When the ruling Maoists floated the formula of nominating Chief Justice Khil Raj Regmi to head an election government last week, they thought it would finally end the political deadlock.

But the proposal has further deepened the distrust between the Maoists and the other parties, and ignited a controversy within the UML and NC. Older leaders whose bottom line is to see Bhattarai step down conditionally accept Regmi, but others say merging the executive with the judiciary is fatally flawed.

On Thursday in Biratnagar, Prime Minister Bhattarai let the cat out of the bag when he said: “If the CJ is unacceptable to the parties, then I will head the election government myself.”

Analysts like Narayan Wagle say making the CJ the PM was like putting the cart before the horse. “It is more important to first appoint an Election Commissioner and ensure free and fair polls,” he told Nepali Times.

Civil society is also divided on the issue, with Maoist-aligned ones going with the CJ proposal, while another group of activists led by Daman Nath Dhungana said in a statement that making the CJ the PM would undermine due process.

Independent observers say the least messy option now may be the original proposal to convince the UML and NC to join a Bhattarai-led election government.

Sunir Pandey
Nepal's violent conflict ended in 2006 with a lot of loose ends. War fatigue pushed leaders to overlook human rights violations for the sake of peace. Nepal's King Gyanendra and the Maoists announced a peace agreement in 2006, followed by a constitutional referendum in 2007. However, the peace process was marred by violence and political instability. The Maoists refused to disarm and negotiated based on their own terms, leading to a stalemate. The government and Maoists failed to agree on a cease-fire, and the conflict escalated into full-scale civil war. Despite international attempts to mediate, the war continued for years, with both sides committing atrocities.

In 2010, the Maoist-led government took power, and the Maoists were integrated into the political system. However, the transition to democracy was marred by a lack of accountability for war crimes. The Maoists were accused of committing human rights violations, and there was a lack of justice for the victims of the conflict. The Nepalese government was criticized for not addressing the root causes of the conflict and for not providing justice to the victims.

In 2015, Nepal experienced a major earthquake, which further destabilized the country. The earthquake caused widespread destruction and loss of life, and the Nepalese government was criticized for its slow response and lack of preparedness.

Years of political instability, economic stagnation, and natural disasters have contributed to Nepal's current state of affairs. The country is still grappling with the legacy of war and violence, and the struggle for justice and accountability remains unresolved.

The post-conflict process in Nepal has been characterized by a lack of accountability and justice for war crimes. The process has been marred by political maneuvering, corruption, and a lack of commitment to the rule of law.

The Nepalese government has struggled to address the needs of those affected by the conflict. The government has failed to provide adequate compensation and support for the victims of the conflict, and there has been a lack of transparency and accountability in the distribution of resources.

The lack of justice and accountability for war crimes has contributed to a culture of impunity, where those responsible for human rights violations continue to act with relative freedom.

In conclusion, Nepal's transition to democracy has been fraught with challenges, and the country continues to grapple with the legacy of war. The struggle for justice and accountability remains an ongoing challenge, and the country's future will depend on its ability to address these issues in a meaningful and transparent manner.
Reconciliation without resolution

Nepal has tried to reconcile with its past without resolving the underlying reasons of the conflict.

Ever since the Maoists launched their ‘people’s war’ in the mid-western hills exactly 17 years ago this week, there has been a lot of analysis of why there was a need for a revolution in the first place.

Some saw it as the Maoist party taking a short-cut to power through armed struggle because they lost elections, while others saw the revolution as a true uprising against centuries of entrenched feudalism. Seven years after the end of war, the contest for the definitive narrative is still going on.

Did 16,000 Nepalis have to die because Pushpa Kamal Dahal and his dogmatic comrades wanted to establish a communist dictatorship, or was it a legitimate struggle to counter the structural violence of the state and establish a more just and equal society?

War cannot be justified even in retrospect of the achievements it claims, but what tends to get glossed over today is the state’s lack of response to the inequities and injustice that was at the root of Nepal’s conflict. The tales of discrimination against the Dalits, women, Muslims, Madhesis by a monolithic Hindu monarchical state that preceded the conflict have been deliberately air brushed from today’s narratives.

Earlier this week, on the eve of 17th anniversary of the start of the conflict, noted Norwegian peace studies professor Johan Galtung gave a stark warning during a talk at the Peace Museum in Patan. Nepali society will be in perpetual conflict if Kathmandu’s elite continues to betray people’s aspirations for genuine structural change in society.

Often in post-revolution phases, the elite is scared of retribution from the bottom rung and resists change, Galtung said. So to ensure a peaceful transition, it is better to lift those at the bottom without disturbing those at the top. This was a generic prescription Galtung has been giving out from South Africa to South America, and fails to take into account Nepal’s unique political power balance where the progressive middle is squeezed by extremists on both sides of the political spectrum who dominate the discourse.

One of the contested provisions of the peace process is post-conflict truth and reconciliation. The prevalent narrative portrays the conflict as mindless killing with no socio-economic or political rationale. However, the cold blooded murder of Muktinath Adhikari by the Maoists in 2002 and the torture and killing of Maina Sunuwar by the Nepal Army in 2004 were both manifestations and by-products of the same unjust political structure. Those who killed Adhikari were also citizens of this land and their action speaks of the psyche of society as a whole. Similarly, the torture and rape of fellow citizens by soldiers exposed how dehumanised state security forces had become.

“We know punishing those who took away our loved ones will not bring them back, but the least they could do was confess and tell us the truth. It is equally disappointing that those claiming to speak on our behalf have used our cause for their own ends.” Ram Kumar Bhandari, whose father Tej Bahadur Bhandari was disappeared by the army in Lamjung in 2001, told me after the Galtung talk. Bhandari now leads a network of families whose members were disappeared by both the Maoists and Nepal Army.

In the name of peace, many in Nepal have been trying to work towards reconciliation without resolving the underlying and unaddressed reasons for the conflict. It is now clear that the Constituent Assembly was dissolved last year because traditional forces across political parties, sections of the mainstream media, and the civil society feared changes that would come with a secular and federal Nepal. The longer the excluded are kept at the margins, the potential for conflict will always be there.

History has always privileged the powerful, but it has also given the oppressed the right to protest. Nepal’s political future hangs uncertainly waiting for a resolution between the two. When that happens, reconciliation will take care of itself.

BY THE WAY
Anurag Acharya

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Gone are the days of bulky wooden tables and chairs picked from the local carpenter’s workshop. Companies today want their office space to reflect their corporate culture, and are willing to splurge on stylish yet comfy furniture and decoration because after all happier workers are more productive workers.

“The demand for practical and low maintenance office furniture is at an all time high," says Hitesh Golchha of Fusion which imports its hardware from the German company Hettich.

As land values soar and space becomes a premium, optimising workstations for maximum efficiency is the primary concern of most business owners. So showrooms across the Valley not just supply material and customised packages, but also have professional designers who guide clients from the start to finish and help them make the most out of what is available.

Most businesses today are housed in rented apartments and it’s a waste of their time to hire 15 people who will take a month to set up the place. Efficiency is the key. “Owners would rather pay a little extra to a professional designer who can have the office ready in two weeks,” says Jacqueline Silvers of SB furniture which imports easy-to-assemble furniture from Thailand.

Today’s workforce spend almost one third of their day in the office. So investing in modern, comfortable, and inviting office spaces will not only keep your employees happy and boost their productivity, but also generate more profit in the long-term.

Bhrikuti Rai

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Bhrikuti Rai
For years, the beauty of Nepali homes was only skin deep. Urban Nepalis would indulge in the exteriors of their houses, but neglect the insides. At the start of the new millennium bright garish colours, flamboyant columns, gaudy chandeliers and drapes became hugely popular and turned into immediate status symbols.

Today’s middle-class Nepalis, however, are not only paying greater attention to interiors but demanding simple, smart decor that is durable and easy to maintain. “People no longer want furniture and flooring that their friends or colleagues have. They want something unique, yet minimal and are willing to pay for it,” says Sunaina Shah of Urban Design. “The mantra today is simple is elegant.”

Middle-class Nepalis are not only paying greater attention to interiors but demanding simple, smart decor that is durable and easy to maintain.

Pressures of modern life mean that many Nepalis don’t have much time or energy to take care of their homes. As a result, bulky wooden furniture that take weeks to make and assemble are making way for easy to assemble and dismantle, light-weight furniture. And despite the higher costs, people are opting for parquet flooring instead of rugs and carpets because they are harder to upkeep.

Improved internet and more money for travel, mean Nepali youngsters have easy access to designs from all over the world at their finger tips. They do their homework and know exactly what they want. High-end furniture like leather sofas, waterproof furniture for outdoors, and walk in closets are particularly popular among this age-group and the premium price tag does not seem to deter them.

As hundreds of boutique furniture outlets mushroom across the Valley, clients are spoiled for choice with local, imported, contemporary, and antique goods. Most showrooms have mock ups, or model structures like the one above to make decision-making easier. If buyers still feel lost, in-house interior designers will work with them to come up with customised plans that suit their budget and space.

With rising purchasing power and more sophisticated tastes, interior decor is no longer about practicality for most middle-class Nepalis. And in their quest for the picture-perfect home, they are eager to splurge on aesthetics and luxury.

Cindrey Liu and Sulaiman Daud
"A generation ago, people would simply visit their local carpenter and bring home whatever was on display or whatever was the cheapest. Today’s consumers have a very clear idea of what they want and come to us with a detailed list.”

Devraj Sharma, Karuna Furniture

“Minimalistic design and easy to maintain furniture is the rage today.”

Nikhil Tuladhar, Index Furniture

“Buyers need to do a little bit of homework beforehand so that they can make an informed purchase. Also it’s always a good idea to ‘work backwards’ by choosing things they really want, and then getting the rest with whatever is remaining.”

Rajat Sarawagi, Ambience Lifestyle

“Customers want the best-quality interior products because they feel their house is a reflection of their personality.”

Rahul Sarawagi, New Madan Furnishers

“More and more young Nepalis are splurging on the most contemporary and unique products because they want to stand out and make a name for themselves.”

Saurav Joshi, Furniture Land

“Home decor is a one-time investment so customers are willing to spend as much as it takes so long as the products are of good quality.”

Sharmila Joshi, Sumo World

“Five years ago very few Nepalis would think about parqueting floors in their homes because it was too expensive. But since those floors are easier to clean and maintain than carpets, everybody wants them today.”

Akhil Chapagain, Akhil Trading

“We counsel our clients from the design phase to delivery and make sure the plan fits their budget and space available.”

Pravin Mittal, Emporios

“The wide range of readymade furniture available in the market today is attracting new and old home-owners.”

Jacqueline Silvera, SB Furniture

“Furniture can cost anywhere between Rs 5,000 and Rs 50,000. But middle-class buyers are not fazed by the heavy price tag.”

Raju Karmacharya, Life Style Decor

“Furniture can cost anywhere between Rs 5,000 and Rs 50,000. But middle-class buyers are not fazed by the heavy price tag.”

Raju Karmacharya, Life Style Decor

“When clients are spending thousands on interior decor, their biggest concern is to make sure the products last them a lifetime.”

Pradesh Shrestha, CP Interior

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Furniture can say a lot about your home or your company. Choose wisely. CP Interior Pvt. Ltd is equipped to provide you with a wide range of furniture products that blend functionality and style. Our products are manufactured from the finest and solid wood and fabric. From single chairs to complete dining sets, we have a product for everyone at a competitive price. Also, our service staff is knowledgeable about high-quality products, providing a unique shopping experience. Call us today, and allow us to help you.”

Pravin Mittal, Emporios
**EVENTS**

**MUSTANG: A SPIRITUAL ODYSSEY**
an exhibition that showcases thangkas, photographs, sand mandalas, and dances from Mustang. Art Gallery installations, and exhibitions that showcase thangkas,

**MUSTANG: A SPIRITUAL ODYSSEY**

In Mustang, an extensive eight-day training on the technical and creative aspects of video production and editing will be held. Learn the art of editing videos through the **Ultimate video editing workshop**, where you can receive hands-on training and guidance from professionals.

The workshop will cover the basics of video editing, including software familiarization, video file manipulation, editing techniques, and more. Attendees will get the chance to work on real projects and receive feedback from experienced trainers.

Venue: Ananda Bride Hall, Nepal T, an up and coming location in Kathmandu.

Date: 22 February

Time: 9.30am to 9.30pm

Fee: Rs 4,000

Contact: info@pranamaya-yoga.com

**CHIHAPROMA**

A unique opportunity to be part of an evolving exhibition that focuses on local food, culture, and art. Join the festivities during the celebration of the seventh edition of the Nepal International Indigenous Film Festival.

**ALFRESCO**

Visit for homemade pastas, coffees, and waterfronthehotelnepal.com

**WATERFRONT RESORT**, the lakeside hotel invites you for special barbeque diners on Friday and lunches on Saturday.

**GETAWAYS**

Grand Nairoling Hotel, countryside weekend packages offering suite room, swimming, gym, massage, and discounts on other facilities.

Temple Tree Resort and Spa, a peaceful place to stay, complete with a swimming pool, massage parlor, and sauna, it'll be hard to leave once you get here. Gaungaha, Lakeside,

Dhulikhel Lodge Resort, located on a hilltop, the resort offers a magnificent vista of valleys, foothills, and mountains to the north. Dhulikhel,

**DINING**

**YIN YANG RESTAURANT**, east meets west as you choose from a variety of Thai and continental dishes. Boudha, (01)4495855

**NEW TUSHITA RESTAURANT**, Tibetan cuisine, its pleasant and spacious garden is ideal for big gatherings.

**MARK DAVIDSON AND MIRACLE WINE TASTING IN POKHARA**

**ALFRESCO**, visit for homemade pastas and other lip-smacking delights. Boudha Crowne Plaza, (01)4723999

Boothe Stupa Restaurant and Cafe, bide your time in the cafe's free wifi zone as you enjoy wood-fired pizzas, home-made pastas, and the Tibetan gyaliok. Boudha, (01)4495855

**Magic Beans**, coffee, cakes, and sandwiches with magical touch and taste. Shepa Mall, Durbar Marg, (01)32691

Dechelling, the place to head for Bhutanese and Tibetan cuisine, its pleasant and spacious garden is ideal for big gatherings. Thinan

**New Dish**, grab filling meals like pork momos, spring rolls, and chop sueys with excellent value for money. Khicha Plahari

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Dhulikhel Lodge Resort, located on a hilltop, the resort offers a magnificent vista of valleys, foothills, and mountains to the north. Dhulikhel,
**Pizzas are hit and miss in Kathmandu. While Fire and Ice and Roadhouse Cafe are the big boys, Pizza Hut is average at best, and most other restaurants serve the Italian delight as an afterthought. Himalayan Pizza, the newest kid in town, has finally arrived with a mission to transform the Valley’s pizzascape.**

Boasting a delivery service anywhere in or around Thamel, Himalayan enjoys the distinction of being run by a genuine Italian manager, as well as having a chef who has plied his trade around the world. The influence shows on the menu, which includes not only traditional Italian favourites, but also an inventive ‘fusion’ selection with toppings native to the particular region of Nepal that the pizzas are named after. For example, the Annapurna pizza is lined with spicy paneer, boiled egg, and zucchini.

Space is a bit of premium, but you can choose to sit in the outdoor ‘garden’ or a bigger room connected to it by a small staircase. Being surrounded by high-rise apartments on both sides gives the impression that you’re dining at a friend’s loft.

There is a buffet of pizzas to choose from – 108 to be exact – both vegetarian and non-vegetarian, and the pizzas aren’t huge (the small ones are about the size of a large saucer) so you can afford to try a bit more of the menu. The owners tell me they settled on 108 because it is a lucky number in Hindu and Buddhist cultures.

We felt like having a real Italian-style meal, which always begins with an antipasto dish. Usually made from cold cuts and fresh bread topped with cheese and tomatoes, and served with olive oil. Bite-sized pieces enough for one person, they were the perfect start before the pizzas arrived.

Being a big fan of cheesy pizzas, we got the small Quattro Formaggi (Rs 225) or four cheeses in Italian. Baked with mozzarella, parmesan, cottage cheese, and feta, it was savoury without being overwhelming. The small Pavarotti (Rs 285) won’t make you warble like the famed opera singer, but its mushrooms and smoked ham was a nice contrast to the vegetarian option.

But the menu really shines in its fusion pizzas, for where else but Nepal could you get spicy buffalo meat as a pizza topping? The small Gorkha (Rs 275, pic centre), topped with spicy buffalo, chilies, and garlic was fiery and flavourful. There’s a pizza for every town in Nepal, so pick your destination and see if it matches up.

With salads, pastas, and fruit pizzas for the kids looking to try something sweet, Himalayan has enough options to keep both adults and children coming back for more. Give it a try next time you’re in Thamel.
Kathryn Bigelow has created a world of controversy with her most recent film, Zero Dark Thirty. Previously the first woman ever to win the Best Director category at the Academy Awards in 2009 for her tremendously intense film The Hurt Locker, Bigelow beat her former husband James Cameron that year for Avatar, with herself and her film winning over Cameron and his wondrous science fiction epic in both Best Director and Best Picture categories. It is impossible to overstate the kind importance and credibility that this win can give to a director. With Zero Dark Thirty, Bigelow has taken her biggest risk yet. This finely crafted film is about the 10 year long search for Osama bin Laden after the horrific events of 11 September 2001.

Opening with the title: ‘based on firsthand accounts of actual events’, the film launches into the now infamous torture scenes where a man, Ammar (Reda Kateb), suspected of having links to bin Laden is routinely tortured via either water-boarding or other so called ‘enhanced interrogation techniques’ (this is the official nomenclature of the CIA for what anyone else would call torture).

Conducting the torture is a CIA officer called Dan (Jason Clarke). As witness is the initially horrified Maya (Jessica Chastain), a young CIA officer who has just been posted to Pakistan, the hub of suspected terrorist activity at the time.

What Zero Dark Thirty does as a film is to lay out in cinematic form an intricate procedural method, in other words it portrays a series of connecting events, people and information that eventually lead to the Navy Seal assault on a compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan resulting in the killing of Osama bin Laden on 2 May 2011.

There are many troubling aspects to this very fine, very watchable film. Already, the word ‘watchable’ is problematic when addressing the manhunt for a terrorist that undeniably made things worse, HAPE and cerebral edema (HACE). To get to the title: ‘based on firsthand accounts’ and to root unabashedly for a committed band of CIA agents hell-bent on killing a terrorist.

There is also, of course, the mixed response from people elsewhere who believe that they are indeed watching a version of reality. What makes things even worse is that bin Laden is dead, having been killed during the film’s final scenes.

Lett There Be Light: A Tibetan girl lights a candle to celebrate the third day of Tibetan New Year 2013 in Jawalakhel on Wednesday night.

The heights of war

DHANVANTARI
Buddha Basseyk, MD

More than 50 years ago, Chinese and Indian soldiers found themselves locked in lethal combat at 5,000 metres in the disputed Aksai Chin region of Ladakh. If you’ve watched or read The Hobbit, think about the colossal battle in the Misty Mountains, the 1961-62 Sino-India war was fought in a similarly treacherous terrain.

Unfortunately, many Indian soldiers arrived at Aksai Chin from the Indian plains without proper acclimatisation and suffered life-threatening forms of altitude sickness such as high altitude pulmonary edema (HAPE) and high altitude cerebral edema (HACE). To make things worse, HAPE and HACE were almost unknown to the medical fraternity in the early 60s and as a result, many soldiers were misdiagnosed with pneumonia and treated with antibiotics. Later on the doctors came to realise the men were not suffering from pneumonia, but water collected in their lungs was making them sick. The medical team intuitively thought the water was due to the heart’s inability to pump blood efficiently in the cold and low-oxygen environment.

So they stopped the antibiotics, used digoxin to thin the heart muscles, and prescribed powerful diuretics (like Lasix) for edema. Unfortunately, none of these drugs (antibiotics, digoxin, or diuretics) are useful for HAPE and hundreds of lives were lost in the high mountains.

The Chinese army, on the other hand, was far better prepared than its Indian counterpart to survive at high altitude. With a long history of fighting in the mountains with Tibetans and others, they are experts in alpine warfare. Unlike Indian soldiers many of whom were flown directly from New Delhi to Ladakh in their summer uniforms, the Chinese wore well-padded clothes to prevent hypothermia, were better rested, and did not exert themselves excessively upon arriving at Aksai Chin, a key component in acclimatisation.

No surprise then that China eventually won the war. The tragedy in Ladakh, however, led to some of the most comprehensive research and field literature about altitude sickness.

The 1965 article on HAPE by Captain Menon in The New England Journal of Medicine is a classic work, and the study in the same journal in 1969 by General Indir Singh et al of almost 2,000 soldiers fighting in this hostile terrain is clearly a tour de force.

Despite this wealth of knowledge, lack of awareness about altitude illness continues to plague the subcontinent. Last year, over a hundred Indian pilgrims died due to altitude sickness while visiting Sri Amarnath Temple (4000m) in Jammu and Kashmir.

We are seeing winter winding down now, and a lot of evidence of weasly fronts beginning their spring movement south. The minimum temperatures have been rising to up to 24 degrees on Wednesday. This trend will continue next week, but only after a cold spell associated with another low pressure system that will bring rain and snow to the mountains over the weekend. Sunday could even see an isolated thunderstorm or two in central Nepal.
No moral high ground

India’s execution of Afzal Guru will prompt its neighbours to sneer and call it hypocritical.

imprisonment, the death penalty will reek of hypocrisy to India’s neighbours. This is a government that never tired of lecturing Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa on the need to cobble a political settlement with the alienated Tamil population. LTTE cadre were killed in cold blood at the end of the war, triggering accusations of war crimes against the Sri Lankan army.

The Indian government, of which Pranab Mukherjee was a key player and who as president rejected Guru’s mercy petition earlier this month, chose to remain silent on Sri Lanka, quite rightly realising it can scarcely be seen to be interfering in favour of a secessionist movement. Secession and terrorism have been India’s bane as well, prompting it to counter the twin menace through tactics which are at times in gross violation of human rights.

Yet, to appease its allies from Tamil Nadu, the UPA government mounted pressure on Rajapaksa to devolve power to the North and East of Sri Lanka, once the bastion of the LTTE, for removing the root cause of alienation of the Tamils. The Lankan president did not play along, correctly calculating that he didn’t have to compromise at the time he had stymied the separatist tendencies of the Tamil population. This provoked the UPA government into voting against Sri Lanka in the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva last year.

Guru’s hanging should prompt Rajapaksa to harp on New Delhi’s propensity to lecture others on the virtues of reconciliation and political settlement without pursuing these policies in its own dealings with groups alienated from the Indian state.

Kashmir has simmered for much of India’s post-Independence history. Over the last two decades particularly terror groups and the Indian security forces have matched each other in barbarity, reigniting old animosity upon the Valley. However, with support from Pakistan and terror groups tapering off, and Kashmir experiencing tenuous peace there was hope of New Delhi initiating a genuine reconciliation process.

Not only has New Delhi interpreted the lull in Kashmir as vindication of its policies, India has now ruled the emotions of Kashmiris as well. It is still too early to tell what their reaction to the hanging would be, as they are literally locked up inside their homes because of the curfew. But Chief Minister Omar Abdullah did say: “Generations of Kashmiris will identify with Afzal Guru.” His death, so to speak, will become the symbol of the capital’s colonial attitude towards Kashmir. Should there be an outbreak of street-protests, be sure Rajapaksa is bound to snigger at New Delhi’s righteousness.

You wonder, too, what the political parties of Nepal have to say on India mounting pressure on them to recognise the aspirations of Madhesis. Opposed to identity-based federalism, the NC and UML have often heard India haranguing them into accepting the idea which they believe is inimical to their country. Perhaps they too would want New Delhi to accommodate the aspirations of Kashmiris or for that matter, some of the people of India’s Northeast, before it nudges them to tread what it thinks is the path of sanity.

Clearly, the Congress and BJP feel Kashmir and its people are subservient to their goal of winning the 2014 general election. Anxious at the outcome of the BJP’s likely projection of Narendra Modi as its prime ministerial candidate, the Congress had little compunction in sacrificing a Kashmiri, a man whose fate had become little compunction in sacrificing a Kashmiri, whose hanging the BJP had been demanding for long.

As for the repercussions of the hanging, well, the Kashmiris can always be fired upon and silenced. Their vote against the Congress or BJP doesn’t mar the electoral chances of these parties, for the state has just six seats in the House of 543 members. It is from such cynicism and divisiveness that the Indian Republic needs to be rescued.

ashrafajaz3@gmail.com

No moral high ground

India’s execution of Afzal Guru will prompt its neighbours to sneer and call it hypocritical.
SUNIR PANDEY in NEPALGANJ

After a series of boom and bust cycles in the past decade, Nepal’s domestic aviation is flying into strong headwinds of low yield, stagnant growth, over-capacity, and safety concerns. But that is not the conclusion one comes to seeing the hive of activity at Kathmandu airport’s domestic apron during the early morning rush hour these days. Dorniers and Twin Otters line up for takeoff to Lukla as the trekking season begins, and for Mt Everest sightseeing flights. There has been robust growth in tourism arrivals, with 70 per cent of that was between March 15 and July 15 of last year, and the US dollar has appreciated 20 per cent since January. Bringing to 11 the number of airlines that have folded since 2000. Guna has been bought by Simrik Air and Yeti hasn’t made up its mind whether to acquire Agni’s compatible fleet of Jetstreams and Dorniers. If Nepal Airlines takes delivery of two Chinese-made MA-60s as expected, private airlines fear it will worsen over-capacity on trunk routes and put further pressure on fares. The remaining domestic airlines cannot afford to buy new aircraft, and no carrier has planes less than 14-years-old.

“The airline business is all about day-to-day cash flow,” he says, “but with more fuel-efficient and high-volume ATRs, we can offer lower prices than anyone else.” Buddha’s safety record, however, was tarnished by the crash of a Beechcraft in September 2011 that killed 19 passengers and crew. It has also been investigated recently by CAAN (Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal) which has suspended three engineers after engine manufacturer Pratt & Whitney found maintenance lapses. Buddha Air’s Managing Director, Birendra Basnet, admitted there was a “calculation error, but no malafide intent” regarding engine component replacement, and attributed it to a “malicious smear campaign” by rivals.

“The problem was caused by a computer software interface that had calculated the number of cycles incorrectly,” Basnet said. “Pratt & Whitney brought this to our attention and we immediately rectified it.”

The remaining domestic airlines are also major source of income for Yeti subsidiary, Tara, as well as smaller airlines, Goma Air, Air Kathmandamap, and Makalu Air based here in Nepalganj. But the days of food ferry flights may be numbered as roads reach remote districts like Mugu and Humla. Yeti is also promoting Nepalgunj as a hub for transit passengers flying from Kathmandu to destinations in far-western Nepal.

In 2011-12 the total number of domestic airline passengers reached nearly two million, almost 80 per cent of that was between Kathmandu and Lukla, proving how centralised and tourism-dependent the industry has become. "Demand elsewhere is just not high enough, that is why airlines concentrate on Kathmandu," explains CAAN Deputy Director Dinesh Prasad Shrestha. But remote airport facilities in Humla, Mustang, Mugu, and Manang are upgraded, Shrestha expects volume to grow. Kathmandu’s creaky old domestic terminal is also being expanded to handle more passengers.

Meanwhile, here at Nepalgunj passengers for remote Karnali airfields queue for days to buy expensive tickets, and flights are often cancelled due to weather or aircraft shortage. Simikot and Talcha haven’t had flights for weeks because of heavy snowfall.

Nepal’s domestic airlines are headed into another patch of severe turbulence
There seems to be a perception that the woes of Nepal’s national carrier, Nepal Airlines, can be resolved solely by adding new aircrafts. It is true that the airline has antiquated equipment, but the real problem is chronic political interference in management, as well as the activities of its overly-politicised unions.

Lately, there has been a lot of speculation in the press about the survivability of the national carrier, and the behind-the-scenes efforts to bring in new equipment and management. Selective leaks to the media speak of huge cash infusion needed for the purchase of new aircrafts to operate domestic and international routes, as well as keeping its ageing fleet airworthy.

Rivals seem to want to sabotage the airline that flies Nepal’s flag, but for Nepal and Nepali people it would be disastrous. Nepal Airlines could and should be the carrier that provides affordable and reliable air travel to remote areas of the country where private airlines are reluctant to operate.

Nepal has nearly four million people working abroad, but most of them spend hard-earned cash buying tickets of foreign airlines to and from Qatar, Malaysia, Dubai or Korea. Other labour-exporting countries like Sri Lanka and the Philippines concentrate on their own national traffic so the money stays at home. With Nepal, it is just the opposite.

None of this is surprising, Nepal’s national airline is just as mismanaged, misdirected, visionless, unprofessional, and dysfunctional as the government that controls it. Successive governments since the 1990s have destroyed the airline from the inside and the slide continued after the word ‘Royal’ was dropped from its name in 2006.

Nepal Airlines like any other modern transportation company needs to be independent and kept away from the clutches of government and political parties. It is also paralysed by rival unions which are ostensibly there to safeguard the welfare of staff, but represent their controlling arm. This interference has to stop to save the airline.

When one faction in politics finally decided to go into much-needed fleet augmentation two years ago, rivals mobilised the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) or the CIAA to sabotage the deal. When the political tables turned, the rivals returned the favour.

How can an airline that is supposed to compete and fulfill requirements to match 21st century aviation be run by the kind of people who work at the NAC head ofce at New Road? One step into the building and visitors are reminded of a shabby government office with staff gossiping and lazing about with seemingly nothing to do. The rot has now seeped down to every level of staff, with no culture of reward for good performance and punishment for bad.

Executive Chairman Sugat Ratna Kansakar was given a clean chit by the Supreme Court over suspicions of hanky-panky in the Airbus deal. The CIAA and PAC sabotaged the purchase of the 320 and 330 jets three years ago, probably because they wanted a piece of the pie. If those planes had been delivered, Nepal Airlines would now have been ferrying Nepali workers to Doha, Dubai, Kuala Lumpur, and servicing multiple destinations in India.

Now, there is a similar attempt to block the acquisition of five aircrafts from China to augment domestic operations: two turboprop MA-60s and three short-takeoff and landing Y-12s.

The carrier lost more time and money, the employees suffered, and so did the country. Nepal Airlines today doesn’t even fly to the capital of neighbouring India. When it did, it had kept fares low, and today fares have risen even on budget carriers because of cartelting. It has unfeasible once-a-week flights to remote districts.

Why can’t Nepal Airlines sue the CIAA for its mistake and the colossal losses it has caused the airline and country? Where else can the honest employees go for justice?

Just like some Nepalis like to bad mouth their own country, they also like to be cynical about Nepal Airlines. We forget that every time we make fun of our national carrier we are actually ridiculing ourselves, we are highlighting our own failures. It is time again to let our flag fly high and rescue the people’s airline from the clutches of politicians and under-motivated staff.

Captain Vijay Lama has been flying with Nepal Airlines for the past 25 years.
United beginnings

Sashank Lama, Nepal Plus

Every year on 1 January, billions of people from America to Australia pop champagne bottles to welcome the New Year. A month later in February, the Chinese spread in different corners of the globe celebrate the beginning of their lunar year. However, Buddhist Nepalis who have adopted the same lunar calendar, celebrate separately on different days as part of diverse ethnic communities.

If citizens from so many countries across the world can come together on the same day despite their differences, why can’t we Tamangs, Gurungs, Hyioms, Sherpas do the same? Our religion, customs, way of life, and mindsets unite us, so why don’t we boast to our common heritage? We talk a lot about ‘unity in diversity’, but it’s a pity we don’t practise what we preach.

Some will argue that we all have different cultures and traditions and need to preserve our uniqueness. But the Chinese too are vastly different. They speak two languages and hundreds of dialects and every few kilometres one notices a change in culture. And yet all Chinese get together for the festivities. On the other hand, locals of Solukhumbu and Helambu who are both ethnic Sherpas and share similar traditions celebrate Losar on different days.

Advocates of different Losars say that myths and stories dictate when a particular community’s New Year’s day falls on. However, these claims are baseless. In fact, all communities who follow the lunar calendar should celebrate on the same day as China because this is historically and scientifically accurate. Many will vehemently oppose this proposal and claim that our identities will be compromised and sidelined by Chinese cultures. But consider this: we are not bowing down to China, but respecting an ancient civilisation that took thousands of years to be what it is today. Besides no one considers this: we are not bowing down to China, but respecting an ancient civilisation that took thousands of years to be what it is today. Besides no one

To move with the times even India, which is where the Bikram Sambat calendar originated, despite its diversity has opted to follow Gregorian dates.

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Going to polls by 29 May is our greatest priority and for that the NC is ready to work on a unity government even if it is led by some other party, but with consensus on upcoming polls. If the parties cannot decide on leadership we are even willing to accept an independent candidate chosen collectively. The Congress now needs to take the initiative to implement this alternative plan and decide on the formation of a new government in the few days.

If the Maoists don’t agree, then that will put us back to square one. Don’t you think the conditions are becoming increasingly unfavorable for polls in May?

There is no point rushing into elections that will jeopardise the values of democracy. Although it doesn’t sound pleasant right now, pushing the polls by a few months won’t make a big difference. Since the day the Maoists rejected our party president’s candidacy to lead the electoral government, we have been open to holding polls even under the leadership of Pushpa Kamal Dahal just so that Nepal can move ahead. The NC can and will sacrifice whatever is required to hold polls on time, but the country should not be asked to make these sacrifices.

Why do you think senior NC leaders are increasingly focusing only on the Maoists’ proposal?

Some will argue that we all have different cultures and traditions and need to preserve our uniqueness. In fact, all communities who follow the lunar calendar should...
WANT
PILLS?

Narayan Wagle in Nagarkot, 14 February

If you want elections on time, you must first fill vacant positions at the Election Commission. The terms of three commissioners ended on the same day earlier this year, but they can easily be re-appointed if the parties agree and the government sends a referral to the President. In fact, they were appointed six years ago the same way, and this would avoid the politicising of appointments and further uncertainty and tokenism.

There is also the need to re-demarcate constituencies based on the new census results, especially for Kathmandu and the Tarai. But there is no time, the parties seem determined to hold elections by 29 May, and have shown an unsettling disregard for what that would entail. There is also still time to redraw voters’ lists and IDs, and the only way to do this is to make sure the EC is fully staffed. Announcing election dates will only make sense if the EC is complete. The prime minister announced polls for November last year, and postponed it to April this year. Now the parties want elections by May. But this is not a party election, and only the EC can hold polls.

The parties know very well that democracy cannot survive without elections and it will be five years since the last polls on 10 April. More important than whether or not the Bhattarai-led coalition stays in power is to form an EC which can hold free and fair elections.

Kayre to Singapore

Himal Khapatpati, 15 December

Prem Lama of Sanga in Kayre was ridiculed when he established Ashapuri Organic Farm eight years ago. Spread across five hectares, the farm now produces 30 kg of vegetables daily helping Prem earn Rs 1.5 million each month from the sale of 60 varieties of vegetables and fruits in Kathmandu and Singapore. “There is a high demand for mushroom and yacon (ground apple) in Singapore,” says Lama.

Govinda Sharma of Pattale Khet has also found a niche in the international market. Many farmers in Kayre have been inspired by Sharma and Lama’s success stories and have made Kayre the epicentre of organic farming in Nepal.

Just a few years ago farmers were heavily dependent on chemical fertilisers for protection against pests and to increase production from small area. But with increasing awareness about the adverse effects of chemical fertilisers, farmers have changed their ways. Kayre annually produces 150,000 tons of fruits and vegetables half of which is sold in Kathmandu, and the rest exported.

For those who
Dream to Fly

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WANT POLLS?
What did he know, and when did he know it?

S
o Kentucky has decided on a new motto: ‘Kicks Ass’. Drat, they beat us to it. That was a slogan yours truly, Gluteus Maximus, had set aside for our own Maoist Plutocratic Republic to replace the traditional feudal national motto on our coat of arms which goes, ‘Motherland is Greater Than Heaven’ or words to that effect.

Which brings us to the need to modify Nepal’s coat of arms to move with the times. We have removed most vestiges of the monarchy era, including the crown, royal standard, and the holy cow. The new coat of arms of Revolutionary Nepal will replace the cow with the Donkey, which the cabinet will officially declare the country’s new national animule. At the rate we are eating danfes, our national bird is soon going to be extinct, so the pheasant has been replaced with the more ubiquitous urban crow. The holy river in the emblem will now resemble the Bagmati, Mt Everest will be devoid of snow because of climate change, and the crown’s place will be taken up by a centurion helmet.

Not deterred by ridicule, Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai is boldly going where no prime minister has gone before by spending one night a month in a poor Nepali’s home and eating what they eat. By now he has worked his way through grasshopper chutney, barbecued rat, and monkey cury. Given his record for protecting war criminals, we wonder if he is ever going to be allowed into the UK. But if BRB is granted a British visa he can also partake of horse meat when he orders a burger at the Bountiful Cow in Holburn.

I had thought it would be possible to write a column this week without mentioning Justice Kill Raj and his chances of becoming prime minister and spare you the bother, but no such luck. Rumour has it that the idea first originated in the lawn of the Claridge’s Hotel about a month or so ago and was communicated to the Baddies by none other than Comrade Octopus. PKD took this as a great opportunity to remove BRB from power after the convention, but what he keeps forgetting is that Lal Dhoj is an even more of a Machiavellian schemer than him. While the PM appeared to be pushing the CJ formula, what he was really doing from behind the scenes was paying lip service to the proposal knowing fully well that it would be shot down by the opposition. He even blurted out that the alternative to the CJ as PM was his own continuation in office, PKD, UML, and NC had no idea BRB was running circles around them. And an added bonus, by dangling the lolly successfully in front of Justice Kill he also demolished the Chief Justice’s reputation and defanged the Supremo Court in one swell foop. If only the Doc would use his proven genius in wheeling and/or dealing to get the country moving again.

The real question now is what did the Chief Justice know, and when did he know it? The chronology, according to some, goes way back to his appointment as CJ during the PKD regime when he was pulled up from his fourth ranking position in the justice bench. BRB then summoned him over the wall to the Balu Water Palace to tempt him with an offer of PMship that he couldn’t refuse. Kill Raj seems to have swallowed it hook, line, and sinker, because not once did he ever deny that he was in the running, he didn’t even try to salvage his standing by saying his appointment went against the fundamental democratic precept of the separation of powers. But the man seems to have finally had his doubts on Wednesday when he told the Baddies no way he was going to resign prior to being appointed PM. Must have dawned on him that he could be neither PM nor CJ.

So the govt will be shelling out GBP 7 lacks to pay the defence lawyers of Colonel Lama? Why should tax payers pay for the defence of someone who tortured a tax payer? How about sending the legal bills to ex-majesty King-ji?