Weekly Internet Poll  # 453. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com
Q. What is your opinion of Madhav Kumar Nepal as PM?

Total votes: 6,144
- Good: 38%
- Poor: 26%
- Avg.: 36%

Weekly Internet Poll  # 454. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com
Q. What are the chances of the UML-led coalition doing its job?

Eyes right

Nepal’s to-do list is long and daunting

ANALYSIS by DEWAN RAI

Madhav Kumar Nepal may have been chosen prime minister in the house last week, but he is on morally shaky ground because he was not elected. This puts him at an immediate disadvantage to deal with the urgent tasks of constitution-writing, peace-building and development delivery.

What is going for him is that no one really sees Nepal as a threat, and this can be an advantage. Nepal also has rapport with all political forces and can be a bridge-builder. But is he an action man? He doesn’t have much time to prove himself and get to work on his long to-do list.

In his inaugural address to the nation, Nepal laid out his priorities: peace process, constitution and development. But his speeches also exposed him as a status quoist because of his pronouncements on the army, exposing him to attacks by the Maoists who already see him as a spoiler.

And that is just the external threat. Internally, he will have to expend a lot of energy just to keep his flock of 22 parties flying in the same direction. They are already divided within and amongst themselves, not over lofty idealism but over the portfolios to be used to replenish their war chests.

There will certainly be discontents (and there already are) which will be easy pickings for the Maoists eager to bring down the Nepal coalition at a time of their choosing. Blaming MKN over his open support for the army chief could provide the perfect ruse.

Although the Maoists have expressed commitment to the peace process, their history shows that they don’t often mean by what they say. Nepal went through the motions of inviting them to join the government, but he knows they know it is not likely.

The most immediate hurdle in the peace process is to get the PLA integration wrapped up before UNMIN’s departure in July. But integration has now become even more controversial over Pushpa Kamal Dahal’s unguarded comments about inflated numbers in the Shaktikhor tape.

Aside from the development deadend, the nation is facing a crippling grain crisis because of drought and supply mismanagement. Hoarding and cartelling have sent inflation soaring.

The only bright spot in all this is that the constitution drafting committees are hard at work, drafting clauses of the new constitution. The CA secretariat is confident the draft will be finished on schedule. However for that to happen, the ethnic and regional parties must suspend their grandstanding on federalism. But they have worked themselves into such a frenzy, that the agitation is bound to spill out into the streets in the coming months. Unless Nepal can take the bull by the horns.
Towards a praetorian republic

Nepal maybe the only place where Huntington will be proven right

O
do the bestsellers list of a book fair in Kathmandu last week was a revised edition of Political Order in Changing Societies (POCS), a seventy’s classic that attempts to explain political complexities of transitional societies.

Late in his life, political scientist Samuel P Huntington gained notoriety for two of his most controversial works: Clash of Civilizations (1996) and Who Are We? The Challenges to America’s National Identity (2004). In the post-9/11 world, the Clash of Civilizations was cited as being prophetic. Actually it was a prescriptive work for a new world order in the post Cold War era with the United States as the only global power.

Huntington’s lasting contributions to political discourse are contained in two of his earlier works - The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations (1967) and POCS, first published in 1968. Of the two, the later volume is particularly relevant to appreciate the contradictions of Nepali politics and understand its dark forebodings.

Wedge between an assertive military and duplicitous politicians have little room to manoeuvre to establish peace and democracy in the country. Huntington was a ‘conformist-reformer’ policy analyst. Though a lifelong democrat, his prescriptions were invariably on the side of caution when not outright conservative. The Harvard academic preferred order to liberty because, ‘Men may, of course, have order without liberty, but they cannot have liberty without order.’

This is the theme that his student Fareed Zakaria later updated in a tract called The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad. As Francis Fukuyama notes in a very succinct foreword of the new edition of POCS, Huntington laid the groundwork for a development strategy that came to be called ‘authoritarian transition’ in which a modernising dictatorship provides, ‘political order, rule of law, and conditions for successful economic and social development. Once these building blocks were in place, other aspects of modernity, like democracy and civic participation could be added.’

From Burma to Pakistan, the Huntington Hypothesis has failed to stand, but it seems to fascinate a section of the Kathmandu ruling class. Huntington thinks that a propensity for authoritarian transition is the defining characteristic of praetorian societies. Praetorianism is a form of militarism in which the armed forces act as a corporate body to maintain control over government, actively intervening in politics to select or change the government. When social forces confront each other directly and institutional arrangements of conflict resolution are absent, security forces acquire legitimacy by default to step into the arena of civic governance. Nepal seems to be headed in the direction of Huntingtonian praetorianism.

A non-elected member of the CA who entered the legislature by backdoor has been installed as prime minister. His stature within his own party is not prominent: Comrade Nepal is neither party chairperson nor the parliamentary party leader of UML. The legality of the prime minister’s position is unquestionable, but he lacks the moral authority to have his way in the 22-party coalition of almost all anti-Maoist forces. For CoAS Rookmangud Katwal, President Ram Baran Yadav is the boss. When Comrade Nepal disagrees with that assessment, the premier would be free to follow in the footsteps of his illustrious predecessor and bow out with grace.

The collapse of governance seems to cry out for adventurous interventions. Four-induced paralysis of the Pahadi community in central and eastern Nepal, the political and economic heartland of Nepal, has become so alarming that any weak government will be tempted to mobilise the security forces to fight armed bandits. The problem with such a solution lies with the composition of Nepal’s army and police: they aren’t inclusive enough to reassure Madhesis of their true intentions. The Maoists may tacitly support military activism to undermine the credibility of state forces, but they too would ultimately be its victims when the country becomes too chaotic and outsiders invite themselves to restore order.

The antidote to praetorian experiments is the revival of consensus politics, but the two communist parties seem to be poles apart. Communists are said to be adept readers. They should grab a copy of POCS and read it before going for any confrontational politics.
The perpetuators of last week’s fatal blast at the Assumption Church in Dhobighat were terrorist, pure and simple. No religion preaches violence. No interpretation of Hinduism can justify such monstrous acts. The perpetrators of last week’s fatal blast at the Assumption Church in Dhobighat were terrorist, pure and simple. No religion preaches violence. No interpretation of Hinduism can justify such monstrous acts.

Nepal’s third priority must be economy and governance. Every day that is wasted in this regard has implications for education, health and development. Baburam Bhattarai has left the government with a vast sum of money and a finance ministry in good health. His people are working for his economic acumen, needs to appoint the right people for the right jobs and allow them to build up on that. The offer to have active channels of communication with the Maoist leadership, GP Khalis’s proposal of a high-level political mechanism is a positive one in this respect. It provides the top rung a common platform to talk things out when necessary. Madhur Nepal is the only serious leader to have publicly admitted that they made a mistake in not pushing integration before the elections. He should reconstitute the special and technical committee if necessary, but give it the political backing to continue the preliminary homework on the future of combatants. It is unrealistic to expect a final settlement on the PLA in such a political climate, but keeping the ball rolling would be good enough. The government’s second objective must be to address the political-security situation caused by multiple ethnic radicalism in eastern Tarai. The non-UML Thana must operate under serious due process with also the lack of security. The disillusionment with the political parties to shelve their differences and also the lack of

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MKN’s checklist
Nepal’s first priority must be the peace process

Madhur Nepal’s new government is going to operate under serious limitations. He has many allies to please and many debts to repay, which will reduce his room for engineering a political consensus.

There are serious doubts about the sustainability of this government, and whether it can deliver. Yet, here is a three-point checklist for the new government.

NEPAL’S FIRST PRIORITY MUST BE THE PEACE PROCESS

Nepal’s first priority must be the peace process. Those who want to derail it may attempt to do two things: block the payment of the monthly stipend to PLA in order to increase disillusionment within the Maoists, and prevent any discussion of integration. Integration has already become more difficult in recent weeks. The army is opposing it more vocally, the non-Maoist parties have become more suspicious after the video, and Maoists (sensing attack from all sides) feel the need to keep the PLA as a back up force. The new PM must resist any efforts to provoke the PLA. Making life difficult for the Maoist leadership may look like a tempting proposition, but it will boomerang and create complications. Nepal also needs to have active channels of communication with the Maoist leadership. GP Khalis’s proposal of a high-level political mechanism is a positive one in this respect. It provides the top rung a common platform to talk things out when necessary. Madhur Nepal is the only serious leader to have publicly admitted that they made a mistake in not pushing integration before the elections. He should reconstitute the special and technical committee if necessary, but give it the political backing to continue the preliminary homework on the future of combatants. It is unrealistic to expect a final settlement on the PLA in such a political climate, but keeping the ball rolling would be good enough. The government’s second objective must be to address the political-security situation caused by multiple ethnic radicalism in eastern Tarai. The non-UML Thana must operate under serious due process with also the lack of security. The disillusionment with the political parties to shelve their differences and also the lack of

ACT OF TERRORISM
I was shocked to read on your site (www.nepaltimes.com) that a church in Kathmandu had been bombed killing two people and injuring a dozen devotes. Contrary to the news article, though, this was not an unfortunate incident. It was a dangerous act of terrorism designed to provoke religious violence. Which religion sanctions attacking a sacred refuge and killing innocent people? Besides, doesn’t Nepal have enough troubles already, without stirring up a new one? Somehow it would be hard to persuade anybody that the few Christians in Nepal are a source of any serious concern. It is like shooting sparrows where wolves are hunting. Nepal doesn’t need innocent victims, you have plenty from the Maoists.

KOSI
Thank you for your exposé of the callousness of the past government in ignoring the plight of the Kosi refugees (Special Report, #452). Not only did the government fail to address the needs of the displaced people, it is failing to protect the babies in the camps and the children being kidnapped by Indian traffickers. I personally don’t expect a new coalition to do much since it is made up of the same old parties, which have three ministers from the food affected region in the previous Maoist-led coalition. Sunil Das, Biratnagar

AT A TIME TO HEAL
I never agreed with CK Lal, but have to admit that in the past weeks he has started making sense with his State of the State column. Whatever caused the change, I don’t know, but it was about time. His ‘A time to heal’, #452 is balanced and is a fair plea to the parties to shake hands, again create a power-sharing agreement, with the children being killed by Indian traffickers. I personally don’t expect a new coalition to do much since it is made up of the same old parties, which have three ministers from the food affected region in the previous Maoist-led coalition. Sunil Das, Biratnagar

Some simple steps can help improve the security situation: increase in police posts outside district headquarters, a firm direction to the CDOS and SPs that any such attacks by armed groups will face a punishment posting, strict vigilance and deterrence, providing the administration the confidence that if they resist political pressure, they will not lose out, and a constant engagement between local authorities and civil society.

Nepal’s third priority must be economy and governance. Every day that is wasted in this regard has implications for education, health and development. Baburam Bhattarai has left the government with a vast sum of money and a finance ministry in good health. His people are working for his economic acumen, needs to appoint the right people for the right jobs and allow them to build up on that. The offer to have active channels of communication with the Maoist leadership, GP Khalis’s proposal of a high-level political mechanism is a positive one in this respect. It provides the top rung a common platform to talk things out when necessary. Madhur Nepal is the only serious leader to have publicly admitted that they made a mistake in not pushing integration before the elections. He should reconstitute the special and technical committee if necessary, but give it the political backing to continue the preliminary homework on the future of combatants. It is unrealistic to expect a final settlement on the PLA in such a political climate, but keeping the ball rolling would be good enough. The government’s second objective must be to address the political-security situation caused by multiple ethnic radicalism in eastern Tarai. The non-UML Thana must operate under serious due process with also the lack of security. The disillusionment with the political parties to shelve their differences and also the lack of

against the political correctness of the times (Division of sovereignty, #452) to question the premise of federalism itself and also the lack of due process with which it was hurriedly announced. If we were going to have an elected CA, what was the rationale for unilaterally declaring Nepal a federal republic? Is Nepal a country with two minds: first, it is a discussion of the times, second, it is discussing the consequences of such a decision? This has to go to the divide and rule games that anyone complicit with the Maoists will face a punishment posting, strict vigilance and deterrence, providing the administration the confidence that if they resist political pressure, they will not lose out, and a constant engagement between local authorities and civil society.

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sales of aerated beverages and ice creams. Coke, which holds half the market share introduced a scheme of prize money worth Rs. 100,000 in spring. Its competition, Pepsi recently sponsored a rafting trip for 200 winners in a scheme for Mountain Dew. The group also markets Mirinda, 7Up and Everest sodas. The newly introduced Slice in a pet bottle has also attracted customers.

The demand graph for dairy products, especially ice cream has also seen a rise along with the rise in temperature. The trend of having ice cream as a dessert item at parties has caught on, sending the demand for milk soaring 20 percent annually. Although power cuts have affected ice cream sales in the districts, Shiyam Prasad Singh of DDC says: “Because a majority of our products go to big department stores, the load shedding has not really affected the sales.”

Arniko Rajbhandari of ND’s says ice cream has really caught on, and predicts an exponential growth if power was regular. The distributor of Baskin Robbins, Raja Rajakmarikar, says international brands have started making their mark as the purchasing power of the urban middle class rises.

PICS: KIRAN PANDAY
As the temperature hits the higher degrees, the demand for cold drinks, ice cream as well as home appliances like fridge and air conditioners have shot up. And everyone is cashing it. If only the deep fridges would work during the load shedding.

As soon as a Nepali household hooks up electricity, they install lights, a television and a refrigerator in that order. In fact ref sales have zoomed and have outstripped other electrical appliances despite power cuts. The demand for fridges has zoomed even in places like Lukla, Namche and Jomsom as rural electrification spreads, “Changing lifestyle and growing affluence has influenced the need for fridges at homes."

Four years the total annual sales of refs in Nepal was only 25,000. That figure has now doubled, and would probably have been more if there were no power cuts. Kathmandu constitutes 30 per cent of the market, the rest 70 per cent are sold outside the Valley and sales nationwide have been growing at 20 per cent a year to total Rs 800 million last year.

There are 24 ref brands in the market from LG, Samsung, Whirlpool, Hitachi, Haier to Yasuda, Sanyo, Toshiba with capacities in the 80 to 1,500 litres range.

LG offers refrigerators that don’t need stabilisers and have energy-saving technology. Ashok Kharas, senior general manager of Goldstar Nepal says LG has one-third share of the sales. The distributors of LG, Chaudhary Group has also introduced LG refrigerators.

Neck-to-neck in terms of sales is Samsung with 40 per cent of market share, according to Binaya Tripathi, marketing manager of Samsung’s distributor Him Electronics. “Affordable price, high quality, easy maintenance and good service has made Samsung popular,” he says.

Aman Agrawal, director of Ishita Trading which distributes Haier and Godrej refrigerators, says that the competition between the brands is now fierce. Haier and Godrej refs are priced in the Rs 9,000 to Rs 40,000 range.

Anil Goyanka, general manager of Tribeni Nepal says that customers should not look only at the price but also at the quality. Tribeni Nepal distributes Sanyo and Yasuda. The classic Whirlpool brand is sold by Nabin Distributors and prices range from Rs 14,000 to Rs 65,000.

Despite the electricity shortage, the market of air conditioners has also seen a surge as middle class homes upgrade from fans and use aircons also for heating. Samsung, AX, Panasonic, Yasuda, Gree, Macquae, Hilltake, York are among 12 brands that are available in the market with prices ranging from Rs 25,000 to anywhere up to Rs 200,000. Goyanka of Tribeni says that the market has grown for AC in the last five years.

Summer also means rising
**“Armed struggle is not a hobby”**

Excerpts of interview with Comrade Sushil from the Communist Party of Bhutan (Maoist-Leninist-Maoist) in Lal Salam Blog

Lal Salam Blog: What is the history of the Party?  
Comrade Sushil: The CPBM was established on the 7 November 2001, and the party has been working with the exploited people in Bhutan, mostly we work with the people in the villages.

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**“We will not stay in this new mechanism”**

Interview with Maoist leader Namgyal Kaji Shrestha (Prakas) In Janamulda, 20 May

A new government was formed without your party’s demands being discussed. How will you get your demands met now?

We resigned from the government for civilian supremacy so that the president’s unconstitutional action would be corrected. We didn’t resign just because of the struggle within the parliament. We didn’t form the government by just getting 305 or 350 votes. We formed the government by getting 385 votes. We thought pressuring the government both in the parliament and outside was necessary. And, until this unconstitutional move has been corrected we will continue our protests on the streets. The current government was formed because of our flexibility in resigning. For the sake of the peace process and constitution writing we have continued to compromise and be flexible.

How will your relationship be with the prime minister who won unopposed and with his government?

We receive and give moral support.

The Maoists in Nepal have given up their People’s War and taken a new tactic in pursuing the Constituent Assembly elections. Is this a correct tactic in your party’s opinion?

We do not think that we have given up their goals. We think they are pursuing another way, another tactic to establish a people’s state. We don’t think they have established the proletarian dictatorship. So we, our party, does not think that they have achieved state power. We too will go for a Constituent Assembly at first, and only after that can we stop or jump or leap forward to a New Democratic revolution. We think that the Maoists of Nepal face similar situations to us, and have similar actions, so we will continue to watch closely.

Last year the government of Bhutan held elections, in a very restricted and controlled way, but the western media still presented this as ‘democracy’.

The international community has its formula and they see votes and call it democracy, but there is no such thing in Bhutan and it is not possible to impose a real democracy from the outside into Bhutan. Am ‘democracy’ that the regime brings into practice itself will be done in such a way so that real power continues to be restricted and kept in the hands of the old order, and not in the hands of the mass of exploited people. When I say this it does not mean that we are militarists. The people want peace, and don’t want to live in terror but this regime suppresses and exploits the people. It is not a hobby to carry out armed struggle, it is our only option for the liberation of our people.

If you care to reach people’s war, do you think India would interfere to defend its interests?

On this the whole party is very much conscious. But in the present situation, India is not so dangerous to Bhutan. China is quite dangerous: 11,500 sq km of Bhutan’s lands have been occupied and taken by China. So we are surrounded by two very large and powerful countries who are always looking to interfere into Bhutan. Therefore the Army of Nepal has established in Bhutan. Maybe at some point in the future there will be political intervention, and we can try to counter this with our allies by raising grassroots support for our cause in India. If they try to intervene militarily it will be a heavy cost for them, a bloody and long civil war. We also want to establish the sovereignty of Bhutan, so we will always fight foreign influence, from India as well as China.

Is it true your party favours repatriation of refugees to Bhutan rather than resettlement in third countries?

We are not for resettlement, and we are not for repatriation. Moving people around like they are animals is not a solution. Some people have said our party was created to agitate for the repatriation of refugees, this is not the case. Our party was not established for refugees, but for all Bhutanese.

Act of cowardice

Editorial in Nagark, 25 May

In the bomb blast that shook the Assumption Catholic Church at Bhanimandal, Lalitpur on Saturday, two people died, including a ninth grade student at St Mary’s School. Among the 14 injured, six women, six men, and two children were in a critical state. Underground radical Hindu group Nepal Defence Army, claimed responsibility for this condemnable act.

Given that the blast took place during the Saturday service when a large number of worshippers had gathered in the church, the aim was to create terror and panic among the worshippers. Nepal Defence Army is the same group that was responsible for the bomb blast at Choli Jatimala Mosque in Biratnagar two years ago which killed three people. These criminal acts should be condemned by all and every attempt should be made to punish them by law.

The pamphlets found on the premises demanded that Nepal—now secular—be restored to a Hindu state. The act may have been committed in the name of religion but in fact, it is nothing but an inhuman cowardly crime. We have to maintain the religious tolerance that has always been a part of Nepal unity. The police and the church should be very sensitive to this issue.

The politics of today is so rooted in violence that even the criminals who have started using the mask of politics or religion as an excuse for the monstrous acts they commit. Whatever the motive, the victims are innocent civilians and such an act cannot be forgiven. Nepalis are free to practice the religion they choose. Religion should not be a reason for conflict.

What will the Maoists make in writing the new constitution?

Since the 1950s military supremacy has been established in the name of civilian supremacy. The Nepali people are still not able to make decisions for their needs. We will continue to struggle for civilian supremacy and now we have the opportunity to make concrete proposals that benefit the Nepali people.

We can’t change the situation in our country.

Certainly. We are preparing for this. Without the armed struggle, we can’t change the situation in our country. We cannot change state power.

We don’t receive any physical support, but we

So have you learnt much from the experiences of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)? Are there close or special links between your parties?

We do not have special or direct links with this party. (Prakash) In Janadisha, we discussed. How will you get your demands met?

We resigned from the government and boycotted the election is known to be intolerant towards these imperialist countries. The politics of today is so rooted in violence that even the criminals who have started using the mask of politics or religion as an excuse for the monstrous acts they commit. Whatever the motive, the victims are innocent civilians and such an act cannot be forgiven. Nepalis are free to practice the religion they choose. Religion should not be a reason for conflict.

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n Wednesday, the CA convened for the 18th time in a year and began the constitution drafting process, just five days behind schedule because of the political impasse and election of the prime minister. But only one committee, the National Interest Preservation Commission (NIPC) submitted draft concept in time for the 22 May deadline.

Although the committee said the draft was passed unanimously, differences have surfaced in the NIPC’s report regarding state structure, the system of government, and other important national defence policy, national interest and border issues. “Our first job should be to delineate fundamental issues raised in the committee,” says Pari Thapa, a member of the Constitutional Committee. “And if we agree on those issues, the constitution writing process will be completed within the stipulated time.”

The NIPC concept paper has proposed a provision of conscription for all adults and compulsory identity cards or passports for Indian and Chinese citizens entering Nepal. NC has disagreed about this concept stating it mentions preparing Maoist PLA soldiers who are over 18 for army integration.

In spite of the individual committees’ delays the day of 28 May 2010 is still scheduled for promulgation of the new constitution. The secretariat Mukunda Sharma is hopeful it can be written within the stipulated timeframe. He says the committees’ delay in submitting their reports will not affect the CA schedule. “We have allotted five days for discussing each draft concept submitted by the committees,” Sharma says adding, “Even if all committees had submitted their reports on time, they would have had to wait their turn.”

The Committee for Protection of Fundamental Rights of the Minority and Marginalised Groups has also finalised its concept, which will be submitted to the CA chair on Thursday. However, other committees are still embroiled in discussion. Sharma thinks the growing differences among political parties took its toll on the work of the CA committees. The CA sessions were disrupted by political protests, rostrum gnomes and festival breaks. The CA committees also failed to meet because of political deadlock.

“Despite all things, the committees carried out their duty of drawing up their concept draft. It takes time,” he says, “But it will not affect the scheduled date for finalising and endorsing the new constitution.”

The first five months passed with preparing and approving the CA procedure, which delayed its first sitting. A disagreement over whether the members should vote according to their conscience or follow the party whip had delayed approval of the procedure, which was eventually approved after dropping the controversial clause altogether.

The thematic committees were supposed to make come up with a draft of clauses by mid-April, but the submission date was delayed by a month. The received drafts should be debated and presented to the CA by 15 August. Thereafter, public hearings will be held on the draft up to 15 December. “Considering the present work pace of the committee, we hope to be able to prepare the preliminary draft of the constitution and take it to the public on time,” Thapa told Nepal Times.

The public’s suggestions will be incorporated and debated at a Constitutional Committee meeting before the draft is finalised and debated in the full CA session before the new constitution is promulgated on 28 May.

From an economic point of view, how feasible is it to turn Nepal into a federal state?

Tracts of government-owned natural resources in Nepal are limited to certain districts only. Eighty-five per cent of tax revenue is collected from customs offices in Parsa, Jhapa, Morang, Sindhupalchok, Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Rupandehi. Although maximum revenue is collected in the Terai, most goods are consumed in the Kathmandu. Thus, the maximum contribution to the taxes is made by residents of the Terai. Federalism will be challenging tax collection and economic activities are clustered in certain parts of the country.

How far will federalism live up to the expectations of the people with regards to economic growth, employment and development?

In a federal country, the state government is responsible for the daily administration, education, health and development of the state, while the central government takes care of issues that the state government cannot address. Federalism encourages people to be more involved in the development of their states and they reap the benefits directly. But when we talk about the development of the whole country, we also have to think about the distribution of foreign grants and taxes. This depends on the central government.

The constitution gives the states the right to formulate their economic development plans and policies. But there might be difficulties regarding resources and capabilities—skilled manpower, infrastructure, institutions are severely lacking in some regions. Development will take time, federalism will not suddenly bring about these changes.

How are the economic challenges as we enter a federal system?

The first challenge is distribution revenues raised from VAT, income tax, excise duty and other types of taxes among the states. The second challenge concerns the handing over of resources. One concern is regarding how efficient the states will be in collecting taxes on land, assets, entertainment etc., which until now has been incompetently handled by lower administrative bodies. This work is difficult politically as well as administratively. The economic and financial discipline poses the third challenge. In order to be able to utilise their natural resources efficiently, then the states need to be able to manage the corresponding budget and not allow it to line politicians’ pockets.

We do not have legal provisions regarding distribution of natural resources, and it is also going to be a challenge as it includes the issue of ownership, conservation and allotment of their benefits.

How should the states be established in consideration of the economical factors?

The basis for establishing the states should be complimentary. Our economy includes agriculture, hydropower, tourism and industry to some extent. The Terai is based on agriculture and industry, the hills have lucrative opportunities in hydropower and the mountain regions are important for tourism.

While establishing states, three economic sectors have to be taken into consideration. We need to understand two issues here, one is the transportation of goods and the other is the ease with which one can travel. Right now, Bintnagar, Kathmandu and Bhairahawa are the economically thriving districts, which cater for their adjoining regions. Therefore, in terms of economic activities, the country should have three major states.

As we establish the states, some might be affluent while others might be backward. In such a case how will we be able to achieve economic equality among them?

To ensure economic equality, two provisions can be made in the constitution. One is to fulfill the basic needs of all the states. The second is to distribute resources according to the recommendations of the fiscal commission, which prioritises issues like poverty, infrastructure and regional balance. This will pave way for granting a higher budget to weak states.

DEWAN RAI

One year to go

Political impasse shouldn’t interfere with the constitution drafting process

From an economic point of view, how feasible is it to turn Nepal into a federal state?

Tracts of government-owned natural resources in Nepal are limited to certain districts only. Eighty-five per cent of tax revenue is collected from customs offices in Parsa, Jhapa, Morang, Sindhupalchok, Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Rupandehi. Although maximum revenue is collected in the Terai, most goods are consumed in the Kathmandu. Thus, the maximum contribution to the taxes is made by residents of the Terai. Federalism will be challenging tax collection and economic activities are clustered in certain parts of the country.

How far will federalism live up to the expectations of the people with regards to economic growth, employment and development?

In a federal country, the state government is responsible for the daily administration, education, health and development of the state, while the central government takes care of issues that the state government cannot address. Federalism encourages people to be more involved in the development of their states and they reap the benefits directly. But when we talk about the development of the whole country, we also have to think about the distribution of foreign grants and taxes. This depends on the central government.

The constitution gives the states the right to formulate their economic development plans and policies. But there might be difficulties regarding resources and capabilities—skilled manpower, infrastructure, institutions are severely lacking in some regions. Development will take time, federalism will not suddenly bring about these changes.

How are the economic challenges as we enter a federal system?

The first challenge is distribution revenues raised from VAT, income tax, excise duty and other types of taxes among the states. The second challenge concerns the handing over of resources. One concern is regarding how efficient the states will be in collecting taxes on land, assets, entertainment etc., which until now has been incompetently handled by lower administrative bodies. This work is difficult politically as well as administratively. The economic and financial discipline poses the third challenge. In order to be able to utilise their natural resources efficiently, then the states need to be able to manage the corresponding budget and not allow it to line politicians’ pockets.

We do not have legal provisions regarding distribution of natural resources, and it is also going to be a challenge as it includes the issue of ownership, conservation and allotment of their benefits.

How should the states be established in consideration of the economical factors?

The basis for establishing the states should be complimentary. Our economy includes agriculture, hydropower, tourism and industry to some extent. The Terai is based on agriculture and industry, the hills have lucrative opportunities in hydropower and the mountain regions are important for tourism.

While establishing states, three economic sectors have to be taken into consideration. We need to understand two issues here, one is the transportation of goods and the other is the ease with which one can travel. Right now, Bintnagar, Kathmandu and Bhairahawa are the economically thriving districts, which cater for their adjoining regions. Therefore, in terms of economic activities, the country should have three major states.

As we establish the states, some might be affluent while others might be backward. In such a case how will we be able to achieve economic equality among them?

To ensure economic equality, two provisions can be made in the constitution. One is to fulfill the basic needs of all the states. The second is to distribute resources according to the recommendations of the fiscal commission, which prioritises issues like poverty, infrastructure and regional balance. This will pave way for granting a higher budget to weak states.

“Federalism doesn’t suddenly bring development”
Mishal Moktan is originally from eastern Nepal and moved to Kathmandu about five years ago. In that time, she has been unable to find a steady job. Many young women compromise their dignity or sell their bodies in some way to earn money in Kathmandu, Mishal says, which is something she is unwilling to do.

“Before I came to Kathmandu, I was very fat. When I lived in the village, I had to do a lot of work, so I ate a lot. Because I ate a lot, my body became bigger. I was probably 60 or 65kg then.”

“I’m not trying to lose weight now. I used to be alone, I didn’t feel like eating. I only ate Rara noodles.”

“I got ulcers in my stomach. I would only eat rice once in two or three days. I had to study a lot, too, and even though I didn’t eat, I wouldn’t be hungry. And after not eating well, I became unbalanced.”

“Now, I think a healthy, fuller body is better. Before, when I was fat, I never got fevers or got sick. The cold wouldn’t get to me. Now I am trying to gain weight! Really!”
Mishal completed a diploma course in fashion design and now studies at a college in Baneshwor. She is supported in part by an American family friend. She recently traveled abroad for the first time to work as a costume designer and coordinator for a series of music programs in Singapore and Malaysia. She is hoping she will be able to continue doing this kind of work. She has lived alone for many years in a rented room, though her father has recently joined her for an extended stay.

“Right now I am 40 or 41kg. I’ve put on about 1kg recently, within the past month.

“There is a big difference between the old me and the new me. I never used to talk and I was always afraid. But now when I run into someone on the street, I speak with them, and I have a lot more confidence.”

“In my experience, no matter how many people I meet, they all want to become slim, because it’s fashionable. They want to copy other people. All of the heroines are thin and slender. In Kathmandu, 50 or 60 per cent of girls, and women, too, want to become slim.”

“I am not satisfied with my body or my face. When I look in the mirror, I don’t like the external shape or the structure of my face. I think I look skinny, like a tall, thin bamboo shoot. I think that it was better when I was a little fat. Actually, I don’t look in the mirror much. If I look in the mirror too much, I get mad.”

“After I moved to Kathmandu, I began to realise how people perceive you. If you sit silently, people have certain ideas about you. I learned how to speak with different kinds of people. I became more comfortable with myself than before. I have a lot more confidence than I had before.”
hey have kept their pristine country out of bounds for mass tourism, ensured good governance, done huge hydro deals with India to raise living standards, nurtured cultural and national symbols. Bhutan expects to double its GDP in five years. And it doesn’t even believe in GDP, but in Gross National Happiness (GNH), the national policy that combines cultural and environmental preservation with a welfare state and guided democracy.

“We don’t want to make Nepal’s mistakes” is a phrase you hear often in Bhutan. It’s not helpful to compare because Nepal is 40 times bigger than Bhutan’s 700,000 population. Yet, officials here keep reminding you, this country doesn’t want to lose its monarchy and have a feckless democracy.

When former king Jigme Singye Wangchuk proposed GNH as a national doctrine in the 1990s, many made fun of the idea. Then, in 2006, he announced dramatic democratic reforms and stepped down to make his 26-year-old son Jigme Khesar the king.

Jigme Singye wanted to give

Taking a path less

KUNDA DIXIT in THIMPHU

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The resistants

SITA MANDEBA in DHARAN

ajendra Ispo of Dharan was employed as a soldier in the United Kingdom for 17 years. When he came back after receiving his pension in 1993, Dharan was still relatively empty. But within the last couple of years the town had become a thriving middle class residential area for ex-Gurkhas who set up their homes in the city. Visitors to Dharan were stunned by the smart houses and beautiful gardens.

Recently the houses have gradually been emptying, the gardens neglected as more than half the 10,000 ex-Gurkha families in Dharan migrate and settle in the UK.

But Ispo says he is not for settling in the UK, “I want to live a life of dignity in my own country. In the UK, I will be degraded to a second grade citizen. Why go to a foreign country to slave for others? My principles don’t allow that.”

Since the Gurkha Army Ex-Servicemen’s Organisation (GAESO) was set up, Ispo has been actively involved in the fight for equal treatment of the Gurkha soldiers. He has been trying to help the families of the remaining ex-Gurkhas in Dharan. But as most Gurkhas have left to settle in the UK, he says he has not been able to help as much as he would have liked to.

Supporting Ispo is Ram Narayan Kandagwa, who has also decided to stay back. After his pension arrived, he completed his PhD on Nepali British relations with special focus on Gurkhas. Kandagwa explains, “I am against going to the UK because I believe that we have to make a contribution to Nepali society. British society, culture, religion and lifestyle are different. Language is a problem as well. In addition, our life will be of a lower standard. My life here is good, why should I leave? There is no point.” Along with Ispo and Kandagwa other Dharan residents who have opted to stay include Ramesh Rai, Nara Bahadur Thapa and Bhaktesar Rai.
trodden

“We don’t want to make Nepal’s mistakes” is a phrase you hear often in Bhutan

his people democracy before they demanded it, and help preserve the 100-year-old dynasty by turning kings into constitutional monarchs with mandatory retirement at age 65. Officials say it was all done to ensure a calibrated democratic transition that would not destabilise the society.

The king’s move appears to be driven by a deep-seated sense of national vulnerability, and a fierce determination to preserve the Drukpa culture and counter an over-dependence on India. While Nepali politicians make public denouncements of “Indian expansionism” and try to play China off against India, Bhutan uses deft diplomacy to keep New Delhi happy and at arm’s length.

Before he handed over the throne to his son, King Jigme Singye renegiated the 1949 treaty of friendship with India and quietly removed clauses about Bhutan’s defence and foreign policy being guided by India. He had been working on this for years, cultivating a personal friendship first with Rajiv Gandhi and then with Sonia Gandhi. The king himself led his army to flush out Assamese ULFA militants from camps in eastern Bhutan, thus ingratiating himself further to New Delhi.

While Nepal just talks about it, Bhutan is set to export an additional 11,000 megawatts of hydropower to India by 2020. The idea seems to be to make energy-hungry India economically dependent on Bhutan, and not the other way around.

Bhutanis were ecstatic with the Congress win in this month’s Indian elections. Guided the Thimpu daily, Kuensel: “For Bhutan, the election results couldn’t have been better. Though no government official will say so, it is an open secret that the Bhutan government has always been more at ease with a Cong government, whose leaders right from Jozdarlal Nehru to Sonia Gandhi today, are close friends of Bhutan.”

Not all Bhutanis are comfortable with the democracy their monarch has bequeathed to them. People seem to be thinking: decay in the neighbourhood and are afraid Bhutan may also follow. Among politicians and the bureaucracy there are misgivings about an over-pious prime minister and a new aggressiveness in media.

Prime Minister Jigmi Y Thinley served as prime minister under the absolute monarchy and is now the elected head of government under the constitutional monarchy. Thinley admits to being “nervous” about making the democracy perform. He says there are no plans to establish diplomatic relations with China, hinting that this will only happen when there is a green light from New Delhi. “Bhutan’s choice of neighbours is determined by geography, we happen to be on the southern slopes of the Himalaya and we have relations with India of which we are happy,” he said.

In a refreshing departure from Nepali politicians, Thinley makes delivery a priority. During the campaign his party promised to build roads to all 205 local administrative units, provide electricity and safe-drinking water to every home, ensure every primary school is only one hour walk away and staff every district hospital with three doctors and two ambulances.

“We made huge promises to the people at election time, and it will be a big challenge to meet them,” Thinley admits.

Bhutan’s eviction of 100,000 Lhотовsampas in 1991 was a deliberate policy to ensure what the Drups felt was Nepali speakers over-running the country. By pushing democracy now, Bhutan could also be legitimising the eviction of its past. Now that the refugees are being resettled in third countries, officials here appear confident that the problem will now “go away”, despite the activities of Bhutani Maoists.

Although refugee leaders say many Lhотовsampas are still denied citizenship papers and were not allowed to vote in the last elections, Nepali speakers make up one-fifth of the MP’s and cabinet posts in the new government.

The fertile southern valleys where the Lhотовsampas lived are about to be submerged in reservoirs to generate power for India. Bhutan may be a happy country, but it has come at a cost: the mass misery of one-sixth of its population that it evicted 20 years ago. ●

The fight for equality opened doors for the Gurkhas to settle in the UK, but the towns back home are now deserted

The UK started recruiting more than 35,000 Nepalis in the British army. Every year more than 200 Nepali youths are recruited.

But there are very few who choose not to join the race. According to GAESO there are about 40,000 ex-Gurkhas, the majority of whom have chosen to migrate with their families, which totals 60,000 Nepali people. Towns like Dharam, Damak, Pokhara, Butwal, Ihalari and Pulpa, which used to have heavy settlements of ex-Gurkhas, are now almost deserted. Many families sold their houses and property before leaving.

Dharam became a thriving town, thanks to the money invested by former soldiers. The former Gurkha has established Depot Secondary School under the one-day salary program. Gurkha Savings Cooperative has operations worth Rs 110 million. The Gurkha Community Building was well attended and land worth Rs 2.8 million was bought to construct Gurkha Department Store. British Gurkha Memorial Park, a Rs 150 million project, is being constructed to encourage tourism in Dharam.

But the situation has not discouraged the ex-Gurkha community. Despite the low manpower, they are determined to carve out an identity for themselves and perpetuate the ongoing works. Those who have left also contributed to the projects.

The Gurkhas united in 1995 to fight against the British army. Every year more than 200 Nepali youths are recruited to the British army. Every year more than 200 Nepali youths are recruited to the British army.

Two men in their 40’s, having served more than 20 years in the British army, have decided not to emigrate to the UK. Former Gurkha soldiers gather at a mass meeting earlier this year (left).

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The Ex-Gurkha Organisation, women’s committee used to have 300 general members and was very active in social service activities in Dharam. Now they rarely have enough women to justify holding a meeting. Local businessmen say the mass emigration has had a detrimental impact on local businesses. Remittances have also gone down.

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The power-brokers in Beijing play a long, highly intelligent hand, driven by private consensus among a powerful few about the country’s national interests. Discerning what those takes creative thinking, an ability to do serious homework and a modicum of luck – none of which Nepal has demonstrated in recent years.

Nor for that matter, have the US, Europe or other major powers cracked China’s code and their policy towards Beijing often seems to be set on the fly. Those countries that have done well on China include those who sell it goods: Australia, South Africa, Brazil, even Angola and Sudan.

China’s hunger for minerals from those places is well known, even as it buys up US government debt and sells cheap widgets to Western consumers to pay for it all. China has leapt into Africa with bags of money and dynamism, criss-crossing a continent that the West long treated like a collective basket case. In the process many countries once considered to be moribund with war and corruption have witnessed great leaps forward in GDP and government revenues.

The trial balloon late last year by a Chinese Central Banker that speculated about ending the role of the US dollar as de-facto world currency was no accident.

In short, China is on the move. It is coping well with the global economic slowdown and decline in US and European demand. One obvious reason is that China has a robust domestic economy that buys about half of its output and is carefully developing a wide variety of trading partners around the world, including India.

China’s flaunting its naval and other military prowess, quietly encouraging North Korea to needle the Americans with claims of nuclear and missile tests and frightening its old adversary India by building sea bases in Sri Lanka, Burma and elsewhere. A blue water fleet that includes at least one aircraft carrier is a mailed fist with reach and the message isn’t lost in New Delhi, which has never signed a peace treaty with Beijing after a humiliating military defeat in a 1962 war that resonates still in Indian strategic planning sessions even today.

In Nepal, Beijing is still focussed on Tibet-related policies in the short term and access to blue water ports and markets in India in the future. That could include a Lhasa to Calcutta train, better highways and pipelines from Central Asia.

Stability here is also important to Beijing and its seeing little of that lately. Nepal needs to do many things but first among them on the foreign policy front is coming up with a sensible national consensus about China, balancing local interests as always with what Delhi expects from this country.

Given the perpetually squabbling mediocrities who dominate Kathmandu politics it’s hard to have confidence that this will happen. It’s much easier to combine carrying favour in the most rapacious way, with underhanded unilateralism. These behaviours are more typical of the men who’ve ruled Nepal for decades, through authoritarianism, democracy, civil war, royal rule and faltering peace process.

At the end of the day, China could easily decide it has bigger fish to fry than the minnows who swim the political currents in this capital. It will be to this country’s great cost but that doesn’t seem to bother anyone who aspires to power here.

Daniel Lak’s latest book is the India Express.
A night of Stevie Wonder

H e is the king of the ‘last slow dance’ and no romantic compilation album would be complete without ‘I just called to say I love you’ while many a wedding couple have smooched their first to ‘Isn’t she lovely’. This weekend the soulful hits of Stevie Wonder are being played live at a tribute concert at the Summit hotel by Dutch vocal trio Posey and the Fags and 1974AD.

This is the final concert here for trio who have been in Nepal for the past eight months, performing in various places throughout the city and teaching at Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory. Also performing on the piano is Yan from Norway.

A big fan of Stevie Wonder, 1974AD and Posey and the Fags have been deeply influenced and inspired by his music, though they are making their own musical arrangements of his songs. The Friday concert is to give Kathmandu a taste of some of his greatest songs and a chance for different bands to work together, the bands claim.

“This is also a great opportunity for Nepali musicians to learn, teach and form relationships with bands from other countries. We can learn more about different countries and their cultures” says Sanjay Shrestha of 1974AD.

Tickets are available at the Summit Hotel for Rs 1499 and the concert starts from 6.30 PM. Summit Hotel’s spit roast barbecue will also be served.

June highlights:

Mercury is at its greatest elongation westwards from the Sun on 15 June. But it’s rising less than an hour before the Sun and we are unlikely to see this planet at all, this month. Venus is rising an hour or two before the Sun, and we should be able to see the brilliant ‘Morning Star’ low in the east at dawn. On the morning of 19 June, the waning Moon will appear close to Venus.

Mars appears very close to Venus in the sky this month, so both planets will fit into the same field of view in a pair of binoculars. But the Red Planet is far further away at present, so it looks much fainter, just like a dim yellowish dot.

Jupiter is rising in the south-east around midnight, and it’s well up in the southern sky at dawn. If you can find the ‘Summer Triangle’, you will find Jupiter far below Deneb, the upper left-hand star in the Triangle. Early on the morning of June 13 & 14, waning Moon will be seen close to Jupiter.

Saturn, in Leo, is well to the left of the bright star Regulus in the western sky at dusk, and doesn’t set until well after midnight. Saturn appears brighter than Regulus, and it shines with a steady, unwinking light. On the evening of 27 June, crescent Moon will appear just below Saturn.

kedarbadu(at)gmail.com
EXHIBITIONS
❖ Festivals of the Kathmandu Valley - an exhibition by Scott Fais at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited III from May 29 to May 31, 6PM.
❖ Fair & Lovely Beauty Lies in Nepal by Liz Lance, a photo exhibition on May 29 at 5:30PM at Indigo Gallery, Talka.

EVENTS
❖ Call for entries for Film South Asia till 31 May, entries made in and after January 2007 qualified. 5552141
❖ A tribute to Stevie Wonder performed by 1974AD and Posey and the Flags, 6:30PM on May 29, 11AM.
❖ KiC Concert series IX on May 30, Yala Maya Kendra, 4PM and 9PM, Rs 100.
❖ TGIF at Jazzabella Café every Wednesday and Friday, 2110475
❖ Baja gala, every Tuesday at Mohish, 7:30 pm onwards, Pulchowk. 5025212
❖ Kathmandu express, performance by International Arts. 7:30 PM onwards with free entry at Mohish
❖ Live band every Friday and rooftop bbq everyday at Kausi Kitchen, Durbar Marg. 4227288
❖ Sunday Jazz brunch barbecue and live jazz music at the Terrace, Hyatt Regency from 12-3.30 PM. 4491254
❖ Jazz evening at Delices de France Restaurant every Wednesday, 11AM-2PM. 4263026
❖ Epic, at the Brunch: the Acoustic Lounge every Friday. Thamel. 9851035437
❖ Strings Band live every Tuesday at G’s Terrace Restaurant and Bar, Thamel.
❖ Wednesday Melody at Jazzabella Café, Happy hour 6-8PM and TGIF party with live band Epic every Friday at 8PM. 2114075
❖ Some like it hot every Friday BBQ and live music by Dinesh Rai and the Sound Minds. 7PM onwards, Rs 899 at Fusion, Dwarika’s Hotel. 4479488
❖ Happy cocktail hour, 5-7PM, ladies night on Wednesday with live unplugged music at Jatra Café & Bar.
❖ Live Sensation, performance by Yenaki every Saturday. 9PM, Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4491234.
❖ Fusion and Loozia Band every Friday night, Bhumi
❖ Resto Lounge, Lazimpat. 4412193
❖ Safari at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited III from May 29 to May 31, 6PM.
❖ Fair & Lovely Beauty Lies in Nepal by Liz Lance, a photo exhibition on May 29 at 5:30PM at Indigo Gallery, Talka.
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HAPPENINGS

HOUSEWARMING: Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal being welcomed at the official residence in Baluwatar on Wednesday, five days after he was elected to the post.

FORCES OF NATURE: A Kosi local points at the area flooded last year where three newly constructed cofferdams were again destroyed this week. Reconstruction has resumed after the rainfall ceased on Wednesday.

FOREIGN HAND: An activist lobbying against international intervention in Nepali politics and demanding timely drafting of the new constitution at a rally in Babar Mahal last week.

SHATTERED FAITH: A blast at the Assumption Church in Dhopighat on Saturday killed two and injured 15. Nepal Defence Army, a Hindu extremist group, has claimed responsibility.

DAREDEVIL: Mountaineer Appa Shrepa arrives at Tribhuvan International airport on Tuesday after summiting the Mount Everest for the 19th time and setting a new world record.
Sometrail it doesn’t feel right calling the right honourable prime minister by his Nepali initials ‘Makunay’ anymore. Despite being a communist, Comrade Nepal apparently did a tour of the temples to thank the lord for having propelled him to PMship. When the swearing-in was delayed, seems Lainchor was getting a bit antsy and inquired about what was holding things up. Apparently he was waiting for clearance from his astrologers. The delay was therefore caused by a Soothsayer and not Soodsayer.

Trust PKD to get back to his Pistachio Palace and sulk. And he couldn’t help crying sour grapes and lament that he should never have arm-twisted the JNK to get MKN nominated as a CA member and how he never imagined Nepalji would grow to be a “poisonous tree”. MKN couldn’t let that pass, and in his inaugural address retorted: “I am neither a poisonous tree nor a magic tree. I will try to be a tree that bears fruit and gives shade to travelers.” Hear-hear.

The Ass’ prediction is that it will take at least two more weeks for the UML to form a new govt, and even then it is doubtful that it will be complete cabinet. Wanna bet? If it was so difficult to agree on even Surendra P and Bidya B, imagine trying to negotiate with 22 members of the coalition. Looks like there was a formidable tug-war between Oli (backing Bidya because of his soft spot for Madan Bhandri’s widow) and Jhallu (backing Suren ‘cos he is his bro-in-law). The compromise was to give them defence and finance, respectively. The remarkable thing is that none of the big names who won elections wants to be on a cabinet led by a PM who lost, probably sensing its short lifespan. They’re all losers scrambling for a place at the head table.

The higher they fly, the lower they fall. Upadro Yadav was a Maoabaddie who was caught in Delhi, managed to get released when the two comrades he was with were incarcerated by the Indians and later deported to Nepal. A year later, he emerges in Gorakhpur to give a fiery speech to reinstate the royalty a few weeks before communal riots break out in Nepalgarh. The Madhes movement gathers strength and there is Upadro again taking its lead. He formed the MJF to leave the politics to him. Now, he should’ve known that no politician likes to be told not to do politics. Meanwhile BijayG spent the best part of the past nine months throwing lavish parties for MJF MPs to get them on his side. The investment on all the booze and sekuwa paid off. Still, last week as the bargaining gathered steam the going rate for a mid-level Forum MP was said to be 30 lakhs.