Forging electoral alliances in Nepal is getting to be far more difficult than solving a Rubik’s Cube. While most people are immersed in Tihar-Gai festival festivities, political leaders have had to stay up late at night to finalize candidates for Provincial and Parliamentary elections in November and December. It is not an easy job to balance factional interests with the needs to preserve electoral alliances. Two weeks after announcing their alliance, the UML and Maoist (Unified) are still struggling to divvy up seats, even after the exit of Ishwori Bhattarai’s Naya Shakti party. An intense battle is raging, not just within the Left Alliance, but also within its constituent parties between rival factions.

For example, the Maoists want the single-constituency Bhujpur for Gopal Koirala, who initially opposed the Left Alliance calculating that the deal might hurt his ambition to become Chief Minister of Province 1. The UML Chair KP Oli has hinted that the Maoists can take Bhujpur, figuring that a deal could secure the political future of his ally Bishr Dhan Rai at the expense of Rajendra Rai, who is backed by his party rival, Madhav Nepal. Nepal’s two largest communist parties, who say they will unite after the polls, are also in direct competition for seats in many other districts.

Squeezed out of the Left Alliance, Bhattarai has gone over to the NC’s fold to help him win his home constituency of Dokhka-2. He has promised to support NC in Dokhka-1, but its cadres are unsure if it will be a good deal, given Naya Shakti’s humiliating defeat in the recent local polls.

After the surprise announcement of the Left Alliance, the NC is desperately trying to cobble together a ‘democratic’ alliance, tying up not just with Hindu sympathizers but even with fringe nationalist parties like Akhanda Nepal. The NC has welcomed Bijaya Jachhadar back into its fold, but forging partnership with other Madhav-based parties looks difficult. The RPPN and the FSFN have formed their own alliances in the Rasuwa, and are ready to partner with the NC only where they are weak.

Some of these are unlikely alliances because parties are joining hands with those charged with, and even found guilty of, crime and corruption. Some parties are selling tickets to highest bidders, leaving their ideologically committed cadres disillusioned.

The alliances could still go in any direction before Sunday’s nomination deadline. But no matter who wins the polls in 32 mountain, districts on 26 November and in the remaining districts on 7 December, it looks like the new Parliament and Provincial Assemblies will be dominated by those most responsible for the current state of the country.

Om Astha Rai

THE ELECTION FESTIVAL
EDITORIAL PAGE 2

Reservoirs of suspicion
Nepal is blessed with water resources, but cursed by geologists
BY OM ASTHA RAI

Page 14-15

Reparing rural roads
Trails destroyed by the earthquake are being fixed, reviving trade and trekking

Page 8-9

Fly from Kathmandu 4 times daily
Enjoy additional flights from Kathmandu to more than 150 places worldwide via Doha with four daily flights. You now have more convenient connections to the USA, Europe, Africa and the Middle East.

Visit qatarairways.com or call us at +977 01 444 0467

Terms and conditions apply
THE ELECTION FESTIVAL

This year as Nepal’s emerge from a month of Daish-Tihar-Chhat festivals, they rush headlong into another festival, Provincial and Parliamentary elections on 27 November and 7 December.

The Tharu nation has famously said, ‘Life is like a river, it cannot be stopped’. This year, in every part of Nepal, the rush towards elections is not stopping. The continuous flow of the river has been interrupted, the rapids have been smoothed and everyone is struggling to keep the river moving.

The election has brought a new hope to the people of Nepal. The promise of a new beginning has brought new energy to the people. But the question remains, ‘Is the promise of a new beginning real?’

In the context of the current political situation in Nepal, the election has brought a new hope to the people. The promise of a new beginning has brought new energy to the people. But the question remains, ‘Is the promise of a new beginning real?’

The election has brought a new hope to the people of Nepal. The promise of a new beginning has brought new energy to the people. But the question remains, ‘Is the promise of a new beginning real?’
Wishing you a prosperous Vijayadashami and a Happy Tihar 2074, filled with happiness, peace and prosperity.
Making Nepal future-ready

Without strategic intervention in education, Nepal will lose another generation to the brinkmanship of selfish leaders.

Nepal may be South Asia’s oldest nation state, but it is a young democracy with a youthful population. The share of population in the 15-49 age group is projected to increase to 55.5% by 2051 while that below 24 years will peak at 51.5% in 2018.

CONNECTING DOTS
Dinkar Nepal

Nepal’s youth bulge (16-40 years) stood at 49.3% of the total in the 2011 census and is expected to expand to 49.8% in 2051 before the proportion of elderly will start growing. Countries like Japan, Greece and Finland are also aging, which is causing an immediate economic imbalance.

Never before have there been so many young people in Nepal. And never before has there been such an easy flow of knowledge, skills and people across the world. These two facts put together produce immense potential for economic and social progress.

This demographic window of opportunity will only last a few more decades. And if something is not done urgently to take advantage of this, our one-time opportunity will be lost forever. For example, the GDP of many Southeast Asian countries increased seven-fold in the late 20th century, causing an economic boom described as the ‘Asian economic miracle’.

But in Latin America, education and health were neglected and a similar window was lost forever. The key to harnessing this dividend lies in education. Providing opportunities to the burgeoning young population to grow to its best potential should be the focus of all government policies, including local ones.

Our education system needs to be quickly steered towards providing interdisciplinary, analytical and creative skills to our children. Without this holistic transformation, we will continue to be the unskilled labour suppliers of the world. And that would be the greatest injustice to the future generation that present leaders could do.

A report, Education Redefined: The future is Now, published by The Economist Intelligence Unit, recently assessed the effectiveness of education systems in preparing students for the demands of work and life in a rapidly changing landscape. An ideal 21st-century education system is designed to impart interdisciplinary skills, creative and analytical talent, skills in entrepreneurship and leadership, in digital and technical areas, as well as global awareness and civic education.

New Zealand, among the countries studied, scored highest in the report. Nepal, of course, is not included in the study but its recommendations apply to us too and can help us to focus on education. This means reforming the curriculum for future skills, ensuring the effectiveness of the policy implementation system, teacher education, government education expenditure, career counselling in schools and collaboration between education and industry. Most importantly, the study concludes that a holistic future-ready education system is inextricably linked with societal openness, cultural diversity and tolerance.

It has been recognised for decades that improving the relevance and quality of education is necessary to prepare Nepal for the future. But for the politicians at the centre, it remains a matter of least priority. A sepulturist with no interest or experience in reforming education is at the helm of Nepal’s affairs. And the situation doesn’t seem to be changing any time soon, even with new elections.

The only hope lies in improving the quality of education from the grassroots up. Under the new Constitution, much of the responsibility for education and health has been given to local governments. But even a newly-elected mayor’s hands may be tied because even under the federal system, it is likely that local governments will not have any real say in teacher management and curriculum redesign...

“Hopefully, local governments will band together to ask for alternative methods to credential schools and gain more curricular freedom,” says Dinesh Panditast, an educational entrepreneur and activist with Khinika, which works in STEM education in schools.

A likely solution can be local governments joining forces to collaborate with individuals, think tanks and private organisations to design and implement model solutions. Such initiatives from the local level will ensure that low-cost, organic innovation at private educational institutions can be replicated widely.

As this report shows, the ultimate hope in Nepal now is that local governments will take the initiative and wrest control out of the clutches of politicians at the centre, who seem hell-bent on sending the country into a downward spiral.
Responsibilities at home and abroad

Nepal's record on conflict-era cases does not inspire confidence in its role as a new member of the UN Human Rights Council.

as a member of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) for a two-year period beginning January. The Government, fearful of human rights commissions, welcomed this development as signifying the international community's acknowledgement of Nepal's humanitarian efforts and accomplishments in the field of promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Tejshree Thapa

The UNHRC, established in 2006, has become an important institution for holding countries to account on human rights issues. During which are known as Universal Periodic Reviews, all UN member states submit reports and updates, respond to criticism, and make commitments to reform. The council also has the capacity to appoint special rapporteurs and other independent experts to ensure effective investigation into alleged abuses in specific countries, even when the country concerned refuses to cooperate.

Perhaps the council's most significant contribution has been its ability to appoint commissions of inquiry specific to particular countries—and these have included North Korea, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam. While the establishment of such commissions requires political will within the larger international community, the onus members of the UNHRC decide whether a specific commission of inquiry will be established, and what its contours will be.

Thus, Nepal's membership in the UNHRC will mean that it can meaningfully shape the human rights discourse over the coming two years. The question is: how well will it use this opportunity? How will the Government of Nepal respond when faced with serious human rights crises around the world?

It is important to remember that it was not so long ago that Nepal itself was the object of scrutiny, both before the Council and its predecessor, the UN Commission on Human Rights. There were well-documented allegations of serious human rights and international humanitarian law violations by both government forces and those of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) (CPN-M). The war between 1996-2006 saw almost 14,000 people were killed and thousands were forcibly disappeared, sexual violence and torture were used by both sides.

Even as the conflict escalated, the Nepali Government, confronted time and again in Geneva over the allegations, continued to deny their existence and retaliating twin international community. Its internal affairs were none of its business. However, international pressure paid off.

In 2015, the government agreed to a dedicated UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) for Nepal, with a broad mandate that included monitoring violations nationwide. The Nepal government continued to resist full cooperation with the OHCHR office but rather limited it to a negotiated mandate. But the office produced an important monitoring account of wartime allegations that serve as a blueprint for Nepal's transitional justice process to this day.

Enjoy your Smile

Enjoy your Smile

Fine Wine for Fine Taste

Leading technology behind your smile
made in Switzerland

Enjoy your Smile
Aching for the Arctic

Lisa Choegyal

A row of bulky figures are silhouetted against a blue sky on the ridge behind us — local Inuit people being entertained at the zodiac boat shuttle 27 of us from the floating jetty to the chunky research vessel anchored in the bay. And some of us are pretty entertaining, incongruously dressed in navy blazers, tweed caps and corduroys of our British shores — soon to be replaced by down jackets, woolly hats and long undergarments.

This is the start of a two-week journey through the towering scenery, desolate islands and floating ice of the fabled North West Passage in the high Canadian Arctic. Aboard the ice-strengthened 105m Russian ship Akademik-Ioffe, escorted by my bailing brother Nick and his cheerful wife Iris, our select Ultimate Travel passengers have the benefit of attentive staff from Kalaallit and the limitless knowledge of teams of expert guides and photographers from the US, UK and Canada — specialists in whales, seals, birds, polar bears, Arctic explorers and Inuit history.

The first three days in west Greenland are as fresh to our guides as to us. The visit to remote harbours of multi-coloured houses and unpronounceable names – Kangaallussuaq, Sisimiut and Ilulissat, where the world heritage site Jakobshavn I foolishly digresses massive blue icebergs into the Disko Bay. A hardy paddler demonstrates local survival skills in this toughest of environments with ‘eeking birds’ in a slender canoe. Local fishermen in tracked skis paddle dead seals on their gunwales and heap spotted wolf fish into buckets. Chained sired dogs lie contentless in the sun, relishing the summer respite from their indescribable winter work on the snow.

Having crossed the Davis Strait, at the settlement of Pond Inlet we enter Nunavut Canada, amidst barren black mountains streaked with old snow and hanging glaciers. A traditional welcome includes throat singing, blubbery lamps and a demonstration of hunting techniques by our Inuit hosts, dressed in sealskin and natty white polar bear skin trousers in a smart new school insulated from the cold. “What do you do during the winter dark?” someone asks a shy teenager. “Go to Ootalik,” she smiled wryly. The landscape is huge and harsh, and we sail on deeper within the Arctic Circle, past the largest uninhabited island in the world, soaring seas lull (swimming with seals, and the northernmost tip of the North American continent in Belloit Strait. During the brief summer months the sun never sets, and a bright white Arctic is starkly conspicuous on the snowcapped hillside.

The ship glides silently through the ice, stalking polar bears: a yellow head swimming or a creamy baap resting on the ice, scattering out into a family of whale with cows. As adopt in the water as on land, one lone marlin male carries a fall catch as he boils in alarm straight upright from the gravel beach, leaving a dark wet trail in his wake. One evening, vodka tonic in hand, I watched from the bar as a bear on ice floated past; uninterested, just a few feet from the ship.

Several times a day we don layers of warm clothes culminating in clumsy colourful outer gear, and pile into the rubber zodiacs for excursions on land, ice and sea; hikes through the untroubled tundra, ancient Thule rock mounds and crumbling historic huts. We sail past icebergs, recalling Franklin’s tragic expedition on the black gravel of Baffin Island with tons of rum and honey eyes, before being hurried back to the boats by our rude, uncouth shipmates. In the presence of fear at an advancing polar bear. Through bunkers on deck we spot grazing marauders “Igloos”, and several species of seals and whales. One morning, polar Beluga circle right beneath our boats, blowing with curiosity, glistening just under the surface. A startlingly white gyrfalcon guards her nest on a naked rock tower, honks well on glassy seasonal lakes, rapsing black ravens rule the beaches, and myriads of guillemote, eiders and wilde skid through the grey waves.

It is a heavy ice year within the North West Passage, despite the ice cap generally falling to well below average, and the Canadian coastguard will not risk us proceeding to Cambridge Bay. The sealed Russian cap with a large aquiline nose changes course and we leave the ship to fly out of Resolute, another name that resonates with history. The US presidential group is made from the timbers of the captured Russian ship HMS Resolute. Charter flights from Resolute edge of the world airtrip pick up North Pole expeditors in a for price, but we fly south four hours to the closest Canadian city of Edmonton.

More people-climb Everest than visit the Northwest Passage every year – less than 400. We are told, rather unfortunately, by the terse Australian tour director. This may change with the impending arrival of a serious cruise ship, the Crystal Serenity, which carries 1,700 captive passengers escorted by her own personal icebreaker. Along with a few hardly sailing yachts waiting in vain for the ice to retreat, this red icebreaker was one of the very few other vessels we saw on our entire trip.

Sweltering in the September humidity of a Kathamandu traffic jam, I ache for the crack of calving glaciers.
RUBEENA SHRESTHA

As the curtain closed on the 15th annual Jazzmandu, the audience and organizers were taking stock of the performance of this unique festival. The showcasing event has always been the Jazznashaa at Gokarna Resort. With its lush greenery, Gokarna provides the perfect, magical backdrop for this multi-act event. Although as one was congratulating goer put it: “You have to be truly committed to jazz to take on this route,” referring to the journeys Chabahil-Boudhha-Gokarna stretch, which has been under perpetual construction for more than a decade. Yash Shrestha, an RJ with Radio Nepartak 98.3, hasn’t missed a single Jazzmandu since the festival’s inception 15 years ago. Jazzmandu has taken fans like him on a dynamic journey to explore a mass of cultures, music and spirituality.

Jazz is one of the most important arts of this century: it has this ability to be fluid and absorb all kinds of music. People are beginning to understand that it’s not this stodgy, closed-in music: it has a big heart,” he adds.

The Palawan Jazz Project, which performed at Gokarna, is made up of faculty members from the Monti Hampton School of Music at the University of Idaho. It plays traditional jazz standards along with its own compositions. Pianist and vocalist Kate Skinner’s rendition of ‘A Beautiful Friendship’ was lifting and lovely. Pillar M brought together artists from New York, Mali, Switzerland and Nepal to create Nepamali, which had its debut at Jazzmandu this year. Mams Koch of Pillar M relates how he and Navin Chottri had been talking for years about bringing a kor player to Nepal: this year they introduced Billa Toumak, who plays the 21-stringed, lute-bow instrument. The sound is evocative of long narratives told under open skies and melds exquisitely with the bass of the saxophone and guitar. Improvisational, experimental, young and vibrant, the music of Samuel Wooton Toy Story defines categorisation: every song in a while, like a conjurer, the title artist would extract another item from his eclectic collection of global percussive instruments and add another layer of sound to the music.

“Jazz is exciting and special because it is an art form which enables the thrill of creating spontaneously, in direct response to improvisation,” says Wooton. Piyal Rai has come to Jazzmandu at Gokarna every year. “It is one place during the week-long Jazz fest that allows me to listen to all the performances on one stage. And also meet people.”

Rakesh Khadgi, a regular concert goer, has a different take. He laments the fact that the festival has a great cultural event for Kathmandu, but not a musical one. He explains: “There events have become about eating and being seen rather than the music. And I find that he be in conflict with the objectives of Jazzmandu, which is to bring international music to Nepal and showcase Nepali music to international artists.”

Indeed, Jazzmandu has brought new voices and acts, providing Nepali audiences exposure to international music. This year the Julli Sar Collective, with its West African rhythms and jazz melodies, was a good example of the festival’s breadth scope.

But Khadgi shakes his head. “Looking at the audience, it doesn’t look like the organizers are bringing international music to Nepali audience, it looks like they are bringing international music to audiences that have already had exposure to such kinds of music.”

Bites and well-received Nepal’s. Another festival-goer, Pooja Rana, agrees that Jazzmandu could try to be more inclusive. “I feel they conduct master classes for select students, but the other events are prohibitively expensive.”

Khadgi needs events like Jazzmandu, and many people will continue to flock to them in droves. But reducing the entrance fees, and broadening the appeal to a larger audience (perhaps even outside Kathmandu) would expand the reach and impact of the festival in its next 15 years.
Repairing rural ro

Trails destroyed by the earthquake are being fixed, reviving trade

RIWAI RAI
in DHADING

While the residents of Kathmandu complain about potholed roads and dusty sidewalks, here in remote northern Dhading district people are happy that the trail system destroyed by the 2015 earthquakes is being restored for local trade and trekking.

Trails are the only access to the northern regions of this district, which feel as remote as Humla even though it is only 88Km from Kathmandu. The lack of road access has meant that villages like Bigan and Lapa always suffered chronic food shortages. The earthquakes made them even more remote. But today, residents once more have easy access to neighboring villages as well as Galung, the nearest jeep station from where there is motor transport to the district headquarters of Dhading Besi and the Prithvi Highway to Kathmandu.

Dhading is the only district in Nepal that has terrain rising from the Chure hills bordering Makwanpur to the south, and from the Gama Himal range to the north. It borders Kathmandu to the east, Gorkha in the west and Rasuwa to the north. The first section of the repaired trail system starts at the settlement of Riche in the village of Kapan, linking Karang and Kichrut before finally descending to Lapa. The serpentine trail with stone steps runs about 27km and was cut off by the quake.

Walking the trail was extremely difficult during monsoon. It was hardly possible. It is very steep and Lapa is at least half a day’s walk from here,” said Ram Bahadur Tamang, 49, a porter from Riche. “Now that the trail has been repaired, it is much safer.”

Riche is made up of 170 households, a village of mostly Tamang families. Illiterate and poor, most youths in the village do multiple jobs to make ends meet; carrying loads, farming potatoes and making bamboo baskets.

The restored trail makes it easier to transport those products to Galung and on to Dhading Besi for sale. In turn, heavy laden male porters carry sacks of rice, salt, oil and other grocery items from the jeep station at Galung to villages on the trail.

Repairs to the trail system in Dhading and Gorkha have been funded by donors led by the United Kingdom Department for
International Development (DFID) used the World Food Program (WFP), which has repaired up to 100km of trails under its Quick Win Trail Project; another 64km is left to be restored.

From Kichet it takes five or six hours of a steep uphill climb on foot to reach Karang, then another four hours to descend to Lapa. Although a long and tiring journey, the faint music of the rushing Akha River below helps ease the monotony.

"Going to school for children has become much easier. It used to take almost three hours to reach school from Kichet; now it takes them a lot less," said Mamber Tamang, 30, a teacher at Sheru Lapa Rural Valley School.

Lapa is known for its beautiful potatoes, with each household producing at least 3,000kg and selling the surplus in Dhading Besi. The trail has now made it much easier, and safer, to transport the cash crop to market.

The 25-km walk from Lapa upstream is blessed with magnificent views of Ganesh Himal and fields of thick, lush barley and buckwheat. The repaired trails have also revived hopes of trekking and homestay tourism.
**Rock Climbing**
Gauge your own strength by trying your hand (and feet) at rock climbing at the Adrek Climbing wall. The package includes: lunch, bottled water and climbing safety gear. No previous experience required.

Every Saturday, 8 am-5 pm, Rs 50,000 per person.
(011) 4601655, 9817153762.
www.facebook.com/adrekclimbing

**Girl Child Day**
Take part in a discussion on Graupaldi to mark the 6th International Girl Child Day. 16 October, 11 am, Hotel President, Park Chowk, 9817122044, 9897319063.

**Miss Motivation**
Kripa Joshi

_When you’re scared but you still do it anyway, that’s brave._

- Neil Gaiman

### Gokarna Forest Resort
A forest sanctuary to help you relax, breathe and meditate. Just a 24 minute drive from Kathmandu.
Gokarna (014) 4601252, info@gokarnaresort.com

### Park Village Resort
Yoga, drives and spa/treatment in a quiet corner of Kathmandu. Hemispheres Peace and Wellness Centre, Park Village Resort, Budhanilkantha, (01) 4500266, personalelb.com.np

### Kantipur Temple House
Located in the heart of the city, this eco-friendly boutique hotel is an epitome of cultural heritage in itself. Don’t forget to try the organic food.
Ph: (014) 4695517

### The Famous Farmhouse
A farmhouse to belong to the truly family friendly, the girlish and boogie-a-leaf meanwhile, the furniture and fittings are an antique collectors delight.
Nawalparasi, (015) 4601207

### Hotel Mystic Mountain
Plan a weekend trip to this newly-opened exquisite resort located in the forest of Nagpur Hills, Nagpur Hills, (014) 4606686

### Creole cuisine
For exotic and tantalizing dishes from New Orleans, Bali, Spain, Africa, Germany, the Caribbean and Portugal at Rs 1200 per person.
27 October to 5 November, 12:30 pm, The Cafe, Hyatt Regency, (014) 5117234

### The Vesper House
Step by step the best in Indian and all local favours, in brevity outdoor seating. Also a great venue for wine connoisseurs.
Ph: (014) 5540717, www.thevesperhouse.com

### Meghhaul Serai
Enjoy the relaxing fine dining, then venture out to the mesmerizing wildlife sanctuary, via the Mansoon offer at Taj Satal’s Meghhaul Serai.
Chowki National Park, (014) 301989, 88253104

### Jhuile Mountain Resort
Resting 2,650m above sea level, the resort boasts a farmhouse that stretches across a hill covered in fresh pines. Enjoy an organic farm stay experience.
Sherpa National Agricultural Park, Jhuka, (014) 5123399
Nepal's conflict had been going on for four years, the violence was spreading out from the Maoist 'base areas' of the mid-western mountains to other parts of the country. Teachers, farmers, students and traders were being extorted, tortured or killed. In Kathmandu, factions and fractious parliamentar parties were incapable of showing statesmanship, or the ability to govern.

Then, it was in the dominated, underfunded Nepal Police that was fighting motivated Maoist guerrillas and hundreds had been killed or injured. Police outposts were being abandoned. Brutal crackdowns by the Police in offensives like Operation Remco and Kilo Sierra 2 had alienated civilians, making recruitment easier for the Maoists.

Girija Prasad Koirala was Prime Minister, and Bimalendra Nidhi had split from the NC only to return and become the Chairman of the Peace Committee, entrenched with tacitly negotiating with the Maoists. And yet, it was the himself as prime minister in February 1998 who had ignored the Maoists ultimatum that led to the insurgency.

Then, in the most audacious attack till then, a 1,000-strong Maoist guerrilla force attacked a district headquarters for the first time, here in Nasim. They chose Degey-district, an area notorious in the state response, and the mountains claimed no enemies back to Rukum and Jumla.

The strike was planned and led by Bishnu Man Pau, who went on to become Finance Minister and is the husband of Parliament Speaker Omast Girait Mahar. Hundreds of guerrillas stormed Nasim from all sides on the night of 25 September 2001, drowning police, hoisting Rs3.5 million from the Nepal Bank branch and abducting 12 officials. Dozens of Maoists were killed, as were 14 policemen.

The battle raged all night, while soldiers at the Salgud Army Base nearby backed off, reasoning they had no orders to intervene. Seventeen years later, looking out from the sentry post at the confluence of the Salgud and Thuli, up river towards Baisi, one can almost hear the sound of bombs and mortar blasts reverberating among the surrounding mountains.

There is now a motorable road to the site of Baisi to Dandu: the jeep that pitted it had to be helicoptered in and the diesel was ferried in. Bridges were blown or destroyed by the Maoists to prevent the soldiers from coming out.

The raid began at midnight with huge explosions at the jail and the police station followed by a fierce gun battle. The police fought till they ran out of ammunition, hoping that the Royal Nepalese Army soldiers would come. The Army finally did help, but only to shift the dead and wounded. Witnesses at the same time said soldiers of guerrillas washed down the river and were found along the banks next morning.

Kantipur editor Yubraj Ghimire, reporter Nayan Wagle and Kathmandu Post reporter Sunam Pradhan flew into Dandu from Pokhara that afternoon and interviewed surviving police. One told them: "We fought till dawn and they (the soldiers) came only in the morning to pick up the corpses." The Maoists knew the Nepal Bank branch was receiving Rs3.5 million in cash, and delayed the raid until the money finally arrived from Nepalgunj on that morning’s flight. The army had intelligence of unusual Maoist activity, and warned the administration of an imminent attack. CDO Purna Bhattarai asked Kathmandu for reinforcements, and a unit was flown in by helicopter - within a few hours they were in action, and some of them were among those killed.

Today, the town has grown dramatically and even has a Citizens' Bank branch with flashy neon lights. Families from Upper Dolpo have bought winter homes here. The sound of motorbikes is being replaced by jeeps honking incessantly. A larger prayer complex has been built next to the one destroyed in the attack, and a new steel bridge links the two banks.

The Nepal Army is no longer fighting a war, but guarding Shey Phoksundo National Park and fighting a war that will connect Dandu to the rest of Nepal within two years. New shops and hotels are opening up in anticipation of the road, and land prices have shot up.

The battle for Dandu was a turning point in the war. The main fallout was criticism of the Royal Nepalese Army for not helping the government, which exposed confusion about the chain of command in the Army. Who was doing what: the supreme commander of the Army, who was a constitutional monarch, or an elected civilian government?

After Dandu, Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala put pressure on the Palace to order the Army to ordain off the escape route of the Maoist attackers. He also sped up the plan to get the Army to arm and train the paramilitary Armed Police Force in counter-insurgency.

Commentator C K Lal wrote in a column in this paper a week after the strike: "The issue of who the army should be answerable to is now a matter of public debate thanks to vibrant media coverage... the Army even if reluctantly submitting to the government's command has averted a near-constitutional crisis.""
Chhakka Panja 2

Deepa Shree Niraula’s second venture as a director, like the first one, takes up the issue of the brain drain caused by Nepali youth migrating abroad. While the characters in the first movie strived to go to the Middle East to earn a living, the youngsters in the second one are looking for a stable life in Australia.

Although the filmmakers say the storyline of the sequel has nothing to do with the first, one can’t help but draw parallels because of the overlapping theme and trajectory of the two movies. The main cast remains mostly unchanged with just a few new faces added to the sequel.

Chhakka Panja 2 introduces viewers to three friends in an unidentified village: Prajwal (Swaroop Dhakal), Sarawati (Jitu Nepal) and Geetu (Geetu Pahari), each with their own dreams and aspirations. Geetu has returned to the village from the US to get married, Prajwal dreams of going to Australia to earn money and Sarawati wants to become a government officer so he can get married to the girl he likes. While Geetu returns to the States after overhearing a conversation between his soon-to-be wife and her lover, the two other friends make their way to Kathmandu to fulfill their dreams.

In the capital, Prajwal and Sarawati meet a pair of friends: Akash (Swastita Khadka) and Brinda (Bhumi Bastak). Akash wants to go to Australia to study but is pulled back after getting low scores in the ELTS. With the help of Consultancy Mama (Kedar Ghimire) Akash and Prajwal enter into a paper marriage. What follows is a dragging plot and lukewarm acting.

The first half of the movie survives on over-the-top one liners that keep the audience sufficiently entertained, but the film loses its way in the second half. Watching Priyanka Khadka play the mother of a 20-year-old is a whole lot of catharsis. Her character often comes off as preachy, embarking on long rants about why youngsters should opt out of going abroad. But throughout the entire movie, the producers fail to establish why she is so against the idea. Neither the long recap of her life before she got married nor confrontations with her daughter gives the audience any clue.

Watching the movie, one can’t help but think that the filmmakers have bitten off more than they can chew with this one. A tighter script and some more work on character development would have assured a better watch. The only saving grace for Chhakka Panja 2 is its cinematography. All in all, much like 1, 2 is a collection of old, tried and tested jokes that are no longer funny.

Sahina Shrestha
Wheeler-dealers

Kumari in class

It is the small details that give you the big picture.

High Quality Precision Printing with State-of-the-art Equipment at Jagadamba Press.
Reservoirs of suspicion

Nepal is blessed with water resources, but cursed by geopolitics

The map shows 53 river reservoirs (grey) identified by the Department of Electricity Development as suitable for hydroelectric dams. But only a few of them are in early phases of development (green). It does not show run-of-the-river schemes.

OM ASTHA RAI

In May, when the last cabinet meeting of the Maoist government awarded a $2.5 billion contract for the 1,200MW Budi Gandagi hydropower project to a Chinese company without competitive bidding, it was seen by many as an act of appeasement to Beijing, and a move that could ruffle feathers in New Delhi.

The fact that ex-Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai, viewed by many as pro-India, demanded the contract be scrapped fuelled speculation that New Delhi indeed did not want the Chinese involved in such a large reservoir project upstream. There is a deep-rooted suspicion that India covets Nepal’s vast water resources, and will do anything to prevent China from being involved. This is not a false perception, but some analysts argue it is not necessarily completely right either.

"It is not true that India objects to Nepal implementing storage projects, in fact India is gladly waiting for Nepal to commit blunders like Budi Gandagi," says hydropower expert Rana Sansar Shrestha.

Other experts are in favour of Budi Gandagi because it will generate not just electricity during peak periods, but also control floods and irrigate the Turi. They also saw other benefits in developing fisheries, inland navigation and tourism.

But Nepal contracted China Gezhouba Group Corporation (CGGC) only to provide electricity generation from Budi Gandagi without factoring in these benefits. The design includes a 263m high dam to generate 1,200MW of electricity creating a 63 sq km reservoir the size of 15 Pashu, Lalak, 60km west of Kathmandu.

The dam will displace 3,550 families from 27 villages in Suwalsi and Geruwa, but it will also augment lean season water flow downstream in Uttar Pradesh, which will benefit from its flood control and regulated flow. India putting in a single pallet.

"India will receive lean season augmented flow without having to compensate for the negative impact of the dam in Nepal," Shrestha explains. "So why would India sabotage Budi Gandagi or any storage project in Nepal as long as it received fresh water in the winter without having to pay for it?"

Just like Budi Gandagi, the 750MW West Seti project is being built by China’s Three Gorges Company (CGGC) only to generate electricity. But in this case, India is apparently not happy — not because a Chinese contractor is involved but because a parliamentary committee directed that Nepal maximise irrigation benefits from West Seti’s stored water for the downstream Turi.

CGGC itself has its own doubts about the project since the electricity will not be expected to India as originally planned, and this has delayed construction. Last week, Energy Minister Mahendra Baburam Shrestha from the Maoist Centre threatened to terminate CGGC’s contract, but this week Prime Minister Sush Bahadur Deuba stripped Shrestha of his responsibility in a reshuffle.

Analysts say India has never really been interested in buying Nepal’s hydroelectricity because it has multiple alternatives to meet its energy needs. In a candid interview with BBC Nepal in 2008, Indian Water Resources Minister Sajid Uddin Zia admitted his country was interested in Nepal’s rivers only for flood control and irrigation: electricity would be just a "by-product".

Nepal’s former Water Resources Minister Dipak Gyawali confirms this: “India wants storage projects to be built in Nepal in a
Pancheswar pending

The ability to irrigate flood crops for its densely populated states downstream, India has for years been trying to push projects on Nepal’s rivers. But the legacy of historical mistrust from border hostilities on the Kosi and Gandaki, which most Nepalis see as unfairly favourable India, has delayed the construction of large reservoir schemes even though they would benefit both countries. The much-delayed Pancheswar Multipurpose Project is an oft-repeated example of how this mistrust has delayed an initiative. During his visit to New Delhi in August, PM Deuba agreed to complete the Detailed Project Report for Pancheswar within a month. But two months have passed and the project is still stuck because of India’s claim to water flowing through the Lower Sarada Canal. The canal is the biggest irrigation project in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, receiving 151.88 cubic metres per second of water on average in the wet season from the Mahakali river that forms Nepal’s western border with India and on which the Pancheswar project will be built. India wants the same volume of water retained in the canal even after Pancheswar is finished.

Madhavi Balha, a joint secretary at the Ministry of Energy, has strongly opposed the proposal, arguing that it violates the 1999 Mahakali Treaty and, if agreed to by Nepal, will set a precedent for other rivers. But Deuba is a lone fighter in Nepal’s hydro-crazy, and it is not known how long he can keep his job.

Meanwhile, the clock is ticking. Deuba signed the Mahakali Treaty during his first tenure two decades ago, and it is still to be implemented. The Australian company, SNC-Lavalin, pulled out of West Seti after 15 years of it going nowhere. The Kosi High Dam project is on India’s priority list again, but has been stuck for decades.

Storing water

Nepal’s need for large reservoir projects has opened the country to significant geo-political influence. The great breakthrough in hydroelectricity over the last century wasn’t the use of flowing water to generate electricity—it was the realization that it was possible to store water to produce electricity exactly when you wanted it. The absence of sufficient storage capacity and lacking meaningful vision on reservoir-based hydro power, Nepal’s famed potential, would also face serious setbacks. Resources for electricity generation remains just a distant dream.

Of Nepal’s total capacity of 5070MW, the 920MW Koirabishre dam (plotted left) is the only one with storage. A few plants like Chil fears and Gaandaki A, can operate as peaking-run of river but this capacity is limited to a few hours.

Some reservoir-based plants are being considered. The 1270MW Upper Seti Tanahun project has started construction. Last year, Nepal and Bangladesh signed a memorandum of understanding to develop 1,000MW of pump-storage hydro power plants in the Sunkeni under the Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal (Bhini) initiative.

Despite these prospecs, Nepal’s storage-based hydro plant capacity is severely limited. As a result, Nepal faces two resulting challenges on electricity supply reliability. First, generation capacity is reduced in the dry months, making it difficult to meet demand in that season. One way to address this is through seasonal storage of monsoon water for use later.

Second, electricity demand peaks in the evening and morning and there often isn’t enough capacity to meet demand during these peak hours. One way to address this is through diurnal storage, where water is stored during the day and used for peak hours.

In the absence of storage, Nepal’s current approach has been to use Indian imports to manage both the seasonal variation and diurnal peaks. The net result: Rs 15 billion of electricity imports last year.

The Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA), the country’s monopoly electricity firm, has created differentiated power purchase procurement for storage and peaking plants. It currently stores 2700MW of power for dry and wet months respectively. Similarly, for intra-day peaking plants it currently offers Rs 5-10.50/kWh depending on when the plant can store water and generate.

Differentiation being a good start, but insufficient, Nepal must separate its strategy for intra-day and seasonal storage. These require very different policy approaches and instruments.

On intra-day peaking, one way would be to undertake a renovation and modernization program for existing hydro plants that would retrofit all plants with an intra-day peak plant. This isn’t a new approach: India, for instance, is currently examining how it can integrate at least four hours of peaking within all its existing run-of-river hydro plants.

Distributed renewable energy, storage, demand-side management, and remote management technologies have also created many new opportunities. These solutions, already in use elsewhere in the world, can help to immediately solve Nepal’s intra-day peaking problem.

The challenge on seasonal storage is different and stems largely from our unitary reliance on hydro. One way to address this is by diversification: include other sources of generation (gas, power plant) by leveraging opportunities in the Indian power market.

Building large seasonal storage is expensive, involving a large socio-economic-environmental footprint, and Nepal currently lacks the financial and technical resources to undertake such projects. It is dependent on international partners, most notably India, and China, for such projects. This has in turn opened Nepal’s hydro sector to significant geo-political influence.

Development of large storage capacity will also have a large bearing on downstream water flow, particularly India. Hydro power generation and water management, in this case, cannot be separated, and such an integrated water-electricity approach must be the cornerstone of Nepal’s strategy.

Indian Prime Minister Modi is looking at a $17 billion river interlinking project that would connect 60 rivers in India with the promise of improved flood control, water management, irrigation, sustainable water distribution, transport, and, of course, electricity generation.

Beyond the rhetoric, beyond the weight of geo-politics, the core is on Nepal to act. We must devise our own course—for that, we first need to know what we want to do with all the resources we have.

Bishal Thapa is Managing Director of Saral Nepal, an energy services company
Not Really Needed

As an Ass permanently domiciled in Nepal, this article was invited to the recent Non-Resident Nepali (NRN) election which saw newly-elected politicians promise a host of policies to attract potential investors. With its new dynamic leadership, non-resident Nepalis can at last make progress on some of their long-standing list of demands. The article issued an ultimatum to the government that they will keep visiting Kathmandu as frequently as possible until their demands are met — and that was meant as a threat.

One main demand is to change Nepal’s official name to the People’s Federal Democratic National Republic of Nepal (PFDRN) so that the new acronym contains the letter ‘N’. They also want dual citizenship so that non-Nepali Nepalis don’t have to pay extra fees for flights during their annual holidays in Jomsom. The other demand is the right to own property to indulge in a little real estate hankypanky on the side. To grant this wish, the Permanent Three Party High-Level Political Mechanism has been offered its cut roughly in proportion to the strength of each of the parties in the new Parliament.

The Ass’ rough guess estimate is that 30% of government delegates to international conferences never come back. Nepal’s mental health teams often remain in Japan and Korea after tournaments. At this rate, there will only be two types of Nepalis left:

- Non-resident Nepalis who want to permanently reside in Nepal.
- Ass, Nepalis who want to permanently reside in a non-Nepali country.

After watching this week’s elections to the Not Really Needed (NRN) Central Committee, it seems there were no flat-lights and no rejections of votes cast. It is clear that we would do much better if we let overseas Nepalis run Nepal on a Build Own Operate Transfer (BLOT) scheme for 25 years. (Which means we can boot them out after 25 years.) The World Headquarters of NRN, Inc would then be located in Kathmandu, itself and Nepal could be subcontracted to Nepalis of alien descent.

The idea is to keep the new generation of Nepali leaders who have missed things up, on this country around in the forthcoming two decades and hand it back to the next generation of Nepalis in an are-we-safe condition. Fine print: Conditions apply. Overseas relatives of current rulers not eligible, elected wealth welcome.

The Nepal Government has also decided to allow non-resident Nepalis to invest in Nepal, except in sensitive sectors like Defence, Aerospace and Breweries. Other strategic industries are out of bounds for NRN investment as instant noodles, medical colleges, casinos, restaurants, construction companies, tea and fruit schemes. These sectors are reserved for local crooks. Allotted Nepalis have already set up the following FDI in their beloved motherland:

- White Elephant Study Abroad Consulting
- 4 Horse Power Management Agency
- Fly by Night Airlines, Ltd.
- Money Business Versus Export Import, Inc.

[Deepawali festival celebration image]

Wish you all a delightful Deepawali

May this festival of light bring happiness, peace and joy

[Deepawali festival celebration image]

Deepawali

[Deepawali festival celebration image]