DEEPMENDHA BAHADUR

Anybody home?

As the honeymoon period ends, uncertainty looms

The Maoist-led government has been in office for three months, and some of the ex-guerrillas in government admit that waging war was easier. The Maoists inherited a battered economy, a fuel crisis, a crippling electricity shortage and a standstill in development and governance. Although their ‘people’s war’ was largely responsible for some of these problems, Nepal still expect the Maoists can bring change.

However, the biggest challenge to the party leadership is now from within. The Maoists are holding intense backroom consultations before a conference of nationwide cadre opens on 20 November.

“This is a very crucial meeting,” says Sarala Regmi of the Maoist Tharuhat Provincial Council. “The CA is just a transitional compromise; we will not give up until all oppressed people are liberated.”

Party sources told Nepali Times that there is strong criticism from within of Maoist ministers, and the hardliners look like they are going to be dominating the conference next week.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal met senior Indian leaders on Wednesday in New Delhi and briefed them on the state of the peace process. The Indians are understood to have urged him strongly to work with the other parties.

Indian Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee is due here next week and is expected to urge the NC not to play oppositional politics at this time because it could undermine the peace process and delay constitution-drafting.

OUTSIDE LOOKING IN: Rohit Kushait from Janakpur looks in at the gate of President Yadavís residence at Dhapashi on Saturday while the president was meeting journalists. Kushait wanted the president to help him with a land dispute.
Inside the UML
The party suffers an existential crisis

 Plain Speaking
 Prashant Jha

doing away with the private property of the rebels. The community, however, found their decision controversial due to the potential implications on the social fabric and cultural norms in the area. The conflict has led to a significant increase in the number of displaced people and forced families to leave their homes. The ongoing struggle has raised several questions about the role of the UML in the conflict and its commitment to peace. The party leadership has been divided on the issue, with some members calling for a more inclusive approach to the Maoists and others advocating for a firm line against the rebels.

Made in Japan
We can learn from the Japanese about successful local government

TOKYO—In a study on governance, a few things jumped out. The level of trust in public institutions in Japan, government, and state officials in countries around the world was overwhelmingly low. A majority of people were more comfortable with forming their own government entities and taking care of themselves than waiting for the government to look after them. In Japan, there was more trust: 71 per cent said they trusted local government, 60 per cent said they trusted the national government, and only 51 per cent said they trusted the police.

The key to Japan’s success is its autonomous local government model, with locally elected mayors and governors. This model has been in place since 1998 and has been highly successful. The autonomy of local governments allows them to make decisions that are more relevant to the local community. This has led to greater accountability and better governance.

Local officials are extensively trained and often have a long tenure in their positions. This has led to a culture of expertise and professionalism. The mayors and governors are elected by the people and are held accountable for their actions.

The Japanese model of local government is not without challenges. There is a concern about the concentration of power in the hands of a few local officials. However, this has been mitigated by the presence of strong checks and balances. The local government is answerable to the people and is subject to review by the national government.

In conclusion, the Japanese model of local government is a successful example of good governance. It is worth examining and learning from for countries around the world.
TIMBER
The report “Timber to Tibet” (#424) made sad reading. How the local authorities are turning a blind eye to such destruction of forests and illegal cross-border trade in timber is not understood. They have to wake up and stop such blatant misuse of natural resources which are community property. The government has to ensure adequate supply of food, fuel and other essential items to the people of the remote district so that they do not have to cut the valuable forests to get a pittance in return. In fact, planting trees and hence renewal of forests should be encouraged by free or subsidised supply of seedlings.

D B N Murthy, Peace Lane, Sanepa

REMITTANCE ECONOMY
I would like to commend Mr Ganesh Gurung for his insightful comment in favour of opening up the migrant worker market for women (IA) what cost the remittance economy? #423). It doesn’t make sense to ban women from working in the Gulf since they are smuggled there anyway by unscrupulous manpower agencies. As Mr Gurung argues, this makes them more vulnerable to exploitation. What should be done is to learn from the experience of Sri Lanka and the Philippines so that labour rights of the women are safeguarded, and embassies should be set up in countries which have a high proportion of Nepali women working.

P Kumar, Kathmandu

LETTERS
Your special coverage of the plight of Nepali workers abroad, especially women, should be read by every official at the Department of Labour and in the recruiting agencies so action is taken to protect Nepalis from exploitation and cheating by fellow-Nepalis. It is a shame that the very people we rely on to prop up our economy are so shabbily treated. While Desven Rai exposes abuse, Ganesh Gurung says women should be allowed to go abroad to work. Unless safeguards are in place, it would be criminal to allow Nepali women to be sent to places like Kuwait and Saudi Arabia where they will face abuse.

Renu Sah, email

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Special Winter Collection
When Sonam Wangchuk first came to this western Tarai district to look at schools last winter, he was surprised to see the classrooms half empty.

When he entered the schools, it was clear why: the rooms were just too cold. He was determined to do something about it.

Wangchuk is from Ladakh and has been working to improve the curriculum and classroom infrastructure in the harsh climate of the trans-Himalayan region of India where the temperature in winter often drops to 10 degrees below zero. But the classrooms were often heated to 10 degrees in summer. The walls were made of compressed mud blocks that retain heat and insulate the rooms.

“Design, orientation and construction materials make a lot of difference,” says Wangchuk.

Three more two-room school buildings with this design are being built in Bardiya.

The advantages of the new design are: the building is ready in less than three weeks; the classrooms are climate responsive; the mud blocks have good insulating properties; local materials and labour are used; and the construction process empowers the community.

“The building shows that if we work together we can do it,” says Hasina Banu Sheikh of the group BASE which supported the construction. Banu says the government should use designs specific to the Tarai and mountains in the 15,000 new classrooms it wants to build in the next five years under an ADB/World Bank-funded program.

The Maoist-led government wants to achieve 100 per cent literacy in the next two years, for which it needs classrooms for 7.8 million children. Many are skeptical that this can be done, but Maheshran Sharma, Director at the Department of Education says it can. “The money has been set aside for 9,000 classrooms this year alone, and if we launch this campaign is supported by the Danish group, MS, with its local partner, BASE. It is partly funded by high school children in Denmark who set aside a single day’s earning every November and have so far collected more than Rs6.5 million.

The Janatanagar school was built using earth blocks made of 94 per cent mud and 6 per cent cement compressed with a manual compactor. Wangchuk conducted workshops for Department of Education engineers on the process, but says many people have a mental block against mud architecture. He says: “They think it is for poor people, but this technology is appropriate not just for schools but also residential buildings.”

Better climate for education

New school design could revolutionise classrooms

Mud saves time and money

A s concrete and glass become the symbols of progress, proponents of mud and architecture are fighting a losing battle.

However, research in mud technology has shown that sun-baked adobe bricks can be superior to kiln bricks both in strength and insulation properties. Our ancestors understood this and used mud, which is why old buildings are cool in summer and warm in winter. In stark contrast, concrete and cement structures have poor thermal qualities, making their interiors baking hot in summer and bitterly cold in winter.

Research at the Auroville Earth Institute in India has proved that the heat against mud will need to change if society wants to graduate to energy-efficient, appropriate building practices.

The technology used to build the Bardiya school used Compressed Stabilised Earth Blocks (CSEB). Mud is mixed with cement in a ratio of 96:4 and compressed with 15 tons of pressure with a manual compactor (see picture). The resulting bricks are even stronger than kiln-baked bricks.

In addition, they use much less energy and the kiln chimneys do not pollute the environment. The mud blocks emit eight times less carbon dioxide into the atmosphere than kiln-baked bricks and each school building saves 15 tons of firewood.

The lightness of the blocks also makes the buildings earthquake safe and the walls are reinforced with six horizontal RCC ties and a vertical tie every 1.5 metres.

Mud has its downsides: it takes training to use properly, needs maintenance and is generally not waterproof or insect proof. However, most of these disadvantages can be addressed with CSEBs which use six per cent cement to stabilise the mud. The compression technique makes strong, durable blocks as strong as baked bricks.

The technology could be easily used to mass produce cheaper and environment-friendly bricks even for the Kathmandu Valley. For architects, the bricks could easily be dyed red to make them look like kiln-baked bricks.
Imagine

Bhattarai’s D4E plan will doom this country

I magine no school and no exams either. Imagine the government gives you a degree anyway. Last week, Minister of Finance Baburam Bhattarai, PhD, said the government was preparing to hand out academic certificates to those who could not pursue formal education due to their involvement in the 10-year long people’s war—a war that left more than 13,000 Nepalis dead and thousands more injured and displaced. Put another way, when this degree-for-experience (D4E) plan is carried out, the path to earning a degree will not be the old-fashioned way of studying hard, but will be the new 4E way of being given a degree. And this act of providing certification letters will expand the discretionary decision-making power of senior politicians, some of whom are likely to use their new-found authority to please not Mao but Mammon by selling favours on the side.

But another way, when this degree-for-experience (D4E) plan is carried out, the path to earning a degree will not be the old-fashioned way of studying hard to fulfill the requirements, but of having a political leader vouch that you were in the jungles of Rolpa toting a gun at a time when you should have been at school in Tribhuvan.

Assuming that the D4E is not a new rung placed on the career ladder of ambitious young Maoists, it is destined to be a corruption-ridden plan. It won’t help anyone in the job market. And there is a better way to teach the former rebels how to fish for themselves. Corrupt process: Suppose the plan goes forward. How will the government verify the facts concerning a D4E aspirant? Will it ask for letters of verification from senior political leaders who were also engaged in the war? And this act of providing certification letters will expand the discretionary decision-making power of senior politicians, some of whom are likely to use their new-found authority to please not Mao but Mammon by selling favours on the side.

Failed the SLC five times? No problem. Pay a senior politician to vouch that because you spent your teenage years hiding pamphlets in Kirtipur, you are now eligible for something akin to a Bachelor of People’s War (BPW) degree. Confused signals: Shown a BPW certificate, how is the job market to evaluate its worth? (BPW) degree.

Corrupt process: Suppose the plan goes forward. How will the government verify the facts concerning a D4E aspirant? Will it ask for letters of verification from senior political leaders who were also engaged in the war? And this act of providing certification letters will expand the discretionary decision-making power of senior politicians, some of whom are likely to use their new-found authority to please not Mao but Mammon by selling favours on the side.

Failed the SLC five times? No problem. Pay a senior politician to vouch that because you spent your teenage years hiding pamphlets in Kirtipur, you are now eligible for something akin to a Bachelor of People’s War (BPW) degree. Confused signals: Shown a BPW certificate, how is the job market to evaluate its worth? Since full-time jobs that pay regular salaries do not require employees to engage in even mini people’s wars in the workplace, how relevant will the experience ‘recognised’ by the certificate be to obtain a job?

Or is Bhattarai giving out certificates now to mollify disgruntled cadres and put pressure on the private and the state sectors later to accept the BPWs as new hires? If so, when those with dubious degrees are seen to be paid salaries, others with genuine degrees will have little incentive to work in Nepal. The counterfeit in effect drives out the genuine.

Concrete action: In his budget speech, Bhattarai announced that the next year will be the Year of Construction, while 2011 will be the Year of Tourism. These sectors require skilled workers. Why not find money to pay for short-term, skill-based training programs that help former rebels master skills that they can sell to the construction and tourism markets? The sooner the former rebels acquire skills to earn their own money in and out of Nepal, the less of a burden they will be on the government.

Many Nepalis gave up their student years to take part in the war. In these relatively peaceful times, we must find ways to economically rehabilitate these Nepalis. But the way to do that is not by ‘recognising’ the ex-rebels as, say, fishermen, when in reality they do not know what a fish is—much less how to catch one.●
Why is the NC resentful towards UNMIN?
Govinda Raj Joshi: We believed that UNMIN would play an important role in bringing the peace process to a fair conclusion. However, UNMIN has failed in both these tasks.

What went wrong with UNMIN commit during the elections?
They made the people go to the constituencies of other parties who were being targeted by the Maoists. Thapa conveniently cruising in a government SUV, representing the NC.

Why do you think UNMIN did this?
The Maoists need to be in government. That’s why the government makes us question their so-called commitment to the right to information. How effective can such a directive be when the ministers themselves act irresponsibly with regard to foreign visits and don’t even care to inform the public?

Directive be?
It’s the Maoists who need UNMIN, not the government. UNMIN provides the legality that the Maoists need to be in government. That’s why even if the government asks UNMIN to stay on, the NC will not accept it.

Direct the undirected
Yubraj Ghimire in Samaya, November 7-13

Recently the cabinet issued a seven-point directive regarding civil servants, especially about their meetings and interactions with foreigners. The directive, issued at the initiation of Foreign Minister Upendra Yadav, indirectly requests foreign diplomats in Nepal to respect diplomatic ethics and norms while meeting politicians, ministers or government employees.

Minister Yadav must have his reasons but it would be foolish to expect a substantial result by implementing such a code of conduct only at the civil servants’ level and not at the political level. Nepal’s history is a history of rushing abroad at the drop of a hat, often jeopardising national prestige.

Neither the government nor the ministers make any effort to formally notify the public of their junkets. This slapdash attitude of the government makes us question their so-called commitment to the right to information. How effective can such a directive be when the ministers themselves act irresponsibly with regard to foreign visits and don’t even care to inform the public?

Toward the NC, Ian Martin is a communist
Interview with Govinda Raj Joshi (NC), Nepal, 16 November

Govinda Raj Joshi: We believed that UNMIN would play an important role in bringing the peace process to a fair conclusion and having an independent election. However UNMIN has failed in both these tasks.

And NC found out about this only now? We knew about this before, but our party as a whole just found out now.

So you must be displeased about UNMIN’s term being extended.
We are. This is about ethics. Cijnjaho even told the UN secretary-general that UNMIN did not behave correctly. Yet the government is still getting ready to ask UNMIN to extend its term.

But the government probably needs UNMIN.
It’s the Maoists who need UNMIN, not the government. UNMIN provides the legality that the Maoists need to be in government. That’s why even if the government asks UNMIN to stay on, the NC will not accept it.

Learning fast
Sarawati Karki in Kathmandu, 12 November

Sant Devi Rajbhangsi, a Maoist CA member, didn’t even know how to dial a number on her mobile, but now she uses it a lot. “Now I can make my own calls. When we don’t have meetings, I call my friends up for a chat,” says Rajbhangsi.

Her ‘chats’ are at times complaints about not being able to learn English because she is illiterate. ‘I can speak everything but can’t write. Right now I have learnt to write my name in Nepali.’

Other female CA members like Rajbhangsi are trying to adjust to the city life by training to use a computer and ride a scooter, and learning English. There are 197 women in the CA from 19 parties. CA member Asha Kumari Sardar of the MJF feels that to adapt to city life it is necessary to learn all three—computer, scooter and English. At present she is learning English and how to use computers, but is determined to learn all three by the end of the year.

An NGO is aiding 19 other women like her to learn English and computer skills. Jubba Suren of the Santhal ethnic group gives a high priority to learning English. Every morning she spends an hour in a language class.

“I can’t understand when the other CA members speak in English during our meetings,” says Suren, who is educated up to grade six. “That is why I feel it is extremely important to learn the language.” She is also planning to buy a scooter because she has to attend a number of programs.

NC’s Kaba Sardar, who used to be a teacher, says: “While I was in the village, I thought I knew something. But I’ve realised now that there is a lot more to learn.”

Toxic school
Dhristi, November 11

Bara—A warehouse near the Nepal National Secondary School in Amlekhganj is packed with toxic chemicals causing serious health problems for the students. The smell of the chemicals that are leaking from their containers is overpowering, and the students are having dizzy spells and even vomiting. Besides the students, residents of nearby houses are also affected.

The warehouse stores pesticides and agrochemicals that were imported 12 years ago, found to be hazardous and put into storage before being destroyed. There are 140 tons of toxic chemicals like organophosphates and mercury-based chemicals, DDT and other carcinogenic chemicals here.

Both the school and the residents have requested the government on numerous occasions to remove this toxic store and relocate it. Students even blocked the Tribhuvan Highway twice to press their demand.

VOC chairman Bhutan Ghalai says locals have given up hope that the government will do anything.
Rationale for federalism

Many Nepalis, even CA members and political leaders, do not fully understand the concept of federalism. Himal Khabarpatrika talked to Krishna Khanal, political science professor at Tribhuvan University, about how federalism might work in Nepal.

Why do we need federalism?
Federalism is required in our country due to the structure of society. The previous system could not address the ethnic, lingual and cultural diversity of our society. People’s aspirations gradually started rising and there was no other way to address them. Federalism is a means to address all sorts of aspirations.

Is federalism the only way to address ethnic, lingual and cultural diversity?
Federalism recognises individual identity. But this identity is not necessarily ethnic or linguistic. Switzerland is a small country but there is ethnic and linguistic diversity which is addressed through a federal system. India is a big country with wide diversity. Therefore, it adopted federalism.

Are there other reasons for Nepal to become a federal state?
It is also necessary for the country’s development. Decentralisation could not bring development. Those representatives elected from the villages settle in Kathmandu and live a life of luxury. Decentralisation cannot be meaningful as long as the leadership is centralised. Therefore, federalism is necessary to expedite development activities and ensure the participation of the people.

The development and utilisation of natural resources is not possible in a unitary state. Take Kamilli for instance—rich in natural resources but reliant on food sent from Kathmandu. In a federal structure, there will be internal competition within the provinces. Some provinces have potential for tourism and others for water resources. It is federalism which opens avenues for competition.

There are 101 ethnic groups in Nepal. Should we have as many provinces?
This is not logical. It is the argument of those against federalism. It is not possible to give each ethnic group a state or province. We can create provinces in a manner to include major ethnic groups.

Then what do we do with the smaller groups?
We always have alternatives. For them, we can create cultural councils’ within a province, which is widely practised in countries that have adopted federalism. Some even talk about sub-provinces. But it is impractical to create an autonomous sub-province for each ethnic group.

Decentralisation to some extent can address this issue at VDC level. Nepal cannot sustain too many provinces.

Doesn’t the breakup of Yugoslavia show that federalism is not always the answer?
The federal system of Yugoslavia was created based on democratic norms, values and systems but on a communist system and principles. It was the same case in the Soviet Union. The party was run centrally while the state was federal. These are examples of how a politically controlled federalism fails. Democracy is the first condition in federalism.

Is federalism not necessary in relatively homogeneous countries like China?
In principle, China is running under a unitary system, not a federal one. By the time Hong Kong was returned, it adopted a ‘one country, two systems’ policy. Now we can say it has adopted a ‘one country, three systems’ policy, as there are separate policies for Hong Kong, Macau and mainland China. There are autonomous regions for minorities within mainland China, for instance in Tibet and inner Mongolia.

Most countries become republics either after independence from colonialism or after winning a war. Are there countries where federalism was discussed as we are doing now?
Federal states have been established in two ways—sovereign states which had to unite for some reason, for example the USA, where there were 13 separate states under British colonial rule. The previously unitary state of Belgium went federal in 1993. Voxons were raised over ethnic, lingual and cultural issues in Belgium, which continued to escalate and there was fear of the country breaking up in 1980. They created a new constitution in 1993 with a federal republic.
following war in 1814-16 with the East India Company, concluded by the Treaty of Sugauli, Nepal was obliged to accept a British Resident at Kathmandu. Edward Gardner presented his credentials to King Girvan Yudhha at the royal palace of Nuwakot in 1816 and the Residency was established on land gifted by the king—but believed locally to be ‘ill-omened’. The 50-acre site in Lainchaur (named from the English ‘lines’, the usual name for British enclaves throughout India) included a church, a greenhouse, a miniature zoo and a bird sanctuary. But the 1934 earthquake caused severe damage to the residence, which was eventually demolished in late 1940. Work began the following year on a new building. The Maharaja of Nepal laid the foundation stone on 1 May 1941, but a confidential despatch sent to London in February 1942 noted that construction work had been ‘sorely retarded owing to the difficulty of getting the material of the required standard through the Nepalese Government’. Eventually His Britannic Majesty’s Minister, Lt Col Geoffrey Betham, moved in with his wife, reporting in a secret despatch: “It is a magnificent two-storied building constructed on the most up to date earthquake-proof plan and is fitted with electricity and modern sanitation.” But within six years, the building’s shortcomings had become apparent, with a British government official complaining that the house was “built in the New Delhi style which is unsuitable to the climatic and general conditions in Kathmandu”. The embassy site had passed in 1858 from the East India Company to the government of British India, but with the independence of Pakistan and India in August 1947, properties formerly belonging to British India were apportioned between the new successor states. India, as the only one of them represented in Nepal, appeared to have a reasonable claim to assume title over the old British embassy, but when negotiations became deadlocked over the desire of both India and Pakistan to acquire the Kabul embassy, India opened an embassy in 1948 at the small palace of Shital Niwas, further north on Maharajgunj (today the official residence of Nepal’s president).

The Maharaja offered Britain a new embassy site adjoining the old. Rough plans were drawn up, but a political crisis intervened, with the departure of King Tribhuvan and most of his family to India.

Tribhuvan returned to Kathmandu to assume full power on 18 February 1951, promising his people a democratic constitution framed by an elected Constituent Assembly (a promise finally delivered 57 years later, when an elected Constituent Assembly ratified the abolition of the monarchy in May 2008). Inevitably, amid such turmoil, plans to relocate the British embassy were not a high priority.

Finally, in December 1951, the British Foreign Office Minister, Herbert Morrison, wrote to the Indian and Pakistani prime ministers proposing to relinquish the Kathmandu embassy to India (while the Kabul property eventually did pass to Pakistan).

Negotiations between the Nepali government and the new British Ambassador, Sir Christopher Summerrhayes, soon faced further problems. The British wished to move temporarily into Shital Niwas, effectively swapping with the Indian embassy, while they constructed their new embassy. Prime Minister MP Koirala was evasive, perhaps because he wanted Shital Niwas for his own use. Koirala instead proposed that

The saga of the British embassy in Kathmandu reflected regional geopolitics

The resident’s residence

ANDREW HALL

BEFORE AND AFTER: The old residence (below) in 1918 before it was destroyed in the 1934 earthquake and the present residence of the British ambassador.
The new British embassy was to be smaller than its predecessor. A Foreign Office report of 1948 called for a new residence "not of grandiose design, but sufficient to be representative and not to look too modest in comparison with the Indian Embassy, which will be next door".

The proposed construction cost was £66,000, but the initial plans were soon scaled down, presumably due to lack of funds. Now Summerhayes came up with a much cheaper option: to adapt and refurbish the buildings already there. He envisaged the ambassador occupying Forest House, which had been occupied by Evelyn Smythies, the Chief Forest Adviser to Nepal in the 1940s.

When Smythies left in 1947, the house reverted to the Government of Nepal, and by 1952 was occupied by Koirala. During a "mild rebellion" on the night of 22/23 January 1952, the Forest House with comparatively low walls round it was easily surrounded by the insurgents and the Prime Minister was lucky to escape.

Summerhayes reported, Koirala immediately moved to a better protected house and the site was vacated for British use later that year. In February 1953 the British Minister of Works and Khandgaman Singh Basnyat, Counsellor for Foreign Affairs, signed a sale agreement. The UK agreed to pay £11,256 7s 6d. The following month, Summerhayes handed over the old embassy to India.

"It is hoped that this was done without significant loss of prestige and the move in any case took place in a friendly atmosphere after the previous wrangles," Summerhayes reported to British Foreign Secretary Sir Anthony Eden. The Indian chargé d'affaires wrote to convey deep appreciation and thanks for the handing over of both the Embassy house and furnishings in it in such good condition.

Today uncertainty hangs over the future of Forest House. Structural surveys indicate that the building would perform extremely poorly in the event of another great earthquake, such as that of 1934. Further investigations continue to see if the building can be strengthened to meet accepted seismic standards.

Andrew Hall is currently British ambassador in Kathmandu. The views expressed here are his own.

Andrew Hall is currently British ambassador in Kathmandu. The views expressed here are his own.
The Obama inheritance

It is hard to explain to our children what the Obama win means to those of us born of an earlier generation. For many of us, the 2008 election is the completion of the fatally truncated election of 1968/69, the year of our earliest political education and, tragically, our loss of innocence in the American political process. I was all of 14 in June 1968, yet full of the enthusiasm that youthful ambition can bring to its inchoate hopes and dreams. Already it had been a momentous, agonised and decisive year.

From LBJ’s near-death in New Hampshire to Bobby Kennedy’s announcement he would run for the Democratic nomination against Gene McCarthy, through the brutal murder of Martin Luther King in Memphis, there had already been a year of profound anger and agony in American politics.

Then, in June, as I slept, with a small black and white tv at the foot of my bed, I woke with a sense of disbelief and confusion after lid fallen asleep waiting for the results of the Democratic primary in California.

Although RFK had won Indiana, Gene McCarthy had then won in Oregon and all knew the winner of the winner-takes-all California primary (so different from this years Democratic primary rules) would be the 1968 Democratic Party nominee. That victory would then most likely win this turbulent election to hopefully lead the country out of its devastating war in Vietnam and towards the fulfillment of a civil rights movement that had spluttered then burned on the streets of Watts, Washington and Detroit after King’s assassination that spring.

As I awoke staring at the tv, I realized that something had gone terribly, terribly wrong at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles after Bobby Kennedy’s victory speech. There were people weeping, crying and screaming on the screen. As I ran upstairs to my parents’ room and opened the door, one of them said, softly, painfully: “Senator Kennedy has been shot.”

40 years later, that scene still fills me with sorrow. The scars of that election, sullied by assassination and paroxysms of street violence, still wound. The end result led to seven more years of war by a presidency that ended in the resignation of both the vice-president and the president, for corruption and abuse of authority respectively.

The 2008 US election is the completion of the fatally truncated election of 1968

We had reached the nadir of American politics in our lifetime. Now, 40 years later, Martin Luther King and Robert F Kennedy may be looking down with pride on their beloved America.

This week, with the election of Barack Obama, a black and white man, a dignified, eloquent and compassionate man with a wise wife and lovely daughters who represent the best that America can offer, the ghosts of 1968 may at last be laid to rest.

The incomplete campaign of 1968 that meant so much to a teenage American has taken a generation to fulfill its natural goal, an arc of accomplishment, an epiphany of sorts.

Through this election, we can once again believe that the United States of America is a better country than we sometimes imagine, and still hope she offers an unfulfilled promise for people everywhere in this diverse, interconnected world.

For no matter how Obama governs in the coming years (and I believe it will be for the best), a long shadow of hate, discrimination and intolerance is being put to rest.

Now, when our children read of racism in To Kill A Mockingbird or hear the idealism in Martin Luther King’s I Have A Dream speech, they will know that, although it took the framework of an 18th century constitutional, a crust 19th century civil war and long decades of 20th century suffering, the fulfillment of that noble, democratic enterprise—that all men and women are created equal—has come closer in the 21st century’s first decade.

A year ago, when my family sat in Kathmandu watching Bobby, the first black American to accept his party’s nomination for the presidency, I was surprised to hear my son, Ezra, say afterwards: “That movie made me proud to be an American!”

Although it’s about a deadly political assassination, I understood Ezra was speaking of the individual lives who found a purpose through Kennedy’s inspiration and motivation. That RFK’s message touched so many people at that time gave Ezra hope and, possibly, a greater determination to do something meaningful with his own young life as well.

Maybe, 40 years later, Barack Obama has offered our whole nation, indeed people around the world, this renewed opportunity as well.

COMMENT

Keith Leslie

The global recession has hit the aid community

Aid groups say they are laying off staff or revising programs for 2009 as their income streams flatten because of the global financial crisis.

Funding experts of three of the world’s top charities—Oxfam GB, Save the Children UK and World Vision USA—said their programs will be scaled back next year.

“The growth we had assumed when putting plans together a year ago looks like it won’t happen,” said John Shave of Oxfam GB. Oxfam had envisaged five to six per cent growth over 2009-10, but has now revised this to zero.

Some of the biggest reductions are coming from corporate donors in the financial sector. “Growth from corporations won’t be as much so we won’t be scaling up our programs as we’d want to do,” said Robert Zachritz of World Vision in Washington, DC. The three agencies have an annual income of $1.8 billion.

Aid groups say they are doing all they can to prevent the cuts from affecting beneficiaries.

“We are trying to cut back on support, rather than program costs,” Oxfam’s Shave said. “Estimating a cutback of up to 15 per cent of staff at headquarters and regional centers to create more cost-effective operations.”

While aid groups worry they could be cut back on payouts from wealthy individuals.

While corporate funding is dropping off, lay-offs provide an opportunity for redundant staff from the corporate sector to volunteer for charities, putting their skills to good use. Many humanitarian and development NGOs are revising their fundraising plans.

There are some encouraging signs amid the uncertainty. Major institutional donors such as USAID and Britain’s DFID are taking a long-term view and are not pulling back.

US government funding is going to stay at the same level as 2008 according to World Vision’s Zachritz, partly because the funding cycle runs from October 2008 to the end of September in 2009, and it being an election year, Congress has paused a continuing resolution keeping US government funding steady.

But it is too early to say if this strategy will endure. According to Shave: “At the end of the day, government funding is down to governments balancing their books, and politics comes into it so it is too early to tell, but the commitments made so far are encouraging.”

Zachritz said World Vision is largely protected from corporate cuts because the bulk of the NGO’s corporate donations are “gifts-in-kind”, in other words, medicine, building supplies and clothing, rather than money.

But while financial experts have not yet seen substantial reductions in individual giving, they anticipate potential dips as they approach the holiday fundraising season.
Swapping crampons for studs

DEWAN RAI

Sherpas are known worldwide for their mountaineering skills, but now one of their number, Karma Tsering Sherpa, is carving out a different path to lead his community to the top of the Nepali soccer league.

He set up the Himalayan Sherpa Club as a ‘C’ Division team of rookies three years ago, and promptly won the division title in the club’s first season to gain immediate promotion to the ‘B’ Division. Here they again won several tournaments, and finished second—a performance which has earned them further promotion to the Martyrs’ Memorial ‘A’ Division for next season.

“Next year the league will be a test for us—but we are optimistic,” Karma says. But there is more than just the competition from other soccer teams for the HSC to overcome if they are to top the league.

Football team seeks to prove that Sherpas can do more than climb mountains

However, Karma is optimistic that the arguments will be resolved by the start of next season, which would allow the teams to battle it out once more for the top division title. “It doesn’t make any difference whether ANFA or the NSC organise the league, but it should be held,” he says. “We are depriving players of their right to play.”

Karma has been into sports since childhood. He learnt martial arts at school, and while at college established the Kamal Pokhari Sports Club. Now he is vice president of ANFA. He was also involved in student politics as a central committee member of the Nepal Student Union and later a member of Tarun Dal. “I am not active these days but I have not given up yet,” he says.

His football club has elected him president for a four-year term, and he hopes in that time to make HSC the best team in Nepal. His aim is also to develop the club’s football ground and supporters’ network. “We cannot run a club on donations and aid from well-wishers all the time,” he says.

Sherpas from across the world support the club, and its success on the pitch has attracted growing numbers of supporters from outside the Sherpa community. The club has also provided scholarships for 12 college students and two school pupils at Trungtan International Academy.

“Our players come from all ethnicities,” Karma says. “It would be better if we could discover a few more Sherpa players.”

Karma says he set up the club to prove that Sherpas are also good in management: “Though our old identity is not bad, we need to look for new identities.”

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Rajat’s lifestyle hasn’t changed, but he has.”

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Seriously wicked

A more sombre, tortured Bond is no longer playing for laughs

Quantum of Solace, the 22nd James Bond film, is Daniel Craig’s second round as Agent 007, a role which he has infused with much gravitas and somberness. With Marc Forster at the helm, that seriousness doesn’t let up: if anything it is amplified. Like Christopher Nolan’s reinvention of Batman in Dark Knight, the trend seems to be grittier, even with an element of black comedy. Even the requisite Bond girl, a paradoxical vulnerability, as if he could be killed in the first 20 minutes of the film.

Quantum of Solace could be described as an unruly outgrowth of its prequel not simply with the violence and action, but also with its political storylines and global politics that serves as a tableau for a cracking, violent tale of revenge and obsession.

Bringing in Dan Bradley from the latter Bourne films as second unit director smartly updates the action, granting a more lethal kind of cinema than its predecessors. And Quantum of Solace puts you straight into the thick of things, literally in mid-battle, with harsh edits and tight camera work.

You have scarcely recovered from the adrenaline rush before Bond is giving chase to a double agent who has taken a shot at his boss (Judi Dench as M) and is escaping through (and over) the streets of some picturesque Italian city. It’s breathless, frightening stuff. You can be pretty sure of the outcome, but somehow the direction lends Bond, bounding along like a jungle cat, a paradoxical vulnerability, as if he could be killed in the first 20 minutes of the film.

Quantum of Solace (unfairly) depends on your powers of recollection to make sense of some major plot outgrowths. James is still raw from the death of Vesper Lynd, the previous Bond girl, for whom he had momentarily hung up his cufflinks and quit the agency; and revenge for her death is the ugly undercurrent running beneath his almost psychotic pursuit of the secretive cabal, Quantum, that had blackmailed her.

Yet the slickness and glamour still a feature in Casino Royale are still left behind here. This isn’t a Bond who all but left behind here. This isn’t a Bond who...
**The Pea under the Mattress:**

**An Abu Retrospective**

14-22 November
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Subina is based in Nepal and was trained in journalism in the US and India. She has been working with documentary films since 2001. To bypass Burmese controls, Subina had to sneak in working with documentary films since 2001. To reach the area. She spoke to shocked survivors in the Irrawady Delta in May. Subina posed as a Buddhist from Nepal or government help and a week after Cyclone Nargis, were becoming desperate. Subina produced, or journalists.

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**EXHIBITIONS**

- **Divinity of the Common Life**, an exhibition by Karl Knapp and Nayantara Gurung Kakhapati, 14 November, 5:30 PM, Nepal Art Council
- **Himal Southasian magazine** presents a cartoon exhibition *The Pea under the Mattress* by Dr. Abu Retrospective and cartoons in the *Trying Times*. *The Best of Nepal Satire*, 14-November, 9AM-5PM, Yala Maya Kendra (Free Entry).
- **Once Ben a Time**, an art exhibition by Donato Rosella on 17 November at 6:30 PM with live music, Lazimpat Gallery CafeE.
- **Wij**, an exhibition of paintings by Wayne Edwards till 18 November at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Bhaba Mahal Revisited, Sunday-Friday 11AM-6PM and Saturday 12AM-4PM, 4218048
- **Chance Encounters**, a group art exhibition of artists from Bangladesh, France and Nepal till 19November, Kathmandu Gallery, Lazimpat. 9851050493

**EVENTS**

- **Thankful Bullying**, a talk program by Rakiya Nepal, 16 November at The New Era.4482888
- **3 Yala Maya Classic**, a classical music series. 17 November. 5PM, Yala Maya Kendra. 5557676

**MUSIC**

- **Tuesday Melody** at Jazzabell Cafe, Happy hour 6-8PM. 2114075
- **Passie dhe Fags** playing live on 14 November at Mohik, Pulchowk. 5526212
- **Robin and the New Revolution** playing live every Tuesday, 7PM onwards at Bamboo Club restaurant, Thamel. 4701577
- **Some like it hot** every Friday BBQ and live music by Dinesh Rai and the Sound Minds, 7PM onwards, Rs 669 at Fusion, Dwarkais Hotel. 4479488
- **HAPPY cocktail hour** 5-7PM. Ladies night on right with live unplugged music at Jatra Cafe & Bar
- **HyJazzClub** every Tuesday and Friday from 8.30 PM, Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4469800
- **Dance and Cocktails** at Cube Bar, Kamaladi. 4388017
- **Fusion and Loca** Band every Friday night, Bumi Resto Lounge, Lazimpat. 4412193
- **Rudra night** fusion and classical Nepali music by Shyam Nepali and friends, every Friday, 7PM at Le Meridien,Gokarna. 4412121
- **Fusion and Classical Music** by Anil Shaik every Wednesday, rock with Rashmi Singh every Friday, Suli & Raga with Hemant Rana every Saturday, 8 PM onwards. Absolute Bar. 5521408

**DINING**

- **Thanksgiving Celebration**, 27-29 November, K-tool Beer & Steakhouse, Thamel. 4700043
- **Thanksgiving dinner**, 27-29 November, Kilroyís Restaurant. 4250440
- **Coffee Chocolate** at the Lounge in Hyatt Regency. 4:30-6:30 PM. 4491234
- **Take away at Te Restaurant** from Bluebird Food Court and Welcome Food Plaza at Balkundire, Sanepa. 5549331
- **Salmon Delicacies** at the Rox Restaurant from 7PM onwards. Hyatt Regency. 4489361
- **Organic Salad Bar and Steak** at Jalan Jalan restaurant every Friday from 6PM. Rs 650
- **Pati Du Jour** at Hotel Sharngi-la, Kathmandu, Rs 600. 4412999
- **Pasta pesto passion†** at La Dolce Vita, Thamel. 4700612
- **Steak escape** with Kathmanduís premier steaks at the Olive Bar and Bistro, Hotel Radisson. 4411818
- **Continental and cafe item** with Live band every Friday at Vintage Cafe and Pub, Woodland Complex, Durbarmarg.
- **Home made pasta** at Alfresco, Soalte Crowne Plaza. 4279999
- **Reality Bites**, The Kaiser Cafe, Garden of Dreams, operated by Dwarkais Group of Hotels. 9AM-10PM. 4423541
- **Steak escape** with Kathmanduís premier steaks at the Olive Bar and Bistro, Hotel Radisson. 4411818
- **Cocktails, mocktails and liqueurs** at the Asahi Lounge, opening hours 1-10PM, above Himalayan Java, Thamel.
- **Retro Brunch Barbeque** with live acoustic music by Sound Chemistry, every Saturday, 12-3PM at LeMeridien-Kathmandu, Gokarna. 4401212
- **Kebabs and curries** at the Dhaba, Thapathali. 9841290619
- **iIf Epression Coffee** at Hotel Sharngi-la, Lazimpat and Mandap Hotel, Thamel
- **Socially Responsible coffee** at Himalayan Java, Thamel

When Sameer (Abhishek Bachchan) and Kunal (John Abraham) are turned down for an apartment because the landlord doesnít want two young men to compite her sexy young niece Neha (Priyanka Chopra), they pretend to be gay to secure the apartment. Everything is fine, until they meet the sexy siren Neha. They then begin on a journey of fun, frolic and a test of friendship like never before. To add to the mix, is Nehaís boss-Abhimanyu (Bobby Deol), another contender for Nehaís heart.

*Call at for show timings at: Jai Nepal 4251200, www.jainepal.com*
OFF THE RAILS: Passengers from a train that derailed on Nepal’s only railway between Janakpur and the Indian town of Jayanagar on Tuesday make a valiant but doomed effort to push the locomotive back onto the rails.

FLYING THE FLAG: The crowd waits for the competitors to appear in the XIVth Asian Mountain Bike Championships at Chobar last weekend, which were dominated by Japanese riders.

HELPING HAND: Economic journalist Gajendra Budathoki receives a cheque for Rs 50,000 from Sujit Mundul (right), CEO of Standard Chartered Bank Nepal, for his rehabilitation and recovery from a motorbike accident two months ago. Also seen is Kiran Nepal, president of the Society of Economic Journalists of Nepal (SEJON).
Whiplash in the assembly

Ex-king G is apparently looking for a good editor to get his memoir to the press for release on the first anniversary of his stepping down next year. But being quite a wordsmith (he wrote all his speeches himself while king) it does sound like he won’t need much rewriting.

Publishers are keen because they are sure it will outsell PKD’s forthcoming book is reportedly a biography. A whole chunk of the account of the palace massacre of 2001, and part of an effort to clear his name once for all.

But guess it won’t bring us up-to-date with sonny boy’s shenanigans in S’pore with wife-battering and exceeding the speed limit on the ECP in his Lamborghini.

Politics in Nepal always comes full circle, so it was a given that sooner or later the Mandits would take on Mandalay advisers. Nepal is a secular democratic federal republic, but the new baddies of the baddies are all blasts from the past: Hira Budder, Loktantra Man Singh, Ramesh Nath, etc.

So the assembly committee tasked with making rules and procedures has finally decided to allow all parties to whip their representatives into shape. The reason for the delay was that the patriarchal and conservative party bosses were scared stiff that women and janajati representatives would forge alliances that would cross party lines when they voted on critical clauses in the new constitution. The deadlock was delaying deliberations on the constitution drafting process. The parties have therefore decided to compromise, leaving out all mention of whips and leather studs from the rules and procedures.

Next week’s nationwide cadre jamboree is making so-called ‘moderate’ Maobaddies nervous. Which is why BRB has now got a fan club on Facebook, and he’s trying to sound really hardline by threatening to nationalise private schools and make Pasang C-in-C. Dr Babu has also been trying to cage the hardliners by promising them university degrees: Bachelors of War for the radicals, Masters of Revolution for those whoacked off limbs of class enemies, honorary SLGs for whole timers, and a special PhD for Comrade Terrific. With the Doc and Gaunav sharpening their knives, El Supremo may be pushed to choose between BRB and the hard core.

Whatever degree they get, the new pressure groups in town should stop calling themselves ORCs (Other Backward Classes). How can a downtrodden group ever liberate itself if it describes itself as backward?

The Ass hears Maharaja Dai and Pamphal Didi are so concerned about disenchantment within the party about nepotism ahead of their cadre confab that they met Chairman Terrifying specifically to warn him that there was growing talk of his offspring getting preferential treatment, and of Mrs Parbati padding up ministries and corporations under her command with cronies and relatives.

How will the Financial Minister ever raise revenue to fund his populist budget if his own cadre don’t ask for bills and don’t pay VAT when they buy winter tracksuits on wholesale for guerrillas in the cantonments?

And at the rate rural hospitals and education projects are being extorted, forget about the private sector: even the money that is trickling in for charity will dry up. When the YCL forced an army plane in Nepalgunj to dump sacks of rice destined for Humla and forced them to take passengers instead, it was seen as a one-off incident. But then they started terrorising the private airlines, vandalising Yeti’s office in Surkhet. The airline has stopped operating in the far west since then. The Baddle ministry of uncivil aviation is threatening the airline to resume services to remote areas or have its license revoked; the airline says no way Jose.

PKD, despite his pressing schedule, just can’t seem to turn down a launch or inauguration so he can deliver yet another sermon from the pulpit. At the 24royal National Academy of Science and Technology (NASTY) the other day, Terrifying gave these pearls of wisdom: “Science is a field where cheating is not allowed, but in politics cheating is allowed.” Huh?

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