Keep door open

India’s take on the political gridlock in Kathmandu

PRASHANT JHA
in NEW DELHI

T here is a great deal of confusion in India about the political confusion in Nepal, but officials here say they want the Maoists to “reform internally” and support the Madhav Nepal government.

Sections of the Indian establishment concede Nepal’s government suffers a legitimacy crisis. They insist that the process must move forward in the present framework.

“You cannot start undermining a government as soon as it is formed. They deserve a chance. These parties represent the middle ground of Nepali politics and must be strengthened,” a top policymaker in New Delhi told Nepali Times this week.

The Indian support was expressed when Manmohan Singh met Madhav Nepal on the sidelines of the NAM summit on Thursday. Madhav Nepal, who was supposed to visit India on his way to Egypt, postponed it for 18-20 August. India sees it as a goodwill visit but expects for 18-20 August. India sees it as a goodwill visit but expects for 18-20 August. India sees it as a goodwill visit but expects...
Rollback violence

Let us build a grand alliance to put pressure on groups that incite violence

I t has been three years since a comprehensive peace agreement was signed, and a violent civil war came to an end in Nepal. But ordinary people have yet to see any peace dividend.

During the decade of conflict, Nepal’s national army increased from 46,000 soldiers to 96,000. Its annual defense budget increased from Rs 4 billion to 12 billion. Nepal today desperately needs at least 60,000 additional primary school teachers and a similar number of preschool monitors and health workers. But we seem not to have enough budget for these national priorities, while we maintain our bloated security apparatus and the upkeep of 20,000 Maoist combatants in cantonments. Another tragic development is the widespread availability and use of small arms across the landscape of Nepal. We have an estimated 55,000 small arms and light weapons in the hands of armed gangs, criminals, private militia, and ordinary citizens—far more than the small cache of weapons locked up in the Maoist cantonments.

This is leading to criminalisation of politics and politicisation of violent crimes, particularly in the Tanahun and Kuti areas, but increasingly in Kathmandu and other towns as well. The recent spate of kidnapping for ransom, murder and mayhem that have made headlines in Nepal is directly related to the ready availability of small arms, and the glorification of violence that has been nurtured into Nepali politics in the last decade.

In all post-conflict countries, including Nepal, easy availability of such arms makes legitimate law-enforcement agencies work even more difficult. While we address the culture of violence, it is urgent for us, all political leaders, civil society activists, concerned citizens, and friends of Nepal, to immediately launch a ‘rollback’ violence campaign that seeks to make the possession and use of small arms unfashionable, not just illegal. As an account that saw the soaring rise of violence in the public sphere in the course of the last dozen years, and as a country which is in the middle of a peace process, Nepal is a perfect place to start a broader campaign for disarmament and human security.

In the name of national security, many countries allocate huge chunks of their budgets to military uses that undervalue or undermine people’s human security. The continuing acceptance of violence as a method of political change further endangers not just human security, but universally accepted human rights and the prospect for faster human development.

We hear much talk about “civilian supremacy” in Nepal these days. Yes, we do need civilian supremacy where ordinary citizens feel that nobody can trample on their fundamental human rights. In a democracy, people have the right to protest, engage in collective bargaining, and press their demands peacefully.

But the concept of civilian supremacy is grossly violated when paramilitary youth groups or other formations of political parties subject innocent civilians to violence, intimidation, and extortion with impunity.

Not allowing ordinary people to live in peace, not allowing children to go to school, not allowing legitimate passengers to travel on highways, not allowing patients to go to hospitals, not allowing labourers to earn a living, not allowing small traders to open their shops, all these are a violation of civilian supremacy.

We must acknowledge that ‘structural violence’ of poverty, inequality, exclusion and marginalisation has long persisted in Nepal, but widespread physical violence in public life is a recent phenomenon and a by-product of the decade-long armed conflict. Let us build a grand alliance of civil society, including religious organisations, the media, parents and teachers associations to put pressure on political parties and other groups that incite or condone violent activities, and help our youth to find peaceful ways of addressing their concerns.

KuldChandra Gautam is former Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations, and Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF. This is an excerpt from his keynote address at the International Conference on Religious Youth Leaders on Disarmament for Shared Security in Kathmandu last week.

L E T T E R S

EAST-WEST

It brought tears to my eyes reading Kunda Dixit’s travel-blogs ‘A State of Lawlessness’. The piece describes just how much the country has deteriorated, how people have become with their rulers and how the culture of impunity is now so ingrained that people are living in fear of their own hands. This is a recipe for anarchy.

Ruchi Pandey, email

Kunda Dixit’s travelogue was a bleak book to read. It was a perfect lead-up to the current leadership to tackle the challenges of new Nepal. It looks unlikely that any big transformation will happen here soon. Political bickering and blame-game is unlikely to end at this stage. Let us hope, perhaps, that Pashupatinath will offer some wisdom and common sense to our leaders at this end.

Bhuwanesh Sharma, email

VIGILANTISM

Malika Ayal has spoken our mind (“Vigilants”, #459). The lawlessness has made us more insecure and so desperate that we are ready to take the law into our hands. But the result is more insecurity of vigilantism, anarchy, abduction, robbery and lynching. Our society has become the melting pot of recklessness, channelised violence and pessimism. What an apocalyptic premonition! Never in the past have Nepali people gone through such a period of turmoil. We are frightened. But who are we waiting for to put together the shattered pieces of our system? Can we expect hope out of such desperation, trust out of such doubt?

Sabitri Gurung, email

CORRECTIONS:

The editorial ‘Budget items’ (#459) got the name of the finance minister wrong. He is, of course, Surendra Pandey.

Rajlan M Chitrakar, who wrote ‘Where have all the zebras gone?’ (#459) is with Nepal Engineering College, and not as appeared.
Mahottari-Tarai villagers are on the verge of panic: after a long winter drought, it looks like the monsoon is also failing.

Rice transplanting should have been finished by now. This year, the paddy fields are dry with caked mud. Food has run out, and many are preparing to migrate for work.

The winter exodus to Assam, Haryana and Punjab was the norm here in Mahottari. But when the government started distributing passports from district headquarters in the mid-1990s, people began to pawn the family heirloom, mortgage the ancestral home, sell land or borrow from moneylenders at exorbitant interest rates to go to Qatar.

Qatari is a neologism in Maithili that differentiates a Nepali Worker Abroad (NWA) with seasonal migrants to India.

Out of the 6,000 population of Suga village near the Indian border, over 300 work abroad. The remittance-based economy has transformed this village in many ways even as society remains mired in caste orthodoxy and general backwardness.

Relative ease of life for even the very poor is another reassuring feature of the benefits of a remittance boom. Malnutrition still haunts Dalit quarters but the death-inducing hunger whenever the monsoon failed is mercifully a thing of the past. It’s oddly reassuring when seemingly impoverished villagers complain about the quality of rice or the price of edible oil.

More children go to ‘English Boarding Schools’. Grocers sell expensive, sometimes spurious, antibiotics. Arrack shops have sprouted on street corners and there are more motorcycles on the road. Antennas announce from rooftops that the family has an Indian cell phones. At teashops, the cacophony of ring tones of Mero, CDMA and Namaste mobiles often drown out the din of conversation as people shout into mouthpieces in the hope of being heard over weak signals.

With most able-bodied men gone, there are fewer hands left to toil in the fields. Agriculture stagnates, as people waiting to become Qataris prefer to pull rickshaws in Jaleshwar or Janakpur. The word ‘visa’ is pronounced with reverence.

The world of remittance-beneficiary families falls apart once a NWA meets with an accident. Loans with compounded interest multiply. Children are pulled out of school, the remaining land sold off. Medication for the elderly is discontinued. It takes time for the family to adjust. Human beings possess extraordinary capacity to cope, but the initial shock of losing the sole breadwinner is extremely disorienting.

Two of the dozen Nepalis killed in the boat accident in Doha on 30 June were from Mahottari. One of them was Rajiv Kumar Dutta, a boy I had known since he was born. The loss was personal; I had failed to help Rajiv find a job when he completed his post-school Auxiliary Health Worker course few years ago. His family is devastated.

Suryakanta, Rajiv’s father, was a colleague of UML General Secretary Ishwar Pokharel at RR Campus. He has remained steadfastly loyal to his party even in a village that is overwhelmingly NC. He lead the life of conscientious and proud citizen, doing his part and expecting nothing in return from either his party or the state.

The delivery capacity of a flailing state is limited. When the government machinery fails to perform even its primary function of securing the life, property and dignity of its citizens it would be too much to expect it to come to the rescue of a family that doesn’t ask for help even when it needs it.●
India confused by Nepal’s confusion

NEW DELHI - India wants the Madhav Nepal government to succeed. It also wants the Maoists to come back to the process. But in New Delhi one gets the sense that India is not able to see that there is a contradiction between the two.

Any substantive movement on constitution-writing and the peace process will require a shift in a present power alignment since the Maoists are not in the mood to join as junior partners in this government.

India wants the peace process to conclude, and it is also resistant to the idea of integrating the PLA soldiers into the Nepal Army. How can you conclude the process while still having two armies in place?

The Indian Army says there was no integration in India, so there is no need for it in Nepal. Sections of the intelligence agencies and foreign office agree. There are other relatively saner voices that recognise that token integration is essential. But these voices are lost in the anti-Maoist mood that has engulfed the power corridors here.

India wants to strengthen the “middle ground”, namely NC, UML and pliable Madhesi parties, and weaken the Maoists. But paradoxically, it also recognises the necessity of working with the Maoists. The two goals can be pursued simultaneously up to a point, but then will work against each other.

To weaken the Maoists, India will have to try to engineer splits within the party, create disillusionment among the cadre and block any attempts of Maoists to consolidate power. As soon as they do that, India and Maoists will have to engage in a genuine relationship. The present crisis is only a manifestation of that.

Add to this maze the presence of multiple actors, each with their own concerns. MEA, RAW, IB, the Indian Army, and the political actors: all have a say in framing policy.

On 19 June, the Bihar Police and Special Task Force nabbed a Nepal-bound truck that had left from Kodarma in Jharkhand. Bihar police sources told us it had 18 sacks of explosives, 81 packets containing 100 detonators, two sacks of safely fuse wire caps, and 10 packets of fuse wire attached to detonators.

Six people were arrested. One of them, Ram Parvesh Mishra, is the brother of Indian Maoist political bureau member Pramod Mishra. Two people (Dikwak and Raj Kumar Yadav) are Nepalis from Siraha. Security sources claim interrogations have revealed that 14 such trucks of explosives have already been transported to Nepal. They suspect that Manicka Yadav, with the collusion of the hardliner faction of Maoists, could be amassing weapons.

We can cash in on our community forestry success, but first we need to get our act together

DEWAN RAI

In the past 20 years, the forests in Nepal’s midhills have expanded by 20 per cent because of the success of our community forestry. Those trees absorb carbon dioxide and contribute to the reduction of global warming. The question is whether Nepal is eligible to reap rewards for its contribution to mitigating climate change.

Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) is the international mechanism through which countries that restore forests can be recognised and rewarded for greening their landscape. The scheme is also on the agenda of a big climate change conference in Copenhagen in December.

However, there is intense debate about which countries are eligible, what are the threshold levels of reforestation for qualification and what are the conditionalities.

“We have a lot of work to do before the scheme is embraced in Copenhagen,” says Jagdish Chandra Baral of the Department of Soil Conservation and Watershed Management.

Thirty per cent of Nepal’s land area is covered with forest or shrubs, and 20 per cent is set aside as national parks. Community forests have expanded the canopy cover in the midhills, but forests have been decimated in the Tarai and the high mountains by cross-border timber smugglers and population pressure.

There are 14,300 community forestry user groups all over the country protecting 1.2 million hectares of forests: more than one-fourth of the total forest area. The community-protected forests sequester 188 million tons of carbon, according to a survey by the Livelihoods and Forests Program.

The total amount of carbon offset that Nepal can realise from community forestry alone is between 1.8 to 3.6 million tons per year, and this means the country could earn anywhere up to $54 million a year in green brownie points from a future agreement coming out of the Copenhagen Summit.

However, we may be counting our chickens before they hatch. Nepal does not get compensated if $600,000 a year for the carbon it doesn’t pump into the atmosphere because of its successful biogas program. But there are still too many uncertainties about reducing emissions through forest.

“By helping us, Nepal has to prepare measurable, reportable and verifiable reductions in emissions,” explains Urmee Manandhar of the Worldwide Fund for Nature office in Kathmandu, “the mechanism will also need adequate and reliable funding starting immediately. Developed countries should commit to providing such funding in Copenhagen.”

If Nepal gets this aid, it could set up a backyard for conservation, maintenance and management of its forests. The money will also be an encouragement to protect existing forests and for extending community forestry.

Experts say a lot will depend on how the compensation for mitigation is calculated, how the baseline is defined, Nepal’s community forests aren’t eligible for carbon credit under the present interpretation because they have a stock of only 1.8 tons per hectare per year, which falls below the threshold.

Says Baral: “We need to make alliances, negotiate skillfully if we want to get full credit for our carbon stock in our forests.”

Countries like Nepal also need technical support to develop carbon inventory systems. There should be government bodies to regulate carbon financing, verifying, assessing and quantifying carbon stocks and offsets. There is also a question of who benefits from the credits.

Nepal has already got $200,000 from the World Bank’s Forest Carbon Partnership Facility for a Readiness Plan (ID loan and $3.4 million has been pledged to fund a Nepal carbon credit.

The government has also been too distracted with politics, so carbon credits and climate change is too far off in its time horizon. Said one official at the Ministry of Environment: “The coordination between the ministries is not a problem, politics is. Politicians go on junkets to summits, and there is no policy continuity.”
Easy trade
To facilitate trade, finance and remittance between Nepal and China, Evergreen Bank, in a cooperation with the Bank of China has opened a Nostro Account, which allows Nepali traders to open LC and to transfer and receive money directly to and from China.

Vision tour
Natraj Tours and Travels organised a tour for 30 visually impaired people last week, marking the 10th death anniversary of late PP Prasad, the founding member. Pledging ‘Tourism for all’, the participants were taken for visits to Bhaktapur and Nagarkot. Another such program will be held on 17 July, where the participants will talk about their experiences during the tour. They will be judged on the quality of their speech and the winner will be awarded a mountain flight ticket.

Lucky two
Winners of the fifth lucky draw for Pepsi’s campaign ‘Make your Dream Team’, Rukesh Shrestha and Bikash Bhushal of Kathmandu, collected Pepsi crowns featuring international footballers and won a free trip to Bangkok and Pataya at an event in Kathmandu last week.

Free fix
Mercantile Office System Darbar Marg organised a free service camp for EPSON brand products earlier this week. Besides offering free service, it also trained its customers in the proper handling of their EPSON equipment.

NEW PRODUCTS
DIGITAL: Golcha group’s Him electronics has launched Samsung digital cameras. With mega pixels ranging from 8 to 10.2, the cameras have three inch LCD, optical zooming, high sensitivity ISO 3200, dual image stabilisation and auto contrast balance.

Bad joke
The budget has become an annual and tired ritual
Guy Ullens is a Belgian businessman. In the early 1970s, he took over his family’s food empire, and turned the troubled conglomerate around. Just prior to his retirement in 1999, his Artal Group bought a majority stake in Weight Watchers from food giant H.J. Heinz. His philanthropic work around the world includes the Ullens School in Kathmandu. Nepal Times asked him about his business empire, his interest in art and his support for education in Nepal.

Nepal Times: You turned around your family business in Europe. How did that happen?
Guy Ullens: It was always about finding good people, and letting them produce the results. Putting good people to work, working with them to solve problems that come up, setting priorities, and having a sense of what is coming up are all important. Then again, life is difficult, and you never know what is going to happen tomorrow. But once you make up your mind to do something, have good people at every level, and you get to work. This was how I was able to do my work. I see many such good people everywhere in Nepal, waiting for opportunities.

And you also set up a school in Nepal?
As an entrepreneur you really go step by step. You test the water all the times. My knowledge of the country is not what it should be. While my wife Myriam was working at an orphanage in Kathmandu, I thought about looking after a public school where the children from orphanages could go. We looked for schools in the Dhulikhel area. Somehow, those schools did not work out and we set up the Ullens School.

But there is a perception that Ullens is a very expensive school catering to wealthy kids in Kathmandu.
I think that the school needs to communicate more to the public what it is and what it isn’t. I think that our team is the best to run this school. We have an active board, which monitors the quality of the school. Around 30 per cent of our students come from an underprivileged background.

Ullens is the first school in Nepal to introduce the two-year IB (International Baccalaureate) programme. Why should Nepali students be interested in IB?
The quality of the IB courses is heavily dependent on the quality of teachers. Other systems such as ‘A Levels’ and ‘Plus Two’ have their benefits. What is unique about IB is that its grading system is such that you know where you stand globally. And the students’ grades give us a clear indication on how well our teachers teach. This knowledge is important for objective quality control, and we can use the feedback to further train our teachers. When our students with strong IB grades apply to universities abroad, their IB grades send a strong signal that they are good students.

Can Nepal ever be a quality educational destination?
I think the key requirement in Nepal is peace. If the Nepalis can settle their differences, set up priorities for the future, and agree on them, that will help. Else, if we start good high schools and colleges, and we continue to have political problems in the country, we will be unable to succeed. This country is waiting for investments, and for many foreign firms to come in and set up factories and companies. That is all part of the future and there is no reason why Nepal should not reach this point for growth and prosperity.

Nepali history and especially the tax-base. When expenses are said to be economic, one often asks who funds the budget. In Nepal, it has come to mean distributing the money. But if private firms themselves misuse the budget, it wouldn’t make sense to hand companies binges on the budget’s success.
People in government need to realize that they have made this budget a ritualistic affair to the extent that it has lost its effect. Money is given to agencies saying that it will have to work with the government to help implement and evaluate the budget. But if private firms themselves misuse the budget, it wouldn’t make sense to hand

ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beeed
Everyone in the government, bureaucracy, politics, private sector and other sectors who keeps on commenting about the budget needs to go through a Budget 101 lesson. A budget is part of the greater apparatus of fiscal and financial management, that also includes the oversight and evaluation of programs and expenses laid out in the budget. To expect the budget to be an economic cure-all is totally ridiculous. More than allotting money, budgets should garner resources, create and implement strategies. But in Nepal, it has come to mean other things. For government employees, it’s a source for salary increases. For politicians, it’s a way to dole out favors. For the private sector, it’s an announcement of tax increases or cuts. One cannot expect much from the political parties as there are few who really understand or appreciate economics. Therefore the lead on the budget preparation should also be taken by the private sector. It needs to work with the government to help implement and evaluate the budget.

The budget has become just an annual and tired ritual. The reality is that no government in Nepali history and especially the ones formed after 1990 have been able to meet the obligations set out in the budget. So why have we expected so much of our last two governments?
www.arthabeed.com

Nepal Times: You turned around your family business in Europe. How did that happen?
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There is no reason why Nepal can’t prosper
Guy Ullens is a Belgian businessman. In the early 1970s, he took over his family’s food empire, and turned the troubled conglomerate around. Just prior to his retirement in 1999, his Artal Group bought a majority stake in Weight Watchers from food giant H.J. Heinz. His philanthropic work around the world includes the Ullens School in Kathmandu. Nepal Times asked him about his business empire, his interest in art and his support for education in Nepal.

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Incomplete budget

In Janaadhi Shapahik, 14 July

Maoist Chairman Prachanda expressed discontent over the latest budget that was announced last week as no provisions have been made for the martyrs of Jana Andolan II.

The budget made under the guidance of UML ‘leader’ Madhav Kumar Nepal and under the shadow of the Indian government is useless. In his three hour speech on the budget, Finance Minister Surendra Pandey didn’t so much as mention the 10-year-long ‘people’s war’, completely undermining its importance. The Maoists had planned to provide the families of the martyrs of the 2006 April Uprising Rs 100,000 annually, adding up to Rs 10,00,000 in 10 years, but this is not included in the new budget.

This budget is only a more revised form of the old development campaigns of the early 1990s. This shows that the current government of Nepal is not heading in a new direction.

This time’s budget is set to be 285 billion, which is much more than the ones that the Maoists had made last year. It however seems to be allocated disproportionately. For instance the Rs 8 billion set for agriculture will be of no use without proper mobilisation. The government hopes to raise the foreign grant-in-aid by 63 per cent. With an unstable government this is objective is not likely to be met.

Right priorities

Editorial in Nagarik, 10 July

While the politicians in Kathmandu are busy squabbling, 34 people in Jajarkot and Rukum have died because of diarrhoea and dysentery. It’s a shame that even in the 21st century people lose their lives because they cannot get treatment for easily curable diseases. This area also suffers from severe famine. The government has tried to address these problems but the efforts have not been effective because of a lack of commitment on the part of the political leadership. And now the death toll is rising.

This situation would not have arisen if the government had been attentive. Diarrhoea and dysentery spread through polluted water. While the villagers don’t have food, sacks of rice rot in the district headquarters. In order to effectively control this situation there is a need to not only provide treatment and medicine but also make provisions for food supply.

The health minister and high officials have already visited the affected areas but there have been no serious initiatives to combat the problem. This unfortunate condition is possibly the result of the lack of importance our politicians give to non-political issues.

Officials say that food and medicines are stuck at the headquarters because there is no way to transport them. But the government’s priority should be to deliver medicines at any cost, even if that means chartering choppers. Security forces can be actively mobilised for the purpose.

The government has to make it a priority to address the basic needs of Jajarkot and other affected areas. The civil society and the international community should contribute when the government makes plans. We have to end a situation where people die because their basic needs for food and medicine are not fulfilled.

Action now

Editorial in Nepal Samacharpatra, 14 July

The budget that the finance minister presented for the fiscal year 2009-2010 in the parliament on Monday is the biggest one so far, amounting to 285 billion. While the main focus of the expenditures should be on the marginalised communities, the budget should also make sure that no Nepali citizen is left behind. This budget does address the needs and development of the groups that have thus far been discriminated against. The budget also focuses on ways to tackle inflation, which is a positive step. But this is a country where leaders put the interest of their political parties before the people all the time. There’s so much political corruption that we fear that these positive plans will not be translated into action. Time will tell whether the present government has the wisdom, political will and foresight to implement such an ambitious budget.

Kinglike

Akhanda Bhandari in Kantipur, 12 July

A few days back former king Gyanendra lamented Nepal’s situation saying how little things have changed since he left and Nepal was declared a Ganatantara. The ex-king’s words rang true last week when Kathmandu came to a standstill for the president’s ‘sawari’ reminding the residents of the royal years. Kathmandu’s traffic was disrupted for five hours that day, and people could neither walk on the streets nor move their vehicles. Incidents like these make Nepalis question whether things have actually changed since the king left.

People feel let down by the very person they thought would end such traditions. It is true that the president needs security but the government must not harass its citizens while providing such facilities. Instead of stirring up this chaos on the roads, the president should have been picked up by a helicopter. This could have been cheaper, saved people trouble and the president all the criticism.
The Maoists should convince their ethnic fronts or step back

Initially, the Maoists succeeded in bringing ethnic issues under the class struggle but could not contain it for long. Maoist leaders themselves admit that it is the Maoist movement that gave rise to various ethnic organisations after restoration of democracy. From Utpal Yadav to Jaya Krishna Goi, they are all ex-Maoists. Now, this has opened a Pandora’s box of militant ethnic groups that are not under the command of the Maoists. However, they are not free from Maoist ideology. For instance, Laxman Tharu of Tharu Autonomous Province Council, an ex-Maoist has been demanding that the provinces should be created on the basis of ethnicity and their history and they should be given the right to self-determination like the Maoists had demanded. The Limbuwans in the east are also demanding a state of their own like the Maoists had demanded. The Maoists have petitioned the right to self-determination in the context of colonized countries, allowing them independence. Third, the ILO Convention’s Article 169 provides the right to self-determination for indigenous nationalities to preserve their ethnic, linguistic and cultural identity.

This article says the Janajatis have the right to ethnic autonomy but not the right to separate from the state. The Maoists are advocating Lenin’s self-determination model, Chairman Prachanda in his political documents. The Maoists say that right to self-determination and autonomy lead the country to fragment. They are orthodox as those who think all women will leave the family and become more accommodating.

“The Maoists raise issues, not solutions”

Ram Krishna Chittrakar, CA member from Nepal Congress, Kathmandu

How much of the constitution have you written? The work hasn’t been properly done, even after the schedule has been revised four times. The Constitutional Committee and subject committees have finished their deliberations and preliminary drafts by 22 May, but that didn’t happen. All in all, the drafting bodies aren’t working as they should.

What does your committee do? My committee will decide the country’s new justice system. We’re getting information from experts on the subject, the parties and those who will have a stake in that system. We’ve had 18 meetings under committee president Prabhu Shuh, but we haven’t made much progress, partly because the Maoists keep raising new issues without proposing solutions. Sometimes they say the power to appoint and sack judges belongs to the parliament, other times, the president. Congress and other parties think both options suggest an improper separation of powers. The Maoists also say that each province/state should have their own high courts but we say they should only have their high courts. They argue that the parliament should interpret the constitution and we say the Supreme Court should. They want to destroy all existing structures, but we think we should preserve the good ones.

Will the constitution be written on time? Not unless politicians and CA members change their mindsets and become more accommodating.

Do you think you accomplished less than you could have this year? I’ve been working as hard as I could have, but the politicians should treat the constitution with more urgency.

What’s delaying the constitution writing process? Political instability, the lack of determination of the part of politicians to fulfill their election proclamations, inattentiveness among CA members, ineffective drafting mechanisms and poor time management.

The Constitutional Committee is leaderless. Will this affect the constitution? That committee won’t have work until the subject committees finish their drafts, so for the time being, at least, it doesn’t matter. But, the politicians better work things out soon.

“Elected to write, not quarrel”

Bhakti Devi Khabas, Nepali Congress CA member from Morang

How much of the constitution have you written? First, we went to the villages to ask people what they wanted in the constitution. We’ve finished our deliberations and are currently preparing a draft. Two other committees have finished their discussions and five have submitted drafts. Those that haven’t finished their drafts are working hard to do so quickly.

What does your committee do? I’m in the Capacity Enhancement and Resource Management Committee. Although we’re not writing a draft, we’re helping others to draft. Other committees have finished their discussions and five have submitted drafts. Those that haven’t finished their drafts are working hard to do so quickly.

So will the constitution be written on time? We’re already behind schedule and yet the politicians continue squabbling. How, then, will we finish the constitution on time?

What’s delaying it? Besides the wrangling, it’s being held up by the lack of peace and security and the dispute over the AUD.

How was the last year spent? I’m not satisfied with the work we have done. As soon as a government is formed, everyone else stands in protest. People forget that we were voted into the assembly to write the constitution, not quarrel endlessly.
or a culture that reveres the dog as the gatekeeper of Yamaraj, Kukur Tihar is perhaps the only day they are treated well. If one were to judge the status of a society by the way it treats its animals, Kathmandu’s will perhaps rank the lowest. Stray dogs are beaten and kicked around, they walk around with gaping open sores or skin disease and scrawny puppies go from one shopfront to another foraging for food.

Worst of all, there was a time when the city fathers used to poison the local canine population in order to control the spread of rabies. Lumps of food laced with strychnine used to be strewn about, and the dogs faced a terrible fate as they writhed in pain for hours and even days before they died.

Much of that has changed. Along came an organisation called the Kathmandu Animal Treatment Centre (KAT), which preferred to term the strays ‘community dogs’. In Nepali, that would be ‘samudayik’ communities come to the rescue as dogs languish in the streets

FINALLY HOME: Scrawny Lucy when she was initially found by the KAT centre turns into a stunning beauty after the treatment (top). Malnourished and mangy Mango when she was first captured by the KAT centre, bathing during recovery and finally a plump and healthy dog after the complete treatment (bottom).
Dogs for adoption:

Name: Seti
Age: 3 years
Sex: female
Contact: Bal Krishna Bhujel, 9841241040

Name: Thamel
Age: 2 years
Sex: male
Contact: KAT Centre, 4373169

Name: Kelly
Age: 5 months
Sex: female
Contact: Bal Krishna Bhujel, 9841241040

Name: Khairi
Age: 4 and half months
Sex: female
Contact: KAT Centre, 4373169

Name: Nani
Age: 1 and half years
Sex: female
Contact: Bal Krishna Bhujel, 9841241040

Name: Pangre
Age: 3 and half months
Sex: female
Contact: KAT Centre, 4373169

Name: Kale
Age: 3 months
Sex: female
Contact: Bal Krishna Bhujel, 9841241040

Name: Sango
Age: 4 years
Sex: male
Contact: KAT Centre, 4373169

Name: Chirke
Age: 2 and half years
Sex: male
Contact: KAT Centre, 4373169

Name: Chiple Kale
Age: 4 years
Sex: male
Contact: KAT Centre, 4373169

At KAT, the dogs are vaccinated, dewormed and sterilised. The canines are then kept as guest for five-six days, and released back to their original neighbourhoods, healthy but sterilised. This is how successful ABC programs have been organised, from Jaipur to Rio, and the program has begun to assume the shape of a success in Kathmandu, thanks to a healthy sense of cooperation between the Kathmandu Municipality and KAT.

There are a total 20,500 street dogs within the Ring Road, and KAT has sterilised and vaccinated about 1,500 each year over the last six years. The organisation started its work north of the city centre and is spreading out in all directions and down towards the Bagnati. The funds required for KAT’s functioning (about Rs 1,500 per dog) comes entirely from dog-lovers in Nepal and canine support organisations overseas, such as the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA).

The entertainer Hari Bangha Acharya is chair of KAT, and his alter-ego Madan Krishna Shrestha is a member. Says Hari Bangha, “We used to be deeply hurt when we used to see the poisoned animals in such pain, and today feel a sense of satisfaction that KAT has evolved as such an effective organisation.”

Anil Roubhantis is the program officer of KAT. He emphasises that KAT is not a dog pound that houses canines, instead it is a treatment centre which has a link to the neighbourhoods from where the dogs are brought. “We are very happy that we collaborate with the Kathmandu Municipality, because this gives us access as well as continuity to our work,” he says.

The result of KAT’s work in its area of operation is beginning to be evident. With the decrease in the number of dogs, the locals are being much friendlier towards the canines if found. A resident of Narayan Gopal Chok, Vinayak Tamang, says he can see the difference. “The number of litters has definitely decreased as the dog population has gone down,” he says. “The quality of life of the dogs also seems to be much improved now.”

At present, the KAT staff is working overtime with the Kathmandu Municipality and some other organisations as part of the Alliance for Rabies Control Campaign. Over the last three months, they have caught, vaccinated, colour-sprayed (as a marker) and released nearly 2500 dogs. The program was supported by WSFA, which in its website speaks of the ‘amazing results’ achieved by the KAT Centre of Kathmandu in addressing the matter of community dogs.

In a country where little happens, and where there is loud trumpeting for little that is done, KAT Centre seems to be an organisation that works quietly – until it is found out!
Next week’s total eclipse of the sun is being touted by astronomers as the event of the century, the longest total eclipse. And we in Nepal have a ringside view of it as the umbra races across from Janakpur to Ilam on the morning of 22 July.

The rest of the country will witness a partial eclipse, ranging from 96 in Kathmandu to 75 per cent in western Nepal. In Kathmandu where the eclipse will start at 5.45AM, reaching its climax at 6.42AM and ending at 7.45AM. In Pokhara the eclipse will first appear at 5.46AM, end at 7.44AM, and reach its maximum extent, obscuring 93 per cent of the sun, at 6.42AM.

The only problem, of course is that we are in the middle of the monsoon and mornings are usually overcast, but even under the clouds there will be total darkness for nearly four minutes.

But if you want to get even more up close and personal, you fly above the clouds and ‘chase’ the eclipse. Buddha Air is “pre-poning” its daily mountain flight to 6AM on Wednesday to take passengers above the clouds to see Mt Everest in the darkness, silhouetted over partial sunlight over the Tibetan plateau.

“Because it is such a unique cosmic event, we have decided to bring forward our regular mountain flight by an hour to be able to combine the eclipse with Everest,” says Rupesh Joshi of Buddha Air, which plans to have at least four of its Beechcraft 1900D planes up in the air to meet the demand from tourists.

Buddha has also got permission from the civil aviation authorities to fly at 30,000ft, instead of the normal mountain flight altitude of 22,000ft. “We want to make sure that we are above the clouds,” says Joshi. Those who can’t afford the Rs 7,000 ticket for the one-hour flight will just have to cross their fingers that the clouds will part at the time of the eclipse. Going up to a mountain-top like Pulchoki or Sarangkot may not help since monsoon cloud cover is even thicker there.

ECLIPSE VIEWING DO’S AND DON’TS

- Don’t ever view the sun directly, even during a partial eclipse
- Use certified glasses or filters
- Don’t use sunglasses, photographic films, slides, x-rays or any other dark lensed device
- Prolonged viewing is dangerous

Buddha Air, 5542494
buddhaair@buddhaair.com
As the day of solar eclipse draws near, nervous, hasty, last minute appointments are being made with astrologers all over the country, and phones are ringing off the hook at tv stations that have live astrology programs.

On 22 July just after sunrise, southeastern Nepal will plunge into total darkness. The whole of the country will be under a partial eclipse. For many Nepalis steeped in superstition, this is a bad omen. They want their zodiac sign examined for do’s and don’ts, the future predicted and their karma settled.

There was a time when Nepalis wanting to have their futures foretold would have to wait for days for an appointment with an astrologer. No more. The proliferation and popularity of phone-in astrology programs on tv suggests many people now have their questions answered from the comfort of their rooms. Who wants to call a tv station to request a music video when your karma can be read to you on the phone?

No one could have predicted when these shows started two years ago that they would go to such a big phenomenon. Today astrology show hosts hardly have time to sit still during their one-hour show. The phones ring continuously.

S Suneel the host of Image Channel’s ‘Janam Kundali’ laughs as he says he couldn’t have predicted how successful his program would be. “The daily hardship has made people insecure and impatient and getting helpful hints about the future gives their lives some stability,” he explains.

Basudev Krishna Shastri is the best-known tele-astrologer, and is known fondly as “laptop jyotishi” by his fans. He wears a daura suruwal, topi and sits behind a computer for his live show on Kantipur Television every morning. He takes at least a dozen calls and dispenses advice after callers tell him their time and place of birth. “The show runs well because it is more feasible and less time consuming for people to make a phone call,” Shastri says.

Even as society moves towards a more modern, rational lifestyle, Nepalis seem to believe even more in astrology. Experts say this is perhaps because astrology has a scientific base in astronomy and the movement of the planets vis-à-vis the constellations.

Validating this to an extent are the various astrological tools, software and formulae astrologers use. But the debate between astrologers and astronomers continues. Jayanta Acharya, Professor of Astronomy puts it bluntly: “People are put under an illusion that these things have a scientific basis but they don’t, so we should stop wasting our time going to astrologers.”

But astrologers say there are many things that astronomy and rational science can’t explain in nature, and astrology has a proven track record through history of determining an auspicious time based on the movement of heavenly bodies.

And scientific or not, astrology seems to fill a spiritual void in people’s souls that modern, materialistic life can’t.

Proof is the growing popularity of the phone-in shows where callers range from 10-year-old school goers to 60-year old retired grandparents.

Ram Chettri, Professor of Sociology at TU explains the reason behind the popularity of tele-astrology is because materialism has failed to answer people’s existential doubts, and also that the Nepali people are deeply religious.

He adds “Astrology fills the gap, it provides answers. It doesn’t matter whether it is true or not, it provides spiritual solace.”
Climate change bailout

War and the financial storm have blinded us to the climate crisis

MAURICE STRONG

BEIJING—A recent study by the Global Humanitarian Forum, headed by former United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan, postulates that the economic and human costs of climate change could now amount to some $1.25 trillion dollars per year and the loss of 300,000 lives. Many more are being increasingly affected, mainly the poor.

The financial measures that must be devoted to the successful achievement of climate security go beyond anything yet being seriously considered by the more developed governments and demanded by China and developing countries. This will not simply be one lump sum, but a package of firm commitments over time initially adding up to an order of magnitude of at least US $1 trillion dollars.

If the figure of trillion dollars and beyond seems unrealistic under today's conditions, we must be reminded that it is only under today's conditions, we must be reminded that it is only the order of magnitude of at least US $1 trillion dollars.

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DEVELOPMENT

BEIJING—A recent study by the Global Humanitarian Forum, headed by former United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan, postulates that the economic and human costs of climate change could now amount to some $1.25 trillion dollars per year and the loss of 300,000 lives. Many more are being increasingly affected, mainly the poor.

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BELING—A recent study by the Global Humanitarian Forum, headed by former United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan, postulates that the economic and human costs of climate change could now amount to some 125 billion dollars per year and the loss of 300,000 lives. Many more are being increasingly affected, mainly the poor.

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If the figure of trillion dollars and beyond seems unrealistic under today’s conditions, we must be reminded that it is only a portion of what the United States alone has spent in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and in current attempts to bailout its major financial institutions and revive its flagging economy. The climate change crisis is in even greater need of a bailout than the economic and financial crisis, though both are inextricably related.

We are the wealthiest civilization ever. Can we really accept we can not afford to save ourselves and future generations?

Fortunately, the problem is more tractable now that we can manage our civilization more effectively with our increasingly sophisticated information technology. Resource-poor Japan and Korea, for example, have built their success on the development of advanced technologies and high rates of investment in educational and research capacities. China too is fast becoming a knowledge and technology based economy. But there is still work to do.

First of all we need a new economic paradigm which integrates the disciplines of traditional economics with the new insights of ecological economics. This “new economics” must provide the theoretical underpinnings for a system that incorporates into economic pricing and national accounts the real values of the environment and services which nature provides. It must include fiscal and regulatory regimes with positive incentives for the achievement of economic, social and environmental sustainability.

In a market economy which drives the processes of globalization, the market provides the signals that motivate sustainable development. This means shifting taxes to products and practices which are environmentally and socially harmful from those which are least harmful. In effect, getting the prices right. No nation can do this alone without disadvantaging its own economy; it can only be effectively done within an internationally agreed framework.

The forthcoming meeting of the parties to the Climate Change Convention in Copenhagen (December 7-18) will be one of the most important and one of the most difficult international agreements ever attempted. It is an ominous paradox that as our future depends on unprecedented levels of cooperation we are experiencing growing competition and division, motivated both self-interest and differing values.

At the same time, there’s little evidence that governments are prepared to undertake the kind of commitments that will lead us to this new era. The countries, the organisations and the people participating in this dialogue will clearly have a critically important, indeed I would say decisive, role to play in Copenhagen.

Let us all give this the highest priority in our own lives that we expect from governments.

T he recent death of pop icon Michael Jackson has generated many tributes to his life and work, but perhaps the most honest and probing of these is a piece of work he created when he was still alive. Coming out in 1988 when Michael Jackson was at the height of his career (or soon after it), when his enormous celebrity became ungainly and uncomfortable, Moonwalker is a commercial artist (with a hagiographic self-regard) and the struggle to negotiate his celebrity and image (with admonitions to the media along with some comfortable self-mocking).

The tagline of Moonwalker is “From the imagination of Michael Jackson comes a movie like no other,” a rousing marketing statement that is accurate but makes no specific claims about the film’s contents. And it is easy to understand why. Directed by Jerry Kramer, it is an assemblage of a few past music videos with its last, “Smooth Criminal,” lengthened into a bizarre, nonsensical, and now perhaps controversial, mini-movie involving Michael Jackson keeping the world safe for kids. He is shown transforming into various machines—a car, a robot and, yes, even a spaceship—and killing or running away from gangsters. In videos that show his skin turning liquid and his face and body morphing, one catches a theme that resurfaces in his later videos, from ‘Black or White’ and ‘Remember the Time,’ that rampage through the subway station. Even though music television stations today give less play to these videos seem. For instance, a wacky, but poignant and fitting, tribute to MJ’s life that MJ himself created.

Moonwalker doesn’t hold coherently but it is fun. This is not surprising, as Jackson has undoubtedly been responsible for some of the most memorable music videos in history. There is a delightful parody of his Martin Scorsese-directed ‘Bad’ video with Michael Jackson and his crew of dancers replaced with cute and uncannily similar children-doppelgangers, running around in a frame-by-frame, move-by-move imitation of that rampage through the subway station. Even though music television stations today give less play to music videos, their short length, the premium on keeping your attention and their viral addictiveness anticipates the youtube generation. Of course, the transition from the small screen to the even smaller screen shifts many of the rules of the arts but still one is struck by how current these videos seem. For instance, Jackson’s ‘Man in the Mirror,’ which opens Moonwalker with footage of his concerts interspersed with clips of Gandhi, Mandela, King and Kennedy, could perhaps be held to ridicule (and even this perhaps controversial, mini-movie involving Michael Jackson, a kind of Gandhian exhortation to be the change you want to see in the world. It is a kind of song that becomes a staple of his songbook, political platitudes converted into stirring anthems.

But the video is also remarkable for the scenes of legends of his fans at his concerts, delirious and ecstatic, a testament to his power and draw as an icon. And icon is the appropriate word for this strange, stylish, talented man-child, Fred Astaire, Pee Wee Herman, whose cult-like and devoted fan-base would put megachurches to shame in their size and extravagance. MJ might be held to ridicule (and even this critic can’t seem to withhold a few potshots), but in our global pop culture, he is a giant that divides culture, he is a giant that divides.
Emboldened by the return of Lord Voldemort, the Death Eaters are wreaking havoc in both the Muggle and wizarding worlds and Hogwarts is no longer the safe haven. Also, Harry’s long friendship with Genny Weasley is growing into something deeper and Ron has also got romantic entanglements. But as romance blossoms, one student remains about with far more important matters on his mind. He is determined to make his mark, albeit a dark one. Love is in the air in Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince, but tragedy lies ahead and Hogwarts may never be the same again.

Call 4442220 for show timings at Jai Nepal
www.jainepal.com
LOUD AND SHRILL: Members of the civil service union blow whistles in front of the Ministry of Finance on Tuesday in protest of the budget for not increasing their pay.

MIGRANT SOUL: The relatives of Kisan Bahadur Sunar, who was a labourer in Malaysia, receive his body at Tribhuvan International Airport last week. Corpses of at least a 100 Nepali labourers arrive in Kathmandu every month from abroad.

WOMEN FIRST: Representatives of Dhanusha’s community service committee protest the official neglect of women in front of the office of the secretary of Women, Children and Social Welfare on Tuesday.

POETIC LICENSE: Students of Bhanu Bhakta Memorial School commemorate the life and work of Adikabi Bhanu Bhakta Acharya at Nepal Academy on Monday.
**Multiple choices**

By now, it is pretty clear that even the Right Honourable Makunay doesn't know whether he is coming or going. In fact, the only place he's going is Sharm al Sheikh for the Much-maligned Movement (MMM) and he has postponed a scheduled stop in New Delhi on the way back. The Indians apparently didn’t want to risk a visit by a PM whose longevity was in question.

Even within the prime minister’s own party there is a sense of impermanence. And having helped bring down the king, the Maoaddies are playing the consummate king-makers by egging on GPK (“Girijababu, sambidhan lekhne bela ma ta tapain nai praghu mantri huna parchha) and wooing JNK (“Jhalnathji, yo sarkar lai tikaunale tapai nai samadhu parchha). PKD is telling both GPK and JNK that if they become PM, his Baddies will join a national govt.

Within the Baddy party itself, there is a move to replace Awesome as the leader of the parliamentary party, and the fact that it will be Mahara Daju and not Baburam Uncle has raised eyebrows about whether BRB is being groomed for bigger and better things like prime ministership. Wanna bet?

Meanwhile, Upadro Yadav has air dashed to Delhi to mend fences after he realised he went too far by cosying up to the Middle Kingdom. The man should’ve known about the extreme Sinophobia in certain sections of the Delhi Durbar, after all he was Firangi Minister in the old govt. And the reason for the trip could also be that BP Yadav has wormed his way to be much closer to the corridors of power down south. The Chinese ticked off the Indians by sending an observer team to the Forum conf in Birganj, and hustling Upadro to Beijing earlier this year. So to send the message to keep its hands off the Medhles, they got a bunch of Madhesi MPs to meet His Holiness in Dharmasala and leaked the pic to the press, which dutifully printed it.

And now for something completely different. After nearly flunking the written exam in a driving test last week (what’s the point asking what a double yellow line in the middle of the road means when there isn’t a single road in the country that has a double yellow line?) the Donkey would like to suggest some changes in the multiple choice questions that are more relevant to our traffic conditions:

1. A blinking right signal light usually means:
   a) Turning right, but not sure yet
   b) You can overtake me now
   c) I’m approaching you
   d) All of the above

2. You honk on the highway to:
   a) Greet fellow travellers
   b) Curse fellow travellers
   c) Because the back of the truck says “Horn Please”
   d) To keep myself from falling asleep at the wheel

3. When a VIP convoy approaches on Putali Sadak, you:
   a) Speed up and race the prime minister
   b) Pull over and salute the national flag
   c) Pull over and give the prime minister a dirty look
   d) Wait for convoy to pass and chase it to get to your destination faster

4. A motorcyclist caught in a traffic jam should:
   a) Squeeze into every available space, knocking out the rearview mirrors of cars
   b) Turn on afterburners, climb up the ramp to the overhead bridges, drop down on the roofs of buses to ride on to your destination
   c) Ride on the sidewalk and mow down pedestrians
   d) Follow traffic regulations so that by the time you get to your office, you have reached retirement age

Suggestions for more multiple-choice questions are welcome. Send entries to ass(a)nepalitimes.com and win a special mention in this column.

ass(at)nepalitimes.com