clear difference between the positions of Maoist and non-Maoist MPs about okaying the large projects. NC MP Ananda Dhungana says: “We are not against the projects per se, but we want the government to be transparent and there should be no compromising on the national interest.”

Indian and Nepali utilities are also getting together to set up joint venture transmission companies in each other’s country not just to export power can be traded, but also to import power from India until the new projects being planned today come online.

With additional reporting by John Narayan Parajuli and Narin Singhi Khadka

Boost for midwest Nepal

Neglected for so long, Nepal’s midwestern Seti-Mahakali region is expected to benefit from two large dams being planned there.

The Upper Karnali which will need a 150m dam at Asar in Surkhet-Dailekh is relativley accessible, and is nearest to Indian markets. In adjoining Doti, the $1.2 billion West Seti is the prototype export project with Australia’s SMC as a partner.

West Seti is the only one among the new projects besides Norway’s SN Power which is not Indian. It is this dominance that is raising misgivings about India getting regulated water from power projects in Nepal for free. It is also said to be side-stepping a constitutional provision (Article 156) that requires 50 percent house ratification.

Water Resources Minister Gyandendra Bahadur Karki argues that electricity is not a “resource” and that regulated water also benefits Nepal. “There is no resource sharing across borders,” he told us. This is hotly contested by former minister and water expert Dipak Gyawali, who says: “When regulated water crosses an international boundary, there is resource sharing.”

After nearly 11 years of often-tortuous negotiations, West Seti is now set to go ahead with investments from SMC (26 percent), the Asian Development Bank (15 percent), Nepal government (15 percent), India’s IFC (15 percent) and Nepali investors. Negotiations are underway with two Chinese banks for the loan component. The other complication left to iron out is an original deal on 10 percent free power that West Seti was supposed to give to India, but which was later negotiated to four percent of profit.

MPs have raised the issue of resettlement of the approximately 1,700 families that will be affected. “We want to make sure the government looks at the national interest and also the welfare of those affected by the project,” says Sidhi Raj Gha, NC MP from Doti. The Maoists have more fundamental objections, but Minister Karki says: “West Seti has already been endorsed by cabinet and we need to remember that there are also Maoists in this cabinet, which means that they endorsed it as well.”

SMEC’s Himalaya Pandé is confident that his project is finally taking shape: “When everyone else was fleeing the country, we stayed, we never gave up, and now we can finally begin work on a project that will benefit the country and the people of an impoverished region.”

John Narayan Parajuli

KUNDA DIXIT

It’s hydropower, stupid
Telling people you work for the Tax Department in Nepal, and they will smile with envy. Most tax officers are known to supplement their salaries with the money they collect from a set of businesses.

I say ‘from a set of businesses’ because not all businesses (and individuals) pay taxes to the government. True, some businesses carry crushing tax burdens. These are the ones that have alienated officers at the Tax Department. Their cleverer rivals regularly hold soirees for tax officers and senior bureaucrats. They thus have an easy time, paying a paltry sum every year. This practice goes on for some years, until the government realises that money is running out, and that large swathes of businesses such as banks, insurance companies, schools, distilleries, movie halls, and individuals have simply not been paying their just share.

It then does what it does reflexively: provide temporary remedies to problems that require permanent solutions. Under the chairmanship of an ex-judge or a retired civil servant, it hastily sets up a grievance window: At present, if business owners do not get along with tax officers, they risk being slammed with high tax burdens. Until a TSC comes along, most businesses have no recourse against such arbitrary measures. A separate dispute-settlement body will help squeeze egos, anger, and acts of retaliation out of the transactions.

Continuous training of tax officers: Tax officers are government’s front-line salespeople. Their customers are members of the public. If a tax-officer’s job is reframed as a ‘customer service job,’ with all the attendant rewards and incentives, then, the job might bring smiles of genuine pleasure to most taxpayers who have to meet and do business with tax officers.

TAXING BUSINESS

Taxation needn’t be either labyrinthine or fertile ground for corruption

I say ‘from a set of businesses’ because not all businesses (and individuals) pay taxes to the government. True, some businesses carry crushing tax burdens. These are the ones that have alienated officers at the Tax Department. Their cleverer rivals regularly hold soirees for tax officers and senior bureaucrats. They thus have an easy time, paying a paltry sum every year. This practice goes on for some years, until the government realises that money is running out, and that large swathes of businesses such as banks, insurance companies, schools, distilleries, movie halls, and individuals have simply not been paying their just share.

As the government realises that money is running out, and that large swathes of businesses such as banks, insurance companies, schools, distilleries, movie halls, and individuals have simply not been paying their just share, it forms an external commission. It calls it the Tax Settlement Commission (TSC), and gives it authorities that trump those of the Tax Department. It tells the TSC, “Forget the Tax Department for some months. You have all the authority to assess what Nepali and Nepal-based multinational businesses owe to the government. Collect as much tax as you legally can.”

To no one’s surprise, the Tax Department sees the TSC as a rival, and some officers spend all their waking hours abusing the media to malign TSC’s activities. But leaving aside these territorial battles that flare up every so often, the larger question is whether there aren’t ways to better facilitate the collection of taxes in Nepal. Some are as follows:

Launch tax-payer education programs: Most businesses and individuals are willing to pay taxes, but they do not know where or how to begin. They do not want to be hassled by officers and taken advantage of by middlemen. If the government holds regular tax-payer education programs, and makes them easily available to all in a transparent manner, old and new tax-payers are likely to have a better sense of their obligations.

Make tax rules simple: Sure, it’s not in the interest of tax lawyers and bureaucrats to make these rules simple. But since the gap between revenue potential (estimated to be additional Rs. 25 billion rupees) and revenue collection (less than Rs. 3 billion by the most recent TSC) is wide, it’s in everyone else’s interest to have crystal-clear rules that reduce the chances of there being multiple interpretations of, and therefore confusion about, the same set of rules.
Abhiyan, 2-8 July

The current investigation by the anti-corruption watchdog CIAA against Rastra Bank governor Bijayanath Bhattarai and director Surendranath Pradhan seems to have more to do with politics than actual wrongdoing.

Sources at the central bank led by Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat say a section of the Nepali Congress has been lobbying hard to remove Bhattarai from governorship. They say CIAA officials have been regularly meeting Koirala at Baluwatar, and these forces are being influenced by prominent businessmen who have been put on the defaulter’s black list as well as accused of plundering private banks by the Rastra Bank. Bhattarai had been a prominent crusader against defaulters and also against those involved in the Nepal-Bangladesh Bank controversy. Koirala had also reprimanded Bhattarai for being over-eager in going after alleged embezzler Sitaram Prasai, whom the Maoist YCL recently apprehended after police showed no interest in arresting him.

Indeed, the CIAA appears to have itself been dragged into controversy by the perception that this is a political witch-hunt. The case against Bhattarai and Pradhan was hurriedly spearheaded by a controversy. Koirala had also put forward this idea as government spokesman. If he was speaking on behalf of his own Maoist party then his ministry should clarify the issue. Mahara is not trying to impose a code of conduct just on the state media. This raises questions about the leadership of a ministry that doesn’t seem to understand that shackling the press in any way is unacceptable.

Mahara’s code of conduct idea should be an issue for the Election Commission, which had asked the political parties not to issue statements that would undermine elections. The IEC can ask the media to refrain from certain actions but even that only undermines the independence of the state media. This raises questions about the leadership of a ministry that doesn’t seem to understand that the government never asks the media to refrain from any action. If his ministry doesn’t get the media’s actions but because of the lack of law and order, the failure to secure a political consensus and chronic violations of the peace accord.

Some European countries are also willing to resettle refugees. The European parliament has threatened to stop aid if we do not accept third-country resettlement. These self-proclaimed champions of democracy and free press have no idea how to do anything, it leaves it alone.

The conditions undermining elections are not a result of the media’s actions but because of the failure to secure a political consensus and chronic violations of the peace accord.

India and Bhutan

On Sunday, the World Bank’s new country director Susan Goldmark issued a statement expressing concern over the case against Bhattarai and urged that the investigation be conducted in an impartial manner. She was also worried about how the issue could bring down the morale of Rastra Bank officials and undermine the impartial manner. She was also worried about how the issue could undermine elections.

The conditions undermining elections are not a result of the media’s actions but because of the lack of law and order, the failure to secure a political consensus and chronic violations of the peace accord.

Why is America’s accepting 60,000 refugees?

India is a culprit in this as it was when Bhutan drove us away. Why America is helping and what its interest is remains to be seen.

Some European countries are also willing to resettle refugees. The European parliament has threatened to stop aid if we do not accept third-country resettlement. These self-proclaimed champions of democracy and free press have no idea how to do anything, it leaves it alone.

The conditions undermining elections are not a result of the media’s actions but because of the lack of law and order, the failure to secure a political consensus and chronic violations of the peace accord.

How do you view UNHCR?

UNHCR says we can’t be in politics if we want to remain in the camps. But the agency itself is political. It has allowed camp secretaries to engage in politics.

How will the people’s war affect the Bhutan Communist Party-Marxist Leninist Maoist?

Maoist has declared in the Nepal-Bangladesh Bank conflict. It was when Bhutan drove us away. Why America is helping and what its interest is remains to be seen.

Maoist has declared in the Nepal-Bangladesh Bank conflict. It was when Bhutan drove us away. Why America is helping and what its interest is remains to be seen.

How do you view UNHCR?

UNHCR says we can’t be in politics if we want to remain in the camps. But the agency itself is political. It has allowed camp secretaries to engage in politics.

How will the people’s war affect the Bhutan Communist Party-Marxist Leninist Maoist?

Maoist has declared in the Nepal-Bangladesh Bank conflict. It was when Bhutan drove us away. Why America is helping and what its interest is remains to be seen.

How do you view UNHCR?

UNHCR says we can’t be in politics if we want to remain in the camps. But the agency itself is political. It has allowed camp secretaries to engage in politics.

How will the people’s war affect the Bhutan Communist Party-Marxist Leninist Maoist?

Maoist has declared in the Nepal-Bangladesh Bank conflict. It was when Bhutan drove us away. Why America is helping and what its interest is remains to be seen.

How do you view UNHCR?

UNHCR says we can’t be in politics if we want to remain in the camps. But the agency itself is political. It has allowed camp secretaries to engage in politics.

How will the people’s war affect the Bhutan Communist Party-Marxist Leninist Maoist?

Maoist has declared in the Nepal-Bangladesh Bank conflict. It was when Bhutan drove us away. Why America is helping and what its interest is remains to be seen.

How do you view UNHCR?

UNHCR says we can’t be in politics if we want to remain in the camps. But the agency itself is political. It has allowed camp secretaries to engage in politics.
Kidnapped

Ghanam Bishar, 4 July

It’s no longer just the Newari community—all businesspeople and other wealthy people are being kidnapped for ransom. There have been over a dozen abductions in the last six months in Kathmandu. Only a few victims go to the police. The kidnappers of those who sought police help have been identified.

Dr Jagdish Lal Baidya of B&B hospital was targeted recently, but did not file a case with the police. Two weeks ago, his son was abducted by a group of armed people and released after Baidya paid Rs 7 million in ransom.

Similarly, former MP Rabindra Lal Shrestha's son Ayush Lal was abducted at 2AM on 17 June and released when his father paid a ransom of Rs 21 million. The details are sketchy because Shrestha did not go to the police, but nine kidnappers (some of them women) are said to have entered Shrestha's house late at night, held the security guard, poisoned the dog, and assaulted the domestic help. Shrestha and his wife were held at gunpoint and asked for the key to the safe, from which the kidnappers took Rs 4 million. The abductors then said that was not enough and took the son away, saying they’d release him in exchange for Rs 50 million. The kidnappers asked Shrestha to come to Thimi, then Gongabu, and then Chobar to pay the ransom and his son was let go after the amount was paid.

Roop Jyoti’s family members, the owner of Shalimar Jewellers Ram Kisan, Anmol Catering’s Shiva Kumar Sarabadi, and scores of others have been kidnapped and released after ransom was paid. Kidnapping is on the rise because the victims won’t talk, and the law is lax on kidnappers.

Hydro politics

Interview with SD Muni, professor of international studies at JNU, New Delhi, Kantipur TV, 2 July

You’ve said “a careful scrutiny of the past 60 years of history shows that the monarchy did utmost to frustrate India’s vital national interest in Nepal—in field of security, energy, and development.” Can you [explain]?

There’s a perception that India’s sensitive security aspects have not been catered to and I see that most of that had happened when monarchy was powerful. Hydropower, energy is India’s need. You have a potential of 85,000 MW, commercially viable to the tune of 45,000 MW. If you harness it, we are willing to buy it... For heaven’s sake, do it for the sake of Nepalis. India is an economic opportunity, come and take part in it. We are willing to share our prosperity. We’ve allowed private companies. If the government is a problem, deal privately with them.

Two suicides

Naya Patrika, 1 July

One died of love, another died from the lack of it. When his second wife Anju started having an affair with his bodyguard, former DIG Balnam Bahadur KC shot himself in the chest with a shotgun by pulling the trigger with his toe. He did this at 5AM on his sofa at home. His suicide note written in marker pen was pasted on the wall. He blamed Anju and his former bodyguard Saroj. “You wanted a lot of sex, you wanted a lot of property, now all you can take is this life...” the note says. The final straw seems to have been KC’s discovery that Anju was sending her lover food from the house. Colleagues described KC as a good looking and mild-mannered man. He was cremated Saturday at Pashupati.

Amrit Rai (‘Comrade Abhisek’) never lost a battle in war, but he lost in love. Abhisek was Section Commander of the Ratna Sakuntala Memorial Brigade in Morang and was in love with his Sub-section Commander. Unable to handle his party’s decision not to allow him to marry her, Abhisek decided to take his own life. Fellow guerrillas remember Abhisek as a courageous warrior. He was absent at morning exercise and seemed depressed. There was an explosion in the camp on Friday morning, and inmates found Abhisek’s body ripped apart by a grenade.

Justice

Robin Sayami in Himal Khobar Patrika, 30 June - 16 July

“...We are fully competent to maintain law and order...”

Home Minister Krishna Prasad Sitoula, in Deeshantar, 1 July
July heat hasn’t quite peaked yet, and so when a big cumulous cloud appears high enough in the sky to mean no rain for the next few hours, I know it’s time to go. It’s quick—a quick change into jersey and shorts, a quick bike, gear, and water check, head encased snugly in helmet and feet clipped in, I push off.

I weave through the traffic, hopping over potholes, and maneuver through busy Koteswor and up towards Bhaktapur. Up ahead, my favourite: a speed ramp. As I approach, I crouch down over my handlebars and jump forward taking my bike with me. It’s a feeling like no other, and I don’t want to stop. I’ll go on, on to Nagarkot, to Changu Narayan, to wherever I can.

Biking is the quickest way to get out of the city and the rewards are significant. The air is crystalline and the advertising boards are smaller. The grass looks greener, the trees seem spikier, and the hills grow bigger as you get closer.

Mountain biking could have been invented for Nepal. The terrain makes for some of the most exhilarating and challenging mountain bike rides around and no matter where you are in the country you don’t have to go far to find a dirt trail. Around the Valley, the numerous routes are small enough to become familiar with, yet large enough to get lost in. And how many people can say they’ve biked the foothills of the Himalayas.

It’s a thrilling way to spend time outdoors and get fit. It’s also a kind of meditation, a brilliant way to de-stress. How can you obsess about work or girlfriend problems while negotiating bumps, rocks, and potholes. Blistering down a narrow dirt trail, bushes, and branches whizzing past, the trail rising thrillingly ahead of you—that’s freedom. When you finally pull on the brakes and come to a stop in a cloud of dust, all the other things in life start to look clearer.

GET YOUR GEAR
Mountain biking is not just for tourists or expats, says Suresh Kumar Dulal, a professional mountain biker who has participated in races in Asia and Europe. Dulal is co-owner of the 12-year-old Nepal Mountain Bike Tours and Expeditions and the Bike Nepal workshop, which promotes the sport among young Nepalis.

Each week the Bike Nepal crew head out for group rides. Riders include athletes on cross training programs, newbies, and adrenaline junkies. To join a ride, head down to the Bike Nepal workshop at Thamel at 6.30AM on Saturdays. No pre-registration is required, and if you do not have a bike you can rent one.

The prices are affordable—you can rent a top-of-the-line mountain bike with helmet and all accessories amounting for about Rs 400 a day. Just an extra Rs 100 will get you a professional guide.

Weekends @ Dhokaima
Happy Hour: Every Friday 6:30-9:30PM (Live music)
Sunday Brunch: 10:00 AM - 3:00 PM

A pleasant cafe... with a nice garden and beer set under a sprawling umbrella trees.
—Low Planet Guide Nepal
BEST ROUTES

Kathmandu-Bhaktapur-Nagarkot (38km)
You’ll want to head east to Bhaktapur before the traffic gets bad, but try to eat a decent breakfast first. Weave past trucks and rampaging minibuses until you get to the base of the hill. The 20km climb up to Nagarkot winds all the way to the summit and can take up to an hour-and-a-half, depending on your stamina and endurance. The view of the central Himalaya is superb. You might want to go down a different way and take the sandy trail to Changu Narayan or Sankhu. Maintaining a decent speed should get you back home in time for lunch.

Ride grade: Moderate. The blacktop up to Nagarkot turns into dirt and jeep trails as you head down to Changu Narayan.

Kathmandu-Kakani-Shivapuri-Kathmandu (70km)
This long day’s ride is one of the best in the Valley. Leaving Kathmandu from Balaju and then head out onto the Trisuli road. Ride steadily up and out the Valley on the road towards Kakani 23km away. There’s refreshing shade on the section past the Nagarjun Forest Reserve, after which you traverse the hill resort of Kakani, then Trisuli Bajar, and then on to Shivapuri. This is a hungry, thirsty ride, so go prepared.

Ride grade: Tough. It’s all road, so make sure to crank up the pressure in your tyres.

BE PREPARED

You really don’t want to be stranded on an unpopulated hillside with a flat tyre or dislocated chain. Make sure you carry a small first aid kit and a toolkit that contains the following:

- Tyre pump (Presta or Schrader, make sure it fits your valve)
- Spare tube (Presta or Schrader)
- Patch kit (for your tubes)
- Tyre lever
- Screwdriver
- Allen wrenches (2, 4, 5, 6mm)
- Chain tool (spare Shimano chain pins)
- Small crescent wrench

All items are available at Bike Nepal, 321 Chaksibari Marg, Thamel.
Going nowhere

Processing of refugees for resettlement is being delayed due to fear and confusion

JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

T he third-country resettlement plan for Bhutani refugees has been stalled due to fear and intimidation in the camps. The Home Ministry sent its directive approving the plan to Jhapa last week, but the International Organization of Migration (IOM), which will administer the process, has not yet set up an office in Jhapa.

Following the riot last month during the attempted ‘long march’ of refugees in the camps, debate in the camps has died down, largely due to the strong-arm tactics of the Bhutan Communist Party-Maoist-Communists Party-Marxist-Leninists and Maoists (BCP-MLM). Ordinary refugees tell us they are scared to speak out for fear of retaliation and so publicly are noncommittal about the resettlement plan, where even a month ago there was spirited discussion (Long way home, #355).

In a meeting with the Foreign Minister late last month refugee leader Ratna Gaurami, who has spoken in favour of resettlement, asked the government to intervene to prevent the security situation from further sliding. Both the Nepal head of UNHCR Abraham Abraham (see interview) and Home Ministry spokesman Damas Nahe Netepane say things are gradually improving. The government is to marginally increase the presence of security forces around the camps next week, says Netepane.

Abraham Abraham has been UNHCR’s Representative in Nepal for four years. He spoke with Nepali Times about the importance of individuals deciding for themselves on resettlement.

Nepali Times: There is a climate of fear and intimidation in the camps. How do you assess the security situation right now?

Abraham Abraham: I think it is relatively calm at the moment. We had a little bit of upheaval a few weeks back. We are working closely with the government to ensure safety and security in the camps at all times. The government is dealing with beheading-up security in the coming days. This is fundamental to creating an environment free of intimidation and threats, so the refugees are not fearful of whatever decisions they may have to take with regard to their future.

What is the role of UNHCR in the resettlement process? Resettlement is not unique to Nepal. Worldwide, UNHCR has to deal with referrals of cases to resettlement countries.

Is the Home Ministry moving forward on resettlement? I believe the Home Ministry is dealing with this as we speak. They should also issue a policy directive on resettlement. We are in close contact to ensure that this policy statement also reaches ordinary refugees, so all know that this is a decision of the government of Nepal to move forward with third-country resettlement.

Has UNHCR been working with ordinary refugees on this? Not yet. We have developed a communication strategy and a plan of action to communicate very clearly to the refugees what resettlement entails and what it is all about, including their personal interest in knowing more about resettlement. We will deliver such messages so all refugees can make an informed decision.

Are you encouraging refugees to opt for resettlement? We don’t encourage or tell anybody what decision they should take. This is the decision of individuals. All we do is inform them about voluntary repatriation. In this case the door has not yet been opened. Local integration is not an issue because nobody has, in a broad sense, requested that as a solution. The only door really open is that of third-country resettlement. As long as there is this option, we’d like the refugees to decide whether or not they’d want to be resettled. But we are not going to force them. We have not started this process of determining their interest, [we will wait] until we have worked out the modalities for taking this forward with the Nepali government.

Will the polarisation in the refugee leadership affect the quest for a durable solution? I think this is free, democratic expression. I would not see it as polarisation. There are people who want to be repatriated, some want to be resettled, some would like to stay here. I see it more as individual interest and individual conviction. To that extent we have no problem at all.

But didn’t the tense security situation in the camp result from this difference of opinion? Maybe. That’s why we say there is no need to intimidate and threaten. I think everywhere refugees should have the right to make their own decisions about their future. We don’t want to influence them in any way. We inform them about their rights as refugees, what they can expect in terms of solutions, and what these solutions mean so they can take their own individual decisions.
Nepali Times: How do you evaluate the past 50 years of diplomatic relations between Sri Lanka and Nepal?

Rohitha Bogollagama: It’s not just 50 years, the relations between Nepal and Sri Lanka are pre-historical. The birth of Prince Siddhartha in Lumbini, has meant that traditionally and historically we have always been close to Nepal. But in contemporary times, since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1957 our bilateral ties have matured. The relations have now transcended culture, which is a major focus, to economic links.

One thing that has literally not taken off are air connections. There are still no direct flights between Colombo and Kathmandu. In fact, I have just raised this matter with Prime Minister Koirala, and he has promised to look into it. Very positively and there are bilateral talks on aviation taking place in Colombo on 16-17 July. We are also looking at an international airport development in Lumbini. There are 40,000 Sri Lankans visiting Lumbini every year and this number could go up if access and hotel facilities are set up with possible Sri Lankan investment. We want to revisit the process of Lumbini development under the UN resolution.

What is the status of the Sri Lankan peace process, and how confident are you that things will be back on track?

We are a very resilient country despite all the internal and external shocks. The peace process is not new; we have been in this process since the establishment of the country. There were 154,000 people killed from 2002-2005 by the LTTE, my own predecessor Lal Shankar Koirala, was killed while in office in 2005. The SLMM was there to do something, but didn’t do anything. There were light aircraft, radio stations, procuring arms and artillery during this period has led to the killings of many civilians.

So, what is the lesson you have learnt from Norwegian mediation?

First thing is, you must look out for the people of your own country. It is the people who give a country its sovereignty. Second, terrorism cannot be justified in any circumstance, there is zero tolerance in the civilized world today for killing people for political ends. The moderate Tamil political leadership has been eliminated by the LTTE. That has made the task of finding leadership in the Tamil community very difficult. The lesson for the world is eliminate terrorism, terrorism is everyone’s problem. Democracy and pluralism are the antidotes to terrorism, decentralising power, and administration to the periphery.

What has been your experience with having a formerly militant extreme left party in parliament and government?

The induction of militants into government was a very important factor, you must do it as early as possible. For example, UNEF said there were 5,400 children recruited, but the SLMM was helpless. There were 154,000 people killed from 2002-2005 by the LTTE, my own predecessor Lal Shankar Koirala, was killed while in office in 2005. The SLMM was there to do something, but didn’t do anything. There were light aircraft, radio stations, procuring arms and artillery during this period has led to the killings of many civilians.

What is the status of the Sri Lankan peace process, and how confident are you that things will be back on track?

We are a very resilient country despite all the internal and external shocks. The peace process is not new; we have been in this process since the establishment of the country. There were 154,000 people killed from 2002-2005 by the LTTE, my own predecessor Lal Shankar Koirala, was killed while in office in 2005. The SLMM was there to do something, but didn’t do anything. There were light aircraft, radio stations, procuring arms and artillery during this period has led to the killings of many civilians.

So, what is the lesson you have learnt from Norwegian mediation?

First thing is, you must look out for the people of your own country. It is the people who give a country its sovereignty. Second, terrorism cannot be justified in any circumstance, there is zero tolerance in the civilized world today for killing people for political ends. The moderate Tamil political leadership has been eliminated by the LTTE. That has made the task of finding leadership in the Tamil community very difficult. The lesson for the world is eliminate terrorism, terrorism is everyone’s problem. Democracy and pluralism are the antidotes to terrorism, decentralising power, and administration to the periphery.

What has been your experience with having a formerly militant extreme left party in parliament and government?

The induction of militants into government was a very important factor, you must do it as early as possible. For example, UNEF said there were 5,400 children recruited, but the SLMM was helpless. There were 154,000 people killed from 2002-2005 by the LTTE, my own predecessor Lal Shankar Koirala, was killed while in office in 2005. The SLMM was there to do something, but didn’t do anything. There were light aircraft, radio stations, procuring arms and artillery during this period has led to the killings of many civilians.

So, what is the lesson you have learnt from Norwegian mediation?

First thing is, you must look out for the people of your own country. It is the people who give a country its sovereignty. Second, terrorism cannot be justified in any circumstance, there is zero tolerance in the civilized world today for killing people for political ends. The moderate Tamil political leadership has been eliminated by the LTTE. That has made the task of finding leadership in the Tamil community very difficult. The lesson for the world is eliminate terrorism, terrorism is everyone’s problem. Democracy and pluralism are the antidotes to terrorism, decentralising power, and administration to the periphery.

What has been your experience with having a formerly militant extreme left party in parliament and government?

The induction of militants into government was a very important factor, you must do it as early as possible. For example, UNEF said there were 5,400 children recruited, but the SLMM was helpless. There were 154,000 people killed from 2002-2005 by the LTTE, my own predecessor Lal Shankar Koirala, was killed while in office in 2005. The SLMM was there to do something, but didn’t do anything. There were light aircraft, radio stations, procuring arms and artillery during this period has led to the killings of many civilians.

So, what is the lesson you have learnt from Norwegian mediation?

First thing is, you must look out for the people of your own country. It is the people who give a country its sovereignty. Second, terrorism cannot be justified in any circumstance, there is zero tolerance in the civilized world today for killing people for political ends. The moderate Tamil political leadership has been eliminated by the LTTE. That has made the task of finding leadership in the Tamil community very difficult. The lesson for the world is eliminate terrorism, terrorism is everyone’s problem. Democracy and pluralism are the antidotes to terrorism, decentralising power, and administration to the periphery.

What has been your experience with having a formerly militant extreme left party in parliament and government?

The induction of militants into government was a very important factor, you must do it as early as possible. For example, UNEF said there were 5,400 children recruited, but the SLMM was helpless. There were 154,000 people killed from 2002-2005 by the LTTE, my own predecessor Lal Shankar Koirala, was killed while in office in 2005. The SLMM was there to do something, but didn’t do anything. There were light aircraft, radio stations, procuring arms and artillery during this period has led to the killings of many civilians.

So, what is the lesson you have learnt from Norwegian mediation?

First thing is, you must look out for the people of your own country. It is the people who give a country its sovereignty. Second, terrorism cannot be justified in any circumstance, there is zero tolerance in the civilized world today for killing people for political ends. The moderate Tamil political leadership has been eliminated by the LTTE. That has made the task of finding leadership in the Tamil community very difficult. The lesson for the world is eliminate terrorism, terrorism is everyone’s problem. Democracy and pluralism are the antidotes to terrorism, decentralising power, and administration to the periphery.

What has been your experience with having a formerly militant extreme left party in parliament and government?

The induction of militants into government was a very important factor, you must do it as early as possible. For example, UNEF said there were 5,400 children recruited, but the SLMM was helpless. There were 154,000 people killed from 2002-2005 by the LTTE, my own predecessor Lal Shankar Koirala, was killed while in office in 2005. The SLMM was there to do something, but didn’t do anything. There were light aircraft, radio stations, procuring arms and artillery during this period has led to the killings of many civilians.

So, what is the lesson you have learnt from Norwegian mediation?

First thing is, you must look out for the people of your own country. It is the people who give a country its sovereignty. Second, terrorism cannot be justified in any circumstance, there is zero tolerance in the civilized world today for killing people for political ends. The moderate Tamil political leadership has been eliminated by the LTTE. That has made the task of finding leadership in the Tamil community very difficult. The lesson for the world is eliminate terrorism, terrorism is everyone’s problem. Democracy and pluralism are the antidotes to terrorism, decentralising power, and administration to the periphery.

What has been your experience with having a formerly militant extreme left party in parliament and government?

The induction of militants into government was a very important factor, you must do it as early as possible. For example, UNEF said there were 5,400 children recruited, but the SLMM was helpless. There were 154,000 people killed from 2002-2005 by the LTTE, my own predecessor Lal Shankar Koirala, was killed while in office in 2005. The SLMM was there to do something, but didn’t do anything. There were light aircraft, radio stations, procuring arms and artillery during this period has led to the killings of many civilians.

So, what is the lesson you have learnt from Norwegian mediation?

First thing is, you must look out for the people of your own country. It is the people who give a country its sovereignty. Second, terrorism cannot be justified in any circumstance, there is zero tolerance in the civilized world today for killing people for political ends. The moderate Tamil political leadership has been eliminated by the LTTE. That has made the task of finding leadership in the Tamil community very difficult. The lesson for the world is eliminate terrorism, terrorism is everyone’s problem. Democracy and pluralism are the antidotes to terrorism, decentralising power, and administration to the periphery.

What has been your experience with having a formerly militant extreme left party in parliament and government?

The induction of militants into government was a very important factor, you must do it as early as possible. For example, UNEF said there were 5,400 children recruited, but the SLMM was helpless. There were 154,000 people killed from 2002-2005 by the LTTE, my own predecessor Lal Shankar Koirala, was killed while in office in 2005. The SLMM was there to do something, but didn’t do anything. There were light aircraft, radio stations, procuring arms and artillery during this period has led to the killings of many civilians.

So, what is the lesson you have learnt from Norwegian mediation?

First thing is, you must look out for the people of your own country. It is the people who give a country its sovereignty. Second, terrorism cannot be justified in any circumstance, there is zero tolerance in the civilized world today for killing people for political ends. The moderate Tamil political leadership has been eliminated by the LTTE. That has made the task of finding leadership in the Tamil community very difficult. The lesson for the world is eliminate terrorism, terrorism is everyone’s problem. Democracy and pluralism are the antidotes to terrorism, decentralising power, and administration to the periphery.
Lessons unlearnt

An Asian financial crisis is not likely to recur, but threats to global prosperity remain

In July 1997, the Thai baht plummeted. Soon, financial panic spread to Indonesia and Korea, then to Malaysia. In just over a year, Asia’s financial crisis became a global financial crisis, as Russia’s rouble and Brazil’s real crashed. Ten years after Asia’s crisis, we should ask: what were the lessons, and has the world learned them? Could such a crisis recur? Is another crisis imminent?

There are similarities between the situation then and today: before the 1997 crisis, there had been rapid increases in capital flows from developed to developing countries—six-fold increase in six years. During the 1997 crisis, a consensus emerged that the global financial system can still be improved. Proposal after proposal was made to reduce the likelihood of another crisis and loss of economic independence is worth it. This growth in reserves—insurance for developing countries—created a new source of global volatility. As the dollar lost its sacred place as a store of value under the Bush administration, rebalancing these multi-trillion dollar portfolios entails selling off dollar holdings, contributing to the dollar’s weakening.

There are big differences too. Most developing countries pointed their fingers at the IMF and the US Treasury blamed developing countries for their lack of transparency in financial markets. But their enthusiasm for greater transparency diminished when developing countries pointed their fingers at secret bank accounts and hedge funds. Hedge funds have since grown in importance and secret bank accounts have flourished. But there are big differences too. Most developing countries have accumulated massive foreign currency reserves. They learnt a hard lesson, as the IMF and US Treasury marched in, took away economic sovereignty and demanded policies to enhance repayment to western creditors, plunging economies into deep recessions and depressions. Reserves are costly and the money could instead be spent on development projects to enhance growth. But reducing the likelihood of another crisis and loss of economic independence is worth it.

Developing countries have also increased their foreign exchange exposure. For those that increasingly borrowed in their own currencies in recent years, reducing their foreign exchange exposure. For those that remain heavily indebted abroad, an increase in risk premia would bring economic turmoil, if not crisis. The large reserves greatly reduced the likelihood of another crisis, had they been absorbed. The first is capital market liberalisation—opening up developing countries’ financial markets to surges in short-term ‘hot’ money—is dangerous. India and China, the only major developing countries to be spared the crisis, had resisted capital market liberalisation. Today, both are under pressure to do so. Second, in an integrated world, a credible international financial institution is needed to design rules to enhance global stability and promote growth in developing countries. The IMF, dominated by the US (the only country with a veto) and Europe (which appoints its head), is seen as representing the interests of international creditors. Its 1997 failures undermined its credibility and its failure to address the massive global financial imbalances that are the main threat to global financial stability today, underscore its limitations.

Reforms are needed, including an overhaul of the global reserve system. Impending crisis or not, imperfections in the global financial system can still be costly in terms of global prosperity and stability.

Joseph Stiglitz

Joseph Stiglitz is a Nobel laureate in economics. His latest book is Making Globalisation Work.
When the promos for Bridge to Terabithia appeared, director Gábor Csupó and others repudiated them for making the film look too fantastical and relegating the realism behind the story. Not that other fantasies don’t deal with real issues. Surrealists like Luis Buñuel have even argued that fantasy is, in effect, simply a state of hyperreality. But harping on the realism of Terabithia has a particular legacy.

The film is adapted from Margaret Paterson’s controversial masterpiece. The American Library Association listed it the ninth most frequently challenged book of 1990-2000. Censors have called for it to be banned from public schools and libraries, not so much for its imaginations as for its real-life preoccupations. Death, child sexuality, and agnosticism are the main charges prigs have made against the book.

The story is simple enough, but its emotions and ramifications are complex. Rural boy Jess (Hutcherson) is a miserable outcast until a spunky, free-spirited girl, Leslie (Robb), befriends him. Through Jess’s drawings and Leslie’s words, together they create the imaginary world of Terabithia, where they rule and where their daily predicaments are magically resolved. Until, that is, a tragedy shatters their world.

The fantasy part is the easy bit. The actual challenge for the filmmakers was to translate the nuances of Paterson’s writing into cinema. It was inevitable that final judgment would be made not on how vividly Jess’s and Leslie’s imaginations are interpreted, but on how sincerely the film portrays the heart-wrenching poignancy of the book without seeming alarming.

It is right for the filmmakers to be concerned about making Terabithia overbearingly fantastical. After all, unlike other children’s tales that have captured Hollywood in recent years, Terabithia does not exist in a concrete, alternative world. It exists only in the minds of its characters, who live and act in the real world. This may also explain why, in the age of Harry Potter and The Lord of the Rings, the special effects appear relatively slapdash, while much attention is bestowed upon minute details of the characters.

Csupó is lucky that he could find so much talent in his young actors. Hutcherson, Robb, and even little Bailey Madison (as Jess’s youngest sister) are hugely responsible for keeping the film honest. Terabithia demands that the actors maintain their childhood sensibility but also bring to their roles the maturity and experience of an adult. And they have gloriously risen to the challenge.

Terabithia stands out, not only because it honours imagination and creativity, but also because it puts them in context. Paterson seamlessly blends the complex realms of thought and action, of fantasy and reality, and to a degree that is preserved in the film. And perhaps this commingling will bother those critics who doubt the ability of children to meaningfully grapple with strong ideas and emotions.

**EXHIBITIONS**

- Solo art exhibitions by Sushma Rajbhandari Joshi, 1 July onwards at NAFA, Nakal.

**EVENTS**

- **Blood Diamond** a film by Edward Zwick, starring Leonardo DiCaprio. 6-45PM on 6 July at the Lazimpat Gallery Café.
- Shastraarthra on communism with speakers CP Gajurel and Bishnu Manandhar, 7 July, 4-4PM at Martin Chautari. 4238050
- Mangalbare Discussion Series on Bhupi Shrechan: a Nepali life and its poetry by Michael Hutt, 9PM, 10 July at Martin Chautari. 4238050
- Film@Chautari showcasing of Paradise Lost, followed by discussion, 9PM, 12 July at Martin Chautari. 4238050
- Photo.circle a workshop on image archiving by photojournalist Nilayam Dutta. 12 July, 9AM-12PM at the Sundhara Bakery Café. Rs 300, 30 participants.
- Japanese Film Festival 13 July: Nido Jiman, 1-15:30 PM, Fifteen 3:30-5:30 PM, 14 July: Adrenaline Drive 10-11.50 AM, Like Asura 3-15 PM, and Ghost Pub 3:30-5:30 PM, at Nepal Administrative Staff College, Jawalakhel. 4426880
- Pottery courses one month course in coil and slab methods and two month course in wheel work, starting 1 August. 9851101837
- Film South Asia 2007 Festival of South Asian documentaries, 11-14 October. www.filmsouthasia.org

**MUSIC**

- Yale University Whithenfoots a performance by the world’s oldest a capella group at the Nepal Music Centre. 7 July, 5.30PM.
- Jazz at Jatra every Saturday 7PM onwards, at Jatra Café and Bar, Thamel.
- Soul of Raga live classical and fusion music, every Friday night at Nuchhre’s Kitchen. The Organic Bistro. 4429903.
- Open mic night at Via Via Café, every Friday, 9PM onwards.
- Live music at the Red Onion Bar, Wednesdays from 8PM with Yanki and Zigme Lepcha. 4416071
- Ciney Gurung every weekend and Rashmi Singh every Friday, live at the Absolute Bar, Hotel Naranyari Complex. 5551408
- DJ Raju and the Cloudwalkers live at the Roxy Bar, Hyatt Regency, every Friday and Saturday. 4491234

**DINING**

- 5th Annual Monsoon Wine Festival 16 wines at Rs 150 a glass and Rs 600 a bottle, at KIROY’s at Kathmandu, Thamel. 4250440
- Friday evening BBQ with live music at the Hotel Himalaya, 7PM. Rs 499 net. 5523900
- Walk and lunch every Saturday at the Shivapuri Heights Cottage. 9841371927
- Kebabs and curries at the Dhaba. Thapathali. 9841200619
- Krishnarpan Nepali specialty restaurant at Dwarika’s Hotel, six to 22 course ceremonial lunch and dinner. 4479488
- Weekend special with sekwa, bara, barbeque, Fridays at Ambassador Garden House, Lazimpat, 5.30 PM onwards. 441706
- Flavours of the Middle East every Friday and the taste of Thailand every Wednesday at The Café, Hyatt Regency, Boudha. 4491234
- Light nouvelle snacks and elaborate cordon bleu meals at La Seon, Pulchok, behind the Egyptian embassy. 5537166
- Continental cuisine and wine by the fire place at Kirky’s, Thamel. 4250440.
- Smorgasbord lunch at Park Village Resort, every Saturday. 4375260
- Gyakok at the Shambala Garden Café, Hotel Shangri-La, minimum four diners at Rs 450 per person, two hours’ notice.
- Retro brunch barbeque with Crossfire Band at Le Meridien, Gokarna from 12-4PM, Rs 1,000 including swimming. 4451212
- Calcutta’s rolls, biyani, kebabs Indian cuisine at Bawarchi, Bluebird Mall Food Court. 9741000735
- Woodfired pizzas at the Roadhouse Café. Thamel 4262768, Bhaktapur 4425887 and Pulchok. 5521755
- Pizza from the woodfired oven at Java, Thamel. 4422519
- Jazzabell café enjoy great food, exotic cocktails and music, Chakupat, Patan. 2114075

**GETWAYS**

- Weekend package at Le Meridien Kathmandu Gokarna Forest Golf Resort and Spa, minimum three days at Rs 8,888 and one night two days at Rs 4,444. 4441212
- Wet and wild package at Godavari Village Resort, every Saturday and Sunday, unlimited swimming, buffet lunch with a bottle of beer or a softdrink, Rs 690 net. 5560675

---

**ABOUT TOWN**

**EVENTS**

- **Mangalbare Discussion Series** on Bhupi Shrechan: a Nepali life and its poetry by Michael Hutt, 9PM, 10 July at Martin Chautari. 4238050
- Film@Chautari showcasing of Paradise Lost, followed by discussion, 9PM, 12 July at Martin Chautari. 4238050
- Photo.circle a workshop on image archiving by photojournalist Nilayam Dutta. 12 July, 9AM-12PM at the Sundhara Bakery Café. Rs 300, 30 participants.
- Japanese Film Festival 13 July: Nido Jiman, 1-15:30 PM, Fifteen 3:30-5:30 PM, 14 July: Adrenaline Drive 10-11.50 AM, Like Asura 3-15 PM, and Ghost Pub 3:30-5:30 PM, at Nepal Administrative Staff College, Jawalakhel. 4426880
- Pottery courses one month course in coil and slab methods and two month course in wheel work, starting 1 August. 9851101837
- Film South Asia 2007 Festival of South Asian documentaries, 11-14 October. www.filmsouthasia.org

**MUSIC**

- Yale University Whithenfoots a performance by the world’s oldest a capella group at the Nepal Music Centre. 7 July, 5.30PM.
- Jazz at Jatra every Saturday 7PM onwards, at Jatra Café and Bar, Thamel.
- Soul of Raga live classical and fusion music, every Friday night at Nuchhre’s Kitchen. The Organic Bistro. 4429903.
- Open mic night at Via Via Café, every Friday, 9PM onwards.
- Live music at the Red Onion Bar, Wednesdays from 8PM with Yanki and Zigme Lepcha. 4416071
- Ciney Gurung every weekend and Rashmi Singh every Friday, live at the Absolute Bar, Hotel Naranyari Complex. 5551408
- DJ Raju and the Cloudwalkers live at the Roxy Bar, Hyatt Regency, every Friday and Saturday. 4491234

**DINING**

- 5th Annual Monsoon Wine Festival 16 wines at Rs 150 a glass and Rs 600 a bottle, at KIROY’s at Kathmandu, Thamel. 4250440
- Friday evening BBQ with live music at the Hotel Himalaya, 7PM. Rs 499 net. 5523900
- Walk and lunch every Saturday at the Shivapuri Heights Cottage. 9841371927
- Kebabs and curries at the Dhaba. Thapathali. 9841200619
- Krishnarpan Nepali specialty restaurant at Dwarika’s Hotel, six to 22 course ceremonial lunch and dinner. 4479488
- Weekend special with sekwa, bara, barbeque, Fridays at Ambassador Garden House, Lazimpat, 5.30 PM onwards. 441706
- Flavours of the Middle East every Friday and the taste of Thailand every Wednesday at The Café, Hyatt Regency, Boudha. 4491234
- Light nouvelle snacks and elaborate cordon bleu meals at La Seon, Pulchok, behind the Egyptian embassy. 5537166
- Continental cuisine and wine by the fire place at Kirky’s, Thamel. 4250440.
- Smorgasbord lunch at Park Village Resort, every Saturday. 4375260
- Gyakok at the Shambala Garden Café, Hotel Shangri-La, minimum four diners at Rs 450 per person, two hours’ notice.
- Retro brunch barbeque with Crossfire Band at Le Meridien, Gokarna from 12-4PM, Rs 1,000 including swimming. 4451212
- Calcutta’s rolls, biyani, kebabs Indian cuisine at Bawarchi, Bluebird Mall Food Court. 9741000735
- Woodfired pizzas at the Roadhouse Café. Thamel 4262768, Bhaktapur 4425887 and Pulchok. 5521755
- Pizza from the woodfired oven at Java, Thamel. 4422519
- Jazzabell café enjoy great food, exotic cocktails and music, Chakupat, Patan. 2114075

**GETWAYS**

- Weekend package at Le Meridien Kathmandu Gokarna Forest Golf Resort and Spa, minimum three days at Rs 8,888 and one night two days at Rs 4,444. 4441212
- Wet and wild package at Godavari Village Resort, every Saturday and Sunday, unlimited swimming, buffet lunch with a bottle of beer or a softdrink, Rs 690 net. 5560675

---

For inclusion in the listing send information to editors@nepalitimes.com
TALK TIME: Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala and UML chief Madhab Nepal chat at the opening sitting of parliament’s monsoon session on Wednesday.

HISTORY FOR WINNERS: Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Baburam Bhattarai stopped off in Zimmerwald near Berne, Switzerland to see where the international communist movement split into the revolutionaries and social democrats in 1915. Trotsky, Lenin, and other prominent European communists of the time attended the conference. Zimmerwald is also known for its collection of wind instruments.

ON THE SAME SIDE: Chief of Army Staff Rukmangat Katuwal stands to attention to the Star-Spangled Banner at the 231st US independence day celebration on 3 July at the Yak&Yeti.
The Mad Tea Party

Till press time the Ass has not yet got an invite from the CP for the Bad Shah’s birthday bash. Hint, hint.

Two thousand people are invited for the Saturday party at Naryanhiti and they have been told to come in colour-coded national dress and are allocated tent numbers. All this must make them rather nostalgic for the good old days. Which pal you are in will decide your position in Kathmandu’s pecking order. On second thought, not getting invited means one doesn’t have to decide whether to go or not and make an ass of oneself.

Either way, avoid the palace perimeter on Friday and Saturday when various republican-minded groups are sure to be blocking the entrance to the Mad Tea Party singing “happy unbirthday to you”. The pro-king Flat Earth Society is staging a rally from Ratna Park to Mahendra Manjil braving brickbats to offer Kingji bouquets. They are hailing the king as a Saviour of Democracy and a Hero of the Hindoos. That should give Gyan quite a kick.

Meanwhile, the Maoist leadership, especially the conjoined comrades Awesomeji and Laldhojji, are reportedly prolonging their jet-setting junkets so they don’t have to take any awkward decisions this weekend. They are all making up for lost time gaining valuable exposure to the luxuries of executive-class travel and VIP sendoffs. This is important since His Fierceness has announced he will be president in two years, max, and we want him to hit the ground running.

The comrades did some sightseeing in Berne, but instead of taking the funicular train to the Eiger lookout, it was a pilgrimage to the house where Lenin lived while in exile in Switzerland. The Ass can understand El Presidente wanting to go there, but why did Bimal Rawal and Shekhar Koirala have to tag along? Our good friend Gunther is giving the delegation an immersion course in Swiss democracy and federalism. Maybe he should also tell them that less than 30 percent of Swiss bother to vote in their frequent referenda.

Farang election experts should stop insisting on a high turnout in November polls since we wise Asses know from experience that this is actually a sign of vote-buying, booth-capturing, ballot-stuffing, and other hanky-panky.

Note that election dates have been announced, brace yourselves for a tsunami of seminars over the monsoon. Himalaya Hotel’s conference rooms are booked till September, the Hack and Yeti has standing room only, Chez Caroline has become an UNMIN canteen and the UN’s air force here urgently needs anti-collision TCAS devices.

The Ass will be giving away Splurge Awards from hereon till November and this week’s prize goes to the UN granting two million dollars to the BBC Trust to conduct election education via radio. We Nepalis make a mess of a lot of things, but if there is one-sector in which we can safely toot our own trumpet it is in radio. Nepal’s network of FM stations are already well-equipped for voter education. In fact they’re already doing it through their lively phone-ins and studio discussions without anyone dishing out any dough using poor, ignorant Nepalis as an excuse.

After a year-long delay, the announcement of ambassadorships is imminent. Drum rolls. President Awesome and Giri-raja Koizina have stitched it up pretty nicely. The Maoists originally wanted an A-Grade country like India, China, Russia and even the United States. But when the Chinese, Indians and Americans made it known that wasn’t such a good idea President-for-Life Prachanda settled for France and Denmark. The comrades are smart, though, instead of putting forth names of card-carrying cadre as candidates they are nominating sympathetic sidekicks. This is probably when civil society stalwarts will get to reap rewards for serving as the Party’s mouth organs.

ass@nepalitimes.com