Cooperatives have become the lifeblood of rural development, like this fisheries collective in Kaski that ploughs income into ecosystem protection.

“Opting for co-ops” by Paavan Mathema
Far From Right
Anders Behring Breivik killed on the basis of his political beliefs and in order to further his political objectives (‘The only conclusion we can reach is that the Maoist party is everyone’s terrorist’, #564). The Maoists in Nepal killed on the basis of their political beliefs and in order to further their political objectives. What is the difference? Why is one lauded and given high political office and the other condemned? The Norwegian government in particular were and still are very sympathetic and supportive towards the Maoists. Why then does the Norwegian government not treat Anders Behring Breivik in the same manner that they treated the Maoists?

Jange

A warped nut acting alone does not need any qualifier appended to the ‘terrorist’ tag to accurately describe what he is. With the advent of terrorist organisations, though, their actions are not guided entirely by fantasy or delusion, but rather by their self-mutilating loyalty to the objectives of the party or movement that have decided to serve. No one has ever hesitated to call a terrorist a terrorist, irrespective of the colour of their skin. That is, of course, until the political exigencies of Nepal’s ongoing ‘peace process’ made it politically incorrect to call certain terrorists what they are. The editor’s discomfiture is understandable: it is a difficult point to make. At worst, as specimens of Nepali terrorism when they currently hold the largest share of seats in the CA.

John Kelleher

The editorial (‘Far from right’, #564) made sense until its first half. After that, the editor seemed to have smoked the weed. He implies that since the perpetrators are individuals the government should increase its vigilance and pursue their cybertrail. This is like asking for a Big Brother to keep track of individuals and haul them to jail every time their activities arouse suspicion. Chandra Gurung

Absolutely spot on! Thank you.

John

You are mostly right but I feel the anger that compelled Breivik to kill all those people was misplaced and no government could do a thing about preventing it. Nepal, despite the fact that its thoughtsless leaders such as yourself have been so hypocritical when it comes to terrorism, has been negligible terrorist. Give this country and its people some credit for that. The NYT and others did not call it a terrorist cause because a criminal act under the guise of a political cause, is a crime by an individual notwithstanding the political cause. On the other hand, a political organisation with an organised army, using lies and using coercion to recruit little boys and girls to commit acts of crime is a terrorist organisation like our own UCPN (M). The ideology which produced such violence is far worse than what any of these nutters could create. Nepal Times and other Nepali media accepting such a group’s political legitimacy is a bigger oversight.

Soni

Solar Power

Lotus, an electric vehicle transport in Nepal with Safa Tempors now needs to develop bigger electric public transport (‘Solar is only sometimes useful for remote areas with no grid at all’, #564). In fact, it is far more expensive than grid power so “incentives” to install roof-top panels in places that are connected to the national grid would be completely wasteful. Wasting money on 35 watt solar panels would only be installing the hundreds of millions of watts needed to end load-shedding. Pure scams like demanding solar subsidies in areas connected to the grid should be prohibited, not just taxed.

Arthur

Better Dead

Good article by Dewan Rai (‘Compensation by accident’, #564), and one that brings to light one of the more ludicrous instances of the ‘law of the promoter Nepalas so like. Except it’s not really compensation, but mob rule, and rule of dumb. It’s convenient for incompetent traffic cops to say ‘tapan haru mitu na’ when that usually means a populist outcome that keeps most people happy regardless of whoever is to blame. When will nepalis begin to take responsibility for their actions? Severe injury caused can end up costing more than death in an accident. This is the disturbing tendency of bus drivers and trucks in particular to back up over those they have been knocked down, so as to minimise costs and potential jail time. Better dead than in hospital for a month - at least from the perspective of the bus driver.

Mark Brightwell

Himla GLOF

Great article Astrid and good photos (If this is what a small glacial lake can do, imagine a big one, #564). Let’s hope that Gov of Nepal can do something meaningful to support its citizens when in need. And that outside agencies also can invest some time, money and expertise into finding solutions to this growing problem.

Mark Brightwell

First time have seen the horror of what a GLOF can do. But let’s not forget that many millions more are affected by the droughts, floods and climate variability. However, since that deals with weather, it is more difficult than that to properly explain as dangerous glacial lakes in danger of bursting. Still, as suggested in a story. Thanks to Astrid Hovden and Nepal Times for bringing it to the world’s notice.

KL

Patan Palace

I’m really glad to see the Patan Durbar Square is getting the attention it deserves (‘Facelift for the Patan Palace’, #564). Played there, ate there, enjoyed the bhangas, bought colourful bangles, sat on those temple steps and gossiped, sunbathed, star gazed. I like the positive tone of the article. We need more of these.

Hoff

I visited Patan Museum last year and can say that it is the best museum I have seen in Asia, and as a respecter of Hindu and Buddhist artifacts it has no parallel in the world. Glad to hear that the rest of the Durbar Square is also being restored and the museum will be extended. I’d come again. Thanks to the work of Rohit Ranjikar and his team.
In the last few weeks, distrust between Kathmandu’s hill centric establishment and the small but resolute Madhesi constituency has been growing. What happened in the BBC Nepali Service studio last week could have been a coincidence, but it set off a fierce debate in the media.

The broadcast was followed by a backlash in Prashant Jha’s article in The Kathmandu Post on 27 July, and a sharp rebuttal to it by Dhruba Nepal in Nagarik on 29 July.

In the interview, when Jitendra Sonal refused to conform to Nepali nationalism devoid of his Madhesi identity, host Rabindra Mishra asked him: “Would you put Madhesi interest before that of Nepal?” The way this question was put reflected the thought process of Kathmandu’s hill community and summed up their position: you cannot be working in the national interest if you are working in the interest of Madhes. Mishra refused to acknowledge a significant remark made by Sonal, “The existence of Madhes is tied to the existence of Nepal”.

Dipendra Jha of Democratic Freedom and Human Rights (DFHR) sees a danger in the Kathmandu political establishment’s hardened stance on the Madhes. “This will only weaken the moderate position in Madhes and strengthen separatist tendencies,” he says. Although instances of political violence has gone down in the Tarai, there is widespread proliferation of small arms indicating that politics is giving way to crime.

There is simmering frustration among the unemployed youth of the Madhes and strengthen separatist tendencies,” he says. Although instances of political violence has gone down in the Tarai, there is widespread proliferation of small arms indicating that politics is giving way to crime. There is simmering frustration among the unemployed youth of the Madhes who can neither find a job in Nepal, nor can they any longer go across the border for fear of being called a “Maoist”. They are told: “Yahaan kyo aate ho, tumhaara Prachanda khaana nahi deta hai tumko?” (Why are you here, doesn’t your Prachanda feed you?)

On 10 June, local postman Dhirja Hatoo was brutally murdered by an armed assailant in Bara bordering Ghodasahan village. The police followed the suspect into the district of East Champaran in Bihar, but was shocked to find that the culprit was being felicitated by the local police as a ‘Naxal killer’. Local rivalry along with greed for easy money in absence of a strong state presence has made the Madhes a fertile breeding ground for criminals.

The Madhes movement of the winter of 2007-8 was an eruption of grievances piled up from years of discrimination and being treated shabbily by the hill-dominated Nepali state. After the steam was let off, four years later the pressure is building up again.

“I collect trash from their bins, but I am treated worse than the trash I collect,” a Madhesi garbage collector told me recently. “Ask them if they behave in the same way with the Pahaadi garbage man.” He has no doubt in his mind that this is racism. What does being a “Nepali” mean to thousands like this garbage collector who are reminded everyday of being second class citizens in their own land?

The fact that we have two Madhes as ceremonial heads of the state is not enough to convince us that we are a multicultural republic, because it cannot bridge the prejudice we hold against ‘bhaiyas’.

Bhim Rai from Morang writes to Nagarik in response to Dhruba Nepal’s article: “Nepal is a land of people belonging to various nationalities living within a state. I belong to the Kirati community and have every right to assert my identity and be proud of it, and so does a Madhesi.”

Madhes are Nepalis, but they must be allowed to accept this on their own terms, not ones dictated by others.
China hopes for social stability

The new Chinese ambassador to Nepal, Yang Houlan, spoke to Nepali Times this week on his country’s priorities in bilateral ties with Nepal, Sino-Indian relations and the plans to develop Lumbini.

Nepali Times: What’s your view about the current state of Nepal-China relations?
Yang Houlan: The friendly relations between China and Nepal have a long history. Nepal is one of the early states to establish diplomatic relations with New China after its founding in 1949. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations, China-Nepal relations have been witnessing healthy and stable development regardless of the international environment and two countries’ domestic situations. China and Nepal stick to the Five Peaceful-Coexistence Principles, mutual respect, treat each other equally, share mutual trust, and sincerely assist each other. The relationship between the two countries should be considered a good example of international affairs. China and Nepal established a Comprehensive Partnership Relationship to take bilateral relations to a new height. With the promotion of exchanges and cooperation in political, economic and cultural fields, this partnership will have a bright future.

But the prolonged political uncertainty in Kathmandu has been unsettling for your country?
CAI YUN: For developing Lumbini. The Chinese side is willing to support Nepal’s plan of developing Lumbini. The Chinese enterprises have shown keen interest in terms of history, religion and culture. As I know, some Chinese enterprises have shown keen interest of developing Lumbini. The Chinese side is willing to support Nepal’s plan for developing Lumbini.

People in Nepal are hopeful that China’s economic growth and the economic development in Tibet will help Nepal. What is your opinion about this?
Yang Houlan: China sticks to the policy of building friendship and partnership with neighboring countries. China cannot achieve sound development without the development of its neighbours. So we are willing to share the experience and opportunities of development with our neighbors and help promote their development. Over the past few years, the Chinese side has been strengthening the work of infrastructure interconnection in the hope of improving the bilateral economic, trade and personnel exchanges between China and Nepal.

And, in which sector would Chinese bilateral aid be concentrated in the next few years?
Since the establishment of China-Nepal diplomatic relations, the Chinese side has always been providing grant assistance to Nepal in a large number of public projects. I feel that the major fields of Chinese assistance are infrastructure construction, hydropower, agriculture, education and culture. What are your plans for Lumbini?
I went to Lumbini to attend the roundtable discussion Advancing the Vision for Lumbini’s Development jointly organised by the Nepal government and UNESCO and knew all parties attached great importance to the development and preservation of Lumbini. As the birthplace of Lord Buddha, Lumbini has great worth in terms of history, religion and culture. As I know, some Chinese enterprises have shown keen interest of developing Lumbini. The Chinese side is willing to support Nepal’s plan for developing Lumbini.

What are China’s main concerns in Nepal?
The concerns you mention can be termed as hopes of China. Firstly, we hope that Nepal can realise long-standing of peace and stability as soon as possible. Secondly, we hope that Nepal can be on the track of fast economic and social development. Thirdly, we hope that China and Nepal should continuously strengthen the cooperation in safeguarding the stability in border areas, combat trans-boundary crime and maintain social stability of both countries.

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Opting for co-ops

A cooperative response to cooperatives may help strengthen this third pillar of development

Last month’s budget recognised cooperatives as one of the three pillars for Nepal’s economic upliftment, setting aside grants, seed money, capital subsidies, concessional loans and rebates on customs and duties. This set off an uproar from the private sector.

Those who have noticed a cooperative in every third house in district headquarters (sometimes even three in one house) may ridicule this special treatment for what are sometimes fly-by-night operations to loot shareholder money. Cooperatives have been blamed for siphoning money. Cooperatives have a business model that keeps the community welfare at the centre of its focus, and is not driven solely by shareholder dividend. And it just happens that across Nepal, there are amazing success stories of rural cooperatives that have helped lift living standards of rural cooperatives that have saved and invest in the community.

More than three million members and a total of Rs 122 billion in deposits and Rs 20 billion in capital. They are growing and have invested in dairy, agriculture, orchards, vegetables, bee-keeping, tea, coffee and even hydroelectricity.

Cooperatives can create economic linkages at the grassroots and can be especially effective in bringing together disadvantaged communities in rural areas. Members benefit by improved bargaining position vis-à-vis middlemen and access to markets for their produce. Many cooperatives have mandatory rules to invest a proportion of their profits in community development. A cooperative of freed Kamaiyas in Kailali first helps its member farmers with equipment, training and seeds and then markets their harvest. The cooperative now has 427 members and apart from benefiting its members, also runs a school in its locality.

Cooperatives have also been credited for their role in economically empowering women. Nearly half of all members of cooperatives in Nepal today are women. With many men away working in the Gulf, women have coalesced into groups that save and invest in the community.

But cooperatives are still largely unorganised, governed by the Cooperative Act 1992 without a proper system of regulation and monitoring. Most urban saving and credit cooperatives have been exploiting loose regulations, playing fast and loose with depositor money.

Nepal Rastra Bank and the Department of cooperatives are supposed to supervise and monitor saving and credit cooperatives with the annual transactions exceeding Rs 50 million, but central bank already has its hands full with over 200 financial institutions. If cooperatives are indeed to become the third pillar for the country’s economic development, the government has to weed out the crooks with better regulation and not punish those doing vital work development at the grassroots. Non-conforming cooperatives must restructure or shut down. But there is no reason for the private sector to panic.

A cooperative response to cooperatives may help strengthen this third pillar of development.
Ten years ago, you would be hard pressed to find a meal on Pokhara’s lakeside in the monsoon. Most restaurants would be shut for the off-season.

With the Annapurnas obscured by clouds, even tourist guidebooks used to advise tourists not to come to Pokhara in the rainy season. But if the past few months is any indication, the monsoon seems to be the time to go to Pokhara. The rains actually seem to attract tourists, the lake front is bustling, restaurants are open, and adventure tourists are rafting in the Seti and even jumping off Sarangkot on paragliders.

“We used to have six months off-season period,” says Biplab Paudel, chairman of the Pokhara Hotel Association, “now it is just July and August when the numbers dip a bit.”

The reason is that the traditional European and Japanese tourists have been replaced in the monsoon by Chinese, Indian and domestic tourists from Nepal itself. Ten years ago, only five per cent of hotel guests in Pokhara used to be Nepali, today that has jumped to 40 per cent due in part to the ‘Jaun Hai Pokhara’ promotion campaign.

Indian tourists are up 25 per cent, and many of them are pilgrims who drive up overland to go to Muktinath. Chinese tourists have increased by 15 per cent. Of the total number of foreign visitors to Nepal, Pokhara used to get only 15 per cent, now a third of all tourists to Nepal come to Pokhara.

Even if the mountains are not visible, there is plenty to see and do in Pokhara in the monsoon. With the highest rainfall in Nepal, Pokhara’s waterfalls and rivers are dramatic, the midhills and valleys are all soothing shades of green.

“We are even promoting the rainfall,” quips Poudel, “the rain is romantic and is an attraction.”

Visitors seem to agree. French tourist Alexandra Hungston has come here to recharge herself after a long backpack travel. She says: “What can be more relaxing than reading a book while having a cup of tea besides this glittering lake?”

Kathmandu’s middle class also sees Pokhara as a perfect getaway from the chaos and pollution in the capital. Chandra Acharya is an engineer living in Kathmandu and prefers Pokhara to Pattaya.

“After a quick downpour, everything is so fresh and clean. The weather is cool as well, so I bring my family here,” he says.

The attractions include Devis Fall, which is at its...
maximum volume because of the rain. Operators are also popularizing the ‘Rice Planting Expedition’ in paddy fields on the outskirts, and Pokhara is soon to be Nepal’s latest sky diving destination.

Pokhara has survived the conflict years, strikes and highway closures and is now looking forward to a busy autumn season. The chairman of the Pokhara Restaurant Association, Balram Pahari, says Pokhara has boomed despite the lack of government support. “I don’t think the increase in visitor numbers is due to Nepal Tourism Year 2011, it was because of our own promotion and packages.”

One tourist visiting Pokhara provides jobs for at least 16 local people, and tourism is now a vital part of Pokhara’s economy, Says Poudel. “There used to be a time when restaurants would ignore Nepalis, now they have realised that a tourist is a tourist no matter what the nationality.”

Baikuntha Acharya of Nepal Tourism Board speaks of his own constraints, but he says NTB aims to increase the choice of activities in Pokhara. “Pokhara sells itself,” he says, “but with promotion and more attractions it can attract even more visitors.”

JAUN HAI POKHARA!

The optimism of Pokhara’s tourism entrepreneurs is evident in the expansion of 400 hotels and addition of the new ones. One such is the Temple Tree Resort and Spa which is one of the newest in the business. Its distinctive western Himalayan architecture by Siddharth Gopalan with slate roofs, stucco walls and hand-made furniture is an example of clever fusion between Nepal tradition and modern comfort. The hotel aims to attract the market for conventional tourists, health and wellness enthusiasts as well as serve as a stopover for trekkers. Basanta Gautam and Chandan Kayastha of Temple Trees (pictured) say they have invested in raising the standard of hospitality in Pokhara. “We have tried to integrate a Nepaliness to the architecture and raise the quality of tourism to international levels,” says Gautam.

Win some, Jomsom

The two things tourists have to be prepared for while visiting Pokhara in the monsoon are leeches and flight delays. Leech repellents are advised for short treks around Pokhara, but the inconvenience is more than compensated by the great views of lakes, forests and paddy terraces. There is less one can do about flights. Just like Lukla and Phaplu have not operated for a week, Pokhara-Jomsom flights have also been cancelled for six days in a row, stranding thousands of Indian pilgrims in Jomsom and Pokhara. The newly-built road is also blocked in five place due to landslides between Beni and Dana, making vehicle transport nearly impossible.

Photography: KUNDA DIXIT

nepalitimes.com
Pokhara’s monsoon attractions
Ten year old Pranil Moktan studies in Grade 3 at Ganesh Primary School in Sandhuwa on the eastern outskirts of Kathmandu. If Pranil had not received the opportunity to go to school, he would either be working in fields or selling firewood like his brothers. However, he is fortunate to be found selling firewood like his brothers. If Pranil had not received the opportunity to go to school, he would either be working in fields or selling firewood like his brothers.

Rounding up for more than business

The incoming president of the Table. In addition to improving school facilities, the initiative provides training to teachers, sponsorship, meals and stationery to students and also helps in streamlining the administration and management of local schools. The organisation also tries to improve the enrollment of children of areas it works in.

Seven years since it started, the initiative has helped over 26 schools and built over 165 classrooms, touching the lives of more than 35,000 students. The Table Nepal has contributed more than Rs 140 million for this propose. The fund for the project is collected through Round Tables based abroad, and locally through fundraising programs. The organisation runs on the principle of zero per cent overhead cost, which means that the contribution made is not used for administrative purpose. Says Rathi: “This is our way of giving back to the society. We call on other corporate business houses and professionals to join in this noble cause.”
Lazy Gringo, fail-safe Mexican restaurant. The lemonade with refills is what won us over, but the food is mightily fine. Bring your own booze though. Jawaishkel.

Jazeo, a quiet place ideal for beer and relaxing conversation. Bring a friend and enjoy their special bar set for a mix of everything. Jawaishkel (near the zoo), 5548931.

Haddock, big compound with ample parking space, their Western and Thai dishes are done to perfection. Jhansikhel, 5546431.

Lhasa Bar, enjoy a beer or a splash of cocktail at this springboard for Lhasa Bar, an authentic Nepali meal. The restaurant at The Dwarika’s Hotel, 6 to 22 courses, an authentic Nepali meal. The Dwarika’s Hotel, Battisputali, 4479488.

Le Bistro Restaurant & Bar, the outdoor dining area invites a great atmosphere for a night of drinks with friends and family. They serve a plethora of dishes, it is the Indian food they pride themselves on. Thamel, 4701770.

The Last Resort: One-stop for Adventure Sports. Take your pick – a bungy jump over the Bhole Khosi river 100 metres below or mountain biking up to the Tibetan border. The Last Resort is a paradise for adventure sports junkies. Relax after a full day of fun with great food and a cold beer at the Instant Karma bar before retiring to deluxe safari tents. The Last Resort Sales Office, Mandala Street, Thamel, 4705025, www.thelastresort.com.np.

Le Bistro Restaurant & Bar, the outdoor dining area invites a great atmosphere for a night of drinks with friends and family. They serve a plethora of dishes, it is the Indian food they pride themselves on. Thamel, 4701770.

Monsoon Getaway at Gokarna Forest Resort, 20-31 August, Gokarna, 4451212.

Park Village Resort, Saturdays and Sundays combo package with swimming, lunch and a bottle of beer. Budhaniketan, Rs 990 for adults and Rs 850 for children, call 4375280 for reservations.

A gawdy critic in the valley contends that dining out should be all but homely. Sterility marks the trend, while simple settings and hodgepodge wares are frowned upon. But for this global gourmand, home is an underrated haven for this global gourmand, their latchkey kin.

Bring your own booze. Dining out should be all but homey. Sterility marks the trend, while simple settings and hodgepodge wares are frowned upon. But for this global gourmand, home is an underrated haven.

For frill-free, comfort food in an atmosphere second to none. While they serve a plethora of dishes, it is the Indian food they pride themselves on. The Dwarika’s Hotel, Battisputali, 4479488.

The Okinawa Special stir-fries chopped bitter gourd, tofu and pork into a hearty dish. Veg options like the tempura—basil, carrots, and prawns battered and fried—are equally filling. Home-sweet homemade Japanese confectionaries like the green-tea chiffon cake and yogurt cake end the nostalgic tour and pair well with a fresh brew of Batangas roast. Handmade Japanese pottery and imported goods like sake, brown rice and miso are neatly labeled and available for purchase at the counter. For frill-free, comfort food in an atmosphere second to none. While they serve a plethora of dishes, it is the Indian food they pride themselves on. The Dwarika’s Hotel, Battisputali, 4479488.

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LAS VEGAS: Two hundred alumni of the Patiala Medical College from India are gathered here in Nevada for a conference. As an alumnus from Nepal, I am one of the invited speakers at the Monte Carlo Hotel. This is a continuing medical education program for these doctors certified by the University Medical Center of Las Vegas. I spoke to Patiala graduates practicing in the United States about a vulnerable group called VFRs (Visiting Friends and Relatives). In this case, VFRs are people in the US of Indian origin who visit India and fall sick. Unlike their Western counterparts most VFRs carelessly do not obtain the required vaccines like typhoid or hepatitis A and B when visiting India. In addition, the VFRs are also prone to tourist’s diarrhoea as living in the US may have decreased their immunity to common microorganisms in our part of the world. I also added a bit about prevention of altitude sickness as many elderly ‘Indian Americans’ to sacred high altitude pilgrimage sites like Kailash-Mansarovar without awareness about altitude travel and its deadly complications: high altitude pulmonary and cerebral edema which can be lethal. Most of the doctors gathered here are specialists in many fields (cardiologists, urologists, neurologists, and obesity and pain medicine experts), but they are generally ignorant about travel and altitude medicine.

After the talks in the evening, there is a well-choreographed bhangra dance and plenty of chole bhature and besan ke bhurji. We could be in a party palace in Patiala, and yet just down the escalators from this ballroom is the Monte Carlo casino in full swing with Americans playing blackjack, baccarat, poker, and the slot machines. The contrast is mind-boggling.

The doctors also raise money among themselves to help their alma mater, Government Medical College, Patiala and the adjoining Rajendra Hospital (picture) so that underprivileged and needy students and patients will benefit. Hundreds of young Nepali doctors have recently gone to practice and live in the US, hopefully down the line they too will follow the Patiala example.

LHASA, CHINA: I flew into the city of Lhasa, which is set in a lovely valley, 12,000-ft above sea level in the southwest corner of China. I have flown over it several times, but this time I got to visit the great city. Lhasa is the capital of the Tibet Autonomous Region, which is attached to China. Lhasa means ‘place of bliss’ in Tibetan. The city is home to the Jokhang Temple, which is considered the most sacred place of all in Tibet, and the Potala Palace, the residence of the past Dalai Lamas. The city is a great contrast in culture and lifestyle, from the grand monasteries and temples to the busy bazaars and crowded alleys. The city is a great place to explore, with many temples, shrines, and museums to visit. I also got to visit the Tibet Museum, which is housed in a building that used to be a palace of the Dalai Lamas. The museum is a great place to learn about the history and culture of Tibet. I also got to visit the Potala Palace, which is a wonderful building and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The palace is home to the Museum of the Potala Palace, which is a great place to learn about the history and culture of Tibet.

We are now officially passing from the ‘Asare’ rain to ‘Bhadaure’ rain. There is a qualitative difference. The Nepali month of Asar has relentless plodding rainfall, whereas Bhadur rain is heavy and isolated showers with lots of rainbows. The northeasterly winds are still blowing in cooler air from Tibet from over the mountains and this is unleashing heavy showers especially at night. But expect this to be replaced by a monsoon front from the bay next week. The weekend should have bright partly cloudy days with brilliant blue skies and sharp bursts of rain in the evening and night.

BIKRAM RAI
Two threads run through India’s bilateral ties with each neighbour: democracy and trade.

Delhi is keen that Nepal resolves its internal political crisis sooner than later. This is the message Home Minister P Chidambaram had for a delegation of Nepali editors in town last week. He said India would not seal the border because there was too much at stake for both sides.

The crux of the new strategy: India has a stake in the improvement of its periphery and it will do everything it can to take its neighbours along on its own path of economic growth. Equally, neighbourhood democracies must meet Delhi half-way.

Bangladesh is a case in point. The Indian prime minister is all set to unveil dramatic new breakthroughs in border management when he goes to Dhaka in early September. Pakistan is being wooed by the promise of greater economic growth as a function of open trade with a Most Favoured Nation trading status, except Islamabad wants to call it “non-discriminatory trade”. Delhi says it doesn’t care what it is called, as long as it’s done.

Do these models have a lesson for the India-Nepal relationship? Yes. With an open border and an open trading system, Kathmandu and Delhi can do so much more for their own people.
It is 6:30am, and the small crowd that has gathered on the shore of Rupa Lake is getting impatient. Suddenly, someone shouts: “There they are.” Canoes appear one by one from behind a forested mountainside that plunges into the mirror-like lake. They row closer to shore where members of a local cooperative get their weighing scales and calculators ready.

The freshly caught fish are still gasping as they are flung to shore. An attendant reads out the names of customers who have come from as far away as Pokhara to buy Rupa’s famous silver carp, tilapia and trout.

The Rupa Lake Rehabilitation and Fisheries Cooperative in Kaski is a unique collective because it not only improves livelihoods of local farmers, but also helps preserve the lake’s fragile ecosystem. “What we have shown is that it is possible to have economic benefits without destroying the ecology,” says the cooperative’s founder, Lekhnath Dhakal. “In fact, the income from fish is helping protect the entire watershed and the lake. It is symbiotic.”

Within 45 minutes, fish worth Rs 10,000 has been sold. This year, the cooperative had an annual turnover of Rs 6.5 million and the money was ploughed into raising fingerlings and maintaining enclosures as well as cleaning up the lake. The cooperative pays Rs 4,000 per year to 17 community forests in the lake’s catchment area for the ecosystem benefits that tree cover in the mountains gives to the lake. It pays another Rs 2,000 a year to 19 schools and gives scholarships to 52 students to spread conservation awareness upstream. “This puts a price tag on protecting the ecosystem,” explains Dhakal. “And it encourages communities up on the mountains to conserve their forest.” Rupa has a larger catchment than nearby Begnas, but a lake that used to be 150 hectares big has now shrunk to only 100.

On the lake’s eastern shore is a local mother’s group that has been planting erosion-control fodder grass along new roads that have recently been built along banks. Ujeli Gurung heads the group which has 22 members each contributing to a savings scheme that lends.

The culture of agriculture

No one inspired me, I inspired myself. I taught myself about soil nutrients. My neighbours thought I was mad because I used to go into town to collect the hair from barbershops and bones from slaughter houses, grind and spread them out as fertiliser. I learnt as I went along.

Once, in Gulmi I saw they were growing coffee. I brought back 12 bushes and today Begnas Coffee is famous, we produce 22 tons of beans a year. But it wasn’t easy, during the 1990 democracy movement, the highways was closed for more than a week and all my chicken died on the way to market. I lost Rs 100,000 and went bankrupt. But out of adversity comes opportunity. I met the specialists from LI-BIRD and they taught me about sustainable agriculture and crop biodiversity.

I have learnt that the most important thing is to follow nature’s rules. You can’t go wrong if you do that. You have to protect the soil, that is the most important thing. This doesn’t just mean stopping erosion, it means not poisoning it with chemicals, it means replenishing the soil’s natural nutrients. Increasing food production is not going to be enough, we have to protect our soil and the agriculture biodiversity that god has bestowed on this land. We have to protect the soil, air and water cycle.

This is not an earth-changing revolution, we just want to make sure our seeds, plants and herbs don’t disappear. Everything is interconnected, we have to learn to live with the land. We have to protect the 16 local varieties of rice that are suited for the soil and the micro-climate around here. We have 12 different types of millet, 12 types of yams.

Just like we set aside areas for national parks, we must protect this watershed that feeds into Rupa and Begnas as an agriculture conservation region. There is still lots to do, I want to set up an agricultural college here so that educated people start respecting the land and the people who work on it.

We need to be able to feed our growing population. For this, you have to protect the land and those who work on it.

Surya Adhikari (pictured) is a farmer in Begnas village in Kaski, a pioneer of coffee production and the home garden concept of crop biodiversity conservation.

KUNDA DIXIT in KASKI

Earning from nature to pay for its upkeep Unique cooperative puts a price tag on protecting the ecosystem
even advises cooperatives in India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Tibet. “Our main aim is to ensure food security by conserving agricultural biodiversity for the poorest of the poor families,” explains Abhiskar Subedi, LI-BIRD’s program director. “We get farmers to participate in improving crops so they are less vulnerable to climate change by protecting the ecosystem.” Kaski has one of the highest annual rainfalls in Nepal, and this gives the region rich biodiversity in herbs, vegetables and fruits. At the Pratigya Savings and Credit Cooperative on a picturesque village overlooking the lake, women members are having their weekly meeting. The farmers are involved in field trials of local rice hybrids that can resist pests and drought. What’s more, they also learn to market these products in the city to generate income. Sita Khadka heads the cooperative, and says confidently: “We are now self-sufficient, we don’t need doners anymore, and we are creating jobs so our young men don’t have to go away for work.”

Rs 200,000 from her Chitwan cooperative last year to pay for medical emergencies rather than income generation. Family, often resulting in substantial debt. Very poor households, like Sita’s, die before the age of 5. Hospital fees can be expensive, furthering the inequalities that arise within a caste and class-based society. Those already better off are in a position to make better use of the inequalities that arise within a caste and class-based society. For bigger businesses. The system thus risks reinforcing some of the inequalities that arise within a caste and class-based society. There are many models of microfinance, but generally it appears to cater well to those people who have access to remittance funds or other resources. In these communities, microfinance has been a stepping-stone towards the betterment of lives. Thouraya Bahri was a part of the Graduate Program in International Affairs, New School, New York.

Many loans are taken to deal with health-related issues, a fundamental need in a country where over 14 per cent of children die before the age of five. Hospital fees can be expensive, resulting in substantial debt. Very poor households, like Sita’s family, often find themselves in a trap, and microfinance is used for medical emergencies rather than income generation. If the government provided better healthcare services, perhaps microfinance could alleviate poverty more efficiently.

Moreover, clients have to meet requirements like monthly savings and collateral to be eligible for a loan. The more land and savings one has, the easier it is to access the larger loans needed for bigger businesses. The system thus risks reinforcing some of the inequalities that arise within a caste and class-based society. Those already better off are in a position to make better use of microfinance than poorer people.

Nonetheless, it seems all members of cooperatives do benefit from training programs to develop the skills to invest in fruitful income-generating activities and build the skills and confidence to confront difficulties. Microfinance can encourage people to transition from a ‘passive’ state to an ‘active’ state, and improve lives. Many women say their membership of cooperatives gave them a “voice” and made them more “assertive” within their communities. Any microcredit loans can actually make things worse. They become even more vulnerable to the point where, in some cases, they struggle to pay for food and basic household expenses. A woman who had taken a loan to buy a goat was in repayment difficulties because the goat died before it provided additional income to the family. In such cases, it is difficult for borrowers to maintain daily expenses, meet the saving expectations required for the membership of the cooperative, and deal with loan repayments.

Rethinking cooperatives

I am thankful for microfinance because even though I am in great debt and struggle to pay for food, I was able to save my daughter from sickness,” Sita said. She had borrowed Rs 200,000 from her Chitwan cooperative last year to pay for emergency treatment for her daughter, and is still struggling to pay off her debt.

The original idea behind microfinance was that the poor could potentially escape poverty by freeing themselves from local moneylenders who charged high interest rates. The low interest rate could be also used to build a business to sustain their families. Microfinance has become an integral part of the government’s poverty reduction strategy in Nepal. In 2004, there were 2,345 saving and credit cooperatives and thousands of NGOs working in microfinance. Many of them were encouraged to provide financial services beyond credit and savings and form groups to rely on the internal resources of members’ savings to generate loans for members.

Today, however, many have come to question the role of microfinance in developing nations in alleviating poverty and helping the poor improve their lives. Analysing cooperatives in Chitwan and Butwal recently, it was clear those accessing microfinance services paired with other financial resources, such as remittance transfers from abroad, did benefit. However, for the ‘poorest of the poor’ microcredit loans can actually make things worse. They become even more vulnerable to the point where, in some cases, they struggle to pay for food and basic household expenses. A woman who had taken a loan to buy a goat was in repayment difficulties because the goat died before it provided additional income to the family. In such cases, it is difficult for borrowers to maintain daily expenses, meet the saving expectations required for the membership of the cooperative, and deal with loan repayments.

For the poorest of the poor microcredit loans can actually make things worse

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Interview with Charimaya Tamang, Himal Khabarpatrika, 1-17 August

Himal: You have recently been honoured with “2011 Hero Acting To End Modern day Slavery Award”. What does this mean to you?
Charimaya Tamang: It’s not just a personal achievement for me. I would like to see this award as a recognition of the hard work we have put to save thousands of women from being trafficked. In this regard, it is also an honour bestowed by the US government on Nepal.

How closely is this award related to your own living experience?
In July 1996, seven organisations in Nepal rescued 128 women including me from Indian brothels. Five months later, I filed a complaint against the person who sold me. My family separated from me because of the death threats that followed. When I look back at what I have gone through, this award feels like it makes up for all the hardships I had to face.

Why are so many women trafficked every year?
The main reason is the state of lawlessness and impunity in the country. The state has not even been able to prosecute a known perpetrator who has lured young women from their own village and sold them off in Indian brothels. Besides this, there is a lack of awareness among the young women, especially in the countryside, about the serious threat they face, so much so that even educated graduates become victim of trafficking.

Where else are the women trafficked besides India?
In the recent years, women have been lured into foreign employment and sold in the Gulf countries. When they try to run away, there have been incidents where they have been subjected to brutal torture. Some have been trapped in fake case and put behind bars. Many have committed suicide.

What needs to be done to put an end to trafficking?
There is no overnight solution. A multi-pronged approach: implementation of international conventions against human trafficking along with extensive campaign against trafficking throughout the country must be conducted. Anti-trafficking laws and programs have to be made a part of the academic curriculum and discrimination against the victim of trafficking has to end. Only then can we hope for a trafficking-free society in future.

Dhobi Ghat denounced

Editorial in Laal Rakshak, 31 July

The Dhobi Ghat episode has violated the tradition of selflessness and discipline in our party. It is a betrayal of the martyrs, the injured and disappeared from the great People’s War. Dhobi Ghat put revolution and the revolutionaries under a serious test. But the way UCPN-M leadership handled the crisis is a proof that the party is capable of overcoming any hurdle to prove its historical loyalty towards the people and cause of the revolution. Dhobi Ghat might have slowed down our path to freedom but it has made us more clear in our direction.

Let it not be seen as a sign of weakness, let it be known that our anger is not just against the betrayal, but against the culture of betrayal. The new found unity within the party is the result of extraordinary leadership skill exhibited by the Chairman. This is a resounding rebuff to imperialists and feudal elements who were waiting for an opportunity to divide and rule. They will come at us with even dirtier tricks.

It has been seen in the past that the more unity there is among the progressive forces, the more reactionary tactics are adopted by the regressive elements to break us from within. The days ahead are full of challenges. Hence, the leadership should transcend the internal rifts to focus on the class struggle. Leaders must understand that the unnecessary debate over party leadership is not in our larger interest. The Dhobi Ghat episode has taught us that there is no fun burning down the house for warmth.

Human trafficking

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Compensation

Nagarik, 2 August

The government is preparing to distribute Rs 2 billion to the family of Maoist combatants who were killed and disappeared during the conflict. Finance Minister Bharat Mohan Adhikari has allocated the amount under the Peace and Reconstruction Ministry after being pressurised by the Maoists. The families will receive Rs 200 thousand each. Fearing protests from the opposing parties, Adhikari allocated the money discreetly under the Peace Ministry not mentioning it in the budget speech. Of the Rs 9.68 billion allocated for the Peace Ministry, Rs 2 billion has been set aside for this purpose. Finance secretary Krishna Hari Banskota and other officials involved in budget drafting had suggested that distributing money to individuals would mean siphoning money from development. Adhikari forced the program into the budget.

Organic cooperative

Bharat Koirala in Annapurna Post, 25 July

After working for 10 years in a farm in Japan, Mesh Bahadur Gurung decided not just to return to Nepal, but to his native Kaski and start an agricultural cooperative. The 45-year-old management graduate has tried to put into practice what he learnt in Japan, even though many here warned him it was a very risky investment. The farm is located in Sardi Khola in Kaski at 1,240 m, about 20 km from Pokhara, over a 80 hectare plot surrounded by mountains. The Parbatiya Agricultural Cooperative has members who have invested Rs 200,000 each and is the biggest cooperative in the district with an investment of Rs 3.5 million. “We are currently carrying out a market study and we will decide on what to plant after talking to customers and traders, we believe organic vegetables are healthier and tastier,” explains Gurung. The farm is already growing tomatoes and has built 96 greenhouses for the autumn vegetable planting. Because it is an organic farm, Gurung also aims to keep livestock for manure and to sell meat. “This is an exemplary project,” says Beni Bahadur Karki of Kaski’s Agriculture Development Office, “it has encouraged others to do the same.” The cooperative is a model for creating well-paying jobs within Nepal that keeps youths from going abroad for work.

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Don of a new era

The pace at which top cops are being sent to jail and top dons released, we are soon going to have a situation where the Central Jail will be full of policemen behind bars and they will be guarded by Mafioso wardens. Which will be a fitting tribute to the don of a new era in New Nepal.

After suffering an editorless week, Kathmandu’s main papers are back to their normal selves again. Just as well, because we were getting headlines like ‘Promotion for 2011 Nepal Tourism Year in 2012’. And an English language one which, while trying to provide a service to its non-Nepali speaking readers, translated the name of the Rastriya Janashakti Party as ‘National Manpower Party’.

Everywhere else in the world, ‘Darfur’ is a humanitarian disaster, but in Nepal it is a scam. And the reason Krishna Sitaula went to see the Maximum Leader at the Pistachio Palace recently was not about forming a new consensus government, but to ask him to call off the blistering attacks in Nepal’s largest circulation newspaper alleging his involvement in the Sudan caper. “I know you know I’m not involved. I also know you know you are involved, so why don’t you talk to the editor,” was Sitaula’s message.

Mercifully, the political parties have now issued a moratorium on those complicated multi-point deals like the 12-points agreement, the 7-point agreement or 5-point agreement that they never fulfill. PKD met JN the other day and the PMO spokesman told the ambulance press later: “They had a one sentence agreement.” So it’s now come down to sentences, and we can only guess what that one was: “I will pretend to ask for your resignation, you will pretend to want to resign, but you won’t until I tell you to”.

The Standing Committee meeting at UML Potala in Balkhu was quite heated by all accounts. (Maybe they shouldn’t have standing meetings, and should all sit down and relax.) Anyway, JN was unusually prompt and accommodative and allowed himself to be convinced. Just then, Leftist God Bum Dev, was seen to surreptitiously SMS someone on his mobile. Because seconds later, JN’s phone rings. The prime minister just listens and grunts. Then he tells the Standing Committee the deal’s off and he’s going to swear the Maoists in. He drives off in a cloud of dust to Shit All Nibas. No prizes for guessing who Bum Dev was texting and who called JNK.

It’s all coochi-coochi-coo between El Moustachio and Jhusil these days. They just can’t get enough of each other, and are going all touchy feely in public. Sushil Da even told PKD at a memorial to his cousin, GPK, the other day: “There is no one I can confide in after Girija Babu died. You should take the lead and become prime minister.” Jhusil wasn’t just trying to be polite he was trying to prevent BRB from leading the next govt and also to destroy any chance Lion Brave may have to making it to Balu Water again. Wily old fox.

And the medal for Junketeer-in-Chief in the present cabinet goes undisputedly to Upadro Yadav who has just travelled to Brazil via Lithuania and Belgium. The reason is ostensibly to inaugurate the new Nepal Embassy in Brasilia, but it seems the five member delegation is having a grand time at Copacabana beach. Can just picture Upadro in thongs with Renu in tow dancing to the tune of Lalai Majnu. Dhananjay (“Whiskey in the Jar”) Jha is also on the entourage hungover after a massive boozep in Brussels. Nepalis in Belgium have petitioned the foreign ministry to stop him being our next envoy to the EU, re.

After the grand success in Delhi, it’s only a question of time before the Slut Walk comes to Kathmandu. CA members, who don’t seem to have much to do anyway, could take part. Charitraheen Chelis, where are you when the nation needs you? 