With President Yadav’s second deadline for a consensus looming, Nepal’s leaders this week tried to take advantage of each other’s greed for power.

The Nepali Congress finally pushed aside internal rivalries to put up party president Sushil Koirala as its prime ministerial candidate. The Maoists quickly signalled that they could agree to this as long as it formed part of a ‘package deal’. That is probably a code word for key ministries for the Maoists in case the NC has prime ministership.

But the package will most likely also include NC acquiescence on an executive presidency and federalism, two stumbling blocks in the draft constitution which the NC had steadfastly not agreed to. However, the Maoist calculation could also be that it sees in Koirala a personality singularly lacking in charisma and popularity which would give the NC an electoral disadvantage in the next elections.

It is unlikely that the NC will agree to abandon its stand on mixed system of governance in the new constitution. “The contentious issues of the constitution cannot be a part of the ongoing negotiations. It must be decided by the future CA,” NC leader Laxman Ghimire told Nepali Times.

But there are those within the party who will be urging Koirala to agree to the Maoist deal because of the perceived incumbent advantage in the next elections. Contentious elements in the new constitution like system of governance and state structure are going to be divisive issues in the elections anyway, and political observers say it would be premature for the NC to agree to them as a pre-condition to lead the government.
Our leaders are so obsessed politicking, they are oblivious to the looming job bomb

number of people who are working in India and other third countries at any given time.

Those following the recent report at Thapathali this week citing ethnic undercounting obviously ran out of an agenda, and once more took recourse in fanning the flames of identity politics out of desperation. It’s not just the Janajatis whose population has gone down, there is a massive depopulation of mid-hills with some districts showing as much as one-third of its population “missing” compared to 10 years ago, due to emigration.

What is going to have a real profound impact on future politics, though, is the fact that for the first time in Nepali history, more people now live in the narrow strip of Terai plains along the Indian border than in the Pahad and Himal. Some of this is because of the high natural population growth in the plains, but much of it is due to transmigration of people from the hills and from across the border. One can argue over which of these is the main factor in Terai growth, but what is clear is that the plains are now a melting pot. Carefully handled, this can moderate politics, but irresponsible short-sighted politics can turn the Terai into an explosive ethnic cauldron.

The census result shows dramatic improvements in literacy, especially in the percentage of women who can read and write which has soared from 37 per cent ten years ago to 57 per cent. As literacy goes up, it will have a positive impact on a slew of indicators, including the fertility rate, maternal and child mortality, age of marriage, and future enrollment of children in school.

The youth bulge, melting pot demographics, and urbanisation can all be turned into forces of good and for progress. But only if there is the political will to move through on the positive changes seen in the census, and to avoid the pitfalls of short-term political advantage.

Nepal is not a small country, it is the world’s 48th most populous. It is also not poor. Just poorly-governed, and for far too long.
Coming and going

If your house is on fire and you don’t make any move to put it out, your neighbours will be worried

Everybody laments the current political deadlock. But the real reason why there is a deadlock is even more lamentable: it is because by seeking government leadership, each party wants to manipulate the electoral process for its advantage. What could be a bigger travesty for democracy in Nepal?

Once again Nepal’s political parties have shown that they are simply incapable of managing their affairs. Karan Singh’s visit last week was not overt meddling, but it just means that if your house is on fire and you don’t make any move to put it out, your neighbours will be worried. Singh’s visit apparently didn’t go down well with the PMO and the Foreign Ministry even though it was a direct message from New Delhi that India wants Nepal to start putting out the blaze.

But the parties have done little to show that they are capable of fire-fighting. Loud op-eds and rabble-rousing commentaries in the media blame Baburam Bhattarai or President Yadav for the current political mess. But the pundits miss the point. The solution to the stalemate is not in the hands of the prime minister or the president, it is with Sushil Koirala, Jhala Nath Khanal, and Pushpa Kamal Dahal.

Two probable solutions would be to ensure a Maoist or Madhesi Morcha-led unity government with the NC and UML getting portfolios of their choice. Second is an NC-led unity government with power sharing with the Maoists and Madhes. While the first option remains unconditionally open for the opposition, for the ruling parties to hand over the leadership to the NC, it is reasonable that they would want an assurance that the party which had until two months ago been against CA elections, is committed to holding polls. On both instances, the ball seems to be in the opposition’s court.

Appointing Sushil Koirala as its candidate, the NC has demonstrated that it prefers leading the government. Now, it has to explain to the people what it intends to do once in power. The party has so far maintained that it would talk about its agenda only after being handed leadership, which is odd coming from a party that claims to be the most democratic among the lot.

On Wednesday, Pushpa Kamal Dahal put forth a condition of agreeing on the date of holding CA elections in April before considering the NC’s leadership. This is an indication that the Maoists and Madhes have enough incentives to go for the polls. After running the government for over a year, the Maoists feel they have done enough to woo the voters, but are nervous about the split within their party. As long as they have the Madhes with them, the Maoists are willing to face polls.

Since the day the CA was formed, the peace process and constitution drafting were held hostage to government formation. Six months after its dissolution, things have not changed. By seeking leadership of an electoral government, each party wants to ensure results in its favour so that it can effectively dictate the peace process and constitution drafting to suit its own ends.

The extended deadline given by the president to forge agreement on the government formation will expire on Friday. It will be nothing less than a miracle if the parties meet that deadline. The parties agreed on consensual politics in the interim constitution, but have been unable to develop a culture of give and take. The fear of losing too much has made them unwilling to compromise on the stakes. Unless they let go of that fear, deadlines will just keep on coming and going.
When Sanduk Ruit, a young doctor from Olangchungola village in the remote mountains of north-eastern Nepal met Fred Hollows, an Australian ophthalmologist, in the 1980s, they had no idea they would radically transform eye care in the country and make it possible for thousands of Nepalis to see again.

While travelling together in 1981 for the National Blindness Survey, Hollows and Ruit were appalled to discover that 80 per cent of Nepalis suffered from blindness that was curable or easily preventable. With most Nepalis living in remote areas, access to hospitals was difficult and travelling to cities was simply too expensive. So they left diseases like cataract, trachoma, and glaucoma untreated which eventually led them to lose their sight.

The two doctors made it their mission to bring the highest standard of eye care to people living in the poorest and hardest to reach corners of Nepal. In 1988 Ruit and Hollows’ wife Gabi started an Australian support group called the Nepal Eye Program Australia to raise funds. After Hollows was diagnosed with cancer, he along with Gabi and friends started the Fred Hollows Foundation so that they could carry on his vision even after his death.

Following in his mentor’s footsteps, Ruit opened the Tilganga Institute of Ophthalmology (TIO) in Kathmandu in 1994 to provide affordable eye care to the poorest and pioneered the modern cataract surgery where only the clouded lens are removed and an intraocular lens implanted into the natural capsule. However, to succeed in his fight against cataract blindness, Ruit needed lenses at more affordable prices.

At that time, a lens cost $150, which was out of the budget of ordinary Nepalis. That is where the foundation stepped in and started a modern intraocular lens (IOL) manufacturing laboratory in Kathmandu which produced lenses at $4 apiece. Since then, the IOL which is now run by an all-Nepali team has produced three million lenses and exported them to more than 75 countries around the globe.

Although Hollows didn’t live to see the good work done by his organisation and TOI, he was fondly remembered during the foundation’s 20th anniversary celebrations at the Siddhartha Art Gallery in October.

“We are incredibly happy to be partners with TOI. Tilganga has been exceptional in lifting the standards of eye care not just in Nepal but around the world, and made the country a leader in ophthalmology,” Rex Shore, program developer for the foundation told Nepali Times after the function.

In addition to providing inexpensive treatment and high-quality care, Tilganga has made a name for itself as a top research and training institute. Training is an integral part of TOI’s motto and nurses here are taught to take greater responsibility in preparing patients for surgery.

Keeping true to its aim of bringing eye care closer to Nepalis, doctors from Tilganga frequently travel to remote areas for microsurgical eye camps and have performed thousands of cataract operations. They also train health workers to run eye care centres more efficiently and reach out to more patients. In a country where people are highly reluctant to donate organs of family members due to religious beliefs, Tilganga’s eye bank has been working relentlessly to raise awareness and encourage more Nepalis to donate and give someone else the gift of sight.

In two decades, Tilganga and the Fred Hollows Foundation have brought about outstanding innovations in eye care. And by providing Nepalis living in remote communities with access to excellent services, they are inching closer to their dream of ending preventable blindness in the country.

www.tilganga.org
www.hollows.org.au

In two decades of vision, two doctors turn their vision of providing world-class eye care to poor Nepalis into reality.
An economic facelift

How successfully China changes its economic model will ultimately determine its prospects for further growth and continued stability.

ZHANG MONAN

For three decades, the dividends from Deng Xiaoping’s initial decision to open China’s economy to market forces, and to the world, have fuelled rapid growth. Until recently, the key was China’s vast supply of low-cost labour, which provided the foundation for the country’s export-oriented model.

Concentrated in coastal China, this model produced an uneven distribution of output and established a unique pattern of high savings and low consumption. Indeed, China’s savings rate rose steadily following the onset of market reforms, from 38 per cent of GDP in 1978 to 51 per cent in 2007.

Economic growth is determined not only by factors of production such as labour, capital, and technology, but also by institutional arrangements. Through 30 years of reform, China has successfully completed the institutional transition from a highly centralised planned economy to a dynamic market-based system. Beginning from rural tiered management based on the household contract system, Chinese reformers supplemented public ownership with various other forms, such as enterprises’ massive outsourcing of traditional manufacturing, high-tech manufacturing, and even some lower-end services spread across six cities.

China’s industrial structure, accelerator of domestic economic drivers. This implies the need to upgrade China’s industrial structure, accelerate the formation of human capital, facilitate technological progress, and undertake further institutional reforms.

If successfully implemented, this agenda is likely to reverse global savings imbalance that has underpinned large imbalances in recent years. China is responsible for the savings side, while the US disproportionately accounts for the consumption side, ultimately turning the Chinese into America’s creditors.

Of course, global savings and consumption patterns have undergone significant change since the financial crisis. With both the West and China trying to restore internal equilibrium, the 2008 global financial crisis and the subsequent eurozone debt crisis have forced Chinese officials to forge a new path for future growth.

Most important, export-led growth must give way to domestic economic drivers. This implies the need to upgrade China’s industrial structure, accelerate the formation of human capital, facilitate technological progress, and undertake further institutional reforms.

Thirty years ago, this was the most efficient and practical strategic choice for China, owing to its lack of capital and advanced technology. But a country’s economic development ultimately depends on its ability to accumulate capital and allocate it efficiently.

With 90 trillion renminbi in banking assets and $3.2 trillion in foreign-exchange reserves, China is now playing a significant role in global finance. And yet the high volume and inferior quality of these assets have also posed challenges to the country’s ability to complete the transition from trade power to financial power, and thus to exploit the competitive advantages of Chinese capital.

After three decades of growth on a scale unprecedented in human history, China’s new leaders are facing a historical turning point. Whether China successfully changes its economic model will ultimately determine its prospects not only for further growth, but also for continued stability.

www.project-synicate.org

Zhang Monan is a fellow of the China Information Centre, fellow of the China Foundation for International Studies, and a researcher at the China Macroeconomic Research Platform.
Move aside Bieber and Bollywood

Rapper PSY has single-handedly put Korean pop-culture on number one spot in Nepal and around the globe

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from flash mobs across continents to UN Secretary Ban Ki-moon breaking into the quirky horse gallop dance with his fellow South Korean rapper Park Jae-sang, popularly known as PSY, Gangnam Style has spread like wildfire. With its addictive beats and hilariously creative dance moves, PSY’s song has racked up more than 876 million hits on YouTube since its release in July and is now the most watched video around the world after dethroning teenage heartthrob Justin Bieber’s Baby.

Urban Nepalis’ fascination with K-pop started as South Korea opened its doors to Nepali migrant labourers in 2008. As hordes of people lined outside the Korean embassy for work visas, language schools mushroomed across the country and Nepalis took an interest not just in Hangul, the script, but also in its music, fashion, and culture.

A stroll around the streets of Basantapur, Darbar Marg, and malls around the Valley will tell you how obsessed teenagers are with K-pop. Everything from the dress, shoes, and accessories to the hairstyles and make-up of popular singers, bands, and actors are eagerly emulated. Hard-core fans even memorise entire dance routines and lyrics of popular bands like 2NE1 and Big Bang.

“My sister used to watch a lot of Korean dramas and that’s how I got hooked. I like the way the male pop singers dress up. They are not exactly ‘manly’, but very chic, flamboyant, and have a wild sense of fashion,” admits 18-year-old Rikiti Gurung, a student at Modern Indian School.

Nepal’s retail and fashion businesses are riding high on the K-wave. Established almost a decade ago, The Korean Shop in Kantipath was among the first to introduce Korean–style clothes in Nepal along with foods like kimchi and Ramen noodles.

“When people come in, they know exactly what they want, sometimes they bring photos of their favourite actress or bands to show us,” says shop attendant Pooja Shrestha. Unable to keep up with a surge in demand, The Korean Shop recently opened a new outlet in Kus-market, Lalitpur.

Similarly, cosmetic shops like Koreanana which rely solely on Korean products are not only sustaining themselves but also making profit, indicating how robust the market is. “People think it’s only teenagers driving the market, but even middle-aged women and men visit our shop. Korean culture has huge mass appeal,” admits owner Kumar Shah.

The entertainment industry is not far behind either. DVD vendors do good business selling pirated copies of Korean serials and movies and sales compete neck to neck with Bollywood heavyweights.

“Ever since they started showing Arirang channel on cable tv, I have been hooked to Korean serials and music videos. The songs are very flashy and you just can’t take your eyes off, adds 22-year-old Toeten Doki, a college student.

Even Bollywood is cashing on K-pop. Instead of feeding audiences with watered down Bollywood mush, directors and producers today are increasingly turning to Korean movies for inspiration. Nepali film Sano Sansar lifted scenes from the blockbuster My Sassy Girl while Metro Euta Saathi Cha was a remake of the popular Korean movie Millionaire’s First Love.

Since 2007, the Korean Embassy in Nepal has been hosting a bi-annual film festival and the queue of enthusiasts gets longer each year. “We have been receiving amazing response at the festival here and with the immense popularity of PSY’s Gangnam Style, I am sure this year it’s going to be even better,” says Shiva Pokharel, research officer with South Korean embassy’s culture department.

While fashion tastes are undergoing a K-revolution, Nepali palates are also gradually changing. There are now over half a dozen Korean restaurants in the Valley from Haankook Sarang, Picnic in Thamel to Pyongyang Okyu-Gowan in Darbar Marg and Sa Rang Chae in Jawalakhel promising to serve authentic delights of South (and North) Korea.

“Nepalis don’t like experimenting a lot with their food, but thanks to movies and soap operas, they are warming up to Korean staples like kimlap and bibimbap,” says Suraj Gurung of Haankook Sarang which now has an outlet in the eastern town of Dharan as well.

While PSY’s ‘dress classy and dance cheesy’ inspired horse dance, may probably fizzle out in a few months, the mass appeal of the Korean culture is here to stay.

bhrikuti rai
Psycing tourism

Fourteen-year-old Alexis Martinez from Texas is on a holiday in Seoul, learning the dance made famous by South Korean musician PSY in his music video Gangnam Style. Like Alexis, thousands of tourists around the world are making their way to South Korea to experience the Gangmania first hand.

The song, which describes the district south of Seoul’s Han River that is known for its trendy clubs, high fashion, and lavish lifestyle, is one of the most viewed videos on the Internet, and the South Korean government is looking market K-pop’s most famous export to attract even more foreign travellers.

“I think Gangnam Style is bringing up Korea’s brand value,” says Je-Sang-won, who heads the Korea Tourism Organisation’s (KTO) Hallyu, or Korean Wave, division, “we did a survey in Los Angeles and found that 70 per cent of respondents said they wanted to visit Korea after they saw the video.”

But very few people predicted PSY would become a global phenomenon. “PSY isn’t the typical idol type or even really handsome, but I think this makes him more interesting and exciting,” he explains, “it’s great to see that he’s promoting Gangnam to rest of the world.”

Out on the streets of Gangnam, PSY’s image can be found on video billboards and on cardboard cut outs in front of shops. Some merchants in Seoul say that ever since Gangnam Style went viral, they have seen an increase in foreign shoppers.

“I think it has created a positive image for the neighbourhood. People are excited to be here, they sing and laugh. It’s a good atmosphere,” admits Om Jong-ryul who sells roasted nuts at a stall right outside Gangnam metro station.

Kwon Da-na manages a boutique clothing shop in Gangnam’s fashionable Apgujeong neighbourhood. “Sometimes there are more foreign customers than Korean shoppers coming to my store. When I turn on Gangnam Style and open the door, some people come in off the street,” he says, adding that some customers even start dancing.

South Korea is breaking the 10-million tourist mark for the first time this year and according to KTO, K-pop’s growing international attraction has something to do with it. But like any pop song, what’s trendy today could be out of style tomorrow and some tourists here say Gangnam Style might be reaching its peak already.

Inside KTO’s Korean Wave gallery, Singaporean teenager Connie says she’s a big K-pop fan, but she’s heard enough of Gangnam Style. “I think it’s nice but it got too over popular after a while. It’s annoying because it’s everywhere,” says the 17-year-old.

But for Alexis, Gangnam Style and its wacky horse dance aren’t getting old. She says it’s easy to learn and maybe that’s why it’s so popular around the globe, “It’s bringing the world together, I guess, it’s cool.”

Jason Strother
www.asiacalling.org
much-awaited Soongava – a dance of orchids. Top ten competitive, non-competitive, and Nepal Panorama films representing 28 countries will be screened in the festival, and all movies are
will also be featured in the festival, and all movies are

Adolescent girls in Nepal between
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Matthew and David H. Wells, and a
PHOTO CIRCLE FORTY FOUR
PHOTO CIRCLE FORTY FOUR, featuring a talk by US-based photographers Annu Palakunnath Mathews and David D. Wells, and a presentation by participants of Photo Circle’s Memory and Identity workshop.

Old girls in Nepal between tradition and modernity, an exhibition of Thomas Kasly’s works which reveal the risks and challenges faced as well as the opportunities available to young women in the country.

New Tushita Restaurant, relaxing ambiance and good food. Don’t miss out on its perky with creamy bacon and mushroom sauce. Lazimpat,

CINNAMON GRILL AND LOUNGE, mouth watering delicacies with live music. Try the grilled tenderloin steak and quiche lorraine with fresh fruit salad.

SHANGRI-LA KITCHEN, cook your own Ovary at this newly opened restaurant.

BOUDDHA, (01)4485585

MUSIC

Shastrya Sangeet, dobbie in the magic of Hindustani classical music. every new moon night. 13 December, Ram Mandir, Battisputali

Live at Café 32, live music, and delicious food every Friday. 7 to 10 December, 6pm onwards;

Dining

PIANO LESSONS, a month-long tutelage under Thumik Dineguick who shall be teaching rhythm, sight reading, scales, simple to advance harmonisation, piano solos, and comping.

Rs 5000 registration fee, 15 December, 10am to 7pm, Fun Park, Bikrubi Manast.

Lazimpat,

Dancing on the silver screen

Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival (KIMFF) is back for its 10th year. This year, 62 films from 27 countries will be screened in the competitive, non-competitive, and Nepal Panorama categories. The festival will see the Nepali premiere of the much-awaited Soongava – a dance of orchids. Top ten films from the Educating Nepal short film competition will also be featured in the festival, and all movies are eligible for Audience Award. Besides the screenings, KIMFF will host talks on grassroots filmmaking, ‘Nepali’ quiz, photo and alternative book exhibits, and documentary and filmmaking workshops.

Selected schedule

7 December
NTB, The Art of Flight, 3.30pm.

City Hall, Xiyi Ragi, 5pm.

8 December
NTB, Bachelor Mountain, 10.30am; Sneuholmenannen (The Snow Cave Man), 2.30pm.

City Hall, The Andes Adventure, 1pm; Who Will Be A Gauhru?, 5pm.

9 December
NTB, Waking the Green Tiger, 10.30am; How relevant is Gauhru recruitment today?, 3pm.

City Hall, The Sound of One Leg Dancing, 11am; Extinct, 1pm; Efreet’s Omen (High Hopes), 3pm.

10 December
NTB, ‘Learning to Breathe – 50 Years in the Mountains’, 12.30pm; Dai A Tu Natacha? (Who Killed Natacha?), 2.15pm; An Epic Tale. 5.45pm.

City Hall, Educating Nepal Short Awards Ceremony, 10.30am; What happened on Pem Island? 12.30pm; ‘Know Your Home’ Quiz, 2.30pm; Mental Nord (Selection of Nordic short films), 4pm.

11 December
NTB, Animation and shorts, 11am; Panel discussion on the challenges and advantages of re-growth filmmaking, 1pm; Eyes and Ears of God.
Confusion greets the unsuspecting visitor at the Patan Museum. A 100 human feet radiate outwards from the centre of the courtyard, where the Keshav Narayan temple stands firm. These are not stray foot-steps of all the visitors that might throng to a place of worship, but are echoes of the same person’s feet. Perhaps the devotee in this art-installation stumbled here by chance, and had so many places to go to that she couldn’t decide to go anywhere at all.

Nearby, was the Peak of Communism: tin pails turned upside down, their bases melted. The imagination boggles at the Kathmandu International Art Festival, what are you waiting for?

Where am I?

Biratnagar and night-time don’t usually belong in the same sentence, but Saurav and Subham Bhattarai are determined to change this. Living by their restar-bar’s name, Carpe Diem, the brothers seized the opportunity of providing youngsters in this eastern town a place to hang out, have a beer, play a tune or two on the acoustic guitars, or give an impromptu concert.

Started in September, the place is lit in neon red light, the place is lit in neon red light, than makes up in its atmosphere. Although there are few waiters, they are pretty quick with their service. And the price is exceptionally reasonable. So gather your group of friends and head down to Carpe Diem on a Friday night.

Carpe Diem

B iratnagar and night-time don’t usually belong in the same sentence, but Saurav and Subham Bhattarai are determined to change this. Living by their restar-bar’s name, Carpe Diem, the brothers seized the opportunity of providing youngsters in this eastern town a place to hang out, have a beer, play a tune or two on the acoustic guitars, or give an impromptu concert.

Started in September, the place is still getting on its feet and the quality of food served and the limited items on the menu are clear indications that the restaurant is in its infancy. Even for a bar, the selection of drinks is pretty restricted: no cocktails, only the regular whiskey, beer, wine, gin, and vodka.

We started our Friday evening with a customary plate of steamed chicken momos (Rs 80). There was nothing spectacular about the dumplings. The covering was thick, some parts felt uncooked, and the generous portion of readymade masala took away from our gastronomic pleasure. Next came the chicken balls (Rs 110). The eight deep fried ball, which came with a side of carrots and shredded cabbage, were too salty for our taste.

The highlight of our meal was undoubtedly the boneless chicken chili (Rs 120). Well-done to the core, crisp around the edges, and lightly fried, the pieces of chicken went down smoothly. The meat along with onion, capsicum, and tomato toppings had soaked in all the sauce and soared in the palate. The live band was still in full swing, we ordered yet another round of appetizer: aalu sandeko (Rs 50). It’s hard to go wrong with this simple Nepali snack, but our potato was doused in mustard oil and the coriander, tomato, onion, and ginger were not at all well-mixed. The oil simply overpowered our senses and destroyed the dish.

We wanted to end with something from the lunch and dinner selection and since we had overdosed on chicken, we got jeera (cumin) rice (Rs 50), but could not find anything to complement it. The rice was surprisingly good, with the right amount of jeera and very light on the tummy. The memo on the side, however, was not needed.

If Saurav and Subham want to sustain their joint in the long run, we suggest they work on adding a little variety to both the finger food and drinks menu. Even if they decide to stick to their ‘less is good’ motto, the little that they offer has to be prepared with more care.

However, what Carpe Diem lacks in terms of food, it more than makes up in its atmosphere. The place is lit in neon red light, with huge posters of popular Hollywood stars from the 1950s decorating the wall and is usually engulfed in a cloud of smoke (not a place for those who have problems with second hand smoking). Saurav is excellent with his guests. He will sit down to have a chat and even stop his performance mid-way through if he feels that a customer is not being served the right way or is unhappy. Although there are few waiters, they are pretty quick with their service. And the price is exceptionally reasonable. So gather your group of friends and head down to Carpe Diem on a Friday night.

Trishna Rana

How to get there: travel south from the main bus stop in Biratnagar, before you reach Rastoss Chok, if you look on your right, you will see Hotel Pacific, Carpe Diem is on the ground floor.

9852026278
Taking wealth out of health

DHANVANTARI

Buddha Basnyat, MD

As we have regularly mentioned in these pages, in countries like ours where there is no social security net, sickness can put immense pressure on families, driving some into poverty. However, certain states in south India are offering relief to the poor through a scheme called Arogyasri.

A public-private partnership, Arogyasri has been targeting poor through a scheme called. However, certain states in south India are also trying to simulate this successful model set up by the scheme. Other states in India are also trying to bring in more stories with these same, dear characters. Luckily, some of the more promising films for this year are yet to be available to us, so, in order to celebrate this quality, I’d like to review a relatively old favourite from 2003.

Peter Weir’s *Master and Commander* is a masterpiece, evoking the remorse and awkwardness for times past. Based on Patrick O’Brian’s beloved 20-volume series on the adventures of Captain Jack Aubrey and his friend, Stephen Maturin (the ship’s surgeon, cells playing doctor), the film chronicles the adventures of Lucky Jack and his much cherished ship the *S Surprise* as they chase a French warship, the *Acheron*, up, down, and around Cape Horn during the Napoleonic Wars.

The story is almost episodic with its little vignettes, its biggest charm lying in the way Peter Weir depicts the bonds of friendship, Aubrey, played by the charming rugosal Russell Crowe is hell-bent on catching the Acheron to the point of losing all perspective, and it is Paul Bettany’s character Dr Maturin that gently balances the headstrong captain’s wildness. Over the course of the film, the friendship between these two is barely tested, and not found wanting. Equally charming are the large supporting cast of midshipmen, officers, and crew, who are too many to mention individually, yet it would be a crime to leave out the brave and very endearing performance by Max Pirkis as the barely teenage midshipman who also carries the title of Lord William Blakeney. Suffice to say that this little boy’s courage is one of the main anchors of this layered and surprising film.

I say surprising because while this is indeed a film about war, sea, cannons, and men (there is not a single female character, by the way), it also has unexpected warmth, tenderness, and humour. Working with an amazing script where each character always says just the right thing, with just the right words, there are, in addition to the main element of adventure, also elements of the natural world (Dr Maturin is an avid naturalist), medical science (of the time), and music, as Jack and Stephen end many of their evenings together in the captain’s cabin playing together (Jack also plays the violin) to suit their moods. Most of the vignettes are punctuated by the unforgettable music played by these two characters as the Surprise lurches across the unfathomable waves.

As a viewer who has seen this film a number of times, I am always left yearning for more stories with these same, dear characters. Luckily, lately in Hollywood there have been rumours that some studios have expressed interest in a sequel. Meanwhile, in the words of one of the catchy little songs in the film, “Don’t forget your old shipmates, Luc.”

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**MUST SEE**

**Captain Paris**

**HELMUT MONTOYA**

MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

**READERS’ PHOTO**

**OPERATION SMILE:** After a long day in the fields, a woman is satisfied with her harvest in Godawari.

**HAPPENINGS**

**WEEKEND WEATHER**

A jet stream has guided some clouds from the western Indian shores to the central Himalayas, but the moisture it carries will not result in high rainfall yet. It might induce light snowfall in the high hills and add to the delight of trekkers. The Western Ghats from the Arabian Sea have by now become a regular feature, but their moisture is divided between the Pakistan-Afghanistan area and the Himalayas. This weekend, the Valley will see partly cloudy skies, and maximum temperatures will drop by three degrees in anticipation of a cool winter.

**FIREFLY:** A massive fire broke out at Bhutanese refugee camp in the eastern town of Beldangi, Damak which left hundreds homeless on Tuesday.

**HELPING HANDS:** Children get ready to clean the Bagmati River with the help of teachers and parents as part of the International Volunteer Day celebrations in Tektuka.

**HANDS UP:** UCPN (Maoist) chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal addresses members of the Newari community in a program organised at Itum Bahal on Tuesday.
Imagine PM Narendra Modi

The election in the Indian state of Gujarat is significant both for India and its neighbours

Should Gujarat’s chief minister, Narendra Modi, triumph for the third time in state polls it would increase pressure on the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to project him as its prime ministerial candidate for the 2014 general election. This is a remarkable feat for a man to whom the United British government did not have any relationship until two months ago. Both decided to shun Modi because of his alleged role in the godly riots against Muslims in 2002, sparked off in retaliation to the burning of a train in which 59 especially passengers were returning from the Hindu holy town of Ayodhya. It was a veritable pogrom against Muslims, Ayodhya. It was a veritable

The logic of self-interest or potential allies fear their support for him could weaken them in the state where they command influence. For them, secularism is the cloak they must wear to both retain their attraction for Muslims and scare the BJP from openly projecting Modi as its prime ministerial candidate. They would rather have the debate over Modi prolonged, thus fanning the hopes of both his supporters that he could become India’s prime minister as well as that of his detractors he might not.

Ordinarily, this could have been the BJP’s preferred strategy. But the party is riven by competition among its second generation leaders. Further, the BJP’s hope of exploiting the corruption charges against the Congress government has diminished because its own leaders have been accused of defalcation of public funds. Desperate to capture power, many BJP leaders believe Modi is their best bet for victory, for he can polarise the electorate along the religious divide as well as gather votes because of his credentials as the man who could usher in development. The BJP’s warring leaders have their own calculations. They know the BJP under Modi can improve its performance but can’t form a government on its own. The potential allies could then be worked upon to offer support in exchange for denying the post of prime minister to Modi. But they also believe the demands of coalition politics will persuade Modi the prime minister to take the middle ground and refrain from building a cult around him.

His record in power for over 10 years in Gujarat doesn’t inspire confidence. He chased out his rivals from the party. He whipped up emotions, harping on Hindu or Gujarati pride. To sustain such politics, Modi needs to create enemies. Now imagine Modi as India’s prime minister, his emotive style of politics will demand he create enemies capable of terrorising the entire nation. Such enemies will be so much simpler to find outside India, particularly the neighbours. It has been Modi’s trait to feed on the weak to become strong personally. Ultimately, Mr Strong is Mr Bully.
RAMESH KUMAR

As Nepal's population pyramid experiences a youth bulge, many young adults will simply have no jobs when they enter the labour market

Last year, 110,000 Nepalis competed for 1,500 non-gazetted posts in the civil services. The Public Service Commission needed to fill 1,000 program officer posts, it received 100,000 applications. For an opening of 1,350 posts in the police force, there were 40,357 applicants. 29,000 candidates applied for 45 first-level assistant officer posts at Nepal Rastra Bank's branches outside the Valley. And long queues of hopeful job-hunters lined up outside Nepal Telecom and Nepal Electricity Authority.

"We lined up from six in the morning to submit our documents. There were hundreds on the street for an opening for five posts. It felt like I was queuing up for movie tickets. I had never seen anything like that," recalls 27-year-old Isha Rai who applied to the post of section officer at Nepal Bank in 2011. She didn't get the job.

As the country's population pyramid experiences a youth bulge, an ever larger employment crisis looms over us. More than half of Nepal's 26 million strong population are economically active, in other words between the ages of 15 and 64. About 500,000 young adults enter the job market annually, but the market is able to absorb only ten per cent. The remaining join the three million Nepalis working abroad in India, the Gulf, South Korea, Malaysia, US, and Europe. In 2011 alone, 3,846 Nepalis packed their bags and escaped rising unemployment at home.

Although the 2011 census puts the unemployment rate at only two per cent, this number is highly skewed. It does not account for the 30 per cent who are currently under-employed or the 68 per cent involved in subsistence farming who contribute around 35 per cent of the GDP.

Political interference means infrastructure development, hydropower projects, and other big programs are all lying dormant and the inability of successful governments to bring out timely and complete budgets has stunted the country's economic growth and job-creation.

"While there are some jobs for skilled labourers in the finance, tourism, and IT sector, for most young Nepalis finding jobs is extremely challenging and the political instability is only making things worse," says economist Chiranjibi Nepal.

During the fiscal year 2008-2009, 302 businesses were registered at the Department of Industry which provided employment to around 20,000. This figure shrank to 160 in 2011-2012 and the number of people employed was slashed by half. The industry's contribution to the GDP also plummeted from 10 per cent about five years ago to a meagre six per cent.

"With no new industries or investment, job creation is at an all-time low," admits Manish Agrawal, vice chairman of Employers Council at the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI).

The private sector has shown no signs of growth either and its current GDP input stands at 14 per cent, down from 18 per cent in 2007-2008. While the state employs 80,000 in civil service, registered at the Department of Industry which provided employment to around 20,000. This figure shrank to 160 in 2011-2012 and the number of people employed was slashed by half. The industry's contribution to the GDP also plummeted from 10 per cent about five years ago to a meagre six per cent.

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SLC graduate Lakpa Sherpa from Memar, Solukhumbu district earns an enviable five-figure income from his farm every month. For the past three years, the 42-year-old has been growing cauliflowers, cabbages, pumpkins, radish, and tomatoes in his green house. While mulberries, pears, ginger, and herbs blossom in his nine acre plot.

Keen to use environmentally friendly farming techniques, he also produces his own organic fertiliser and uses waste from the farm as compost. Although transportation of goods is a problem due to the difficult terrain, he has no complaints. He sells his produce at the bajar in Salleri and Nelema and also at the local market and earns enough to sustain his family of five.

“At times I felt like leaving everything and looking for jobs abroad. I even got a few offers, but I knew that if I worked hard on my land, there would be enough opportunities to earn and make a name for myself,” admits Lakpa.

His farm is now a research and expertise centre for the locals. School children, housewives, and fellow farmers come to inquire out about his practices and get information on modern farming methods. Even farmers who were planning to give up agriculture and move to the cities or search for foreign employment, are having second thoughts after seeing Lakpa’s success.

As parties obsess over meeting deadlines and forging consensus, nobody seems concerned about the unemployed and frustrated youths in the country. If quick solutions are not found, these men and women can turn into potent ingredients for future unrest.

Worried about the rising unemployment rate, nation leaders and experts are calling for better job creation. Although the army has absorbed 90,000 and the police another 58,000, the government is in no way equipped to stem the creeping unemployment rate.

As the labour market competition gets intense, more and more parents are doling out millions for their children’s higher education and professional training. Even families with meagre resources are selling land and jewellery or taking out loans so that their children don’t fall behind in the rat race. However, rampant nepotism and corruption mean that even deserving and competent candidates have a hard time finding employment.

Many take up jobs for which they are over-qualified or fall prey to scams. Last year, desperate candidates were found paying millions in bribe to officials in promise of entry into the army, police, and other government offices. Increasing number of youngsters are relying on illegal channels to go abroad, using forged documents and risking exploitation at the hands of agents and employers.

However, experts say the potential to generate jobs especially in agriculture is huge given that our economy still relies heavily on agriculture. “If we can modernise our farming techniques, move towards industrial farming like the West, increase productivity, then agriculture will become more attractive and pull in the huge unskilled workforce,” explains Ganesh Gurung, former member of the National Planning Commission.

Self-employment and small businesses could be another alternative suggests Komal Bhatta, communications officer of the Employment Fund Secretariat in Helvetas Nepal. But for people to start their own business, they need vocational training and a network of support from the state and financial institutions.

As parties obsess over meeting deadlines and forging consensus, nobody seems concerned about the unemployed and frustrated youths in the country. If quick solutions are not found, these men and women can turn into potent ingredients for future unrest.
Farewell to a good soldier of politics

Pursatam Dahal, Annapurna Post, 5 December

At a time when public figures who are willing to make a sacrifice and show restraint are becoming increasingly rare, Bhim Bahadur Tamang was a living example of his democratic beliefs. His disdain for power politics, and his intent to develop a culture of respect within the political fraternity were appreciated by his colleagues and opponents alike.

Tamang was a very intellectual, knowledgeable about everything from the Vedas, to world history, mythology, philosophies, and sciences, he was equally capable in discussing modern issues, and was an erudite advocate of democracy. He was perhaps the most capable candidate from his generation to lead the country, but unfortunately his own party did not support him.

However, ordinary Nepalis recognized his worth and queued up outside his house in Sanepa to pay their last respects. They stood in line for hours as a show of genuine affection, not as formality. Identity politics has shaken the core of Nepali society today. Many groups are searching for their individuality because they don’t want to identify as Nepalis. They want to be known as Gorkhalis, Rais, Limbus, Newars, Tamangs, Gurungs, Madhesis, Yadas, Chaudharys, and even Brahmins and Chhetris instead. In fact, no one is prepared to be a Nepali.

Bhim Bahadur Tamang always chose to be known as a Nepali. He was born a Tamang, but deep inside he belonged to no particular caste. His nationalism made him a Nepali, politically he was a democrat, and as far as social justice was concerned, he was a thorough socialist. Currently, all political parties are running around the president and looking to extend the deadline. If the NC had promoted figures like Tamang, our political landscape would have looked extremely different. Instead the party became caught up in its rivalries and failed to understand the need of the moment. Indeed, the democratic aspirations of an entire nation have been strangled by this self-righteous approach.
In the dark

The lack of curriculum in braille means that the future of blind students remains bleak

MINA SHARMA

‘Education for all by 2015’ is a slogan that sounds hollow to visually-impaired students of Nepal. In addition to the lack of texts in Braille, blind students are further plagued by the examination system which they say isn’t practical for them. Sita Subedi a graduate of Padma Kanya Campus says it is difficult searching for people to write for her during exams. “I waste most of my time during exams explaining the concept to the person writing for me,” Sita laments.

Ramesh Pokhrel of Pokhara is a blind teacher who has been teaching at Kalika High School for the last 16 years and has similar complaints. “It is a challenge for teachers as well who have to teach without books in Braille and proper training,” he says.

In 1964, Laboratory School in Kirtipur introduced education in Braille. Since then, there has been very little done to help blind students. For the past 50 years, the examination system has remained the same and no new teaching materials have been developed. Many schools don’t yet even have Braille notebooks, slates, or stylus which means blind students have to rely solely on spoken words only.

Nepal Blind Welfare Association started publishing books in Braille in Nepal since 1986. However, due to the high cost of production very few books are published. A set of Braille books costs between Rs 1,700 to Rs 17,000. The budget of Rs 4 million that the Ministry of Education sets aside for every three years, cannot support the number of books required every year, informs Ramesh Pokhrel, General Secretary of Nepal Blind Association.

Last year’s budget helped publish 528 sets of books for school students. Of the total books there is only one set available for every ten students. Recently the Nepal Blind Association with the support of the Education Department published 300 sets of Braille pictures which will be helpful in subjects like Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. Three sets each will be distributed to 90 schools where visually impaired students study. However, the 700 or so students in medium and high schools don’t have access yet.

Audio libraries in Pokhara and Kathmandu have provided some relief to blind students and the Blind Welfare Association also plans to expand mobile libraries in different districts. Till then it is an uphill battle for the visually impaired in Nepal. For them there seems to be no light at the end of the tunnel for at least a few years.

MINA SHARMA

Helpful Him

Engineer Him Gautam used to work at the Department of Water Supply before he lost his eyesight in 2001. Back then the only education software available for visually-impaired people was in English. Gautam then began working on similar software in Nepal language which was successfully completed in 2008. The technology is now available to 200 blind people across the country.

With the support of an Australian foundation, Gautam is now working on his own software for blind people in Nepal language called Triveni. Similarly, he has also developed a font converter software that converts eight fonts of Nepal language in Unicode with audio.

Paralysed

A professor of Nepali at Ratna Rajya Campus since 2000, Govinda Prasad Acharya is among very few blind people teaching in colleges. He says that blind students’ problems are made worse by the lack of disable-friendly educational institutes. The central library at Tribhuvan University also lacks educational materials and resources for blind students. “Although they have been demanding for better facilities, the university administration has turned a deaf ear,” laments Acharya.

Hanging on

Suprabha Aryal is a blind student who passed her grade 12 examinations with the support of an NGO and more importantly by listening to lectures with the help of a friend. Aryal experienced a lot of difficulties as she was unable to find a person to write for her exam. “At times I don’t even feel like a real student,” says Aryal. She is apprehensive about attending college because of the lack of proper educational materials.
Does it say something about us that we are always so obsessed here in Nepal with strongman rule. You’d have thought that after 350 years of the Shahs, 100 years of the Ranas, 20 years of the Koiralas and 2 years of Lotus Flower that we’d have enough of maharajas. In the roaring nineties, while netas were boasting that they’d turn Nepal into ‘another Singapore’ or ‘another Switzerland’, it became fashionable to say that Nepal really needed a Lee Kuan Yew or a Mahathir, but poor us, we were stuck with Gyan Bahadur.

Things must have really got much worse because now there seems to be a feeling that even a benevolent dictator will not be able to turn things around in Nepal anymore, we need a mad, malevolent one. Someone who can crack the whip, make trains run on time, or do public amputations of members of the public who urinate on street corners. Which must be why His Honour the Prime Minister doesn’t have on his wall the portrait of Lord Buddha or Grandfather of the Nation Prithvi Narayan Shah, but of Soviet Alpha Male Comrade Joseph the Stalin.

Uncle Joe is so popular among the Baddie brass that PKD and BRB have even started looking like him, combing the hair back with gel and sporting thick Georgian moustaches. But we need someone with an even more fearsome reputation than Stalin, which must be why swastikas are popping up all over Nepal. One INGO that runs a network of community libraries all over the country even has a wall motto that it ascribes to Sir Adolf Hitler. Wait, I thought he called it Fatherland?

Talk of the town last week was whether visiting strongman King Karan was preparing to install another strong man here. There was a déjà vu moment when everyone was reminded of 23 April 2006 when the Maharaja of Kashmir met the Sri Punch Maharaja of Kathmandu in a last-ditch, ill-fated attempt to save the monarchy. But who says the country is going to the dogs because our Nattering Netas of Negativity don’t get along? They all got invited to the bash in Bijaybas in honour of His Royal Highness last weekend. The Good, the Bad, and the Agni were all there, toasting to each others’ wealth while Animal Sam Sher doubled as bartender. Observing all the back-slapping bonhomie at Maharaj Ganj, the visiting dignitary must have thought, hey no problem in Nepal yar, they all get along like a house on fire.

The survey result last week that placed Nepalis as one of the least emotional people in the world outraged a lot of us Nips who yowled and snivelled with disbelief. The Cranticurries want to bring out a julus in an emotional protest and burn a hardcopy printout of the report. How can we be classified as unemotional when our comrade leaders weep in public at the drop of a hat? But the survey was reportedly based on the lack of emotional outbursts in Nepal over 16 hour daily power cuts, and total absence of rage over having to wait for 4 hours for 5 litres of gasoline. Any other country would have ratcheted up 230 revolutions per minute by now.

While still on his extended honeymoon in Chandigarh, self-exiled Dear Leader Prakash has admitted in a FB interview that he should have divorced his second wife and married the third before eloping with her. “I have made a grave error in judgement,” he admitted before going on to promise to elope legally next time round. Meanwhile, it looks like another royal scion in self-imposed exile in Siam is soon going to run out of countries giving him asylum at the rate he keeps getting arrested for possessing dope. The Clown Prince is in custody for trashing a hotel in Bangkok and a villa in Phuket. Maybe he should just give up Phuket and come back to Surkhet.

Poor Makune, got gheraoed by emotional Nepali villagers in Parsa this week who were ticked off by the Mao-Mad coalition government not delivering on services and infrastructure. They didn’t care that MKN is now in the opposition or that he actually contested and lost his parliamentary seat from neighbouring Rautahat. Just as the locals were trying to figure out whether they should slap another eh-maley leader, or just chuck him into the Auriya River over which they had been demanding a bridge for quite sometime, the Balm Neta was rescued by Birganj’s Finest. But they still managed to chase his SUV out of the village and out of sight.