Third time lucky?

SUBASH DEVKOTA

Poll dates are set, but the reshuffle may not be enough to mollify all madhesis.

Here are still plenty of things that can go wrong between now and then, but the seven parties have agreed on a date for elections for the constituent assembly by April. Just announcing an election date of course doesn’t mean there is going to be one. There have been two abortive attempts in June and November 2007. But this time it is different. Mest hardliners, who had been putting their leadership under pressure not to agree to polls, are now on board. The NC, which had previously resorted to delaying tactics, has run out of excuses. The election commission, which had wanted 90 days for preparation, will have a comfortable margin for preparations this time. Still, there are spoilers. The main problem is the unrest in the madhes, which is reaching boiling point. All madhesi groups have announced separate but coordinated agitation starting on 19 January, the anniversary of the uprising that flared up a year ago after a demonstrator was killed. The royalist and centre-right political parties also don’t want elections because the polls will automatically set the country on the path to republicanism. Kamal Thapa’s RPP Nepal party held its first big rally in Kathmandu on Monday, questioning the right of the seven parties to abolish the monarchy. This week’s spat between the army chief and prime minister on one side and the Maoists on the other, over integration of the two armies, appears to have been a deliberate attempt to provoke a Maoist reaction and weaken Pushpa Kamal Dahal’s position within his party during a crucial central committee meeting. The cabinet has finally understood the issue of madhes under-representation and tried to appease tarai activists by inducting two madhesi ministers, including Ram K Chaudhary as State Minister for Home Affairs and Formula Mansur as Minister of Science and Technology. Koirala has also brought in his own daughter, Sujata, as minister without portfolio.

Editorial

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The two new UML appointees are also from the madhes: Ram K Yadav who has been promoted to Minister of Public Administration and Nagendra Chaudhary is State Minister for Agriculture. Of the seven new appointees to the interim parliament, five are from the madhes. But these moves may have come too late for radicalised madheshi groups who had wanted Krishna Sinula removed and replaced by a madhesi home minister.
Dear Comrade

An open letter to Pushpa Kamal Dahal

Dear Comrade,

As the campaign for democratic federalism in Nepal is now entering its final stage, I would like to make some comments regarding your recent initiatives which may help to achieve federalism in Nepal.

Firstly, the basic premise of federalism is that people have the right to self-determination and that no state can impose its will on a people against their wishes. This is a fundamental principle of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and is also enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Secondly, the concept of federalism is not just about dividing power between the central and provincial governments, but also about devolving power to local communities and ensuring their participation in decision-making processes.

Thirdly, federalism is not just a means of political power-sharing, but also a way of promoting social justice and equality. It is a way of ensuring that all people, regardless of their ethnicity, religion, or gender, have equal rights and opportunities.

Unfortunately, your recent initiatives have not been inclusive enough. Many people in the Madhesi and Newar communities have been excluded from the process, and this has led to widespread protests and violence.

I urge you to consider the following points:

1. The federalism process should be inclusive and consultative. All voices should be heard, and all communities should be represented.

2. The federalism process should be transparent and accountable. The decisions of the federal government should be open to scrutiny, and the accountability of the government should be ensured.

3. The federalism process should be participatory and democratic. The people should have a say in the process, and their voices should be heard.

I hope that you will consider these points and work towards a federalism process that is inclusive, transparent, and participatory.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]
The border between Nepal and India is shaped like the jagged teeth of a rusty saw. It is difficult to demarcate, tricky to measure and complex to map. Overcoming all these challenges, the Nepal-India Joint Technical Level Boundary Committee declared in 2005 that the two countries shared a common border of 1,880km.

Disagreements over the location of boundary pillars and claims of encroachment are rare along the 1,240km-long, 10-yard-wide strips of no man’s land. However, 640km of the border runs through meandering river beds that change course every few years. When old river courses dry out, land grabbers on both sides claim public land for private use.

The Susta story is more complex. Susta-Triveni was a sleepy settlement in Nawalparasi until the government decided to populate it with retired soldiers in the early 1960s, following King Mahendra’s order to inhabit villages along the international border west of the Bagmati with hardcore loyalists of the Panchayat regime.

Most beneficiaries of this royal munificence were pahadis from the middle hills. They dreaded the prospect of living in the malarial swamps of Susta.

Fallow fields were soon sold to speculators from Butwal, Chitwan and beyond. To these distant owners, the land was not sacrosanct matribhumi but merely property of uncertain productivity that could be bought or sold at will. Rather than moving there themselves, the new owners sent poor tenants to cultivate their holdings.

Settlers from the hills had no emotional attachment to what was for most of them alien terrain. Meanwhile, most displaced madness had crossed the border and found shelter in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, from where they still hold a grudge against pahadi settlers who turned them from landowners into squatters.

Mahendra soon realised this policy was a failure. He shifted his attention to Chure-Bhabar and the Inner Tarai for a colonisation drive conducted with American money and Israeli expertise. But along with greedy compromises over the Gandaki and Kosi (Mahendra was personally involved with both these deals), strategic blunders such as Susta and Bharatpur were transformed into metaphors for Nepal’s fragile nationhood.

So whenever rulers in Kathmandu need to divert public attention from domestic failings, a chorus over Kosi, Gandaki or Susta is carefully orchestrated with the help of useful idiots in the communist parties.

This is the reason why UML radicals and YCL hooligans get so worked up over what is essentially a technical issue to be resolved on the basis of authoritative documents. But what did the regime want to hide this time by reactivating the ‘Susta Occupation’ slogan?

Rajendra Mahato publicly charged that the SPA government was trying to downplay grievances of madhesis by unnecessarily ratcheting up Susta. Some influential NC leaders believe the Maoists just want to refurbish their nationalist image and erase their close association with India from public memory by raising the emotive issue of contested boundary pillars.

Publicly, leftist parliamentarians are more vocal than anyone else over Susta—after all, it was almost their monopoly till recently. But in private, UML stalwarts admit that reactivation of the Tanakapur and Susta issue at this juncture will be counterproductive.

Taking her cue from Balkhu, Foreign Minister Sahana Panday directed Shital Nibas mandarins to devise damage control measures. Early this week, MoFA announced that Nepal and India have agreed to maintain the 1968 status quo over Susta and Kalapani. The implication is that the legacy of Mahendra will still be available whenever some populist has an urge to air their insecurities in the guise of patriotism.

The border uproar will probably die down in a few days. But as long as the Nepali psyche needs a regular fix of jejune jingoism, the last sigh of Susta will never be heard.
Madhesi groups have set a 19 January ultimatum

Madhesi groups have taken their cue from the Maoists. If you pick up the gun, you can have 83 MPs in the house. This is one of the simplistic but powerful lessons that is repeated endlessly by many activists in private conversations. The NC is now more scared of the tarai than it has ever been. Most madness regard the NC as having betrayed them. Kangrej activists are demoralised and have stopped even trying to defend the government’s track record. Many are merely using the party as a cover while being active in other groups, including armed ones. Ram Baran Yadav is a term of abuse.

There haven’t been elections for eight years, and traditional voting patterns have changed. The new generation doesn’t care much for the Congress in what used to be its vote bank. The only thing the party had going for it was a strong organisation, and now Thakur’s party has the potential to damage that.

Not that madhesi groups are any more confident. None of them have strong organisation yet. All leaders, especially Yadav, Mahato, and the coterie around Thakur, face a severe credibility problem. They have limited finances. Madhesi leaders know they will win only a few seats, and privately admit that they have no additional interest in creating an environment conducive for elections.

Here is a situation where poll results will essentially boil down to the crisis. In all likelihood there will be a period of further instability and strife, especially if the armed groups decide to back the protests in full strength.

Once that happens, events can take on their own momentum. No one, not a single outfit or even a group of organisations, can claim to have control over madhesi politics anymore. And that makes the current state of play unpredictable, murky, and in the words of a senior madhesi politician, “mysterious.”

Neither does any one quite know which way the madhes will vote during polls. This is a major reason for both the political uncertainty and why no force has any incentive in creating an environment conducive for elections.

Poll results will essentially boil down to just one condition for next week. Will the people be apathetic towards madhes or not treating them with dignity?

With the government now committed to hold elections by mid-April, moderate madhesi parties have agreed to take part. But the armed groups have said they won’t let the elections happen. Tarian intellectuals feel the armed groups are using the madhes as a front for criminality, and they can be bought off for the right price. But the only way to deal with the madhesi parties is by negotiation.

“The only big change in the past year has been that we aren’t called ‘shiti’ or ‘Indians’ in Kathmandu anymore, we are called ‘Forum,’” says a Lahan resident, Prem Jha.

Aside from the danger of militant violence in the coming months, there is an added tension as parties desperate to compete to tap the madhes vote bank. The NC is the biggest loser because of the defection of Mahanta Thakur, who controlled the party machinery in the eastern tarai. Thakur has defended his move, saying he was disillusioned with the NC leadership.
The world economy has had some good years. Global growth was strong and the divide between the developing and developed world has narrowed. Some economies are experiencing GDP growth in 2007 of 11.5 percent and 8.9 percent respectively. Even Africa has been doing well.

The good times may be ending for a globalised world economy that Americas lost wages, and lost homes will be accepted declines in their living standards in the world. From oil importers to oil exporters and from America’s ill-conceived war in Iraq to the sources of global growth today, the importance of democracy, all this is bad for the day in Nepal, but not elsewhere in the world.

The business sector also needs to think that a well-managed globalisation has the potential to benefit both developed and developing countries, and who believe in global social justice and the importance of democracy, all this is bad news.

There is one positive note in this dismal picture: the sources of global growth today are more diverse than they were a decade ago. The real engines of global growth in recent years have been developing countries.

Nevertheless, slower growth or a possibly a recession will in the world’s largest economy inevitably has global consequences. If interest rates are raised reluctantly to meet inflation targets, we should prepare for the worst: another episode of stagflation. The cost in lost jobs, lost wages, and lost homes will be enormous.

Joseph Stiglitz is a Nobel laureate in economics. His latest book is Making Globalization Work.
“If your stomach hurts, is it the king’s fault?”

Interview with Bharat Keshari Simha, former aide to the king, in Nepal, 13 January

How do you feel about the parties declaring a republic?
Bharat Keshari Singh: How would anyone feel about such an undemocratic, unconstitutional and baseless decision? Right now, the parliament itself is unconstitutional because they’re not elected. The king was the one who gave them their powers and now they’re the ones to strip the king of his powers. How can this happen? This is more stupid than what Jang Bahadur did.

What is the king’s reaction to all this?
If there was any meaning then there would be a reaction. There is no meaning so there is no reaction. If someone says ‘I’ll cut off your name and take away your means of living,’ what do you say to a crackpot like that? This is why the king is quiet.

Doesn’t the palace silence show its acquiescence?
Why comment on something that has no facts, no truth and is unconstitutional? The current prime minister took his oath from the king. Up till now, he is the king’s prime minister. It was when he declared himself prime minister and didn’t come to the king to take the oath that all this senselessness started happening. They themselves wrote in the interim constitution that the king’s fate would be decided by the constituent assembly but they have already made the decision.

Why do you oppose the parties so much?
Maybe I oppose them because I’m a royalist. But talk to the foreigners: they think that the current government is a joke. The people wanted democracy but are now wondering if they’ve brought in another Rana-rule. One party gets to have all the weapons while the king’s weapons get locked in the barracks.

When the Maoists joined the government for the first time last year, Minister of Physical Planning and Works Hisila Yami overturned the decision of the previous government to give the Kathmandu Valley water management contract to Severn Trent. The fact that she was being swayed by anti-Severn Trent activists and NGOs is proven by the fact that she appointed them to decision-making positions. Severn Trent left, but what did we get? A project that would have been finished in 2011 will now take till 2013.

The Maoists have returned to government, and there is now a proposal to turn Melamchi into a multi-purpose regional project and not just a capital-centric scheme. Such new-fangled ideas inexplicably emerge whenever the Maoists come into the government. It is not a coincidence that the expanded Melamchi idea is in the parliamentary committee just before the Maoists returned to government at the behest of some persons and groups.

Do you think there will be an election in April?
Looking at the present circumstances, there is no way in hell it’ll happen. Do you want to exclude the tarai and hold elections only in Kathmandu?

Some say that the king incited the tarai.
Can you say anything you want? Here’s an SMS joke: ‘If your stomach hurts, it must be the king’s fault. Still, the king remains quiet, I myself am surprised.’

What if a constituent assembly majority decides not to have a king? Will you accept the decision? Of course. Why? But that election needs to be impartial. It should be done under international supervision. If the decision is democratic, then it needs to be accepted. If not, then we must take up arms just like the Maoists.

If your stomach hurts, is it the king’s fault?
Denmark, Abhiyan, 7-13 January
appointed ambassador to
Vijay Kant Karna, Maoist-
Excerpts from an interview with
Economic envoy
Melamchi will remain a mirage
shortage, but in the long term
Kathmandu's continued water
actually abort Melamchi.

Purpose Melamchi, the project
the Maoists decide on the multi-
study the new proposal, and if
Melamchi being pushed by a
month. Is the expanded
deciding on the Melamchi loan
proposal comes as the ADB is
back in 1995.

Declared unfeasible by engineers
component to Melamchi was
scared to sign any power purchase
"desperate for electricity", the
Melamchi say the NEA is
supporters of the expanded
Melamchi. Although the
then also be co-investors in
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Vijay Kant Karna: I do not
know that, but if I had not been
a Maoist I wouldn't have been
selected. I was selected because of
region rather than my party.

Since you were
recommended by the
Maoists, how do you plan
to show your gratitude?
I did not become an ambassador
so that I could show any
gratitude. The Maoists asked me
whether I would contribute to
the nation and I said yes. If any
party or group, with the
exception of the royalists,
asks me to do something for my
country, I will happily
do it.

What are your plans as
ambassador?
Right now every ambassador has
the same objective: to change
the identity of Nepal. We need
to establish Nepal as a free,
sovereign republic. I believe
it is the duty of every
ambassador to convince the
international community to
help us build our new identity.
I have also discussed with other
parties my role as ambassador
and I plan to take their advice.

What advice do you plan
to take?
First, economic diplomacy: I
plan to look for donors within
Asia and Europe, and
attract foreign investors who will
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Would you have been an
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A LAND OF OLD AND NEW: (top) A young girl swings free across Kirtipur’s skyline (anticlockwise l-r) A kitchen hand prepares to winnow freshly pounded rice at Nawa Lahana

Women weed mustard fields near Naya Bajar

The Jugal Himal range and the valley as seen from Uma Maheswor Temple, the highest point in Kirtipur

Nawa Lahana is an open museum cum restaurant

Antique swords and shields used during the battle against Prithvi Narayan Shah hang in the Bagh Bhairab Temple

A monk rests in peaceful solitude at the Sri Kirti Bihar.
It’s just 6km from Kathmandu’s city centre, but historic Kirtipur may as well be many centuries away.

The picturesque ridge-top town has always fallen between the cracks of the tourist towns of Bhaktapur and Patan. And despite the proximity, one gets the feeling time has passed Kirtipur by.

Kirtipur was the first of the Valley’s kingdoms to be attacked by Prithvi Narayan Shah. The resolute inhabitants held out till 1768 after three fierce sieges by the Gorkhalis. Unlike Patan and Kathmandu, Kirtipur is naturally protected on all sides.

Despite the ravages of time, past battles and earthquakes the medieval features of this fortress kingdom are still intact. The ancient town is an open museum for religion, cultural tradition and exceptional Newari craft and architecture. The sounds of women using ugha to beat rice and the whirr of the tan as threads are woven into cloth have all but disappeared elsewhere, but survive in Kirtipur.

At the 600-year-old Bagh Bhairab temple the swords and shields, remnants of the battle against Prithvi Narayan Shah, are proudly displayed and remind visitors of the courage of the defenders.

Up the hill is the Uma Maheswor temple, from where there is a sweeping view of the valley and the mountains beyond.

Kirtipur’s glorious history comes right down to the present times: the activism of its inhabitants and the nearby university ushered in democracy in 1990 and in April 2006 with peaceful protests that inspired the nation to stand up against an autocratic monarchy.

Srishti Adhikari
Nepal, Inc.

We should be rebranding our nation in a more positive light

International media images of our troubled nation are upsetting. Nepal appears like a Liliputian comedy, with little people fighting over little things in a faraway little place.

In Jonathan Swift’s classic, the Liliputians and their enemy, the Blefuscudians, are constantly at war to settle their dispute over the right way to eat a boiled egg. The former, called Big-endians, insist on eating from the rounded end and the latter, the Little-endians, argue on behalf of the pointy end. The ongoing Nepali theatrics reinforce that mythic analogy.

The problem is that such stereotyping conceals more than it reveals. Media images change, as we change. During the 1960s, the press couldn’t get enough of our Shangri-La image. Then, during the 1980s, the international media found nothing much to report from here. With the royal massacre, the parachutists suddenly descended on Nepal and found out there was a war going on. And now there is the ‘failing state’ myth.

We should be rebranding our social aims.

His prescription for Nepal: place has a bad image: it needs to be properly measured and understood. A similar project with the ‘Nepal’ brand (symbolising our culture, heritage and biodiversity) is due to begin in 2008.

The government and businesses must manage a versatile public perception.

Of course, the propaganda should not try to cover our warts. But we may very well be a nation in a more positive light. We should be rebranding our social aims. Nepalís own campaign ‘Naturally Nepal’—once is not enough—will help.

We could also carry out a survey of how tourists see us, and then test new perceptions among tourists. Apparently, politics is our worst indicator. With falling exports, sluggish investment, and massive unemployment, our economic situation isn’t faring much better. Still, we may look fairly attractive to someone from a faraway place, perhaps for our mystique. Gforge, a French company, just released the results of a survey of public perceptions on a country’s assets or appeal in governance, economy, culture, people, and tourism. Apparently, politics is our worst indicator. With falling exports, sluggish investment, and massive unemployment, our economic situation isn’t faring much better. Still, we may look fairly attractive to someone from a faraway place.

Nepali Pan Dharma Adhikari

Bir Hospital’s burns unit does its best to provide top class care at rock bottom prices

MALLIKA ARYAL

Early on Saturday morning, Sri Ram Shrestha awoke in his house in Nala, Kathmandu, to find flames and smoke filling the air. He rushed upstairs to save his sleeping 32-year-old daughter, Ram Pyari Shrestha. But by the time he got to her, her face, hands and legs were severely burned.

She was driven to Banepa Hospital, but because 40 percent of her body was covered with second and third degree burns, she was sent on to Bir Hospital, where she now lies shrouded in bandages, groaning in pain, her swollen face and lips oozing with soothing ointment.

The hospital staff fear her lungs may have been damaged by smoke inhalation. Her father lost all his possessions in the fire and on the way to the hospital, where she now lies shrouded in bandages, groaning in pain, her swollen face and lips oozing with soothing ointment.

The hospital staff fear her lungs may have been damaged by smoke inhalation.

The husband could not pay. Instead of turning his back on the patient, staff immediately treated Ram Pyari, bandaged her and applied the necessary ointment. Of the nine patients in the unit, all except one are receiving free treatment.

Bir Hospital’s burns unit, set up in 2001, is one of three in Kathmandu. Staffed by two doctors and five nurses, it is always full. Overall, patients are kept in the emergency ward until a bed is free, and patients receive protein-rich meals and snacks daily. The Khitipur dispensary at the hospital provides some drugs for free to those with absolutely no money.

Most cases are women from poor households, and records at the Bir unit show that nearly two thirds of cases result from accidents, and nearly one third from self-inflicted burns. “It is usually married couples, where the man works and women stay at home,” says Bir Bahadur Lama, the burns unit’s in-charge. “It is such cases that we see most often.”

The charges are minimal—usually for medical supplies—but most patients end up not paying anything because it is generally the poor who come for treatment. “Those who can afford it seek private help,” says Bariya. “The patients who come to us are sometimes so poor that they not only can’t pay for their treatment, but don’t have enough money to go home.”

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The charges are minimal—usually for medical supplies—but most patients end up not paying anything because it is generally the poor who come for treatment. “Those who can afford it seek private help,” says Bariya. “The patients who come to us are sometimes so poor that they not only can’t pay for their treatment, but don’t have enough money to go home.”

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A burning issue

Keshav Das Joshi, chief of the Plastic Reconstructive Unit at Kathmandu Medical College, says a major problem in dealing with such cases is the shortage of specialised burns units and plastic surgeons in Nepal. “In India it is estimated that around 0.5 percent of the population gets burnt,” he says. “We estimate that the figure is similar here, which is quite significant.”

In a month’s time, KMC will open a new reconstructive plastic surgery and burns unit which will help to meet demand.

“There are so many accidents that should not be happening but do because of lack of awareness,” says Marston. She says the government could make more use of radio to provide advice to illiterate families.

While Bir Hospital provides basic medical supplies, patients may have to pay for some expensive drugs themselves. The unit gets some support from international organisations and individuals, but there is always a need for more assistance. “The help does not necessarily need to be monetary,” says Marston. “Those interested can contribute by providing things like protein-rich food, towels and bed sheets.”

Despite the constant struggle to make ends meet, the burns unit provides vital, often life-saving treatment to a steady stream of patients. “The resources we work with may be limited and we may be understaffed, but those who work here are committed, and we always do our best,” says Bariya.
Double billing

Technically a zombie movie, I Am Legend smartly keeps its zombies out of sight until well into the movie, which serves to focus on the existential plight of its protagonist. Robert Neville, played with revealing sensitivity by Will Smith, is apparently New York City’s sole surviving human—or at least the sole surviving human not turned into a sunlight-allergic zombie by a virus engineered to cure cancer.

We witness the afflication he showers on his dog and conversations with mannequins that keep together his fragile sanity engineered to cure cancer.

His isolation ends with the appearance of Anna, who rescues Robert when he suffers a bout of self-destructiveness. Anna, in her faith that there is a colony of survivors somewhere, quickly emerges as the spiritual foil to the rational-minded Robert, a military scientist who is still intent on finding a cure. It is evident that faith in God and science serve to sustain Anna and Robert respectively, and the film is recast along that tension, which is ultimately poorly resolved by a Shyamalan-esque epiphany.

I won’t ruin it by telling you who, if anyone, gets out alive, but the ending, an image of a strange and perverse utopia, a diametric promise of American arms and training in a speech evokes a clash of Civilisations. When our trio brings order to a town of Jindabyne, the women grow up. A mix of live action and animation, set over a hot weekend, the characters’ lives intersect and converge creating an intriguing film.

Storm Boy (1976), 16 January, 5.30 PM

In the wild Coongoor wetlands of South Australia, a 10-year-old boy rescues a baby pelican orphaned by hunters. With the help of an Aboriginal man, Fingerbone Hill, the boy takes care of the bird and names it Mr Percival. The two become inseparable—until the outside world decides to encroach.

The Rape in Placid Lake (2003), 17 January, 5.30 PM

Placid Lake is a boy who follows his instincts. He does what he wants and when he wants. That is what makes him different. But one day, after he flies off the school roof and ends up in a fully-body cast, Lake decides to make a bid to lead a normal life. To his parents’ horror, Lake gets a normal job, buys a beige suit and does everything in his power to conform. Lake will do anything to be banal, even if it kills him.

Jindabyne (2006), 18 January, 5.30 PM

Based on a short story by Raymond Carver, the film tells the story of Stewart Kane, an Irishman living in the Australian town of Jindabyne. While on a fishing trip with three other men, he finds the body of a murdered girl in the river. Instead of reporting the incident, the men continue fishing and only report their find five days later. Stewart’s wife Claire is deeply disturbed by her husband’s action. In her quest to understand Stewart, her peaceful life is threatened and her marriage is taken to the brink. A powerful film about a murder and a marriage.

Aussie action

Your chance to see some of the best films from down under

In Charlie Wilson’s War, refugee camps provide the few sombre scenes in a movie that is almost too incredibly joicy (if sardonic) about one American congressman’s instrumental efforts to fund the Afghans in their 10-year conflict against the Soviet Union. This is a film that manages a bubbly glaze over international arms-dealing, CIA political engineering, and even helicopters firing upon villages.

Tom Hanks is the eponymous Charlie Wilson, a liberal Texan Democrat and a veritable libertine who emerges as the impious conscience of the film. He is nudged by Julia Roberts’s character, Joanne Herring—a right-wing Christian, staunch anti-communist, and again later in the week. Tickets are priced at Rs 30 outside world decides to encroach.

I am Legend (1978), 19 January, 5.30 PM

In late 40s Australia, Len Magnuire and his sidekick Clats are two irredeemable amoralists who cover big news stories for the Cinetone newsrewed company. Len is an old-school cameraman for the company, the Australian Labour Party and the Catholic church. But with the advent of television, he finds times are changing. The film is an adventurous saga of the two cinematographers and reporters who risk life and limb to capture footage of breaking news for the movie-going public.

www.afc.gov.au
01-4376179
After watching Kagbeni when it premieres on Friday, many viewers will say it is the best Nepali movie they have seen. Trouble is, that's not saying much. Given its inane mediocrity and crass imitation of Bollywood, anything would be better than Nepal's pubescent film industry. But even by international standards, Kagbeni is a handsome movie: superbly crafted, seductively acted, meticulously directed. No longer will we have to be embarrassed about Nepali movies. (See also: ‘Aiming high with Kagbeni’, #381)

The film starts with the starkly iconic panorama of the trans-Himalaya forming. Combine this ethereal location with a classic thriller (based on the 1902 novel by WW Jacobs, The Monkey’s Paw) and for two hours you are transported into a Faustian dreamland.

The minimalist screenplay by Prashant Rasaily distills Jacobs down to a barebone plot. Krishna returns from Malaysia and is reunited with his childhood friend, Ramesh. But there is a sense of foreboding when they meet a sadhu who gives them a talisman with tantric powers. After this the story becomes a drama that unfolds at two levels: the real and the occult.

Director Bhusan Dahal does a surprisingly slick job, considering this is his first feature film, by getting everyone involved to give it their best. There is a perfectionist attention to detail in Dahal’s direction. The characteristic up-valley gales of the Kali Gandaki blow through the cinema in surround sound, the faces of the actors are all weathered by sun and wind as they are in real-life Kagbeni. The film’s languid pace fits perfectly with the way the hours in a day and the seasons pass in the mountains of rural Nepal.

The director has included local crudities: the lead actor wipes snot on his jacket, and Dahal even gets away with having a sleazy trader scratch his crotch in public. Empty brandy bottles clink in harmony with mule bells, creating music.

The soothing flute score by Sharad Gurung is a perfect accompaniment to the backdrop. Nothing is overdone, even though it must have been tempting to add more minutes of timelapse cinematography as the clouds race past Dhaulagiri. Bidur Panday restrains himself and has some excellent vertical shots that accentuate the stacked houses and narrow alleys of Lower Mustang.

BEDROOM SCENE: Saugat Malla (Krishna) and Deeya Maskey (Tara) in a sequence from Kagbeni.

As you wait in excruciating suspense for a climax that you know will be tragic, the moral of the story hits you even before the end rushes come on: “Be careful what you wish for.”

Kagbeni will be shown from Friday, 11 January at Jai Nepal and Kumari (01-4442220) and in cinemas across Nepal in high definition digital format.

KUNDA DIXIT

We don’t have to be embarrassed about Nepali movies anymore

Come of age with Kagbeni

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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS
diamond photo.circle.special.edition
Kripa Joshi/taiks about her Miss Mal comics and the scope of graphic novels, 14 January, 6PM at the Pulchok Bakery café.
9851049390

Larger than Life panoramas by Kishor Kayastha, exhibition and sale, until 15 January, 8AM-6PM at the Indigo Gallery, Naxal.
4413930

Himalayan Harmony paintings by Vijay Thapa at Park Gallery, Lazimpat, until 14 January, 10.30 AM-5.30 PM.

EVENTS
Elizabeth A film by Shekhar Kapur at the Lazimpat Gallery Café, 6.15 PM on 11 January. 4428549

Shastrartha on how to read Laxmi Prasad Devkota with Padma Prakash Devkota and Prabhash Devkota, 12 January, 3-5PM at Martin Chautari, 6910277

animalNEPAL community meeting to discuss the street dogs of Patan, 6PM on 20 January at the Summit Hotel. 9841334537

MUSIC
21th Yala Maya Classic with Pandit Hom Nath Upadhyaya and Bikash Nath Yogi, 16 January, 5PM at Yala Maya Kendra.
5553767

Ciney Gurung every Wednesday and Rashmi Singh every Friday, live at the Absolute Bar, Hotel Narayani Complex, 7PM, 5821408

Catch 22 live at the Zest Restaurant and Bar, Pulchok.

DINING
illy espresso coffee at the Galleria café, Thamel with contemporary art exhibition at the Gallery lounge, every Friday espresso coffee cocktails, also at Park Village, Buddhhanikantha.

Saturday special barbeque, sekuwa, momos, dal-bhat at The Tea House Inn, Windy Hills, Nagarkot every Saturday. 9841250848.

Dice-licious brunch at Kakori, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, roll the dice to the number of the day and get 50 percent discount on an individual meal, Saturdays and Sundays, 12.30-3.30PM.
4273999

Vegetarian alternative at Stupa View restaurant and café, Boudha Stupa.
4480262

Scrumptious woodfired pizzas, cocktails and specialty coffees at Roadhouse, Bhattaban 4422587, Pulchom 5211755 and Thamel 4260187.

Cocktails and jazz with the JCS Quartet and a choice of coffees at Fusion the Bar at Dwarikas. 4478484

Saturday night barbecue at Hotel Shangri-la with live performance by Ciney Gurung, Rs 666 nett per person, at the Shambala Garden every Friday from 6.30 PM. 44192999

Kebabs and curries at the Dhaba, Thapathali. 9841290619

EXHIBITIONS
Paintings by Vijay Thapa at Park Gallery, Lazimpat, until 14 January, 10.30 AM-5.30 PM.

For inclusion in the listing send information to editors(at)nepalitimes.com
LOYAL ROYALS: Former minister Kamal Thapa with other members of his RPP Nepal party at a pro-monarchy rally in Kathmandu on Monday.

TAI XI STAND: Taxi drivers rally on Tuesday, choking Kathmandu’s streets and causing a mammoth traffic jam. On Wednesday, the strike was called off after the government agreed to consider all their eight demands.

LOUNGING AROUND: Minister of Tourism Prithivi Subba Gurung at the opening by Oriental Hotels Radisson of a new Executive Class lounge at Kathmandu airport.

TEACHING TEACHERS: Gunnar Andersen of Save the Children Norway and Easania Thapa of Himal Association at the launch of Sikshyak, a new magazine for Nepal’s teachers.

Erasmus Mundus Scholarships Opportunities for Higher Education in Europe for Nepalese students

Erasmus Mundus Masters Courses
Erasmus Mundus offers culturally enriching higher education opportunities for both European and Non-European students. For more information on the Erasmus Mundus scholarships, please check the link: http://ec.europa.eu/education/index_en.html

Prospective students from any country are invited to apply to participate in an Erasmus Mundus Masters Course, provided they have obtained a first degree awarded by a higher education institution. For more information and eligibility criteria please check following link: http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/mundus/laa/faq_3_en.html

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Check this link for the list of available Erasmus Mundus Masters Courses: https://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/mundus/projects/index_en.html

Note:
- There are no Erasmus Mundus Masters Courses offered at undergraduate or doctorate levels.
- Interested students have to register for an Erasmus Mundus Masters Course directly with the consortium offering the Course. The consortium informs interested students about specific admission conditions (e.g. study results, language skills, etc.) and about application deadlines.
- Please do not apply to the Delegation of the European Commission to Nepal or the European Commission.

Delegation of the European Commission to Nepal
Uttar Dhulikhel, Lalitpur, Kathmandu, Nepal.

OUR TELEPHONE NUMBERS HAVE CHANGED
from
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effective 15 January 2008

to
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Himalmedia, Hatiban, Lalitpur.
W hat do Nepal and Naples have in common besides the fact that every year the postal service mis-directs thousands of letters with Nepali addresses to Napoli?

Rubbish. Yes, residents on the outskirts of Naples have stopped taking any more of the city’s trash until the municipality provides them with adequate compensation. They have been burning tyres on the streets of Naples, and garbage is piling up in the tourist area. What a relief to know that they have the same problems with waste management in Italy as we have in the Kathmandu Metropolitan City.

Comrade Awesome keeps comparing himself to Gautam Buddha. The Maoist HQ is in Buddha Nagar, the central committee meeting this week is being held at a resort in Namo Baudha and there is actually a commander with the nom de guerre of Comrade Siddhartha. What’s with the Buddha obsession, comrades?

We don’t know if PKD brought up the matter of the eight-fold path at the Maoist central committee meeting in Kabhre this week since it was being held behind closed doors, but we are informed on good authority that he suddenly got up, looked at his watch and said: “Whoa! Completely forgot. Got ta go.”

So, with Comrade Lalbodhi in hot pursuit, Fearsomeness skipped the centcom to attend a Marwari Family invitation to deliver a speech. The interesting thing here is not that a Maoist leader deigned it important enough to leave a critical party meeting to attend a function organised by Nepal’s premier business community, but what he told the Marwari businessmen: “The YCL can be mobilised to control the growing insecurity, extortion and abductions suffered by business sector.” Do we smell a deal here?

However, over at Baluwatar, there is no sign of urgency in declaring a poll date. Even on Thursday, the cabinet postponed the decision. Last week GPK said one week, this week he is saying next week. The reason for the delay is that Girjau has suddenly decided to make his daughter minister. Frau Jost really wanted the Foreign Minister’s job, but apparently had to settle for minister without portfolio. Which means what, she gets to interfere with all other ministries?

Trouble is that the prime minister is torn between keeping happy the First Nephew (who is Sitaula Baje’s chum) while not hurting the First Daughter’s feelings. How the prime minister sorts this one out is going to have a greater bearing on this country’s future than the unity of the seven party alliance.

But true to the South Asian tradition of anointing offspring as heir apparents (look at Bilawal Bhutto sweating it out this week at a presscon in London), Girjau probably wouldn’t mind if Sujata Ma’m succeeded him. Is that why he told kangresi wimmin cadre last week that it was time Nepal had a female prime minister?