The election was an emergency bypass to get the country’s failing heart pumping again and put our derailed politics back on track. So instead of bickering about whether or not to change the president, now is the time to end this seven-year long, messy transition by relieving the chief justice of his duties, setting up a new cabinet, and letting the 601 CA members begin their job. Once they are in place, announcing local elections should be the new government’s first order of business. Politics abhors a vacuum and the void at the grassroots level needs to be filled right away.
The people have understood the link between grassroots democracy and development, most politicians still haven’t

I t took only a few years after the first people’s movement in 1990 for quarrelsome political leaders to get bogged down with greed. The rot started at the top, but at the grassroots democracy was taking root. Local elections were guaranteed at accountable local leaders who had to perform to get re-elected and to rise up the ranks to national politics. The Decentralisation and Local Self Governance Act of 1998 wasn’t perfect, but it empowered elected local bodies and institutionalised the political authority of VDCs, DDCs, and municipalities.

Like politics, all governance is local. The success stories of the past two decades all happened because communities were democratically empowered. Community forestry wouldn’t have taken off without local democracy. The result actually changed Nepal’s midhill landscape (see page 16-17). Grassroots democracy is not possible without participation, which is not possible without communication, and Nepal’s community radio revolution dovetailed ideally with grassroots democracy. When given command over their own destiny, elected local bodies have successfully protected their forests, managed schools and health-posts, repaired bridges and trails, and built their own microhydro plants.

What happened after 1996 is a part of the fateful dismantling of local democracy by the insurgent Maoists who saw it as a threat to their armed struggle. By the 1997 local polls, the NC Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba was not interested in hearing what the people had to say. The NC was split into two political groups attempting to change the ‘four-party mechanism’ to oversee local development and the VDCs and DDCs were soon infected with the corrosive and corrupt locally-led ‘four-party’ ethos. The NC’s collapse was a wake-up call for the centre. The new democratically elected bodies, user groups and school committees are now politically polarised. In the absence of elected municipal councils, Nepal’s cities are bursting at the seams with unplanned growth, crumbling infrastructure, mountains of garbage, and rivers that have turned into sewers.

The reason everyone has been reluctant to go for local elections is because of the fear of losing. But after the November’s CA elections, there is new sentiment among the UML and NC. There is nothing to prevent local elections from being held by April, the Election Commission says it can do it with electronic voting.

The Himalmedia Public Opinion Survey in May showed people are dissatisfied with the prolonged absence of local representatives. Asked when there should be new local elections, nearly half the respondents said ‘right away’. The people have understood the relationship between local democracy and development, most politicians still haven’t.

The Maoists, still smarting from their humiliating defeat, could see local elections as a chance to redeem some of their lost support. By sequencing violence and projecting itself as a party of change, local polls can be a golden opportunity for the former revolutionaries.

Politics abhors a vacuum and it is time to fill the void at the local level so that the engine of development can be restarted after 18 years. The parties are bickering again about whether or not to change the president, but announcing local elections should be the new parliament’s first order of business.

Two Decade Detour

This editorial could have been written six years ago (The two decade detour’, #894). The focus on drafting a new constitution has been a white elephant and always been a deal of accountability must go to the people who stood by old and let it happen.

- Why just two decades? Why not start counting from BP Koirala’s time? It’s been a tortuous century for Nepal.

- More than a detour, it has been two decades of waging. Ever since the monarchy was abolished and the country adopted a democratic system of government, we have been pushed into a vortex of political and economic chaos. The prime responsibility of a political group attempting to change a system of governance is to first give concrete shape to the new form of governance. In the case of Nepal, the NC has actually been in power for almost the whole of the old system without carefully thinking about what to replace it with. Both the

The unrepresented people need to be heard to create a new system.

- We must find a way to detach the economy from politics. As long as we have a vibrant economy and the power, privileges, and perks of the politics drastically curtailed, it will not matter to common people whom wins the PM and president’s chairs.

Jawahar Talchahadhel

BEHOLD Yes, the poll results are a clear rejection of the Maoist party and I would argue much of its agenda (Behave yourselves, Bhakti K Shrestha, #884). The people preferred the more balanced federalism model proposed by the NC, which has from day one opposed the need for autonomy by the Madhesi and Madheshi parties in the name of ethnic федеральism. The votes received by the UML (and to an extent the RPP) are also indicative of a rejection of the politics of communalism practiced by the UCPN(M) in its Madhesi allies. Too much change was forced down the throats of Nepalis too quickly and the people decided they wanted change at their own pace.

Ashok Mishra

- Since the people have put their faith in the Nepal Congress, it deserves to lead the government. Two decades ago, the NC did a good job on the economic front, but that also led to widespread abuse of power and blatant corruption. Over the years, the NC ans UML became the worst symbols of a democratic system. That was the reason why the country was divided in the wilderness and why the NCs won a large number of seats in 2008. We don’t want to go back to those days. A clean government is the need of the hour and we have Sushil Koirala, one of the cleanest political personalities at the moment. He should pick leaders like Gagan Thapa so the NC remains faithful to the people’s mandate.

Kamal Kishor

- Government should focus on repairing existing infrastructure, building new ones, and ensuring they are well-equipped and run by competent professionals. Also a lot of the money earmarked for healthcare is being wasted due to corruption and an inefficient system. First let’s work on utilising this money properly and then we can talk about amendments to the health policy.

Abhishek Wagle

- The Affordable Care Act (ACA) is badly an over-hyped and half-baked solution. There are no such examples of ACA in any of the Asian, and Australian models. The US model is also not potently, yes Democrats don’t advocate a half-baked, watered down solution. ACA is definitely a step in the right direction, but barely a model that other countries should look up to. After all, the initial plan when the legislation was put to the House of Representatives, for the act to be a single care provider, meaning government provided healthcare for all, Medicare and Medicaid. Of course, this was before the insurance companies started writing the bill for ‘the people’ and influencing key lawmakers. The key way to get this battle back on track is to stop advocating a half-baked, watered down legislation to the Nepal populace with no real solution. Dream big and go single-payer.

John

- For universal healthcare, Nepal needs to look to European, Southeast Asian, and Australian. The US system is too fragmented.

Sant
Dahal’s political harakiri

Pushpa Kamal Dahal is digging a big hole for himself by rejecting the election outcome.

It has been two weeks since my last fortnightly column in this paper in which I pointed out the political immaturity of the UCPN (M) and its need to snap out of it. There is nothing new to report on that score, the party is still in deep denial.

The Maoists stubbornly refuse to concede defeat and to take moral responsibility for the poor showing. This individualist decision is intended to keep Pushpa Kamal Dahal immune from taking responsibility for the setback and the threat to boycott the CA is an effort to distract attention from having to resign as party head.

Other defeated Maoist leaders have also joined in the bandwagon and are accusing the Army, the Election Commission, and even India of rigging the polls and alleging dark conspiracies. A majority of the top leaders have not yet dared to defy the erroneous decision of the party for fear of exclusion from the list of seats for proportional representation. Only a few leaders, who had not actively engaged in elections and not enlisted for the proportional quotas, have been resisting the series of wrong decisions of the party leadership.

To cover up for his party’s defeat, Dahal constituted a probe committee, but who did he get to lead it? Barshaman Pun, a longtime loyalist who himself suffered a humiliating defeat in the direct election. This was obviously not going to be a credible investigation, it would just endorse whatever Dahal has decided as his next course of action.

As expected, Pun’s probe commission simply seconded Dahal’s allegations of an election that was “institutionally, structurally, and methodically” rigged. The whole idea is for Dahal to blame anyone but himself for his party’s election debacle. However, no one really believed the Pun commission, so the UCPN (M) is now demanding an independent commission to investigate alleged cheating in the polls.

It is obvious to everyone what Dahal is doing and what is surprising is that the chairman doesn’t realise that people see through his strategy of diverting attention from his party’s dismal performance under his leadership. Dahal knows all too well that the clamour could grow for his resignation and to take responsibility for his failure of leadership. There is a precedent here, when the UML lost in the 2008 election, Madhav Kumar Nepal took responsibility and stepped down. Dahal can’t afford to do that since it would mean his nemesis, Baburam Bhattarai, would then become more powerful than him.

The Constituent Assembly has a court designed specifically to investigate allegations of cheating by parties who have evidence of serious irregularities. And if the parties are still not satisfied, a commission can be formed to look into all matters relating to the CA election. It is surprising that without exhausting all these options, the UCPN (M) has decided to stall the entire proceedings of the Constituent Assembly. This is cynical, irresponsible, and outrageous. It shows that the Maoists are still not comfortable with the democratic way of doing things.

The latest is that the Maoists have threatened not to send in the list of PR candidates to the Election Commission until an independent commission is set up to probe poll irregularities. Moreover, it has initiated talks with other regional and ethnic parties who also fared badly in polls to form a political front. If the UCPN (M) commits more follies like these it risks being further marginalised.

The best course of action for Dahal & Co would be to graciously accept the party’s defeat, analyse the reasons why it happened, correct those mistakes in the future through parliament and the constitution-writing process. After all, just like there are no permanent enemies in a democracy, there is no such thing as political harakiri. Leaders can always live to win another day.

Muma Ram Khanal was a central member of the Maoist party during the conflict. His column, Inside Out, appears fortnightly in Nepali Times.
A Nepali Nelson

The wait for our own Madiba is going to be a long and grueling one.

As the world mourned the death of former South African President and anti-apartheid crusader Nelson Mandela, many Nepalis silently wondered when we are going to have a leader like him. If the events of the past month are anything to go by, then the wait for our own Madiba is going to be a long and grueling one.

There was a nagging sense of déjà vu this week as the Election Commission was forced to postpone the dates for parties to submit their final proportional representation list at the behest of the Nepali Congress. Memories of the multiple, unsuccessful extensions to the previous Constituent Assembly and delays in holding polls still rankle. Sticking to deadlines has never been a strong suit of our political leadership and old habits die hard.

The eight day extension can be excused as a minor hitch if we look at the bigger picture. However, if our newly elected representatives were serious about respecting the ‘people’s mandate’ they should have had their party lists ready by Tuesday. From the time the last CA was dissolved to 19 November polls, they had 18 months to prepare it. The wrangling within the NC and other parties over who gets to sit in the assembly should have taken place months ago. Yes, no one could have predicted the exact number of PR seats, but a little foresight and better decision-making by the top leadership and the new CA could have conducted its first session before the new year.

For their part, the first and second runner ups – UML and UCPN (M) – seem unwilling to budge unless their individual demands are met even if it means needlessly prolonging CA proceedings and the formation of a new government. When a provision in the interim constitution says that the president and the vice-president will remain in office until the new constitution is drafted, the UML’s insistence on having new faces for these ceremonial posts is petty. If the UML is really in a hurry to see one of its own in Shital Niwas, then it is in the party’s best interest to get the constitution out of the BICC hall within the one-year deadline.

And the longer the Maoists cry foul, the more their demand for an independent probe committee looks like a strategic ploy to save face and avoid coming to terms with their embarrassing defeat. The UCPN (M) calling for a constitutional amendment to make consensus politics a mandatory provision, on the other hand, shows a complete lack of faith in other parties and a deep seated fear of being left behind. However, this provision will lead to further obstruction in the assembly because each ruling will require the approval of all forces and thorny issues like federalism would never be passed by the floor. Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Co would do well to remember that if they keep stalling the CA forming process, the people will run out of patience and in future elections the Maoists might not be able to muster even the 80 seats that they won this time.

Nepalis showed up at polling booths in record numbers in November not because they were worried about state structure and federalism, but because they wanted a stable government that would look after their day-to-day needs and deliver on development and basic services. Let’s not delude ourselves. Our leaders will never be the statesman that Nelson Mandela was, a man with a strategic national vision, but willing to compromise and take everyone along. The least they can do now is to end this seven-year long, messy transition by relieving the chief justice of his duties, setting up a new cabinet, and letting the 601 CA members begin their job.
Innovation and inequality

Even while many developing and emerging economies lifted millions of people out of extreme poverty, the perception that growth meant greater inequality was always bubbling beneath the surface. But now increasingly persistent unemployment and under-employment are giving new impetus to the rise in inequality, as the OECD reported to the G-20 in July.

Indeed, in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, youth unemployment now averages 16 per cent in advanced countries even while many developing countries to invest in high-quality education. That is why it is critical for governments, employers, educational institutions, and civil-society groups all have an important role to play. Our economies’ long-term sustainability depends on it.

www.project-syndicate.org
Imagine this scenario: the UCPN (Maoist), most Madhesi parties, and recent Janajati-centric political parties got 371 seats in the Constituent Assembly election (the combined strength of the Nepali Congress and UML and without including their share of the 26 nominees). It would be close to two-thirds majority in a 601-member assembly or even better than that.

Now imagine the thoroughly trounced NC and UML saying a) though we lost, our agendas have not been defeated, b) we will not accept a federalism model other than the one that we mentioned in our manifestos, c) we demand the recognition of all agreements reached by the people. Both these demands are met. Let us not try to pretend anymore what the mandate means and what it does not. Nepali Times published multiple surveys since 2008 in which respondents across the country rejected the federal model proposed by the UCPN (M), the Madhesi parties, and later Janajati groups (the last of which actually split from their parties on the question of single ethnicity-based federalism). Some political parties and pundits chose to ignore and dismiss those polls. Now that election results have backed the survey results, these very people are attempting to explain why they voted the way they did.

Basically, the NC and UML are being asked to disrespect the mandate and accept the demands of the parties that fared poorly and whose agenda has been rejected by a majority of the people. Both these parties have stood firm against any kind of arm-twisting. But if they resort to uncalled for compromises, there is no doubt they will get a severe drubbing in the next election. Except for those who advise the disgruntled parties in private and write opinions in public, most see this as blatant blackmail by the losers. These parties should be mindful of the precedent they are setting: losers in elections can attempt to hold up the process of government formation.

The election could have been held earlier with the UCPN (M) taking credit for delivering the constitution and formally concluding the peace process. The last occasion for the UCPN (M) to redeem itself was in the final days of the previous CA in May 2012. When different models of federalism failed to break the deadlock in the CA (the last agreed was 11-state proposal to which even the Madhesi parties had agreed, but Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Baburam Bhattarai backed out of it the very next day), the NC and UML suggested 3 options. Either incorporate all the agreements reached by then and pass the constitution as a work-in-progress or just pass the Preamble of the new constitution and preserve the parliament part of the CA to help conduct government business and hold the new election. Bhattarai who sensed a threat to his government with reports of Mohan Baidya, NC, and UML leaders discussing a no-confidence motion against him, refused both the options and dissolved the assembly half an hour before its extended deadline expired on the midnight of 28 May 2012.

Mohan Baidya, NC, and UML leaders discussing a no-confidence motion against him, refused both the options and dissolved the assembly half an hour before its extended deadline expired on the midnight of 28 May 2012.

The UCPN (M) missed the boat and it has paid the price. Now it is time to move forward. The work is cut out for the NC and UML to try and accommodate the concerns of the disgruntled parties. It would be generous to offer some government posts to the UCPN (M) and some others, but it’s not absolutely necessary.

The two largest parties ought to try for a sincere consensus on accommodating the concerns of the Maoists, Madhesi, and Janajati parties on federalism. Since federalism turned out to be such an emotive issue during the last few weeks of the first CA, it requires sensitive handling. Those who want a real federal structure in the country will not settle for a cosmetic arrangement, whatever the new states are called. The more important point is whether there is genuine devolution of power, real decentralisation in terms of resource-mobilisation and sharing, and whether there is a mechanism to prevent the federal government from unnecessarily interfering in the affairs of the state. All need to show responsibility, keep their partisan interests on hold, and for once think what is best for the country. The coming days will show us if the parties have learnt their lesson.

Twitter: @damakant
With her film *Indreni Khojdai Jada* (*Chasing Rainbows*) opening the 11th edition of KIMFF, director Sahara Sharma is a trailblazer for young Nepali filmmakers. *Nepali Times* caught up with the 25-year-old to learn more about her movie and her style of filmmaking.

**What is *Indreni Khojdai Jada* about?**
The story revolves around the lives of three siblings who moved to Kathmandu to pursue their dreams. They are common, everyday people that you would meet on a sauna tempo or in the local vegetable market.

**Who are your lead actors?**
Sanam Pyakurel, who is a theatre artist, Deepak Ghimire, who has tons of experience performing in college and street plays, and Kritika Lamsal, who is a remarkably talented puppet artist, portray the three main characters on screen.

It looks like you’ve sacrificed production values for strong content. Was this a deliberate choice?
Our goal was to give this film a very realistic feel. We refrained from using trolleys and cranes, or even a tripod because we want the audience to feel like they’re watching real life unfold on screen. I agree we’re not as technically strong as mainstream cinemas, but I don’t think that has affected our storytelling in any manner.

What are some of the challenge and advantages of working with first-timers? We shot everything with proper permission of the concerned authorities. Although, if young directors and writers have a story to tell, they shouldn’t feel compelled to wait for production houses or a big star cast, or be concerned about distribution, if they have faith in their work, everything else will fall into place.

What can we expect from you in the future?
Well, I have a few films lined up. In fact there are a number of stories our team is working on. Our producer Abhimanyu Dixit and I are currently developing a script for a sociopolitical thriller.

Would you recommend youngsters interested in making films to take up guerrilla method instead of waiting for production houses?
I really like the guerrilla style of filmmaking, but I wouldn’t put my film in that category because we shot everything with proper permission of the concerned authorities. Although, if young directors and writers have a story to tell, they shouldn’t feel compelled to wait for production houses or a big star cast, or be concerned about distribution, if they have faith in their work, everything else will fall into place.

**What do you think of the competition at KIMFF?**
I think it’s ample room for improvement. One thing I like about KIMFF is that filmmakers from all genres are honored. It’s a film festival dedicated to the mountains and their people.

**Who are your lead actors?**
Salam Pyakurel, who is a theatre artist, Deepak Ghimire, who has tons of experience performing in college and street plays, and Kritika Lamsal, who is a remarkably talented puppet artist, portray the three main characters on screen.

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**Indreni Khojdai Jada**, 13 December, 4.30pm
WORD WARRIORS LIVE, poetry by the garden with Kathmandu’s best slam poets. Free entrance, 15 December, 1 to 5pm, The Yellow House, Sanepa, theyellowhouse.com.np/contact.html

Tell your story, make a 2-12 min video about how girls are changing the world, contest open to girls aged 12 to 25, winner takes $10,000. Deadline 31 December, www.letgirlslead.org

EVENTS

DINING

Bihani film, watch two films ‘Search’ and ‘Serenity’ by filmmaker Govinda Siwakoti, food and beverage afterwards. Rs 500, 13 December, Naini Garden Restaurant, Patan

Seed freedom, food freedom, a lecture by world-renowned environmental leader and recipient of the Right Livelihood Award Vandana Shiva. 22 December, 9pm, Shanker Hotel, Lajimpat

Climate-Change, an awe-inspiring educational science exhibition about climate change and Nepal’s Himalaya. December to April, Nepal Art Council

Merry Christmas, deck the halls with bows of folly. 25 December

DRAGON CHINESE RESTAURANT, try the Kung Pao Pork if alone and the Mai Cao if with company. Lakeside, Pokhara

Trisara, with dishes like flambeed prawns, crispy chicken and khao soi, it would be a folly to ignore its aromas. Lajimpat

Bubbly Brunch, the best of the Mediterranean in shawarma and pasta. Rs 1,200, 11am to 3pm, Shambala Garden and Club Sundhara, Hotel Shangri-la, Lajimpat, (01)4412999 ext. 7520, 7515

Mike’s Breakfast, huge breakfasts and an endless supply of coffee amidst a lush garden setting characterise this cafe, popular among tourists and locals alike. Naxal, (01)4424303

Tass and Tawa, savour a wide variety of Nepali meat dishes and reserve your palate for the heavenly Chusta. Pulchowk, Kathmandu

Fuji Bakery, tucked in Chakupat this bakery offers homemade goodies like apple pie, pain du chocolat, and banana cake. Chakupat, Lalitpur

Mulchowk, the blend of culinary expertise and charms of a bygone era. Badaamshah

Chilly Bar and Restaurant, quality food and wide selection of drinks with great views of Phewa Lake. Lakeside, Hallanchok, Pokhara, (061)463614/463163

Le Sherpa, past the dustbowl chaos on the road outside is culinary paradise. Panipokhari, Lajimpat

Falcha, give yourself away to the twin pleasures of lemon jera chicken and mutton handi kabab. Lajimpat

Club Amsterdam and Café Bar, great food, exotic cocktails, live band, BBQ, and more. Lakeside, Pokhara, (061)463427

Tass and Tawa, savour a wide variety of Nepali meat dishes and reserve your palate for the heavenly Chusta. Pulchowk, Kathmandu

Falcha, give yourself away to the twin pleasures of lemon jera chicken and mutton handi kabab. Lajimpat

NOYOZ, this tiny little joint serves food that tastes like your mother’s home-cooking. Bhatbhateni

SPECIAL SATURDAY, table-topping Arsenal visit challengers Manchester City. 13 December, 6pm, Reggae Bar, Thamel

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Times
Uphill, downhill

The 11th edition of Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival is upon us. Here is a selection of films from the International and Nepali Panorama competitions.

33 December

ANNEX

12pm, The odd sound out, dir. Prernille Shinn & Itamarara Schouwandreaesen, 65'. No place is far away, dir. Michelle Ilaven, 75'. 2pm, audio-video presentation by Gerda Pauler on the Great Himalayan Trail. 4pm, in the shadow of the sun, dir. Harry Freeland, 84'.

14 December

ANNEX

11.30am, A drop of gold, dir. Christope Pelada, 11'. The hanging village, dir. Veronique, Anne, and Erik Lapied, 70'. 1.30pm, The binding sunlight, dir. Yi Liu, 85'. 3.30pm, Journey for happiness, dir. Marie Veno Thesbjerg, 21'. Breathing the smell of the sky, dir. Benoit Aymon, 52'.

25 December

MAIN HALL

11am, Himalaya Bhootas between Nepal and Tibet, dir. Denis Olivier Poulit, 75'. 1.30pm, Last dreams, dir. Avik KC, 67'. Jhysaul, dir. Rakesh Kayastha, 30'.

Education for peace

For the seventh time, Nepathy is setting off on a nationwide tour to 30 new cities, this time with the aim of voicing the concerns of children.

14 December

Taithawa, Kapilbastu

16 December

Gulari, Bardiya

18 December

Lamahi, Dang

20 December

Abu Khaireni, Tanahun

22 December

Miyaghi, Beni

24 December

Gagan Geunda, Kaski

29 December

Patan Darbar Square

A green Christmas

If Bing Crosby’s song ‘White Christmas’ is hammering in your head this season, look for a green Christmas next week. After all, it’s the season to be eco-friendly.

Instead of chopping down fresh pine trees and branches, you can have a small tree in a pot, look after it throughout the year, and then when Christmas next week. After all, it’s the season to be eco-friendly.

But, perhaps the best option is to plant poinsettias inside and outside the house, its red petals the perfect symbol of Christmas.
The discovery of a new species of vulture has created excitement among conservationists

TSERING DOLKER GURUNG

Last December, 40-year-old Saraswati Rawat was making her daily round of her farm in Dharmapani of Tansen when she stumbled upon an unusual looking nest belonging to a pair of vultures that were unlike any other spotted in the area before. Like most Nepalis, the Rawats considered vultures as harbingers of bad luck and wanted to destroy the nest immediately. Little did they know that their accidental discovery would lead to a breakthrough in the study of vulture conservation in Nepal.

The nest, as a group of ornithologists from Animal Rights Nepal later confirmed, belonged to a pair of redheaded vultures, the first recorded sighting of the species in Nepal. For the past year, the team has been studying the behavioural patterns and recording the activities of the two birds through binoculars and digital cameras. Recently, the experts noticed a different pair of vultures using the same nest which has led them to believe that a significant number of red-headed vultures may be present in the area.

Locally called soon gidha, the species was historically abundant and found widely across the Indian Subcontinent. However, in recent decades, as with other species of vultures, a sharp decline in its numbers has been reported. In countries like Singapore and China where they were found in large quantities only 30-40 years ago, the red-headed vultures are now extinct.

Among the seven species of vultures found in Nepal, three (oriental white-backed, long-billed, and slender-billed) are listed in the critically endangered list of International Union for Conservation of Nature, the oldest and largest global environmental organisation.

“The discovery of soon gidha in Nepal will lead to greater developments in vulture conservation efforts in the country,” says Krishna Mani Baral, an oncologist with the Animal Rights Nepal team.

Conservation work across the region intensified since 2004 when India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Nepal agreed on the ‘Kathmandu declaration’ and pledged to ban the use of diclofenac, a veterinary steroid commonly used to treat livestock, which was determined as the main cause of death among the birds. In 2006, the Nepali government also imposed a ban on the manufacturing, sale, and import of the drug. As a supplement to the banned diclofenac, the government permitted the use of Meloxicam.

There are now vulture breeding centres in three of the eight South Asian countries. Nepal’s progress in safeguarding the birds and their habitats has been particularly impressive. We led the way in establishing community managed provisional vulture safe zones.
The vultures are circling again, circling back, soaring again, areas that have lower chances of diclofenac poisoning. So far, eleven districts in the country have been declared ‘diclofenac free’.

Another unique effort is the ‘vulture restaurant’ which was started by Bird Conservation Nepal (BCN) in 2012. The restaurants are basically feeding centres where the birds are given carcasses free of the harmful diclofenac. The centres purchase elderly or sick cows from farmers, look after them, and treat them. Once they die, they are fed to the natural scavengers. Staff say there has been a double-fold increase in the number of vultures within a year ago. Currently, there are six such restaurants and BCN plans to open more.

Although, they lack the appeal of other mammals and rarely revered in any culture, vultures are essential for our eco-system. Says Baral: “Unfortunately, since they are not naturally attractive birds, the importance of vultures to the environment has been overlooked.”

As professional scavengers, vultures play a vital role in aiding nature’s sanitation process by consuming dead carcasses. Fewer of these birds mean more food for stray dogs and the improper management of carcasses leads to an increase in the contamination rate. The decline in vulture population also puts the Buddhist sky burial tradition practiced in some Himalayan communities in jeopardy. However, the work of organisations like BCN and Animal Rights Nepal provide hope that these beautiful creatures will get a second chance at resurgence.

The vultures are circling again, #606 Circling back, #484 Soaring again, #286

**Found in Nepal**

**HIMALAYAN GRIFFON**
Altitude: below 900m to above 5,000 m

**INDIAN VULTURE**
(Lamothunde Giddha) Critically endangered
Recently discovered in Nepal (Nawalparasi), population status and distribution not known

**LAMMERGEIER**
Altitude: rare below 1,000m and normally resides above 2,000m

**RED-HEADED VULTURE**
(Sun Giddha)
Critically endangered
Altitude: below 3,100m

**WHITE-RUMPED VULTURE**
(Dangar Giddha)
Critically endangered
Altitude: widespread below 1,000m and up to 3,100m during summer

**EGYPTIAN VULTURE**
(Seto Giddha)
Endangered
Altitude: below 915m and found up to 3,810m

**SLENDER-BILLED VULTURE**
(Sano Khairo Giddha)
Critically endangered
Altitude: spread below 350m up to 2,050m

**CINEREOUS VULTURE**
(Raj Giddha)
Passage migrant
Altitude: below 4,900m

The vultures are circling again, #606 Circling back, #484 Soaring again, #286

**MUST BE INSERTED**

Not a usual resort.........
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The annual and beloved Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival (KIMFF) is once again upon us bringing with it a slew of more than worthy short and feature length films to impatiently choose from. As usual with the array before us it is inevitable that we'll see a few but miss a few regardless of our careful timing and planning. Clearly, also, it is impossible to review more than a few films in this column, but I encourage all of you to go to City Hall (Exhibition Road) and watch as many as you can in addition to the two gems that I have the privilege to write about here.

When Hari Got Married (14 December, 3pm) a charming documentary by Ritu Sarin and Tenzing Sonam is set in Dharamsala and follows a hyper-articulate and charismatic taxi driver named Hari who is on the verge of getting married to a suitable Brahmin girl called Suman whom he has never seen. Trying to break out of the rigid traditions of his fairly rigorous family, Hari intrepidly manages to obtain Suman’s telephone number and establishes a relationship with her via phone, where he teases her, coaxes her to speak with him, and teaches her to say ‘I love you’ in English. While all of this is engaging enough, it is the filmmakers’ patience in staying with Hari – day in and day out, learning about his life and interacting with his family that truly pay off in the viewing. We may all be familiar with the insularity that can come from our culture: its treatment of women, its assumption that women should and ought to be married off (at which point their home is with their husband), and other such shockingly outdated conventions – but seeing it play out in real life with real people is a thought-invoking pleasure that only a good documentary can bring to us.

Documentaries can assume many forms. Much argument has been made for the cinèma verité aspect of it, where we are shown, as much as is possible, a ‘slice of life’. When Hari Got Married is a rather lovely example of this, a film which seems slight at first, but dig into the very way in which we lead our lives, observing minutely without judging, but made with such skill that we can’t help but to have questions.

Then there are the documentaries that are like mesmerising tone poems, made about philosophical subjects such as life, birth, and death which cannot be approached with the same kind of narrative structure that we have become accustomed to. Sky Burial (13 December, 1.30pm) a short documentary set in Mongolia and made by Tad Fettig follows the sacred and esoteric rituals performed by a monk who has carried the tradition of the Tibetan Sky Burial forward through generations. With gorgeous cinematography overlaid with Buddhist philosophy describing the nature of attachment and the freedom of the soul, the film is a meditative document of a ritual where the body is torn apart and made to be unrecognisable so that the skill that cannot come to it.

The films at KIMFF are as diverse as they come. I hope that you will view at least a few this week.
**Degree Maila**

There is a vapid listlessness in the unnamed village of Daya Hang Rai’s play *Degree Maila*. The local drunkards are playing cards at a teashall whose owner happily obliges with refills. Young boys are deliberating on how to impress the opposite sex. The women, as usual, find themselves on the periphery. 

When an approaching vehicle breaks the monotony, the locals are visibly agitated: who dare drive through the newly dynamite-blasted track without the permission of the village? The troublemaker, as the audience discovers, is none other than protagonist Maila (Pradeep Kumar Chaudhari). The only one in the village to hold a degree, Maila enjoys the immunity provided by his education and exposure to the outside world. While others seem resigned to their fate, the graduate has big plans for his hometown. By building new roads and constructing a hydropower plant nearby, Maila hopes to bring about a reversal of fortune for the villagers.

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It is never mentioned what Maila is trained in or what he has done with his degree to merit such hope. But the fact that none of the residents have stepped outside the village, is enough for them to trust him. How will our hero fare under the weight of expectation?

**The Lunch Box**

It is hard to miss The Lunch Box in Kupondole. The bright yellow signboard with the joint’s name screams for attention and is big enough to draw at least a glance from any pedestrian who walk the Kandevta-Hotel Summit road. After seeing groups of happy faces in front of the restaurant on numerous occasions, this reviewer was encouraged to pay a visit.

As soon as you walk into this tiny establishment, all your senses come into play. The walls, plastered with pictures of all-American fast food delights are as pleasing to the eyes as the lunch options spread across the counter. The appetising smell of smoked sausages further appeases the senses in a delightful sway.

After the initial excitement of seeing so many options on offer quenched down, we settled on our first order: double deluxe hot dog with Polish sausages (Rs 295). As promised the hot dog was massive. I don’t know how Polish sausages, taste but going by the sheer size of the sausaged chicken roll I wouldn’t mind going to Poland just for the sausages. Filled with melting cheese, mustard sauce, and veggies oozing out, every bite is a tasty mouthful. With names such as Wrigley field hot dogs to Chicago burgers, the owners of the Lunch Box seem to be ardent followers of American baseball. Claimed to be the biggest burger in town the ultimate Chicago Burger (Rs 250), doesn’t disappoint in size. With generous layers of ham, egg, cheese, chicken patties, and potato chips on the side this is the burger to go for when you are hungry as a horse. But sadly like many other burger joints in town, the burger’s downdfall lies in its bun. Failing to hold the enormous portions of the meat and veggies, the bun spoils what could have been a heavenly experience.

Besides fast food, the Lunch Box also offers lunch specials, different cuisine each day of the week. It was Wednesday so we had the non-vegetarian Newari set (Rs 210). It had the quintessential Newari items and the portion was large enough for two.

Although there is a wide range of drinks on offer, the lemon iced tea (Rs 75) that we ordered was frothy, but lacked the citrusy flavour, propelling us not to experiment with our drinks. We ended our meal on a sweet note with a brownie and a scoop of vanilla ice cream (Rs 100) which although not the best was good enough to make us leave the place in happy spirits. The extremely friendly staff, reasonable price, and most importantly the enormous portions of cheese filled goodness will definitely bring me back to this lunch box. The Lunch Box also offers take away lunch packs for busy office goers.

**Stage Review**

By Sunir Pandey

Degree Maila

Cast: Pradeep Kumar Chaudhari, Sirjana Shabah, Somnath Khanal, Umesh Tamang, and others

Director: Daya Hang Rai

Writer: Sayad Ashok

Live music by Adhodi Sar

Rs 200 (Rs 100 for students), Mandala Theatre, Ananmgar, Runs until 5 December, 4.30pm, (036924269, 9841355560

**THE LUNCH BOX**

The Lunch Box offers take away lunch packs for busy office goers.

How to get there: head right from Kandevta in Kupondole towards Hotel Summit. The Lunch Box is on your left beside Sarvanga Hospital.
Biggest losers

Nepal has very few obese people, but as young, urban Nepalis adopt increasingly unhealthy food and working habits we together with the rest of South Asia are set to be an overweight nation. Overweight is defined as a body mass index (BMI = kg/m²) of 25 to <30 and obesity is defined as BMI of 30 or more.

DHAIVANTARI
Buddha Basnyat, MD

Forget about having rippling, abdominal muscles. Just keep your weight in the normal range. Shedding even a few kilos and increasing physical activity can help prevent plenty of medical complications like high cholesterol, diabetes, heart disease, arthritis, and increase a person’s lifespan.

Patients on a diet generally lose about five per cent of their body weight over the first six months, but by 12 to 24 months they are back to ‘mangal man’ (square one). The long-term ineffectiveness of diets may be due to compensatory changes in energy expenditure that oppose the maintenance of a lower body weight as well as genetic and environmental factors. Here are some common diets used for weight loss.

The Atkins diet which lets you eat fat and protein to your heart’s content with very low carbohydrate is probably impractical in Nepal because of the lack of variety of meat and fish. The LEARN (Lifestyle, Exercise, Attitude, Relationships, and Nutrition) diet is based on intensive lifestyle modification and may be too ‘idealistic’ for many but very beneficial if you can bring about these changes in your life. The Zone diet comprises of 40 per cent carbohydrate and 30 per cent each of protein and fat.

My favourite, however, is the vegetarian-based, fat restricted Dal Bhat diet also known as the Ornish diet, named after Dr Dean Ornish, a professor of medicine from the University of California in San Francisco. But I think even the good doctor would be stunned at seeing the mountain of rice that many Nepalis consume here twice a day with minimal exercise. Probably the only group of people in Nepal that can efficiently deal with this vast amount of rice-eating are porters along the Himalayan trails. A modification of the Ornish diet with controlled rice consumption but plentiful dal, vegetables, and a side of tasty achar, may be a very suitable and practical option for the Nepali palate.

Some diet programs are easier than others. Therefore, it is crucial to have a diet plan tailored to your individual needs. Setting attainable targets is equally vital in ensuring successful weight loss. Getting advice from nutritionists and joining self-help groups can help make it easier to keep up with diet regimes.

Very few people are able to just exercise and lose weight without controlling their calorie intake. Breaking the bad eating habits that led to weight gain in the first place requires immense will power and months, even years of hard work. Slow results often dampen people’s resolve. But there is no silver bullet for weight loss. Being patient, sticking to a suitable diet plan of your liking and gradually decreasing calorie intake, exercising sensibly, and keeping a positive attitude will go a long way in losing weight.

Acer’s V series notebooks are built for easy portability, offer good battery lives, and deliver decent performance with the specs on board. The V3 models are the cheapest, but are let down by low specs. The V7, although blessed with top specs, does not come cheap. The V5s, on the other hand, strike a perfect balance between price and performance and the Acer V5-573G, in particular, deserves a look-in.

A flawless blend of metal and plastic, the V5-573G is a great looking device with the silver grey-metallic front giving it a premium feel. At less than one inch thick and weighing a lowly 4.5 lbs, the notebook is easy on your back, while the 15.6 LED HD display is extremely easy on your eyes.

Well-armed for everyday office and home use, the V5-573G is built to run natively on the Windows 8 64 Bit Pro Operating System, which is powered by a fourth-generation 1.6GHz Intel Core i5 processor, 6GB DDR3 RAM, and 2GB NVIDIA GeForce GT 720M graphics cards. While most laptops these days handle office tasks effortlessly, the V5-573G impressively masters the more demanding multimedia and gaming needs. Full HD movies and graphics-intensive games/programs run smoothly and look stunning. The four speakers built into the notebook project rich, clear, and powerful sound, which allow for complete multimedia and gaming experiences.

Users also have the option to maximise RAM to 8GB to fulfill their more memory-intensive needs. The V5-573G allocates owners with 500GB of on board storage (@5400 rpm), which should be adequate for most, while the space and speed-hungry among us might opt for more spacious and faster hard drives. V5’s performance is well backed-up by a decent battery life, easily lasting more than six hours of moderate use on full charge. The gadget is further equipped with Bluetooth capability, three USB, one HDMI slot, and a card reader to meet your everyday computing needs.

Priced at around Rs 85,000, the V5-573G’s design, performance, and specifications easily rival those of more ‘fashionable’ laptop brands like Samsung, HP, and Dell, while saving you Rs 15-20,000.

Yantrick’s verdict: good specs, killer design, and competitive pricing are what make Acer’s ultrathin V5-573G notebook a worthy buy.
The astonishing performance of India’s anti-corruption citizens’ party has injected a new idea into the country’s fractured polity, an idea likely to affect the 2014 general elections. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) stumbled at the finish-line in the Delhi Assembly election this week, but it ensured the city-state had to contend with a hung Assembly and perhaps witness yet another round of election.

More significantly, it has made it difficult to predict the magnitude of the wave that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) can generate in next year’s general elections. The Delhi result suggests that wherever a credible alternative to the Congress exists, the BJP’s Narendra Modi might not be able to wean voters to his fold.

The Delhi election mirrored the proverbial race between the hare and the tortoise. The tortoise was the AAP and the two political behemoths – the Congress and the BJP – symbolised the hare. The AAP doggedly began to crawl from the starting line six months before the assembly election, choosing its candidates for a campaign kitty of only IRs 200 million, disclosed the names of its donors, did not wave money-muscle from election, for the small to trounce the big, and that politics is not necessarily divisible into classes.

America birthed a new type of mass party in 1912. The Progressive was a virile movement, with Thomas Woodrow Wilson as its brand ambassador, aspiring classes and those sensitive about their Hindu identity.

Narendra Modi has come to personify development and decisive leadership, but his self-avowed attributes have not altered the project of turning India Hindu. His Hindutva had found a match in no way altered the project of turning India Hindu. His Hindutva had found a match

During the 90s, a resurgent Hindutva, with Hindutva had found a match in no way altered the project of turning India Hindu. His Hindutva had found a match

The AAP’s rise impacts the Hindutva had found a match in no way altered the project of turning India Hindu. His Hindutva had found a match

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India’s anti-corruption citizen party has potential to upset next year’s general elections. For sure, AAP leaders will now step into the national arena. In the 2014 general elections, the party will target 40 constituencies in eight cities having a population of over five million, another 20 big-city constituencies, and a few surrounding Delhi. The AAP’s strong showing in the capital will inspire its volunteers into believing it is possible to divorce money-muscle from election, for the small to trounce the big, and that politics is not necessarily divisible into classes.

The AAP’s rise impacts the BJP more than the Congress, which has been steadily losing ground for factors too stark to retell. For one, the BJP has been traditionally stronger in urban than rural India. Second, BJP prime ministerial candidate Narendra Modi has come to personify development and decisive leadership, but his self-avowed attributes have not altered the project of turning India Hindu. His Hindutva had found a match in no way altered the project of turning India Hindu. His Hindutva had found a match

THAT politics is not necessarily divisible into classes.

For the latter, the pull of identity politics still remains strong. Two, the AAP can generate in next year’s general elections. Three, can the AAP convince urban voters to cast their ballot in the 2014 elections considering it is inconceivable it can lead a coalition? But then, the Indian electorate has become so inured to a hung Parliament that it might be willing to give the AAP clout to transform the political system.

There are imponderables to factor in. One, the political mindsets of metro citizens differ remarkably from those in smaller cities and towns. For the latter, the pull of identity politics still remains strong. Two, the AAP can generate in next year’s general elections. Three, can the AAP convince urban voters to cast their ballot in the 2014 elections considering it is inconceivable it can lead a coalition? But then, the Indian electorate has become so inured to a hung Parliament that it might be willing to give the AAP clout to transform the political system.

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The Himalaya in Nepal is the most densely populated mountain region on earth. Its landscape is closely linked to land use patterns, especially forest tenure. When forests are nationalised and traditional community-management systems destroyed, they disappear. Handling management back to communities revives them.

The changes are starkly visible and the best way to tell the story is through before and after pictures, as Fritz Berger and colleagues have done in their new book, Changing Landscape in the Highlands of Nepal, Sikkim-India, and Pakistan: A Photo Journey. Nepal’s midhills forests vanished after the Private Forest Nationalisation Act was promulgated in 1957. It took a full 40 years for the canopy cover to be restored after a corrective legislation leased the degraded commons back to communities. “The photographs demonstrate that the forest landscape of Nepal has improved since the forest land tenure process started in the 1990s,” Berger says in the

Erwin Schneider was a mountaineer and a legendary map-maker, his meticulous chart of Mt Everest and other parts of the Himalaya made his surname a trademark in cartography. In 1971-72 Schneider undertook an ambitious aerial survey of Kathmandu, using the photographs to make detailed maps of the Valley. The maps remained, but the precious negatives had disappeared until Heidelberg University professor Niels Gutschow and Hermann Kreutzmann of the Freie Universität in Berlin found them hidden in tin cans at the Technical University of Munich. They decided to publish them in the context of map-making and urban development to record just how fast Nepal’s capital has changed from an intensively cultivated Himalayan Valley into a chaotic city. The book combines unique black and white photographs with the maps made using them and is a collector’s item for everyone interested in Kathmandu.

The images in the book give us a glimpse of the Valley from the perspective of time and space. The contours of terrace fields from the photographs 40 years ago provide a 3D relief effect to the pictures, matching the map contours. The outskirts of Kathmandu look bucolic with a few farmhouses surrounded by fields and crisscrossed by braids of an unspoilt Bagmati and its

Images taken decades apart show how community forestry has restored Nepal’s midhill vegetation

KUNDA DIXIT

The Valley From The Air,

THEN AND NOW: Photograph of Kathmandu Valley taken by Erwin Schneider in 1972 from a Pilatus Turbo Porter (below) and in 2013 by Dinesh Shrestha from Champadevi (left) showing the dramatic urban growth.

Schneider’s detailed aerial picture of Baneswor and Kathmandu Airport and a Google Earth image taken 41 years apart (right) show how houses have encroached on farmlands.

The way we were

Pictures taken decades apart show how community forestry has restored Nepal’s midhill vegetation
41 YEARS AGO

Kathmandu looks dramatically different from the perspective of time and space

introduction to his book. But the pictures also show the deforestation that follows the building of new roads, when pastures turn into farms, and new urban centres spread and put pressure on surrounding forests. The effect of out-migration can also be seen in pictures of Manang taken in 1973 and today: the millet fields are fallow because there is no one to work them. While the forests in Nepal and Sikkim are coming back, in Pakistan they are depleting. 'Photos speak' is the conclusion of the authors and the most dramatic pictures are those of the resurgence of forests in Jiri in just 25 years. For the authors, this is a lesson: 'One thing we can learn is that policy matters and so do institutions and their governance.'

tributaries. The white stupa of Boudha stands prominently amidst a jigsaw of paddy fields. The Ring Road has not yet been built, but the newly-made Kodari Highway and the new runway at Kathmandu airport are the only two prominent straight lines in a Valley that is dominated by curves. The towns are dense clusters with temple squares and ponds, hemmed in by farmlands and the rectangular compounds of Rana palaces.

Schneider first entered Nepal in 1930 after trying to climb Kangchenjunga from Sikkim. He came again to attempt Mt Everest in 1955 and did a detailed survey of the Khumbu to make the famous 1:25,000 map of Mt Everest that is still used by trekkers. He went on to map Langtang, Hinku, Rolwaling, and other areas and his photographs from the 1950s now form a valuable visual archive for before-and-after images to record the effects of climate warming.

For the Kathmandu maps, he went up with the legendary Swiss pilot Hardy Fahner in a Pilatus Turbo Porter to take aerial photographs. These were then plotted by Fernando Girioni of Aermap in Florence into maps through stereophotogrammetry. With the Department of Housing and Physical Planning, more detailed maps were made of the Valley to assist in town planning.

Gutschow and Kreutzmann have used the book to also delve into the cartographical history of Kathmandu from the surprisingly accurate very first known map of 'Nepaul' by Charles Crawford dated 1802 and the work of the first ever Nepali map-maker, Chandra Pandey, in 1873. Then there are the maps in books on Nepal by Sylvan Levy (1905) and Perceval Landon (1927). Later maps became tools in urban planning, most of which were ignored by successive governments. Which is why Kathmandu has turned out the way it has. Even as early as 1968, Gutschow recalls, a western-educated Nepali urban planner called Kathmandu a 'mad house'.

This collection of Schneider's aerial photographs is a photographic documentation of a Kathmandu that is no more. The book will be launched on 13 December at a new Documentation Centre at the Tara Gaon that will include other contributions by writers, scholars, and artists for heritage preservation.

SINDHUPALCHOK 1968

SINDHUPALCHOK 1994

PHOTOS SPEAK: Before and after photographs can give us a glimpse of the passage of time. The most dramatic pictures are those of the resurgence of forests in Jiri in Sindhupalchok in just 25 years because of community forestry.
Fighting corruption

Shreekamal Drivedi, 9 December, Setopati

Every year on 8 December thousands of people around the world take to the streets chanting anti-graft slogans to mark the International Day against Corruption. But for many in Nepal where corruption is deeply entrenched, it will take much more than slogans and speeches to rid our system of this practice. The belief is that it’s not wrong to abuse power and authority for personal gain; it’s no one’s fault at the core of corruption. And we have no one but ourselves to blame. When our loved ones are able to bend rules for personal gain, we pat them on the back. But if we see others doing the same, we immediately point fingers at them.

People in my neighbourhood boast of how they ‘settled’ problems for personal gain; they pat themselves on the back. It is unfortunate that we take pride in acquiring a larger share of government services through malfeasance. At the same time, we look down on honest people who refuse to abuse their authority for personal benefits.

Taking and giving petty bribes at government offices to get things done is the mildest form of bribery. However, the more potent ones aren’t easily visible because they take place at the policy-making level among powerful individuals who bleed the state treasury dry by using the public fund for personal use. One slight change in policy can lead to billions in windfall. Officials use their influence to land lucrative government contracts and in return, they use low quality products and come up with excuses to delay work, so that the money keeps rolling in. Tax thieves, which cost the country millions in revenue, is one such kind of corruption no common man fails to notice.

But it is the corruption within politics that has the most severe consequences on the country and its people. Laws are bent and broken to benefit the powerful and rich. Billions are embezzled and nothing is done about it because these people enjoy political protection. Those with high connections find ways to lease public properties for long periods at unbelievably low prices. They change the low density capacity of large hydropower projects which further hurt our already faltering economy.

Corruption at all levels in the state machinery threatens to weaken the system that is supposed to monitor irregularities. A country cannot head towards development when corruption threatens the foundation of nation building. Strong anti-graft laws alone won’t solve the problem. If law and corruption is considered socially unacceptable, it will be impossible to stop the epidemic.

But the UML seems adamant about changing the president and vice-president. How will the NC clear this hurdle? We don’t understand why the UML is dying to amend the constitution. Bringing new people into these posts is not a relevant post-election scenario. If it was important, we would have discussed such possibilities when we drafted the 11-point and 25-point agreements. We don’t buy into the UML’s arguments, especially since the interim constitution has so clearly stated the rules for the president’s term. And the NC is not in favour of having presidential elections.

How can there be any consensus then?

This demand has been put forward only by the UML. There will be discussions on it. There maybe be other proposals which might have their own points of compromise. We will talk through these possibilities.

UML leaders say they will remain in the opposition if the Congress doesn’t come up with a balanced power-sharing model.

That’s not a big deal. A strong opposition has a role in democracy. Even we might sit in opposition. Remember the Maoists stayed both in and out of power during the last CA? The important thing is that the next government will be led by an alliance. If we can be in an alliance with everyone, we can be in an alliance with anyone who can be made use of as able individuals. Before Chhamb, Bahun and Bhatrani-described Prachanda as having a volatile personality. But after the meet, Bhatrani somehow seemed to change his opinion and said the chairman was as dynamic as Lenin.

It is true that Prachanda lacks the patience to focus on a single goal because of which he lacks the stability needed for a statesman. But if he made up his mind about something, he would achieve it anyhow. I do not see that Prachanda of 2005 anymore. He has left behind his ideals and forgotten his party’s objectives. It is little wonder why the people who used to look up to him and love him including myself are gradually distancing ourselves from him. There were days when I used to proudly walk around with his photo in my pocket. But those days are long gone.

Only when a leader has the support of his followers, cadres, and the general public can he achieve greatness. But when the same leader jumps from one social class to another and in the process destroys the ideals that he created in the first place, he loses all respect.

Prachanda undoubtedly played a crucial role in Nepal’s communist movement. It is for this reason that his portrait was considered important enough to be placed alongside other great leftist leaders. But the moment a public personality stays from the path that he set out for himself, he loses his aura and power. Prachanda committed this cardinal sin of politics.

Clearing the first hurdle

Rishi Dhamala, Ghalata ra Bichar, 11 December

Interview with NC leader Ram Sharan Mahat

Have you found a formula for consensus? Nobody has an exact formula on how to go about forging consensus, but we believe holding discussions with various political players is the best method. The NC will organise official meetings with all parties. In fact, we have already begun preliminary talks. However, parties need to come on board without pre-conditions or intimidation.

But the UML seems adamant about changing the president and vice-president. How will the NC clear this hurdle? We don’t understand why the UML is dying to amend the constitution. Bringing new people into these posts is not a relevant post-election scenario. If it was important, we would have discussed such possibilities when we drafted the 11-point and 25-point agreements. We don’t buy into the UML’s arguments, especially since the interim constitution has so clearly stated the rules for the president’s term. And the NC is not in favour of having presidential elections.

How can there be any consensus then?

This demand has been put forward only by the UML. There will be discussions on it. There maybe be other proposals which might have their own points of compromise. We will talk through these possibilities.

UML leaders say they will remain in the opposition if the Congress doesn’t come up with a balanced power-sharing model.

That’s not a big deal. A strong opposition has a role in democracy. Even we might sit in opposition. Remember the Maoists stayed both in and out of power during the last CA? The important thing is that the next government will be led by an alliance. If we can be in an alliance with everyone it would be ideal, because the responsibility of drafting a new constitution lies with all the political parties who won the elections.

Prachanda’s changing portrait

Guna Raj Lohani, Nepal, 8 December

Interview with NC leader Ram Sharan Mahat

In November, a Facebook friend tagged me in a photo of a painting of Prachanda I had made eight years ago for the Nepali Communist Party’s famed Chhambang meet. The caption read, “What happened to the Guna Raj Lohani who made this portrait of Prachanda with so much love?”

The picture is one among many others I was asked to make for Chhambang where I was in-charge of all decorations. Besides Prachanda’s portrait, which he personally asked me to make, I painted portraits of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and Mao that were hung on the meeting hall.

While working on the portrait, I felt a deep sense of pride and achievement. After all, this was a man who had led a revolutionary people’s movement and for whom I had the utmost respect. During the meeting, Prachanda talked about the need for a new communist manifesto and the one he promised would be written by the party. We began to regard him as the greatest leader after Mao. At the time, I was also in the process of writing his biography.

With his excellent oratory skills, Prachanda had developed the ability to easily convince people. His greatest asset was his ability to adapt. He could quickly judge a person’s capability and didn’t refrain from making use of able individuals. Before Chhambang, Bahun and Bhatrani described Prachanda as having a volatile personality. But after the meet, Bhatrani somehow seemed to change his opinion and said the chairman was as dynamic as Lenin.

It is true that Prachanda lacks the patience to focus on a single goal because of which he lacks the stability needed for a statesman. But if he made up his mind about something, he would achieve it anyhow. I do not see that Prachanda of 2005 anymore. He has left behind his ideals and forgotten his party’s objectives. It is little wonder why the people who used to look up to him and love him including myself are gradually distancing ourselves from him. There were days when I used to proudly walk around with his photo in my pocket. But those days are long gone.

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Placard: Boycott

Rabinda in Nepal, 8 December

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

I try to talk to Khanal about the PR seats, but he makes excuses and has no time. When I heard he was travelling to the east, I got to the VIP lounge in the airport before Bhattarai arrived, but it was closed. Do I have to wake up the road to meet my own party’s president?"

UML leader KPS Oli, quoted in Budhabhar, 11 December

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It is hard to believe that the same party who registered a landslide victory in the first CA polls just four years ago, suffered an ignominious downfall at this year’s polls. The UCPN (M) guaranteed the people revolutionary change, but failed miserably and betrayed the trust of thousands of Nepalis including former Maoist combatants and supporters. Seeing party leaders backtrack on their promises and turn into power hungry politicians, the voters used the polling booths to make their aversion to the UCPN (M) and its agenda evident.

I was waiting for my husband Gir Bahadur Sen Oli for lunch when I heard a loud explosion outside. An assistant sub-inspector, he was deployed for security at Rammani College, Butwal that day and was among the dozens of police officers who were killed in the ambush. He said he would come back for lunch after work, but that was the last time I ever heard from him.

I left my six children and wife to join the Maoist revolution during the height of conflict in 2003. I was also the UCPN (M)’s village in-charge for a long time and worked really hard during the 2008 CA elections. After the Maoist party came to power, I went to ask for assistance for my blind son, who had just joined college but the leaders turned a deaf ear.

My friend’s family was promised compensation after he was killed by the army, but they still haven’t received the money. The leaders even looted the funds meant for the ex-guerrillas in the cantonments.

The party has been made to pay a huge price for distancing itself from the people and only thinking about short-term gains.

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Kathmandu has been ranked #3 in TripAdvisor’s travellers’ choice ‘Top Ten Rising Destinations in Asia in 2014’. Ahem. If you have taken a look around The Mandu lately, you will have noticed why the federal capital of New Nepal made it to the list:

1. The street corner garbage pile is rising
2. Lots of high rises rising
3. It has a paper named Rising Nepal
4. The price of a kilo of onions is rising
5. People are rising and shining every morning
6. The barometric pressure has been rising
7. Parts of the city are rising from the ashes
8. The High Level Political Mechanism is rising again
9. Lots of dust still rising on Lajimpat road
10. Geologists tell us the Himalaya is still rising

Of all the sour grapes sound bites after the elections, the most astounding one came from the lips of Shri Rajinder Mahato, who said, and I quote: “The loss of the Madhesi parties is India’s loss.” That statement has been analysed to death now, but the Ass’ take on it is that Mahato is keen to set things right in Nepal by standing as a candidate from Bihar in next year’s general elections in India.

The latest competition among the politicians who did not fare well in the Constituent Assembly election is to issue threats left and right. The Cash Baddies have been threatening to take the country back to 1996, which is a veiled way to say that they may go back to killing people, not that they ever stopped. And after the Dashies lost the elections, they want to put us all on reverse gear back to the pre-ceasefire days of 2006. The royalists are even threatening a return to 1770 and the reign of Prithvi Narayan the Great. Nepal is probably one of the few countries in the world where politicians have such great hindsight and vie with each other to set the clock back.

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