IN A MAZE

Nepal’s electoral politics was thrown off kilter by the surprise alliance between the Maoist Centre and the UML. The after shocks are still being felt with only three weeks to go for voting, and candidates filed their nominations for the second phase on Thursday.

Provincial and parliamentary elections on 26 November and 7 December will be a milestone in more ways than one: it is the first election under the new federal constitution and marks the end of the peace process that began in 2006. It should usher in an era of stability, reform and inclusiveness, but the fact that most of the same personalities from 20 years ago are in the fray, including politicians who have been ministers and prime ministers multiple times, does not assuage much hope. In many areas, tainted candidates with questionable, and even criminal, backgrounds have been nominated. This NC was caught off guard by the UML-Maoist alliance, and its main intention now is to stop the UML from gaining a majority in the new parliament. But its strategy of allying with the RPP and the IMF, frayed as senior party members fought bruising battles for candidates. There was a tussle between whether the NC’s Krishna Sitaula or the RPP’s Rajendra Lingel, stand from Bagbazar. The NC’s Bimalendra Nidhi also fought it out with Rajendra Mahato from the same Province 2 constituency. The NC’s strategy of allying with the RPP (even while the Maoists are still in government while partnering with the opposition) has led to the biggest government in Nepal’s history with 64 ministers. The left alliance has been able to sort out its ticket distribution relatively smoothly. The UML, thinks it can build on its success in local elections by riding the same nationalist platform, and is aiming for a two-thirds majority with help from the Maoists. But that is unlikely because of the arithmetic of proportional representation in the new House. The Maoist Centre, which was the third largest party in the previous Parliament faced the risk of being decimated this time, and saved itself by ensuring the 60:40 formula with the UML. In Kathmandu 1 constituency, it will be a bell run on 7 December for the new alternative Sabita-Bikashchandra Raut in the NC’s Prakash Man Singh. It will be a barometer of how much of a dent the new anti-corruption party can make on the traditional mainstream entity. Sabita-Bikashchandra has made an splash on social media, and Singh has been busy in door-to-door canvassing, but we will have to see if he has the edge to challenge the structure of the established NC. The other duel to watch out for is Baburam Bhattarai of the New Force vs Maoist Namdevanj subrange Dr Shrestha in Gorkha. Bhattarai tried to join the left alliance, but quit to ally with the NC to fight in his home constituency. Ruma Raiz

UNSTOPPABLE

EDITORIAL

FLASHBACK

EDITORIAL

PAGE 2

KHUMBU

Then, and now

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UNSTOPPABLE

It has become a habit for Nepal's rulers, most of whom have been with us since the restoration of democracy in 1990, to play brinkmanship. Just to have you read the Flashback Editorial (below) to realise how little things have changed in 15 years. Even the prime minister in 2002 was the same guy we have now, and he was playing the same games to stop elections even then.

The Nepali people have learnt from this long experience never to trust what their rulers say, and to always suspect that a conspiracy of some sort is lurking behind the scenes. That is why we hope for the best, but prepare for the worst.

And so it is, with just over a month to go for provincial and parliamentary elections on 26 November and 7 December, that Nepalis are not talking about who they should vote for, but about whether the elections will even go as scheduled. Politicians, as is their wont, are firing the blame of uncertainty which the mass media daily transmits as evening talking heads on the screen – further confusing the people.

Enough already. It is time for a media intervention on the extremist pronouncements of politicians because all they are trying to do is stay in the headlines by saying the most outrageous things, misinforming the public and keeping them in the dark. The reason for such intransigence is the low intellectual level of most politicians, their famous good and

ambition which have been amply and in full display for the past 27 years. Things became highly charged just after the holidays when the UML, and the Madesi Party decided to form an electoral alliance leading to supposed unity of the two parties against the polis. This upset the Nepali Congress' apple cart, and it suddenly looked like it would be decimated by the left supraganar, the NC, has allied with the Hindu-right RJP as well as the RPNP. Even Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), following the flotation, has come under the NC umbrella. Wonders never cease.

This phase of uncertainty began with a writ filed by a member of the ruling coalition in the Supreme Court demanding that there should be separate ballot papers for parliamentary and provincial elections. The Court left it for the Election Commission to decide, which it did by passing the ball to a task force. The same person then filed a Contempt of Court which then asked the SC for clarification. These events, played out from one day to the next on the front pages of the papers have completely confused the people.

Even so, despite an early onset of winter, high mountain districts voting in the first phase on 27 November are caught up in the most of campaigning. There is tremendous interest among voters about the elections, and the traditional political marketing mainstream parties are being grilled about their past misdeeds and promises not kept.

To be sure, the political parties deserve credit for bringing the country out of war, and despite the prolonged transition, promulgating a new Constitution under which there have been local elections and hopefully national polls soon. We may be taking one step back every two weeks, but we always manage to take two steps forward.

However, it must be said that Nepal does not have stability, governance and economic strength because of the lack of accountability, gross negligence and lack of effectiveness of these same parties. Our only hope is that the young, promising young leaders within the main parties as well as the anti-corruption Sujal Subedi who caught the eye this year across the country forward on.

The game is on now for the voters to exercise their franchise and not elect lawbreakers to the new law-making body.

PUBLIC OPINION POLL

Public opinion polls are useful only when political leaders heed them. Sadly, just elected national leaders have stopped caring about what the people think. On the other side, the mass media, in their media-savvy role are concerned they throw the towel in, if they don't heed public opinion. In fact, their punishment for disregarding public opinion is a spurious one. Yet, the results of the public opinion polls are quite reassuring, they remind us that our sages and those who agree to rule give public opinion a spin on their pennel. The Nepali people know that the leaders they vote for should represent the democratically elected mandate, but they don't agree with the Madesi, neither with their brutal methods nor their stature.

Disagreement at the decision taken by the Star Balka and Odelau governments was fairly evident. More than three-quarters of those polled said that the term

of local body candidates should either be extended or fresh elections held. More than half didn't agree with the way elections were conducted. There are other restorations. This is the first public opinion poll taken since the election so-called, and we see that less than 1% of those polled see abdication of a majority as a viable solution to the mass problem. And despite the reinstatement in Kathmandu Valley for strongmen rule, the people blame the failure of politicians, and not the breakdown of the system, for the country's problems.

The message from the people is clear: they do not believe in the king, the security forces and even the Madesi to work together to get this country out of its current mess. Even if there is a crisis, they should at least be a coalition among these political parties in parliamentary democracy. The people want a force to emerge out of this chaos.

FLASHBACK EDITORIAL

Excerpt from Editorial in Nepal Times #117, 1-12 November 2002

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Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi delivered his routing speech in 2016 to Nepal’s Constituent Assembly: “Kya sabhi doori nu samajh? Why our Nepal not have it? We indeed have it all, and yet we are still focused on what we do not have.

Decades ago, the joke in Kathmandu was that planners and politicians who travelled to Europe concluded that the reason the UK was ‘developed’ was because even small children spoke English. Many remember the Prime Minister Deuba’s outreach on RUK Saja Swa while there was no way he could get enough Oxford educated people to run this country.

For many years, Nepal’s rulers have complained that one could never develop a country that was so far from the sea. While theickers we looked upon you youth population as a liability, while other countries took them away and put them to work building infrastructure and their own economies.

Instead of taking advantage of the fact that we are situated in between two of the world’s largest and fastest growing economies, we have blamed our government on something we can do nothing about that we are handicapped.

Every two weeks in this column I challenge this mindset and explore new possibilities for Nepal. Over the years Nepal has been a beneficiary of aid which has already diminished our ability to manage and solve challenges ourselves. The real capacity seems to be to convert every problem into a begging bowl. We are too adroit to admit that we have no shame in asking China to donate stations to be used in our voting booths in the last elections.

Is Nepal poor? No, it is just so much easier to beg. In the meantime, our government has no problem buying expensive vehicles for politicians and officials. Look at the vehicles that ply the congested streets of Nepal. Look at the homes we live in, the clothes we wear. Look at the restaurants we eat in. Nepal is not poor, just poorly managed.

I am naming this column ‘FULL’ because the Nepal’s glass has a lot in it already, it is at least half full. We need to build on what we have, and not try to start from zero. We do not need to invent a door every time we have to leave the room. The aspirations that we have for Nepal are achievable if we focus on these assets, capabilities, skills and knowledge, but more importantly, the good decisions we need to make.

Nepal’s glass is also half full because good decisions come from experience, and experience can consist of past bad decisions. We have made enough mistakes, and this has made us more experienced. We must have a larger public debate that leads to good decisions for a prosperous and peaceful Nepal.

This week the media is carrying a story quoting the Ministry of Agriculture that Nepal is to have a bumper rice harvest worth Rs108 billion, which translates into a record 3.4 million tons of Nepal’s favourite and staple food. That is a lot of rice, food, nutrition, carbohydrates and should be able to meet the annual requirement of 146 kg of rice a year of every Nepali eating two meals of rice a day.

The government says the greater harvest was due to an increase in cropping area, good rainfall, irrigation, technology, fertiliser and seed inputs. And yet, the World Bank and Asian Development Bank brought down its earlier GDP growth forecast saying the floods in September reduced rice production. Let’s wait and see who is right.

Anil Chitrakar

half

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Anil Chitrakar

Indipendent
Canada quake aid

Canadian Ambassador to Nepal Narendra Patel announced an additional $14.7 million in aid to support Nepal’s post-quake reconstruction on his visit here last week. Nepali Times caught up with Patel to discuss Canada’s future aid and development priorities. Excerpt:

Nepali Times: What are some of the details about the additional aid you announced?

Narendra Patel: Canada has made a commitment of $51.7 million to support the reconstruction process. I am here to announce additional $14.7 million of which $9 million is going to a number of NGOs and Canadian development partners that are already active in post-earthquake development efforts. In addition, $4.7 million will be given to the World Bank Group for rural housing and another $200,000 to UNHCR for refugee resettlement. During my meeting with Prime Minister Oli and President, we talked about gender and environmental issues, tourism and education.

What are Canada’s development priorities around the world?

Our government recently announced a new Feminist International Assistance Policy with a special and primary focus on gender. Ensuring gender equality and opportunity for girls in terms of education and health will, we believe, contribute to more prosperous society. This underpins our priority around the world, including Nepal.

How about climate change in the Himalayas?

Canada is working with a number of organisations on the issues of climate change. International Development Research Centre (IDRC) has funded research dealing with effects of climate change in the mountainous regions, water management and irrigation techniques to ensure that the impacted population is benefited. Canada is playing a leadership role to address the issues of climate change, our Prime Minister and political leaders have been vocal about it not only in Canada or for Canada but globally.

Is there a backlash within Canada to your government’s liberal immigration policy?

We don’t have the same sentiments that have been expressed in the number of other countries around the world about opening up on the immigration process. Canada not only now, but in the future will continue to rely on immigration to support our economic growth. Canada is settling Syrian refugees in an informed way to ensure that our institutions can manage the settlement to ensure support for the refugees. With Permanent Residence we have a robust process in place so that growth is managed in a responsible way.

Were you able to share Canada’s experience on federalism and autonomy, especially vis-a-vis Quebec, with Nepali leaders?

During my meeting with Prime Minister Oli we discussed Nepal’s transition to federalism and the movement towards democracy. Despite the challenges, the progress and success have been quite noteworthy. It is not easy to promote a new constitution and bring into force for the first time municipal elections. I think the federal election is a great thing and it moving to a right direction. From Canada’s experience, I think the challenges of going into a federalism would be significant because it is not easy to implement a new electoral system at different sub-national levels.

Turkish on Chandragiri

Turkish Airlines and Chandragiri H.C. Cabinet have entered a collaboration under which customers and employees of Chandragiri H.C. will have special services provided by the other company (See page 5).

A330 for Shiraz-Doha

Qatar Airways has upgraded its operation to Shiraz in Iran from an Airbus A320 to the 260-seater Airbus A330.

Cathay’s new flights

Cathay Dragon is starting its new four weekly service between Hong Kong and Running-in-Guangzhou, beginning 8 January.

Smart 4G

Smart Cell has launched 4G service in Kathmandu and Nepalgunj, with plans to extend to Chitwan, Nepalgunj and Birganj.

Leading the way

Nepalgunj Airline has been awarded "Leading New International Airlines in South Asia - Avia at South Asian Travel Awards. A Nepal-China joint venture that started in 2015 currently flies to Dubai, Kuala Lumpur, Dubai and Damman.

SINGLETON 12 YEAR OLD

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The lyrical life of Desmond Doig

Editor, writer, painter, designer, photographer, expeditioner, conservationist, Renaissance man, and a Kathmandu everyman

including my own, presenting the verdant Valley that he loved so intensely and recalling his visits to more innocent times. I also have the only known oil that Desmond ever painted, a portrait of me in 1980 adorned with enigmatic giraffe imagery.

Once ensconced in the cozy, chaotic Pragpokhari house opposite the then American Embassy, Desmond’s myriad talents seemed to blossom in the sparkling air of his beloved “emerald valley”. Kakani and Tiger Tops were occasional escapes, but mostly Desmond had to extract himself from his home. His book titles show the whimsical nature of his attachment: Look Back in Wandering. In the Kingdom of the Gods, and My Kind of Kathmandu, the volume that his best friend Dubby Bhagat faithfully produced to honour his memory, and which many months ago they entrusted me with.

Desmond’s Edinburghship ranged through Himalayan royalty to the most humble of artists and artisans. He was unfailing in his encouragement of the young and talented. One of the nicest things to do was to take time out to commentate a movie or help me with a special event. He persuaded a portrait of my late father Tshering (now my brother-in-law) to be the Great Khan, with Hollywood actor Michael York as Marco Polo for a rather dubious commercial. (How did you get him, Marco Polo?) “In a way, Great Khan, that you can never imagine. On Cathay Pacific Airlines”!

It was Desmond’s idea to arrange the first lamp-lit fitness session in Bhaktapur’s Nyatapola Square to celebrate travel pioneer and Eric Lindbäck’s birthday. One of his best stories was taking a group of mostly British on a sightseeing tour of Kathmandu. As the bus passed in the heart of Durbar Square, a fruity voice rang out from the back seat: “Awful lot of people hanging around doing nothing!”

Desmond’s eclectic dinners usually featured Burmese curries with coconut, pools of laughter, and conversation reconceiving with tales of historic Himalayan personalities — imitations of Sikkim queen Hope Cook’s voice were a speciality. He loved rural picnics and special occasions, and contributed the “From Bullet to Biscy” cake to Brits Living’s 75th birthday party. The then British Ambassador was a particular favourite, memorable for his vague demeanour and fondness for gin-and-tonics, and for the lunch when he mistook a poached egg starter for “lovely fish”. Dubby and I still laughing about “lovely fish” last time we met.

Although his name may no longer be a household word in Kathmandu and Kolkata — “Call” as he called it — his lyrical influence and tingling enthusiasm still reverberates. Desmond was an editor, writer, painter, designer, photographer, expeditioner and conservationist — a Renaissance man, although more accurately a Kathmandu everyman. After he retired from the late 1970s, his passion for the Valley’s magic never failed to inspire us, and he delighted in its vibrant living artistry and people — the “ethnic mosaic” and “crucible of culture” to use his own words.

Born of Anglo Irish parents in India, Desmond studied in Kursung, served with the Gurkhas in WWII, and made his name as a reporter with The Statesman. His weekly Traveler's Impressions series captured Calcutta’s fast-disappearing old buildings and monuments before they disappeared forever. As founding editor of The June, a well-weathered magazine of yesteryear known as just JS, he hired a team of legendary journalists including Jug Sunaya and Dubby Bhagat. He was first to bring the world’s attention to an obscure Albanian nun named Mother Teresa, and with his friend Sir Edmund Hillary pursued a 1963 quest for the yeti in the high Himalayas.

Desmond’s sure touch and design style can still be enjoyed in the exquisite gardens of the Malla and Shangri-la hotels that he landscaped, and the original concept of the Shangri-la Hotel reflects his legacy. His poetic watercolours and delicate drawings decorate the walls of many Kathmandu homes.

SO FAR SO GOOD

Lisa Choegyal

The flowers in the Shangri-la Hotel garden in Kathmandu were newly planted, and the trees still small and immature. I sensed Desmond Doig’s arrival without turning in my chair — the air was charged with energy as he swept onto the lawn with a pose of acrobats and armful of architectural drawings. Desmond was never one to travel alone.

“Hello, Lisa. What a glorious day!” he called to me, before issuing instructions with such an aura waving to those in his wake.

NOW SAY GOODBYE to DISPELLING ODOUR

Nature

Nature...

For more pictures go online.
SHREEJANA SHRESTHA

Are you a local entrepreneur pondering an auto loan? Forget it, says a local bicycle maker, who believes his machines can do the job for you.

Designed and built in Nepal, Portal Cargo Bikes were first tested in 2014, targeting local entrepreneurs and social businesses. Happy with the reaction, the company’s American founder Caleb Joel Spear officially launched the venture in September.

“Portal is a social business on a mission to develop the world’s most innovative and adaptable bicycles that transform lives and power businesses,” says Spear, who made his first cargo bicycle by hand in 2004 for his own use in Kathmandu.

A successful bicycle entrepreneur in the United States, he says businesses can use human pedal power to make deliveries while families make them a part of their daily chores and even to deliver children to school. One bike can carry over 150kg of cargo, excluding the driver. Spear moved to Nepal in 2013 with an aim to introduce innovative bicycles to transform peoples’ lives.

Portal Cargo cycles are available in ‘long-tail’ and ‘mid-tail’ and come standard with seven gears, front disc brakes, extra strong wheels, and heavy-duty parts and components. The parts are imported from Taiwan and the bikes assembled in Nepal. Both versions of the cargo bikes sell for Rs 32,900.

Dustin Alard, administrative director at Portal Cargo Bikes told Nepal Times he believes the venture can have a major impact in Nepal. “Cargo bicycles are essential for people who can’t afford motorbikes. They are an affordable first vehicle for businesses.” After his master’s degree in Development Studies from Kathmandu University, Alard joined Spear to launch Portal Cargo Bikes.

Bharat Prasad Koirala, an entrepreneur in Dhusa, Lalitpur uses the bicycles to transport produce. “This cargo bike is equivalent to a delivery van for me since I can make multiple deliveries in a day.”

Koirala is one of the first to deploy the cargo bike since the pilot project in 2014 to supply sanitary pads, napkins and kitchen items to shops located along narrow alleyways.

“My business increased compared to the time when I was using freight bicycles. This bike is much more suitable for small scale businesses like mine to transport goods,” he adds.

The cargo cycle has another unique feature: it can power a grain thresher,ailer or grinder – ideal for farmers who can use the multi-purpose pedal power on the farm as well as to transport the produce to market. The device can be attached to the transmission wheel and powered by pedalling. The cycle has a motorcycle-style kickstand so riders can also sit on the bike when it is stationary.

Portal Cargo Bikes plan to open a showroom in Narayanhity targeting the Tani market in 2018, and to start focusing on exporting the cycles in the longer term. Currently, the company works out of its showroom in Bhaisepkhel, where potential customers can take the bikes out for a test spin.

PEDAL POWER

Local entrepreneur Bharat Prasad Koirala uses Portal Cargo Bike to deliver produce. The cargo bike is making his business more efficient and cost effective.

nepaltimes.com

THINK IT. EAT IT!

Order food from the widest range of restaurants at the same table menu price.

nepaltimes.com

Order food from the widest range of restaurants at the same table menu price.
Khumbu then, and now

A photograph captures an instant. But we can represent time and the change it brings by repeat photography. Pictures taken decades, or even a century apart, show us how the world has changed and is changing. Nowhere is before-and-after photography as dramatic as in portraying climate change, urbanisation and the rapid transformation of a culture.

Alton Byes is a mountain geographer, conservationist and climber specialising in the impact of climate change in high altitude areas. He did his PhD on the changes of vegetation in the Khumbu, and knows the area well, both the good and bad of how the region has been transformed by tourism, rising living standards and, lately, global warming.

Byes has chosen repeat photography as the ideal medium through which to document change. "It provides an effective educational tool that quickly and dramatically illustrates changes in glaciers, forest cover and cultural landscapes over time," Byes says. Indeed, his slim new volume Khumbu Since 1956 does just that: tell the visual story of how much the land of the Sherpa people has changed in the past 70 years. The region is better documented visually than other parts of Nepal because of the first mountaineering expeditions to Mt Everest started arriving in the early 1950s.

Global warming has been so rapid that even in that short span of time (in a planetary, geological term) one can see shrinking glaciers, receding snow lines, scores of flash floods, increased forest cover in some places, and how mountaineering income has raised living standards and led to the visible growth of Namche Bazaar, Tengboche and other towns.

Byes sourced old photographs from Charles Houston who was the first western climber to visit the southern approaches to Mt Everest in 1956. He collected images by John Hunt and Charles Evans both from the 1955 British Expedition, as well as the Austrian climber-cartographer Erwin Schneider's glacial panoramas from 1955.

Interestingly, Schneider's maps of the Everest region from that period show glaciers where today there are large lakes like Imja (Imja pictured left above the lake). There are also rare photographs of the Khumbu Glacier from Swiss-Canadian glaciologist Fritz Müller who was part of the Swiss 1960 Everest Expedition in 1956. Byes himself first visited the region in 1973 and has his own archival photos from that visit.

Repeat photography essentially means going to the same photograph where the original picture was taken, in the same season, at the same time of day, in similar weather and shoot an "else" picture of the same place. The findings are dramatic in more ways than one. The thinning of snow and ice cover was, as expected, the most visible change. However, contrary to the scientific consensus of the time, it looks like the Khumbu did not suffer much denudation of vegetation, in fact the book shows some marked increase in forest cover after the Sagarmatha National Park was set up and local conservation initiatives took effect.

Byes is donating the book to schools and monasteries in the Khumbu region. He is also returning next year to track two Nepali and US graduates in repeat photography methods who can replicate other archival photos and interview local people to find out about the changes. The book is being launched in January 2018 in Kathmandu, and the captions will be translated for a Nepali edition.

Randa Dietz
Miss Moti-Vation

Kripa Joshi

I couldn’t find a hero so I became one.

Events

Friday, 3 November

Majlis

10.30 am Dancing with Divya (22)
12.15 pm Daughters of the Covered Moon (30)
1.45 pm The Book We Made (26)
3.10 pm A Girl in the River: The Fire of Forgiveness (28)
4.45 pm It’s too much to ask (29)
5.30 pm Lakshya (22)
5.45 pm Panel Discussions (60)

Gauhar Khan

10.15 am A Silencer of the Heart

Sunday, 5 November

Majlis

10.30 am Hospital (59)
11.45 am The Running Walker (97)
1.15 pm Fireflies in the Abyss (89)
3.30 pm Up Down and Sideways (83)
5.00 pm Kheti (17)
5.15 pm Mothers 25

Baghika

10.00 am The Worker’s Cut (87)
11.40 am Derelichted (52)
12.50 pm Famous in Khmer (30)
1.30 pm Born Behind Bars (22)
2.00 pm Afghanian Hugo Stories (60)
4.00 pm Nukleus: Hallucinations (55)
5.55 pm The Color of My Home (World Premier) (60)

Courtyard

7 pm Among the Believers (84)

Music

Getaway

Bubbly brunch, Bubbles, bridge. How's your week and every Saturday is even with friends and family for only Rs.1500 per person (net). The amazing shimmering and party won’t let you down. Every Saturday, 11 am to 2 pm, Shambhala Garden and Club Shambhala, Shangri La Hotel

Prakara

A new spot in town. Spend the weekend with good food and drink bar. Baklava, 9811022222

Lakshya Live

Lakshya band is back with its rich original folk music for a live performance. Reserve your seats.
3 November, 7-11 pm, Tithons, Lompat, 9811043030

Classical concert

Brendan Evans and The Righteous Girls will be performing as part of the University Musical Society. The concert will start at 4 November in selected venues.
3 November, 5.30 pm, Le Shergo, Lompat, Bandar, 9811580208, 503 (audience), 9811171467

Meze by Roadhouse

Spot is a gemstone of one of Kathmandu’s most popular restaurants. Memorable Place, Darbar Marg (91) 4227807.

Kantipur Temple House

Located in the heart of the city, this eco-friendy boutique hotel is an epitome of cultural heritage in Nepal. Don’t forget to take the organic food, Channel (91) 4274177.

Creole cuisine

For exotic and tantalizing dishes like New Orleans, Bali, Spain, Africa, Germany, the Caribbean and Portugal Rs.2,000 per person.
27 October to 5 November, 6.30 pm, The Coffee, Hotel (91) 5177572

Mango Tree Lodge

Cut the quakes, relishing in the Kayani, wildlife exploration, and Jungle safari at Barad Sotark National Park. Bhairahi, Biska, 9810115588

Park Village Resort

Yoga, detox and ayurveda treatment in a quiet corner of Kathmandu.

Hotel Mystic Mountain, Plan a weekend trip to this newly-opened upscale resort located in the heart of Nagauta hill. Naxalbari (91) 4206946.

Tour

Gluicer Hotel


Kathmandu, October 27 - November 2

Air Quality Index

Kathmandu Valley is a low, walled basin surrounded by the towering peaks of the Himalayan range, and is home to one of the most polluted cities in the world, with an average of over 800 micrograms of particulate matter per cubic meter of air.

The movement to rebuild Kasthamandap

Trail-blazing community-led initiative could be a model for reconstruction of other heritage sites

ALOK TULADHAR

The 2015 earthquake damaged more than 750 historic structures in Nepal. Many collapsed to the ground, including the iconic Kasthamandap originally built in the 7th century at Kathmandu Durbar Squares. For over a millennium, Kasthamandap stood witness to the timeline of the civilization of Nepal’s Mandal. The pavilion was used for many purposes, from royalty-sponsored, as well as community religious ceremonies. It was always a public space, where people, including travelers from Tibet and India came to shop, rest, worship or socialize.

Kushalnagari, followers of Gorakhnath, actually lived in the pavilion for centuries until as recently as 1968. It was a colonial, living symbol of Kathmandu’s religious harmony between Hinduism and Buddhism, as many believed the physical structure of Kasthamandap from the foundation to the final wall represent various teachings of the Buddha. Until a few decades ago, community engagement was at the heart of the practice of continuing traditional culture and heritage. Urbanisation, relocation and social factors slowly started dismantling these forms and processes.

Community engagement in preserving heritage took a backseat, with state institutions taking over these roles and responsibilities. Government measures for the conservation of cultural sites and monuments have been mostly inadequate, and quite frequently, negligent, resulting in irreplaceable failures one after the other. What started out right after the 2015 earthquake as a campaign to bring Kasthamandap into the government’s radar as much as Dharahara was, soon gathered enough public support to be able to put a brake on the Kathmandu Metropolitan City’s (KMC) decision to give out the reconstruction of Kasthamandap to the lowest-bidding contractor. A concentrated series of events followed suit to drum up public sentiment towards community leadership in reclaiming lost heritage.

On May 12, 2017, the National Reconstruction Authority formally authorised the community organization registered as the Kasthamandap Preservation Ko Lagi Abhiyan (the Campaign to Rebuild Kasthamandap) to undertake all activities for the reconstruction of Kasthamandap, while giving supervisory roles to the KMC and the Department of Archaeology. The newly elected local government leaders of Kathmandu, however, have tried to downplay the community’s initiative, and claim they will rebuild Kasthamandap on their own. It is common knowledge that the KMC’s lack of vision and technical inability, financial regulations and inherent bureaucracy will cause disastrous results if it goes ahead to try and rebuild Kasthamandap, as proved by its previous track record of dealing with heritage reconstruction, including the glaring example of the statuette of Rani Pokhari.

Recently, to try and achieve a breakthrough, a think-tank group including the mayor’s top advisors and a former Kathmandu mayor have devised a practical mechanism where the Kasthamandap mayor will chair the steering committee that will direct and monitor the implementing body Rebuild Kasthamandap. The status quo will hopefully and soon and open up the path to start a community-led reconstruction, creating the template for public-private partnership that many other groups can adopt in cultural restoration. While the political and public lobbying goes on, the technical team of Rebuild Kasthamandap made up of part-time volunteers have quietly prepared the complete set of architectural drawings, plan, section and elevation of each floor, as well as the foundation, taking reference from existing photographs of the building’s elements and in consultation with senior architects, master craftsmen, archaeologists and historians. The team is currently working on the detailed drawings, as well as the computational and modeling aspects in order to assess the structural integrity of the building as per the drawings that have been developed — using traditional construction materials and methods.

The need for communities to come together to take ownership and become a part of the rebuilding process has never been as critical as it is now. The Rebuild Kasthamandap movement has been unprecedented process to reach out to the wider community to reclaim the values of local engagement, and to develop a sense of ownership so that they take the lead in building back a part of history that is a part of their lives.

Our ultimate goal is to see communities all over Nepal actively take the lead in rebuilding heritage sites. The physical rebuilding of Kasthamandap, with the community playing a central execution role, will be a trailblazer. The KMC and other government bodies should embrace this local initiative rather than try to undermine this genuine, innovative effort.

The author is an active member of the Rebuild Kasthamandap Movement.
Viceroy’s House

For those of us who studied in Nepal through high school, our knowledge of history was limited to the bloody conflicts between the Shahs, Thapas, Pandeyas, and Rana over the course of Nepal’s unification and the Machiavellean struggle for power that followed for a few centuries. Year after year, unthinking teachers named the same history down our throats in varying degrees of detail while we memorized dates that didn’t really serve us in the future.

We never studied the history of the world, and not even that of our nearest neighbours. Watching Gurinder Chadha’s Viceroy’s House about the partition of India and Pakistan, released earlier this year in the UK with a dubbed version a few months later in India, was therefore a let-down even though it is admittedly a bit of chocolate box of a film.

Starring the immensely likeable Hugh Bonneville (of Downton Abbey fame) as Lord Mountbatten, the last Viceroy of India, the film tells the story of Mountbatten and his wife Edwina’s (the formidable Gillian Anderson) moral quandary when they are sent to India in 1947 to “give India back to its people”.

This Jolly goodquickly devolves into one of the most mixed ethical predicaments of the past century when Mountbatten is faced with the intransigence of the Hindus and Muslim leaders of India, Nehru (Tom Hopper) and Jinnah (Denzel Smith), who refuse to budge regarding their notions of religious hegemony needed by the British, who sought to divide and rule over these two countries. Following the anguish of everyday Hindus and Muslims as they face extreme violence brought on by the imminent division of their beloved country, and mirrored by Mountbatten’s distress, the film is hard to watch even while it is so much more costume drama then neo-realism.

giving the viewer an inkling of how horrific it really must have been.

Chadha’s script takes its politics from The Shadow of the Great Game: The Untold Story of India’s Partition—Narendra Singh Sarlia’s book from 2006, and while the twist make for great cinema, not being a historian myself, I am unsure of the historical accuracy of what occurs in the latter half, shocking everyone concerned and odd in the core.

At a time when Nepal is on the verge of elections that will finally propel us towards federalism, Viceroy’s House comes with the warnings of what happens if we allow our own politics to use race, religion, and ethnicity to divide instead of unite us.

The India-Pakistan partition is a searing reminder of how hatred can triumph over unity—seven by leaders who only look towards enhancing their own power.

Nepal has a wrinkled history of federalism that has worked consistently against the poor, the marginalized, the others (which includes women of all castes and ethnicities), and that continues today, no matter how much we may want to deny it. Our federal borders have been drawn, but the struggle to be inclusive will continue for decades to come.

Viceroy’s House, while historically accurate, is a difficult, essential, reminder of what might happen to us.

HERITAGE PLANNING: Participants inspect a miniature model of a monument destroyed in the 2015 earthquake during a relief-focused Kathmandu workshop on Saturday.

TRAGEDIES: In a deadly avalanche on Nepal’s highways 25 people were killed when a speeding overtaking bus fell into the Jorose River 40km west of Kathmandu, on Saturday. A day later another 22 were killed in two other bus plunges in Chitwan and Lalitpur.

DEAL SEALED: General Manager of Turkish Airlines Abdullah Tuner Keles and Ambassador Bilal Shaf of Chadargöl Cubuk sign a cooperation agreement on Thursday.

JOURNALIST TO POLICITIAN: Rabindra Mishra of Sanyo Blackshoe Party of his candidate from Kathmandu 1 for the upcoming parliamentary elections in which he is beaten by Mahesh Man Singh of the NC.

ALL MEN: Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba along with other Nepali Congress members launch the party’s declaration for upcoming elections at their headquarters in Saneup on Tuesday behind portraits of past leaders.
“Elections are a life-line”

It’s a miracle. But there has been little improvement in the people’s standard of living. This is a problem, and the elections will be a measure of the people’s enthusiasm.

But there is still uncertainty about elections. I, too, thought so. Even though I was in government, I suspected there might not be local elections. Those days, I am campaigning for the vote and the same doubts have returned. The reason for this uncertainty is that because the transition the belief that decisions are made elsewhere is deeply ingrained. People suspect a conspiracy. Elections are also being decided by the courts, that could be why.

Is there a conspiracy to postpone polls?

I don’t think so. There may be some power centres and individuals who want it to happen, but I don’t think it will affect the elections. If the NC and the UML didn’t want elections they could have acquitted it earlier. We are accusing each other, but both our parties are focused on elections.

So the main parties are geared for polls?

Absolutely. They are doing what needs to be done to make it happen.

Three elections will hopefully take us towards stability, raise the public’s trust in democracy, move the constitution forward, and streamline institutions of government. These elections are Nepal’s life-line.

Have you found much interest among the people towards the elections?

The people may still asking ‘what’s in it for us’ because they haven’t experienced good governance due to past misunderstandings of the political parties. We have achieved a lot, we have made the constitution and implemented federalism.

We need to change our entire electoral strategy. That is why we also want to have alliances with other parties. The alliance has given us a chance to widen some of the democratic votes from UML supporters who do not agree with its alliance with the Maoists.

Has the left alliance pushed the UML to the left, or the Maoists to the centre?

I think the UML will shift from centre to the left slightly because of the talk of party unity with the Maoists. They will have to support the Maoist insurgency. So we have an opportunity to pull some UML voters to us, while retaining our traditional vote bank. We need to put forth more clearly our political relevance and principles.

Is geopolitics behind the left alliance?

Many political observers think so. And the democratic alliance that is being formed is also seen by some to be pushed by others. This has made us weaker. We have to stop blaming everything on outside forces, and say that despite differences we have made our decisions ourselves.

Is there a danger of the NC being pushed to the right because of its alliance with the UML?

The question is whether the NC will shift to the right, but whether the UML and others will come to the centre. But the NC must change itself. I am personally glad that the left alliance has given us this opportunity. I am just worried that the moderate left will be pushed to the far left.

Highway of death

It took Nepal Police eight years to nab Maiti Centre leader Balkrishna Dhungel whom the Supreme Court had sentenced to life imprisonment. When Police Chief Prakash Aryal refused to follow the Court’s order to arrest him, Aryal himself had to face a contempt of court. It can be understood that the main reason the Police did not arrest the man was because of political pressure. It is disappointing that an accused found guilty of murder by the courts cannot be arrested by the Police. A photograph showing Dhungel sharing the podium with the Police Chief at a function (left) became symbolic of the state of impunity in this country. After removing a king, we now have many kings who seem to be above the law. This is a worrying situation for the future of democracy in this country.

Even though Dhungel was moving around in broad daylight in full view of the public, there was no police escort. The DGP was pretending it couldn’t find him. Chief Justice Sundhara Karki had to issue an order to the Police to catch Dhungel within one week. Even then, Dhungel was at large and after the left alliance was formed he seemed to have been given an asylum.

This confirms the suspicion that with the alliance between the UML and Maiti Centre human rights violations and transnational justice will face a setback. This will entrench impunity even more, and there will increase public outrage as well as the pain of the families of the victims of conflict.

Dhungel in dungeon

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Interview with NC leader Gagan Thapa in Nirmal Khubarkhatri, 25 Oct 5 Nov

Himal: How important are these elections in socio-political terms?

Gagan Thapa: For these reasons: if there are no elections it will be a disaster for the constitution, political instability will increase pressures on society, and it is important to end this prolonged political transition. In other democracies there is concern about who will win, but here we are worried mainly about whether there will be elections or not.

These elections will hopefully take us towards stability, raise the public’s trust in democracy, move the constitution forward, and streamline institutions of government. These elections are Nepal’s life-line.

Have you found much interest among the people towards the elections?

The people may still asking ‘what’s in it for us’ because they haven’t experienced good governance due to past misunderstandings of the political parties. We have achieved a lot, we have made the constitution and implemented federalism.

Highway of death

A bus heading to Kathmandu from Supriya plunged into Trishuli River on Sunday, 28 October leaving 31 people dead. The overloaded bus was carrying people who were returning from the eastern district after attending a Dhankuta Fair. The accident took place in Gauri Rural Municipality 5 in Dhading district and the section of Pitha highway has been marked as ‘black spot’ by Road Division. The driver lost control of the bus at a bend and the bus dived into the Ganga river. Speeding is one of the major causes of bus crashes on Nepal’s highways. It is mandatory to have two drivers on a long route, but the law has never been implemented.

The Home Ministry has directed the local administration to make public transportation safe and even formed a three-member investigation committee. It is a norm for Home Ministry to form such committees right after a serious road accident, but the law never implemented. And everything is forgotten till the next accident.

Two years ago, the government decided to enforce special licenses for drivers of public transport vehicles to decrease the number of road accidents, but the rule too fell by the wayside. As a result, inexperienced drivers (even) have the least of innocent passengers in their hands.

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The kingdom of cardamom

Climate change and price collapse force farmers to diversify

SONIA AWALE
in TAPLEJUNG

Nestled in the lap of the world’s third highest mountain, billowing terraces here are draped in cardamom, the cash crop that has raised the living standard of the whole region. Farmers have built fancy new cement houses, sent children to schools in the city and bought motorcycles from the cardamom bonanza. Nepal is still the largest exporter of the spice in the world, but a collapse of cardamom prices in recent years, extreme weather due to global warming and out-migration of mean have left farmers in the region uncertain of their future.

“Cardamom was easy to grow and needed little of no care, and it was so profitable we switched from growing other crops to cardamom,” recalls Bholu Gurung, 25, (above) who has seen the boom and bust cycle of the cash crop. “But then the prices collapsed, and the plantation was damaged by disease.” Sujan Dahal (below) still remembers the day when his father brought the first large cardamom seed to plant in their farm. The family was making up to Rs 2,500 per kg from the cardamom harvest, but in the past two years the price has gone down to Rs 400 per kg. Says the 44-year-old farmer: “I wish there was a stable market price for us, and the government cushioned us from the fluctuations.”

Although there is a lot of attention to how climate change is affecting agriculture across the Himalayas with erratic monsoons and extreme weather, for farmers here the drastic decrease in cardamom prices has been much more damaging.

Large cardamoms, also known as ‘black gold’, were introduced to Eastern Nepal from Sikkim in 1960s, and is now cultivated in over 40 districts, with Taplejung being the biggest producer. The spread of cardamom and the oversupply brought down prices. Some 65% of farmers in Taplejung depend on the cash crop for extra income. They sell the pods to middlemen, who in turn trade with wholesalers in Bhadrakot or across the border in India. Higher production also has not improved productivity, and farmers sell raw cardamom which means they have not benefited as much from the processed or value-added crop. In addition, increased dependence on just one crop has made farmers vulnerable to price fluctuations.

The Kathmandu-based regional research centre ICIMOD (International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development) through its Himalica Project is trying to change this by encouraging farmers to diversify not just to other crops, but also benefit from using different parts of the cardamom plant for handicrafts and processed food, as well as promote homestay tourism in the farms.

“We are encouraging diversification from the monoculture to bee-keeping, fruits, vegetables to reduce the dependency and risk for farmers in cardamom is reduced,” says Susmanta Rai (right) of the Himalica Initiative (below).

“Cardamom is a sensitive plant and needs shade, good drainage and proper soil conditions, and is susceptible to global warming and pest infestation. Which is why farmers are encouraged to inter-crop for shade management and

Nepali Times accompanied ICIMOD Director General David Molden on a field trip to Taplejung to look at the centre’s attempt to share the experience of Nepal’s cardamom farmers with those in Sikkim and Bhutan.

Nepali Times: How much has climate change affected farmers here in Taplejung?
David Molden: Climate change is felt strongly across the Himalayan region. We probably hear more about glaciers melting. But here in the field, talking with the farming community, we see the impact is quite strong.
Farmers are reporting different kinds of pests and diseases, increased heat and changing rainfall patterns. They have had to think of newer ways of farming.
Here in Taplejung we have been working with farmers to see some options to adapt to climate change. People grow cardamom which is highly sensitive to water, soil conditions and temperature.
Here, like in this farm, we have fantastic examples of people using varieties of techniques to manage their cardamom terraces using fertiliser made of animal urine and herbs, which acts both as a water source and pesticide.
CARDAMAMANIA

A three-story modern house with freshly painted gables stands out among traditional dwellings here in Tayang, It was built by a local farmer with the bonus he earned from cardamom sales, and is now torted by the local unit of the SWAC Business Association of Home-based Workers (SABAH). The rooms are noisy with the clatter of weaving machines. Four women in a row weave sheets of cardamom into the elegant tablecloth which they will later sew into aprons, dresses, and other elegant garments.

SABAH belief is being known the largest exporter of spices, is a cardamom superpower, but only 1/3 of the harvest is consumed within itself. This vast growth is due to the high quality of the product which is in great demand as an ingredient in food, for medicine, and cosmetics. 

Kotumah-based SABAH has been collaborating with ICIMOD to recruit the farmer-growing on a single cash crop and in midseason by training them to practices grown goods to increase their earnings.

Cardamom farmers are dependent on a single crop and inadequate knowledge on how to diversify their product mix with value-added processed cardamom commodities. We also find them a market for their products," says Binan Man Aryal of SABAH.

Eco-systems do not respect boundaries between countries. Forests, wildlife, landuse and weather pass across them as if they did not exist.

The Kathmandu-based research centre on the Himalayas, ICIMOD (International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development) has designated seven ecologically fragile areas that need trans-boundary protection. One of them is the Kanighanjung Landscape, which covers a 35,000 sq km area in eastern Nepal, Sikkim and West Bengal in India and 'the base' below the world's third highest mountain. 

Glimpses of the Kanighanjung massif feed some of the major rivers in the region like the Tamor, Teesta and Torsa. Heavy monsoon rains and enormous altitude variations give the area one of the most diverse flora and fauna of any mountain region on earth with 4,500 species of plants, 190 mammals, 560 birds and 600 butterfly species. The area is especially rich in orchids with more than 500 species, as well as 40 types of rhododendrons.

Many of the animals here are endangered, and some are extinct nowhere else on the planet, including the snow leopard, red panda, takin, black bear, musk deer, tigers and elephants – all are protected in the region's 16 national parks and nature reserves.

ICIMOD hopes to establish habitat linkages across national boundaries through the Kanighanjung Landscape Conservation and Development Initiative (KLCDD) under a 20-year strategic plan agreed between Nepal, Bhutan and India for the 7.25 million people who live here.

"We are trying to prove that the border is not a barrier for exchanging experiences and ideas," says KLCDD Coordinator Nalkot Chhetri. "And the great advantage is that we literally speak the same language across the three countries: Nepal."

In Nepal's eastern districts, Sikkim and western Bhutan, the people's livelihoods are similar, they farm more or less the same crops, depend on eco-tourism, and they are all impacted by climate change.

Cardamom is a major cash crop in the region, but the recent collapse of cardamom prices has affected farmers hard in all three countries.

ICIMOD is using the Kanighanjung Landscape partnership to help create programs that will help create a new, more resilient, and more adaptive future for these communities.
The Ass

Bottoms up

B eing the Fifth Column of the Fourth Pillar of the State as well as the mouth organ of democracy, and thanks to our guards and the New Constitution to forgive us our press passes, this slightly esteemed media person has no qualms this week to devote these column inches to how well things are going in our Federal Democratic Republic. Yes, today we will delve into how everything is hunky-dory here in the boondocks. (OK, you can now take away that sharp object poking into my backside. Thank you.)

The main national accomplishment this week was that the Election Commission has done the impossible by successfully setting fire to 15 million already printed ballot papers. This is no mean feat, and much more challenging than printing 30 million new separate ballot papers asking what more the government can inflict on us, we should be asking what together we can do to escape from it altogether.

Given the plethora of triumphs in the state’s Pandora’s Box, someone has to take the bull by the horns of a dilemma and open this can of worms. It is like egging a dead horse to insist that we could very well be a fly in the ointment and not a storm in a teacup. We had not already been in the aforementioned byzantine dilemma.

So, let’s begin with this week’s main achievement which is the good news that Nepal has established diplomatic relations with Sri Lanka. About time. I know there is always a question that springs to the minds of most Nepalis when they see a news item like this: “Is it the time?” The simple answer is that very pertinent and timely general knowledge question is that the government has not told us yet, so we can’t delay this. It’s a closely guarded secret.

As a part of Nepal’s global diplomatic offensive (Official motto: “Let’s be so offensive as possible”), Nepal has also signed a Non-aggression Pact with Sri Lanka and Principe, which significantly reduces the chances of full-scale war breaking out between us. This will allow us in many patriotic minds about threats to our national security from the Tanzanians. Not only the Principians (and so that, we are, Nepal, can rest easier than we have been feeling so far in the days to come. (Editor’s note to self: Google “Sri Lanka and Principe”).

Given the number of candidates in forthcoming elections who are convicted criminals, mafia dons, traffickers, tycoons and typhoons, Nepal can now take a leap in the global corruption rankings from 89 to 127. This is not necessarily bad news: it all depends on whether you are counting from the bottom or from the top. Since we have traditionally taken a bottoms up approach on these matters, this is great news: we can now overtake Sri Lanka and Principe.

The Ass

The Embassy of Brazil in Kathmandu will promote the screening of Brazilian documentaries

Nepal Tourism Board on November 10th, 2017

“Poses at the Embassy of Brazil or the Venice on the day of the Show”

For program go to: https://www.facebook.com/embassybrazilkathmandu/